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Written by Maureen Younger

ARTS

MY Outlander

The time-travelling historical romance is back and *Maureen Younger's* excited. Here she is with the first of her new weekly blog to tell us why. Contains SPOILERS.

Posted on 11/04/2016



Highland bling: Jamie Fraser (Sam Heughan) and Claire Beauchamp (Caitriona Balfe) smarten up for their French society debut. All photos: Sony Pictures Television/Starz.

After what seemed to be an absolute eternity, Season 2 of *Outlander* is back on Amazon Prime. Even before the end of the pre-credit sequence I was hooked; because if there is one thing executive producer Ronald D Moore and his team know how to do, it's how to reel in the viewers.

Unexpectedly, the new season doesn't start where Season 1 ended with Claire (Caitriona Balfe), Jamie (Sam Heughan) and Murtagh (Duncan Lacroix) off to France but rather with Claire, having evidently left 18th-century Scotland before the Battle of Culloden and back at the standing stones in 18th-century dress but most definitely in 1948, wishing she were dead but prepared to keep a promise she'd made – presumably to Jamie – and to live a life she no longer wants.

So, even before the titles came up, I already had questions racing around my head: Why has Claire come back? Why did she make that promise? What's the significance of the ring whose stone she seems to have lost while time-travelling? What's happened to everyone? Did Jamie Fraser die at Culloden? And not forgetting the pivotal concern of the average hot-blooded female viewer (me included): if we're in 1948, when the hell will Jamie Fraser make an appearance?

It's clear that Claire still loves Jamie as she talks about him to her confidante, Mrs Graham (Tracey Wilkinson), avidly looking for references to him in various history books. A moving little scene which had me shedding the odd tear.

"In the capable hands of this particular set of writers, directors, producers and actors, I suspect *Outlander* will somehow manage to pull off the nigh impossible."

What's great about *Outlander* is that it can be rather thought-provoking. Mrs Graham advises Claire to move on with her life and not keep chasing a ghost when she still has a real man, her first husband Frank (Tobias Menzies) who loves her. And this raises a much more general question about relationships: haven't we all done that at some time or other? Held a torch for someone we can't have while steadfastly pushing away what's right in front of us?

And without a doubt Frank loves Claire. As Frank, Tobias Menzies gets the short straw in this love triangle in time. Fortunately for *Outlander*, Menzies is a keenly intelligent actor who deftly portrays not only his love for Claire but the gut-wrenching agony he's suffered at all he's been through.

Yet, we're never in doubt that some of his ancestor Black Jack Randall's propensity to violence is lurking under his urbane British staidness, as can be seen by his sudden angry outburst when Claire drops the bombshell that she is pregnant with Jamie's child.

Frank agrees to stay with Claire on condition that they raise the child as his and she agrees to forget about Jamie. Then Claire drops another bombshell. Jamie had already made her promise to let him go. At this Frank seems to begin to grasp the measure of the man Jamie is: a man who, we now know, decided to stand and die with his men at Culloden despite knowing they were doomed.

Frank and Claire then head off to Boston, while fortunately for *Outlander's* legion of Jamie fans, the episode shifts back to 1745 with the arrival in France of Claire, Jamie and Murtagh, a man who can say more with a silence and a glare than the average actor can with a page and a half of dialogue.

Knowing that the Jacobite Rising is doomed to failure and in its wake will lead to the destruction of the Highland way of life by the British, Claire persuades Jamie that they should try to change history and thwart the Rising. With its figurehead, Bonnie Prince Charlie, ensconced in Paris, Claire concludes they can do this before the Rising gets a chance to even get off the ground.

But this mission of Claire's seems to have an ulterior motive; it is presumably Claire's way of giving the still traumatised Jamie something to focus on after his torture and rape at the hands of Black Jack Randall.

Having enlisted the help of Jamie's cousin, Jared Fraser (Robert Cavanah) to introduce them to the Jacobite leaders in Paris, Claire, Jamie and Murtagh set off for the capital but not before making an enemy of the Comte St Germain (Stanley Weber), an arrogant (what else?) Frenchman.

So it seems the climax of Season 2 will be Culloden. Moreover, we already know that Claire and Jamie fail in their mission to change the future. As this is apparently the crux of Season 2's storyline, this could have a serious impact on the dramatic tension of the series.

But in the capable hands of this particular set of writers, directors, producers and actors, I suspect *Outlander* will somehow manage to pull off the nigh impossible – that tricky paradox of being able to create suspense in a story whose ending we already seem to know. *Outlander*, welcome back!

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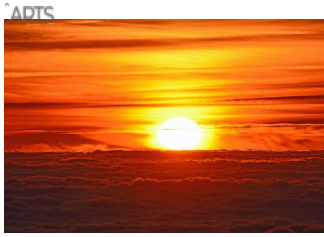




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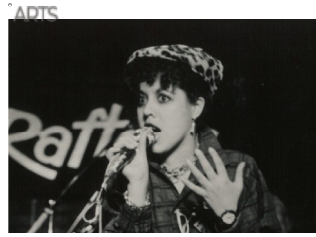
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