In this week's recap, Mitch says, simply put, this episode will go down as one of the greats, right up there with the whackings of Richie Aprile, Ralph Cifaretto, Tony Blundetto, and Adriana La Cerva. Christopher's death at the outset of the episode shook things up, and Tony is primed for a showdown with Phil and his crew over the asbestos dumping. Just three episodes remain in the final season. Mitch recaps this week's episode of The Sopranos.

Simply put, this episode will go down as one of the greats, right up there with the whackings of Richie Aprile, Ralph Cifaretto, Tony Blundetto, and Adriana La Cerva.

But in all of those episodes, the murder took place at the end of the show, and it wasn't until the next week when they showed how everyone dealt with the repercussions. In this one, for the first time it happened within the first ten minutes, with the rest of the show focusing mostly on Tony's unexpected range of emotions.

One thought regarding Tony's mindset in killing Chris. He's terrified lately of someone talking to the Feds. So I now don't think that the Arab sub-plot will play out. Tony attempted to help the Feds in hopes that it could save him, but after finding out all the good it would do would be to possibly reduce his sentence, he's done with that, and will be looking out for Number One.

Recap

Phil is enjoying his view from the top and is making life miserable for Tony. It seems that Phil didn't know that Tony was dumping asbestos at the Barone garbage transfer station that he owns, and he's apparently upset about it. Not that he has suddenly turned Al Gore level environmentally correct or anything…he just smells another way to get more money from Tony, and demands 25% of Tony's take in the asbestos "clearing" business if Tony intends to keep up the illegal dumping.

As Chris drives Tony back to "Joisey", he recommends that Tony meet Phil's price. He wonders what has happened to Tony and Phil's mutual "stop and smell the roses" attitude, getting another "every day's a gift" line from Tony. Yeah, today's gift was the last Chris was ever getting.

You can tell Tony was getting a little concerned about Chris's behavior, as Chris kept fidgeting like a ten year old after consuming a one pound bag of Skittles, piddling around with the stereo, finally settling to put on the soundtrack of "The Departed". Which led to another classic David Chase musical moment, with Tony giving Chris a disappointed look right during the part of "Comfortably Numb" where Van Morrison sings "I cannot put my finger on it now/the child is grown/the dream is gone" (yes, I know it's a Pink Floyd song, but Morrison and The Band did this cover , along with Roger Waters). You can see that Tony is listening to the lyrics, and applying them in his mind to his protégé. He has grown, but not the way Tony wanted, and the dream of having Chris take over is definitely gone.

And then we get the biggest shock since Sil took Adriana on a ride. Chris looks down again trying to adjust the sound levels of the SUV, and crosses left of center. Another car is in the other lane, and Chris has to jerk the wheel to avoid a collision, rolling down and embankment, flipping several times. When they come to rest, Chris tells Tony that he needs help, because he can't pass a drug test. Tony is livid that he's fallen off the wagon once again, and that this latest mistake nearly cost Tony his life. He starts to dial 911, and then thinks better of it, reaching in and holding Chris's nostrils shut so that he suffocates on his own blood.

Buh-bye, Chris. I figured it was coming this year, but certainly not this way.

The next morning the boys visit Tony, and the Monday Morning Quarterbacking begins. An interesting exchange takes place when Silvio asks Tony if Chris had seemed high to him. "Are you kidding? I'd have been furious. I would have f-in' strangled him." And there ends any little debate as to whether Tony killed him because he thought Chris was suffering and about to die anyway, or whether it was just an opportune moment to get rid of a problem.

At Chris and Kelli's place, Kelli's mother informs everyone that Chris did have cocaine in his system, and that he could have lived had he (a) received attention earlier, (b) had worn his seatbelt. She left out (c) Tony not doing his best Dr. Kevorkian impression. A couple of minutes later at the house, Patsy tells them that he had just learned that Paulie's aunt/mother had just died of a stroke (the one he thought was his mother all his life until last season, when it was revealed that she was in fact his aunt).

We next see Tony in Dr. Melfi's office. "This is difficult. This is pain…like I'm not used to". Good. Maybe we're going to see Tony finally express some remorse. Instead, he seems to forget about the fact that he can't admit to crimes to a psychiatrist, and talks about the murders of family and friends that he's committed, and I'm wondering what the hell is going on.

Then he wakes up. Ah, that tricksy, tricksy Chase. First dream sequence of the year for Tony. I thought it was an amusing touch how Tony's first reaction was to ask Carmela if he was talking in his sleep. "No. Just snoring".

So Tony lumbers downstairs to get some coffee, sees a

“Cleaver” coffee cup, and promptly takes it outside and tosses it. Then he has a conversation with Carmela, and he seems to be hoping that she was like him, and was actually feeling relieved about Chris’s death…a suggestion that goes over like the proverbial lead balloon.

“Perhaps not the best approach”, was Melfi’s comment to Tony about his conversation with Carmela. Ya’ think? But in reality, this session almost goes exactly the same as the one in Tony’s dream, without the blatant self-incrimination. “There have been some hard moments. But a weak, lying drug addict who fantasized about my downfall?”. No guilt or sorrow in the slightest. He also talks about the Adriana whacking in a roundabout way…pretty much trying anything to rationalize his actions to himself.

At Chris’s wake, one of the first people Tony sees is Julianna Skiff (Julianna Margulies). A curious cameo, I first thought, but the reasoning became clear later on…this was a woman Tony wanted to sleep with, but didn’t; and Chris did. The guys are yacking a little later at the side of the room when they see Kelli come in with her parents, sunglasses covering her tear swollen eyes. “Like a movie star” says one, impressed with her dignity and grace. “Jackie Kennedy” says Tony…the second Kennedy reference in the show, as one of the teenaged girls almost hit

by Chris was named Kennedy.

We also have the first Artie Bucco sighting of the year. Words cannot describe my sense of underwhelming boredom at that bit of news.

Tony and Carmela duck out to go to Aunt Ma's wake, where Paulie is good and pissed that so few people showed up, as they were all at Chris's wake instead. Paulie pissed? In further shocking news, I must report that the sun came up in the East today.

At least AJ seems to be doing a lot better. He's taking classes (auditing them, anyway, while he waits for his transcript to transfer), spending time with the Jasons, who consoled him at Chris's wake, and telling his therapist that things are going much better. So I wonder how long this is going to last? Oh, about a day…until Jason Gervase opens his car door without looking and a Somali student on a bike runs into it…inspiring the junior goons to beat the crud out of him. AJ only participates by giving him one shove, and then he looks on during the beating with obvious disgust. Later, in the therapists office, he breaks down with a Rodney King "can't we all just get along"

plea, firmly back into his depression.

Side note…this may totally shoot to hell my theory of AJ going into the family business. While he seemed to be into it with regards to acceptance and camaraderie, he just doesn't seem to have the intestinal fortitude required.

Fortunately for this show, his father has no such qualms with brutality, immorality, and self deception…but he does have a problem with everyone else moping about, so it's Vegas Time, Baby! Alan, Tony's connection in Vegas, gets him a private plane, transportation, and a suite, so Tony's all set. Except for the obligatory female companionship it seems he must always have.

This time, it's a choice that would make Dr. Melfi cancel all her afternoon appointments to talk about the ramifications. Tony visits Sonya, a former party pal of Chris's who is now working her way through college by stripping (what a cliché). Tony tells her about Chris's death, of course embellishing things even more ("he died instantly"). Later on, it's time for more fully clothed sex, and a post coital joint.

Tony's definitely living out his revenge. After Chris added the scene in "Cleaver" where the Tony-like character slept with the hero's fiancé, Tony wanted some payback (conveniently forgetting that he was very tempted to sleep with Adriana). Seeing a woman he wanted but couldn't get due to Chris (Julianna), he's relishing shagging and partying with someone his deceased nephew had.

He also decides to cross "taking peyote and stumbling around a casino stoned out of my gourd with a slut half my age" off his "must do" list. But at the roulette table where he previously lost a small amount, he ends up winning big time. Tony remarks "he's dead", and starts laughing uncontrollably, collapsing on the floor. Obviously, he thinks that Chris was his black cat, and getting rid of him has changed his luck. Yeah…like David Chase is going to let that happen.

Finally they end up looking over a canyon at sunrise, with Tony bellowing out "I GET IT!" I'm not sure what he gets…but my guess would be that he's thinking he's able to re-establish control over his own life, and he's about to be back to being large and in-charge. With three episodes left, I get the feeling it won't be all wine and roses for him.

Best Line: “The biggest blunder of my career…is now gone.”

Best Scene: No question it’s the car crash and the subsequent snuffing out of a truly tragic figure. Clean and Sober was never going to be something that would apply full time to Chris.

Latest Whacking Odds. The only way I thought Tony would kill Chris would have been in retaliation for killing Paulie. Wrong again, Mitch.

1) Paulie (odds – even) – I think Tony may decide to make it a two-fer in regards to people he thinks may rat him out to the Feds.

2) Butch: (odds – even) – Phil’s best buddy. After seeing him laughing while Phil was offering condolences to Tony, I figured he isn’t long for this world.

3) Phil (odds – 2:1) – Then again, it could be Phil that kills Tony.

4) Carlo (odds – 4:1) – Phil's going to hit someone in Tony's crew. I'm still thinking it'll be Carlo first…although Benny or Patsy are other lower level possibilities.

5) Uncle JuniorMummyHead (odds – 5:1) – Just like Paulie's Aunt Ma, this will the last of the older generation checking out quietly.

6) Bobby: (odds – 6:1) – Still could be Phil's target.

7) Silvio (odds – 10:1) – Still feel the need to keep the entire main crew on the list.

8) AJ or Meadow (odds – 12:1) – They have not given Meadow an episode to have more than two or three lines yet this season. So it's still possible that a tragedy may befall one of the Soprano children…but my guess would be an accident rather than murder, with AJ still being the most likely victim. (Janice

could also be the member of Tony’s real family that dies).