Mitch has been breaking down episodes of The Sopranos for us for the last two years, and I know of no one better to go to in hopes of making sense of Sunday nights controversial series finale. Did Mitch like it? Did he hate it? More importantly, what the hell did it mean? In this fantastic column, Mitch disects the final episode ever of The Sopranos, giving us his thoughts on the conclusion as well as the series as a whole.

I have come to the conclusion that people are more like AJ than they would like to believe. Listening to all the howling about how bad the ending was on this show reminds me so much of listening to Prince MobEntitlement droning on and on at Bobby's funeral dinner.

"We were cheated!"

"We deserve closure!"

"It's not fair to leave things open!"

Horse.

Hockey.

This show was NEVER an action/adventure series or shoot-em-up escapism. It was about the complex lives of individuals who just happen to be criminals. We had never seen anything this intricate, this intimate, this raw in any movie or television series before, and over the course of eight years and six seasons, the characters and their relationships were the focal points, NOT the violence and amorality of their professions, which were simply by-products (albeit amusing ones, to say the least).

Take last week's shocker of Dr. Melfi dropping Tony for example. Any long term fan of this show could write a dissertation about whether Tony actually was responding to therapy, or was just using it as another tool in his sociopath's tool-box. And there are valid arguments to either side that could be backed up by numerous examples over the years.

The dynamics of Tony's interactions with his family and The Family were as layered and multi-dimensional as anything you see in real life.

And people expected a nice, clean resolution to 85 hours of this intricacy in the final 60 minutes?

Sorry…that's not how life is. It goes on, and sometimes you just have to use your own brain cells and apply some imagination to fill in the blanks yourself. But evidently not in our online, microwavable, real-time world where we can't be bothered to take the time and effort to do anything other than have things continually spoon fed to us.

I always wondered what happened to Rick and Captain Renault after they made that walk down the runway, or how Scarlett O'Hara's "tomorrow is another day" turned out for her, or what happened to The Chief after he suffocated Randle Patrick McMurphy and threw that sink through the window to make his escape. I wondered…and then I made up "what happened next" scenarios in my own mind based upon my own belief system, and my interpretations of the character's motives and personalities.

David Chase could have wrapped things up in a shocking "kill them all" style…but that was just done last year by Scorsese in "The Departed". He could have killed off Meadow or AJ, but that was done in "The Godfather: Part 3". He could have made it so that the entire show was a dream in some boring sales schlub's mind, but that was done at the end of "St. Elsewhere". He could have had Tony arrested, or entering the witness protection program, as we've seen in countless other mob stories.

Or he could have whacked him.

And maybe he did.

"You probably never see it coming…it's just black and silence". And that's what happened. Someone was whacked at the end…whether it was Tony, or whether it was the audience is entirely up to your imaginations. In any case, the fate of the Sopranos families are now in the jurisdictions of our minds' collective eyes. Do not expect a movie… Chase states that he doesn't intend to go in that direction.

We never found out what happened to that Russian in Pine Barrens. That's how it goes in real life as well…we often don't know what happens to people who cross our paths, even if they are closely involved with us for a time. So now, at the end of the most unique and originals shows ever to be filmed, we get a unique and original ending.

Bravo.

Recap

Like so many episodes, it starts with Tony laying in bed, but luckily there is no dream here…only some classic rock and an AR-10 by his side at the safe house.

Flash to Tony and Paulie in a van at the airport, waiting for someone. It turns out to be Agent Harris, and we're immediately thinking that Tony is tired of hiding and wants to turn State's evidence. That's not the case. Tony's after the location of Phil, and offers up some more information on the Arabs, their banking location…which I'm assuming isn't the local branch of Bank of America. "You're overreaching", Harris tells Tony…another avenue evidently closed off to him.

Tony visits the house Carmela bought at the beach, and Queen Clueless is very unhappy when she's not holding court over 5,000 square feet of opulence. AJ is there with Rhiannon, who we find out is 17. Nothing like being a 22 year old going from a 29 year old single mother to a high school student, AJ. They talk about Bobby's funeral, with AJ wonders how it's possible to attend given the circumstances, and Carmela tells him that it will be safe due to all the FBI surveillance that will be there. I found her matter-of-fact attitude towards the obligatory law enforcement presence interesting; Carmela truly has become totally assimilated into being a Mob Wife, no longer even pretending to herself that Tony is in legitimate business (as she did the first few seasons).

What? No f-in' ziti? Actually, there is plenty of ziti as everyone follows the fine Italian custom of stuffing themselves stupid after a funeral (I like the Irish tradition of drinking yourself stupid after a funeral much better). Paulie sits at a table with the younger people…and immediately unbuttons his pants due to the aforementioned stuffing, right in front of Bobby's hot niece. Ick. And then AJ gets pissy that they are talking about American Idol and Dreamgirls, instead of being as morose as him. What he should have remembered is that any younger guy that is talking about "American Idol" or "Dreamgirls" is only doing so to try to get into some girl's pants. But that ploy flies over AJ's head, as does every other clue in life, as he quotes the apocalyptic Yeats poem from the other week, pronouncing the author as "Yeets" instead of "Yates". Sign number 53 that AJ will follow Tony into the mob: the oblivious butchering of the English language.

At the safe house, there is a Twilight Zone episode playing where the

character is telling a screenwriter, “the television industry today…they are looking for talent. They are looking for quality. And the writer is major commodity” Subtle, Chase, very subtle. I’m also looking at that as a slam to the current viewpoint in Hollywood, where we now get shows like the “The Bachelor”, “Big Brother”, and the upcoming idiocy where a 30 something guy chooses between a bunch of sorority 20 somethings or cougar-ish 40 somethings. We also get an introduction to a cat that just showed up, caught a mouse, and was completely adopted by Tony.

Butch is in Little Italy, which, per the words of the tour guide on a bus going by, has been reduced from over 40 blocks to one row of shops. Phil calls, upset that Tony still hasn’t been hit. Butch actually brings up the prospect of “reaching out” to Tony, but it is rejected immediately by Phil, and I find it interesting that he’s the one insisting on killing all these people, but he’s out hiding like a little girl while others are on the firing line. Phil hangs up on the irritated Butch, who realizes that as he’s talked on the phone, he’s wandered out of Little Italy to Little China.

Tony visits Janice at her place, where she’s enjoying the fact that Bobby’s son wants to live elsewhere, but she’s vowing to keep his daughter, no matter what, just to give her daughter Nica some company…and keeping her greedy claws in control of Bobby’s money. As Tony is leaving, he gets a call from Agent Harris saying that Phil has been making calls from a pay phone in Oyster Bay, Long Island. Seems Harris has been banging his “contact” regarding Brooklyn, and she doesn’t look pleased at all when she comes out of the bathroom to put her clothes back on. Guess it’s not just the gangsters that are cheating on their wives. By the way, the hair shirt worn by Harris in that scene was pretty damn disturbing.

AJ and Rhiannon are in the woods in the SUV, listening to Dylan, when they decide it's time to have sex, making him the 1,032,543rd person to fake interest in Dylan's work just to impress a girl enough to score with her. But evidently it's not just Rhiannon that was smoking hot, as AJ was keeping the car running to keep it warm, causing the catalytic converter to catch a bunch of leaves under the vehicle on fire, engulfing the vehicle. "At least there was hardly any gas in the tank"…BOOM! Right again, AJ. "But no big deal, Dad…I'll take the bus now.", he later tells his parents…which is predictably followed by "I'm depressed!" card.

Tony calls George, a retired former gangster respected by all sides (and wiretapped by the Feds), to set up a meeting with Little Carmine, Butch, and Albie. Tony gives everyone a convenient scapegoat right off the bat, putting the blame on Johnny Sack, saying he was the one that first put the atmosphere of distrust between NY and Jersey. Butch says it's gone too far, and Phil has changed, agreeing that it's time to call a halt to the hostilities. Tony requests information on Phil's location, but Butch won't go that far, although he does tell Tony to "do what you have to do"…implicitly signing off on whacking him. Butch agrees to "come up with a number" for Janice as payment for whacking Bobby, and the handshakes are made. All out war is avoided, and it's back to business.

Everybody back in the pool!…or, shall I say, back to the house,

the Pork Store, and the Bing, where the guys have taken the adopted cat. Paulie, being old style Italian (or stupid…the more likely case) believes in the old wives tales, hating the idea of having the cat around. I normally am not a cat person, but if it pisses off Paulie, then here, kitty-kitty-kitty. Tony, animal lover that he is, won't allow Paulie to get rid of him. You don't want to go against that order, Paulie…remember what happened to Ralph after he killed Pie-O-My.

Janice shows up at Junior's new mental facility, where Junior mistakes her for Livia (a logical confusion). She tells him about Bobby's death, and he thinks she's talking about Bobby Kennedy. Junior's friend Pat later goes to Tony, saying that Janice is only there to get Junior's money (another logical conclusion). "He can rot", is Tony's response…and I think Tony's already gotten his wish, at least as far as Junior's brain is concerned.

AJ has a Melfi-lite session with his therapist, who is doing an interesting leg crossing impression of Lorraine Bracco. AJ talks about the SUV blowing up…and how he hasn't bothered looking for a job yet…and once again I swear that AJ has enough slacker rationalizations imbedded into his head to qualify as an honorary Cyrus.

Carlo turns up missing. Paulie's worried that Butch double-crossed them, but Tony is thinking that Carlo flipped, after recalling that Carlo's stupid son Jason was picked up the day before for dealing ecstasy. Tony gives the look of "so now it happens".

Carmela goes to Meadow's room, and sees she's with old party-girl friend Hunter…who is now in medical school after turning her life around. D'Oh! That's gotta smart. And speaking of awkward, there is the family get together with Patsy Parisi and his wife, and Patrick and Meadow. Patrick talks about how they are already wanting Meadow to come onboard at his law firm when she gets out of law school. Seems Patrick is defending a county commissioner on corruption charges. In other words, Patrick (and maybe Meadow) will end up becoming mob lawyers. Carmela looks so proud, thinking of Meadow starting out at $175K per year. Meadow later says to Tony that she wanted to be a lawyer to defend people after seeing Tony drug away by the FBI "all those times". Ya ever think that maybe he was drug off because he's a murderous cretin? Nah…the Carmela-fication of Meadow is in full bloom, and I think she'll settle into her future role as a Mob-wife quite comfortably.

Back at the Bing, the cat seems to just stare at the picture of

Chris, which makes Paulie want to take him out, a desire Tony squashes. Sly little bit; contemplating if the cat might just be Christopher re-incarnated. I just think the cat liked looking at a someone who had fewer brains than him. Tony wants Paulie to take over Carlo's crew…who tells him he'll have to think about it, due to his age. Not the answer Tony was expecting.

Later, Tony is driving up the road, and picks up a jogging AJ, who drops the bomb on Tony that he wants to join the Army, so he can fight in Afghanistan, learn to fly helicopters, and then come back and fly for Donald Trump. The argument is continued in front of Carmela, where AJ also reveals that he plans to study Arabic, maybe go to the CIA after the Army…and go to Officers' Training School. "You flunked out of college", Carmela reminds him. Not that I expect AJ to let reality interfere in the slightest with his delusions of grandeur.

Carmela and Tony meet up with AJ's therapist, and you can tell how badly Tony needs therapy, as he's going right back to opening up about HIS depression, his rotten childhood, and his mother issues. Carmela shoots him multiple "STFU" looks.

Switch over to a scene at a gas station, where Phil is getting out

of the passenger seat, telling his infant twin grandchildren in the back seat to “Wave bye-bye, Grandpa”. Heh…what a perfect touch, as everyone on the planet knows what’s coming next, a bullet to Phil’s well groomed silver head courtesy of Walden, who adds one to the chest for good measure. Phil’s wife jumps out of the driver’s seat to check out her dead husband, bumping the SUV into drive. Just when we think a bigger tragedy might be coming in the form of dead babies, Phil gives his one service to mankind and uses his head for a speed bump to stop the car. Karrackkk….Squ-iiiisssshhh! And a bystander totally hurls, echoing my sentiments. Congratulations, Chase. Your last whacking was your most disgusting. Give your foley artist a bonus for those great (nauseating) sound effects.

At FBI headquarters, Agent Goddard breaks the news of Phil’s demise to Agent Harris. “Damn! We’re going to win this thing!”, Harris blurts. “Who’s this ‘we’ shit, homeboy?”, says Goddard’s surprised look.

With that out of the way, we see that AJ definitely has a lot of Carmela in him as well, as he is so easily bribed. They present him with a screenplay from Daniel Baldwin (not to be confused with another highly intellectual phrase like, “A doctoral dissertation from Brittney Spears”). Carmine will produce it, and AJ will be a “development executive”…aka…gopher. And then if

it all works out well enough, Tony will buy him a club. Can you spell “enable”? I thought you could.

Another problem solved, Tony’s got others on his plate, as his lawyer Mink is telling him that someone is testifying to the grand jury, and that subpoenas are “flying”. Mink tries to calm him a bit, telling him that it’s “not like we haven’t envisioned this day” and that “trials are there to be won”. Easy for the guy charging $300 an hour and not risking any jail time to say.

One last time to see Little Stevie before he goes out on his next tour with The Boss, as Tony visits Sil at the ICU, who is getting his toes done by Gab. “Little Miss Sunshine” is playing on the TV. If I’m in a coma, please do not put “Little Miss Sunshine” on the TV…I’m sure that it is true that people in a coma can hear what’s going on about them, and not being able to move while that crap is playing, it would be pure torture.

Paulie says he’s going to pass on Carlo’s job…his superstitions are stopping him since Richie Aprile,

Ralphie, Vito, and Carlo all ran it earlier, and he's sure he'll die as well (he may have a point). Paulie's also still whining about the cat. Tony tells him that luck is a changing commodity, and that since Chris's death, his gambling luck has "done a 180"…I have no idea why Tony brought that up. In the end Tony does enough manipulations to get him to take the job by threatening to give it to Patsy (maybe Melfi was right). Paulie accepts, but obviously isn't happy about it.

AJ "had to get" a new car for his new job, and no more gas guzzling SUVs, so he's driving a shiny new BMW M3 to pick up Rhiannon at high school, enjoying his life as the next Christopher Moltisanti. He's even laughing now at the TV showing Bush, instead of getting all bummed out about current events…while Carmela looks over housing specs for turning the beach house into her next dream project. Ignorance; thy name is Bliss. Or Soprano.

Tony finally breaks down and visits Junior…who doesn't know him. His mind is completely gone, not even remembering his little brother, Tony's father. "You two

ran North Jersey", Tony tells him. "We did? That's nice." Tony leaves, disturbed on seeing one possible future for himself.

Which leads us to the final scene…the one EVERYONE is still talking about. And while it was, beyond doubt, one of the most tension filled seven minutes in Sopranos history, I don't really feel like recapping it in the normal way, as it's been beaten to death already, and it would be nearly impossible for me to do it without injecting my personal opinions into it, which I don't feel are relevant to the reader. Make up your own mind as to What It All Means.

But I will say that the internet rumor about the truck driver being Robert Patrick, whose character was ruined by Tony (and gambling), is false. As is the story that the suspicious man in the diner was actually Nicky Leotardo, Phil's nephew…that wasn't true either, although it was admitted that both men were cast due to their similar appearance to the other actors mentioned, which does mean that Chase was screwing with viewers' minds right

up until the end.

So all we really learned is that Tony is paranoid as hell right now, Carmela and AJ are blithely content, and Meadow can’t parallel park.

“Don’t Stop”…

But we must.

Roll credits.