

Absolute Power Corrupting Absolutely

There have been various interpretations on the old theme of superhuman powers being transferred to another person. Last night, I revisited one of those in a season 1 episode of *Smallville*. During a freak accident during a lightning storm, Clark Kent's powers are passed to one of his high school classmates. Clark gets to discover what it is like to be a "normal" teenager while "Eric" comes to discover that being the world's most powerful adolescent is not all it is cracked up to be. Looking at the show, I realized that it is a spin on the old classic adage of Nature vs. Nurture.

Clark's initial reaction to his loss is one of confusion and fear. Being able to lift the family truck out of the mud, driving a stake into the ground with his bare hands, and other tasks that would be impossible for mortal men were a snap for the Boy of Steel. However, the sight of his own blood sends him into near shock. Over time, he learns to embrace his "normalcy" and not be afraid to engage in a game of two-on-two without fear of accidentally using his powers to injure one of his friends... even if one of them is Lana Lang's quarterback boyfriend. One of my favorite moments from the episode is Lana's observation that Clark doesn't seem to "have the weight of the world on his shoulders."

On the other hand, Eric takes a totally different approach to his new-found gifts. He flaunts them in front of people on the street. He flirts with a girl right in front of her boyfriend and flings him across the school parking lot smashing him on top of a parked car. When a powerless Clark attempts to intervene (his nature or is his nurturing), he receives a few bruised ribs and a cut to the head. Eric's parents are terrified of the "freak" he has become and determine to send him away to be studied and to find out what happened to him.

Overnight, the teenager has acquired strength and abilities he could only dream of before but is totally unprepared to handle them.

Nurture: Jonathan and Martha Kent discovered a toddler inside a rocket ship in the middle of a field and raised that child with morals and responsibilities. Clark was not meant to score touchdowns with his power but for something more. As his powers advanced over time, the Kent's were determined to hide these gifts and use them when necessary and secretly in order to protect their adopted son.

On the flip side, Eric was an awkward kid and constantly degraded by his parents; particularly his father. It may seem cliché to paint Clark in the best possible light and to show his counterpart in shadow. But I think the point here was to show how two different people from different backgrounds deal with extraordinary circumstances. A very good episode from the beginning of the series.

OK... nerdy sidebar: Shawn Ashmore who played Eric also was in the X-Men films as Bobby Drake/Iceman. His twin brother, Aaron played a certain cub reporter for the Daily Planet in the past two seasons of *Smallville*. Such a nerd!