

*“I’m Just Looking for My Jacket”*

**Atlanta Season One Finale Recap & Analysis**

By

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The final episode of the *Atlanta*'s first season, "The Jacket," opens with Earn in a classic situation I've found myself in many more times than I'd like to remember: he's hungover from an absolute banger of a party the night before, and is now being ripped out of his drunken slumber much more aggressively than he'd probably prefer. Joe, the host of the party in question, wakes Earn up by continuously spitting variations of the phrase, "It's like I know y'all, but I don't *know y'all*, you know?" at him and telling him to get the hell out of his place, as Earn groggily surveys his surroundings, doing his best to remember what mistakes he made in the past 24 hours. I've been in Joe's position before too, so I get being pissed that your house got trashed, but at least let the dude get some water first so he can actually think clearly (even if someone did pour beer in the Britta filter...)

As Joe continues to angrily shout his catchphrase, Earn rolls off the beanbag chair he was using as a bed and realizes that his friends have already left without him—great. But then he comes to an even worse realization as the audience is introduced to the titular macguffin of the episode: Earn's blue bomber jacket, which, as far as he can currently tell, is nowhere to be found. He asks Joe if he's seen it around at all, but Joe says he hasn't and is definitely not about to take anymore of Earn's shit, so Earn finally gets the message and leaves to retrace his drunken steps from the previous night in hopes to find the jacket; however, why this jacket is so important to Earn is still unknown to us at this point.

While most television shows utilize their season finales as a way to tie up the narrative threads and themes of the episodes preceding them, *Atlanta* chooses to take a different approach in this episode. Many shows' finales cover some big emotional conflict between main characters or some culmination of events leading to a huge, climactic battle to keep their viewers interested for the next season, but "The Jacket," defies both of these strategies; it instead chooses to focus on the much smaller story of a man just trying to find his jacket. But while this may seem like a very simple and superficial plot line, and one that might even be considered for the plot of a "filler episode" in other shows rather than a season finale, writer Stephen Glover puts a clever twist on it in typical *Atlanta*-fashion by using this simple narrative thread to mask a major character evolution for Earn by the end of the episode. Regardless of the real reason he's trying so hard to find it, Earn's search for the titular jacket serves as a sort of metaphor for his

character taking responsibility for his decisions and finally having some actual agency in his life, but we'll get to that later.

After another one of *Atlanta*'s bumping title cards, we rejoin Earn walking down the street as he calls Alfred to see if he happened to grab the jacket, before he left Earn to drool away into his beanbag chair. Unfortunately for Earn, Alfred doesn't have it so he decides to head back to the strip club they were at the night before to see if he left it there. But before he can even hang up the call, he, and by extension the audience, is treated to another one of *Atlanta*'s delightfully weird and surreal moments that they love to explain as little as possible: dozens of people walking by dressed as cows (to varying accuracy) while all munching on fried chicken sandwiches. The only explanation we're given is one of the passing "cows" saying to Earn in between his bites, "Free chicken sandwich day, nigga," which immediately gives us American viewers all the context we need; but I'd still love to see the confused expressions of all those international viewers at this moment, who haven't had the privilege of tasting Chick-fil-a's incredibly tasty, albeit somewhat socially-archaic, fried chicken sandwiches.

Earn arrives at the strip club, now looking a lot more sad and depressing than it probably did the night before, and begrudgingly pays the bouncer another \$10 entry fee after trying (and failing) to explain his current predicament. He searches around the club for a few minutes to no luck, before stumbling into a humorous interaction with one of the strippers who works there. After denying her initial offer for a dance, he explains his situation to her and who he was there with the night before, but instead of getting any real help, he's just met with an aggressive request to cast her in a future Paper Boi music video. He "agrees" to this as long as she can help him find one of the girls who was working the previous night who might've seen what happened to his jacket. She asks for a description ("She thicc?", "Big titties?", "Tall with a phat ass?"), but Earn isn't really able to provide one accurate enough for her requirements, due to the fact that he doesn't "know the titty median [in this place]." Don't you hate it when that happens?

Once he realizes that the jacket isn't at the club, Earn leaves defeated (but not before being forced to give the stripper his number for that "video"...). He walks out into the parking lot and realizes that he may have another lead thanks to the wonderful modern day concept of posting all your drunken

shenanigans on social media to show other people you're having way more fun than them: Alfred's Snapchat story. Earn pulls out his phone and begins to swipe through all of Alfred's posts from the night before to see when he parted ways with the ever-elusive jacket: Earn singing along to Nelly's "Ride Wit Me" *way too well* in an Uber, a heated debate over whether Ja Rule may just be an actual dog (followed by a lot of barking by everyone involved), Darius telling Alfred to stop videotaping him because cameras "steal your soul," apparently... you get the point. Eventually he finds a video of himself getting a lap dance at the club without the jacket and figures he must've left it in the Uber on the way there. So he heads to the show's iconic couch in the field (from the pilot episode) where they all hang out.

After throwing out some passive aggressive comments about not waking him up before they left the party, Earn gets the number of the Uber driver from Alfred and gives him a call. Good news! He has the jacket... but will only drop it off for \$50, which we all know Earn's broke ass doesn't have ("These Uber niggas is ruthless, boy!"). So being the perpetual mooch he is, Earn asks Alfred and Darius to drive him over to the Uber driver's place to pick it up; Alfred isn't willing at first, but after Earn begs him by saying, "I really need this jacket man...", and he realizes that he can get some tasty Jamaican food in the same area, he reluctantly agrees.

The trio sits and waits in Alfred's car outside of the Uber driver, Fidel's house, as Alfred complains about how long this is taking while munching on the aforementioned Jamaican food. Earn then gets a call and picks it up thinking its Fidel, but is surprised to find that it's actually Senator K, a popular rapper, asking if Paper Boi would be interested in going on tour with him. While you might expect the first season of a show about an up-and-coming rapper to end with some big opportunity to further his rap career, I can't help but think of how interesting it is that *Atlanta* chooses to make this moment seem almost insignificant within the larger context of the show; of course they're all excited about this new opportunity for success, but it's a moment that could very easily be missed just by not paying super close attention to the conversation for only a mere few seconds. In my opinion, this moment is a very good example of what I think *Atlanta* has tried to establish itself as throughout its entire first season; it's not a show about chronicling Paper Boi's rise from his mediocre beginnings as a drug dealer all the way to rap

super stardom, it's just simply a show about these characters, their lives, their relationships, their decisions, and how all the strange (and sometimes inexplicable) things that happen in their surrounding environment affect them.

This thematic concept is further exemplified as the scene continues, as we don't even really get to hear the content of Earn's phone call with Senator K. Instead, the show decides to use this moment to focus on Alfred, who finally takes a break from inhaling his Jamaican food when he notices that something isn't right in the cul-de-sac they're parked in; it's a little bit too calm and quiet for his taste. Earn hangs up his call, but before they can really even take in the big news, Alfred decides to leave, saying "something's off," despite Earn's protests. He begins to pull the car away, but they're immediately met with a fury of police sirens as a bunch of undercover cop vehicles box them in; officers surround them on all sides, guns pointed in their faces, shouting at them to get out of the car. They comply as they're searched and asked if they're there to buy any drugs/weapons, or if they know someone by the name of "Fidel Royal," the Uber driver. The trio is confused by all this and Alfred tells the cops, "We're just here for a jacket, man!"

But before they can sort out all the confusion, they see Fidel sprint out of a nearby house in attempt to flee the police... and he's wearing Earn's jacket—fantastic. The police immediately spring into action and chase after Fidel as he runs; Earn, Alfred, and Darius all watch in shock as the cops proceed to fill Fidel with enough bullets to kill a whole platoon. "Did y'all *really* need all those bullets!?" Alfred comments. The police tell them to stay back as they approach the body. Fidel's wife runs out of their house screaming, neighbors wander out of their homes to see what all the commotion is about, babies are crying, dogs are barking, helicopter zoom by overhead... but none of this stops Earn from walking up to the officers inspecting Fidel's corpse, saying, "Can you check the pockets? That's my jacket... I left something in the pockets." The cops stare at him in disbelief of his request until they eventually comply, but unfortunately they don't find anything. Earn rests his case and walks away, still defeated as ever (but at least now we know it wasn't the jacket that was even important, but rather something inside of it).

The trio drives back to Alfred's in silence, until Alfred says he's sorry about Earn's jacket and talks about how crazy all that shit was ("and cool," Darius adds); Earn, now looking more depressed than usual, reiterates that he's "not even mad about the jacket". They arrive at Alfred's, where Alfred gives Earn a roll of hundreds saying it's his "five percent or whatever". Earn's confused at first, but his mood brightens a bit after realizing he actually did earn this money; he "did good" for once, as Alfred puts it. Earn says he has to go to Van's place for some "daddy daycare," and leaves after sticking the money in his shoe. He walks off as Darius anxiously states, "I ate them two blunts when the cops came... Tonight's gonna be weird."

We rejoin Earn later at Van's as they eat dinner and watch TV. There's a knock at the door and Earn opens it to find his friend Justin from work; Justin hands him a key that Earn had apparently told him to hold onto the night before ("Your drunk ass outsmarted yourself again!"). Earn thanks him, telling him he's been trying to find these all day, and we finally realize that it was actually these mysterious keys that Earn has been searching so intently for the whole episode. After making eyes at Van and asking if she's got a single sister, Justin finally leaves and Earn returns to the couch to snuggle with Van. He gives her the roll of hundreds and tells her it's for her, "What are you a drug dealer now?" she responds jokingly. But then she has a mild freak out when Earn doesn't respond to her questioning, that is until he eventually bursts into laughter, "You looked so sad! I'm really flattered that you think I could actually sell drugs. I'd be so bad at it." She smacks him playfully as she giggles from relief, telling him he's a good dad.

This is where we get to see the most pertinent example of Earn's character evolution throughout this first season; he started out in the first episode having to beg others for money, but now he's voluntarily giving his own money to others. Later on, Van even tells him he's welcome to stay the night if he wants, but while episode one Earn would've jumped at this opportunity, episode ten Earn respectfully declines her offer and walks off with his headphones bumping. Where he's going and where he plans to stay the night isn't really clear until the moment we also learn the full story behind the keys, and by extension of course, the titular jacket. As it turns out, the keys are to a nearby storage locker that Earn now apparently owns; he opens the door to reveal a bunch of random items strewn about, all surrounding

a ratty-looking couch in its center. Earn flops down onto the couch and pulls the few remaining bills he didn't give to Van out of his shoe, staring at them while still listening to his music as the episode ends.

I feel this is an important moment not only for Earn's character, but for this whole season of the show as well, as it's the first time we see Earn actively *choose* to support and provide for himself instead of mooching off those around him. He's got a job that's actually paying off now, he's there for his partner and their daughter when he needs to be, and he finally has a place to call his own, even if it is just some crappy storage locker. He's finally getting some personal agency in his life and realizing that if he doesn't like the way his life is going, he's going to have to be the one to do something about it; nobody else can, or will. I'm looking forward to seeing how Earn and the other main characters of *Atlanta* continue to develop throughout the next season, as well all the delightfully weird and surreal shit Donald Glover and his staff of writers decide to throw at us along the way.