To say Mitch's Sopranos recaps have been popular this season would be a vast understatement. He mixes his witty brand of humor with an insightful look at what happened, and what could be looming. In this, his final recap for this season, he breaks down the season finale ... and also makes some predictions for what will happen in the final eight episodes.

Have you ever seen a happier Christmas get together of a loving family than the one at the end of the final Sopranos episode for this year?

We have the mobster boss who's worried that someone close to him is going to get whacked by a Brooklyn thug; his doting wife who can't be bought off…but can be rented in the shape of exchanging an investigation of a murder for an approved building inspection; the daughter who's ran away to California, and the son re-enacting "Guess Who's Coming To Dinner" with an older Puerto Rican single mother and her three year old son. Add to that a loser drug addict nephew and the pregnant wife he's cheating on and a scam artist shrew of a big sister with her browbeaten husband and step kids, and you end up with a family Christmas gathering that makes the Griswolds look positively normal in comparison.

And so we fade out of the last full season of The Sopranos with a tableau, not a whacking. The action junkies are furious. For me, it's a false calm and respite before the storm, as the inner peace Tony now finds is as stable as a Jennifer Lopez marriage with half the shelf life.

Recap

We open with Carlo going to a beach house, opening up the refrigerator, and discovering where they took Ted Williams' frozen head! Wait…no…it's Fat Dom's head, and in the name of symmetry in regards to Vito, Carlo is taking it to an abandoned well in New England for its final resting place. Sly touch playing the Stones' "Moonlight Mile" in the background…considering the lyrics "with a head full of snow". Heh.

Carlo asks if the barbeque is still on at Sheepshead Bay, and we all know what that means. Sure enough, as Phil starts walking towards his little hideaway (wire room) with a blonde on his arm, the place blows up real good. Phil and the bimbette are knocked to the ground…which is better than Phil deserves for using the line "let's get something straight between us" towards his goomar. I used that line in a bar once when I was 19…and I can still remember the slap I got. I'm wondering if he used the line "if I told you that you have a great body, would you hold it against me" for his initial pickup.

Speaking of goomars…Tony's with another woman when he gets the news. I guess Carmela can't lovingly button his shirt up every day.

Thanksgiving at Casa de Mob, and what says "Thanksgiving" more than male bonding in front of a huge assed TV watching football? Tony, Chris, Bobby, and AJ are all sitting around, and we get the first real indication that AJ is actually holding on to his new job at the construction site and being responsible. I'm not sure which sign of the Apocalypse this is, but I think it's somewhere between a pale sickly horse, and the Browns appearing in a Super Bowl.

Tony needles Christufuh about the rumors of Chris having a new goomar as well. Yes, he does…and his excuse is it's because his wife is pregnant…or, as he so eloquently puts it…"the playground is closed". Thousands of pregnant women

across the country immediately look over to their husbands and say “if you EVER say that line to/about me, I will Lorena Bobbit you in a heartbeat.” Chris tells the boys that he hasn’t brought the new one around because she’s black, and that might cause a problem with the bigoted Paulie.

Or maybe because she’s Julianna. Seems Chris saw her at one of his AA meetings, recognized her, and when she described (without naming names) what happened between her and Tony, Chris decided to lace up the sneakers and go for the rebound. Chris’s AA sponsor Murmur is not exactly thrilled when he finds out Chris is hooking up with an addict, but hey!...what could possibly go wrong...go wrong...go wrong? Other than Chris ignoring his pregnant wife, banging a woman Tony still wants (T tries to hit up on her twice; at the signing of the Jamba Juice property sale, and at an industrial property Tony’s ‘thinking’ about investing in, and is reee-jected)…and then we have that LITTLE issue of Chris and Julianna lighting up crystal meth and getting stoned on a daily basis. Fuggedaboudit, Murmur…nothing to fear. And did I mention Christufuh continually blabbing his big mouth about details of his mob life? Terrell Owens is quite compared to this motor mouth.

Seems like everyone’s getting laid in SopranoLand this week! (except Phil…thanks to the wire room bomb). At the construction site, Paulie introduced AJ to Blanca, the Puerto Rican Secretary of Mob Payoffs (she hands Paulie a cash envelope when they first meet). Later, at a bar, AJ sees her again. BTW, how is it that AJ can continually be drinking beer in bars and clubs when he isn’t more than 20? (because mob children have great access to fake IDs, Clouseau). Regardless, he and Blanca do some flirting and she writes down her phone number on a napkin. But it only has six digits. “You have to work for that last one”, she says. Let’s just hope she really meant that it was the LAST one that was missing…could you imaging the time it would take (and the ensuing phone bill) to go through all the possibilities if AJ didn’t know the placement of that missing digit. I see a fun new game for women to play on obnoxious men in bars.

Einstein must have figured it out, because later we see him on a 'high rollers' date…watching "The 40 Year Old Virgin" at her place in the presence of Blanca's three year old son. But it's hard to hear the dialog when there are three mini-hoodlums outside the window raising havoc. "My ex used to beat the shit out of them to get them to leave", Blanca tells the Soprano voted Most Likely To Lose a Celebrity Boxing Match To Screech. So if you can't beat 'em up; buy 'em off. How convenient AJ carries around an expensive bicycle in the back of his X-Terra to bribe away the juvenile delinquents. I probably would always carry one around in my SUV myself if it weren't for the golf clubs that are always there.

Then again, if I knew it would get me laid with a hot chick like it just did for AJ, I might reconsider (note to my dear wife; I wouldn't really consider it…I'm just throwing in a little humor here, honey…please put down the phone and don't interrupt the nice divorce attorney during his dinner).

So some people are being screwed…and some are just screwing up. Case in point: Little Carmine. He calls a "meeting of the minds" between Tony and Phil after the wire room explosion to talk about "incidents that have expired lately". Tony and Phil point fingers at each other regarding Vito and the bombing, although Tony and Sil Gregory-Hines their way around the accusations about Fat Dom's disappearance. Carmine actually does calm them down for a bit with a good analogy of "a pint of blood costing more than a pound of gold"…and then blows it all by bringing up Phil's dead brother, which causes the Shah of Iran to go thermonuclear and storm out.

Great people skills, Carmine! For your next career, you can be a marriage counselor, and end every session with a little reminder of that affair with the nanny the guy had five years ago. A little more salt for your wound, madam?

So Phil's on the warpath and his captains debate what to do in retaliation. Some want Tony whacked, but Phil's Old School and says that you just don't whack a boss, so they suggest going after "someone close" to T. Interspersed with some of these scenes are more scenes between Chris and Julianna…so we might think that Captain Meth-Man may be in their sites…until we remember that Michael Imperioli has already signed on for the last eight episodes. I guess that leaves Bobby, or Sil, or Paulie on the Endangered Species List…damn, this is about to get good!

Bzzt…caught again by David Chase saying "PYSCHE!" We don't get to what may be the start of a bloody war, because Phil's got heartburn…and the only purple pills he has in his possession are designed to work about nine inches lower on the body. So Dr. Kevorkian sends him back home with an industrial strength bottle of Tums and a bill for $5,000.

Flash forward a few minutes, and It's The Big One, Ethel! Gotta love those HMO doctors. Five to six months recovery, just in time for January activity…convenient, eh? By the way, how long do you think it'll take the good doctor to recover from his gunshot to the temple?

While Phil recuperates, Agent Harris stops by the Pork Store for his favorite Hero sandwich and warns Tony of the possible hit. Tony responds by showing up at the hospital and turning into Dr. Phil doing a mediation with the ailing Shah…telling the real Phil that there are more important things than no-show jobs, with Tony sharing with him his near death experience and how it's convinced him to concentrate on family first. Phil tears up…I reach for the vomit basket. Damn wusses. I wanted Tony to go in there and mess with his IV bottle or something…but I guess I have to wait until '24' comes back to see really neat torture scenes.

One last issue resolved (for now). Adriana's mother attempted suicide, prompting Carmela to look at hiring a PI to find out what happened to Ade. Remember Tony sabotaging Carmela's spec house? Little change of plans. Tony tells Sil to go ahead and lean on the inspector. "My wife needs a career", Tony laments, saying it in just about the same style as Jack Nicholson in Batman saying "this town needs an enema!" Regardless of the mixed metaphor, Carm is more than happy to toss aside the PI's card as she dives back into her house plans. I'm totally shocked that Carmela could be bought off so easily. Next thing you know, someone's going to tell me that my favorite baseball player Barry Bonds didn't get that melon sized head naturally.

So all is copasetic for now in Bing-Land. No dramatic confrontations…but no real cliffhangers either. At least we don't have almost two years to wait this time for the breaking of the Calm Dam of New Jersey.

Best Line: Melfi: "You don't have to eat every piece of rigatoni. You don't have to fuck every woman you meet."

Best Scene: Bobby, his eye finally healed, visits Uncle Junior to return some money Junior sent him, and basically become the last person he's connected with to tell him to eff-off. Great job of acting from Dominic Chianese showing both the sadness of a man understanding his situation, and the sadness of a man nearing the end of his struggles with dementia.

Guesses for Next Season. No…I will NEVER learn! Despite having a prediction record ranging somewhere in the neighborhood of a NL pitcher's batting average…let's make some early guesses for the last eight episodes in January.

~Phil recovers and the first four episodes build up to the war that encompasses the last four.

~Johnny Sack and Little Carmine learn of Phil's involvement in Rusty's whacking and take some action. Of the three, Little Carmine is the leading candidate to get whacked.

~Tony at one point helps the feds with the Muslim Titty Bar Lovers, as they are of course terrorists. In exchange, they lighten up somewhat on the New Jersey family.

~Meadow and Finn get married, giving Tony his grandson to dote upon for a few episodes.

~Paulie learns he's terminal, and goes on a berserker at some point before going out in a blaze of glory.

~Chris continues down the path of total self-destruction…with Julianna possibly passing info to the Feds. Tony has him whacked…leading to…

~AJ becomes Heir to the Throne. He gets Blanca pregnant, continues on his road to maturity, and in getting closer to his father, he gets closer to the other side as well.

~Tony dies. Life goes on.

In truth, there's a better chance that Tony starts a talk show, Carmela flies to Italy and ravages Furio, Meadow marries a black Jew, AJ becomes CEO of Microsoft, and Christopher is awarded the Nobel Prize for his work in molecular biology. But I'll be back in January to tell you all how wrong I was again. In the meantime, we have Deadwood and Entourage starting back up…with great news being delivered today (Tuesday) that although this is the last full season of Deadwood, there will be two two-hour specials to bring closure to the series.

Until January, keep your heads out of bowling bags, and keep your long legged pshrinks on speed dial.