

'The Good Wife' just keeps getting better

In its sixth season, legal drama raises the bar, unafraid to talk politics and morality at the table

Good, better — best.

It isn't often a drama remains at its creative peak in its sixth season, and yet that's where we are with CBS' triumphant *The Good Wife*, which thrives at the spot where legal, family and political dramas commingle. Ever since it made its bravest and potentially most hazardous move — the decision to send Alicia (Emmy winner Julianna Margulies) and Cary (Matt Czuchry) off to their own law firm — *The Good Wife* has been on an unstoppable roll, through last season's shocking death of Will to the equally surprising (and much more welcome) addition of Diane (Christine Baranski) to Florrick Agos.

It certainly hasn't slowed any this fall as the season opener launched twin story lines: one built around Alicia's run for state's attorney, the other around Cary's arrest for aiding a drug deal. It's a sign of just how joyfully complex this series is that we're not only unsure of where their stories are headed — we're unsure of where they *should* be headed. Maybe Alicia deserves to lose; maybe Cary deserves to be pun-

ished. To create that level of moral doubt around your main characters, while retaining our sympathy for them, is an achievement few other series can match.

Adding a character to a show that is running so well is a risk. But it's a risk worth taking when the character is played by an actor as skilled (and as missed) as David Hyde Pierce. And Sunday, it's a risk that pays off in spades.

For his first live-action prime-time role since *Frasier* exited in 2004, this Tony- and Emmy-winning actor begins a six-episode stint as Frank Prady, a legal commentator and local TV star. When Eli and Jonathan (Alan Cumming and Steven Pasquale, terrific as Alicia's amusingly blunt advisers) learn that Prady may enter the race, they send Alicia to get his endorsement — and she ends up agreeing to do a TV interview.

As Alicia and Prady feel each other out, we're left to wonder whose evaluation of the other is closer to the mark. Again, that's a level of real-life uncertainty a show can embrace when you have actors like Margulies and Pierce, who can show multiple facets of a personality and convey conflicting emotions simultaneously.

As always, there's more to the show than Alicia's struggles, including Sunday's tense Cary subplot that rewards those who remember a previous season, but doesn't punish those who forgot.

At heart, the true joy of *The Good Wife* is how confident it has become in its storytelling, and how much faith it puts in its audience's willingness to follow complicated plots, time shifts, and characters. Ambiguity is not always a broadcast virtue, but it's one this series embraces, without ever becoming ponderous or neglecting an ad-supported big-network series' need to keep people entertained. Quite simply, there is no better show on TV at the moment — broadcast, cable or streaming.

There's a word for that: best.

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Alicia (Julianna Margulies) and Prady (guest star David Hyde Pierce) are pulled together by politics.



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