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Written by Maureen Younger

ARTS

MY Outlander

Maureen Younger talks episode 12, death and punching corpses.

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Far from bonnie: Murtagh (Duncan Lacroix) and Claire (Caitriona Balfe) prepare for further battles.

Photos: Sony Pictures Television/Starz.

To quote Napoleon Bonaparte: "An army marches on its stomach", a sentiment that would not have been lost on the Highlander army that we are greeted with at the start of this week's episode: dispirited after five months of retreat, bedraggled and starving, and burdened with a leader in Prince Charles (Andrew Gower) who believes, as God's chosen representative on earth, he will win come what may. As military tactics go, it's not ideal.

No wonder Claire (Caitriona Balfe), Jamie (Sam Heughan) and Murtagh (Duncan Lacroix) are in despair; for despite all their best efforts, it is looking as if Culloden will soon be upon them. As a born fighter, however, Jamie is not ready to give up just yet.

To be honest, Claire and Jamie could have easily solved the problem of Culloden by assassinating John O'Sullivan whose insane idea it was for the Highlanders to fight on Culloden Moor in the first place. Though to be fair, that would have made for a much shorter novel/TV series.

O'Sullivan couldn't have chosen worse ground for the Highlanders to fight upon if he'd been in the secret employ of the British. Needless to say, as men who know a thing or two about fighting, both Jamie and Lord George Murray (Julian Wadham) are against the idea. The Prince, who knows nothing about fighting – his historical counterpart's previous military experience comprised 10 days' attendance at a siege as a child – concurs of course with O'Sullivan.

Meanwhile, a pregnant Mary Hawkins (Rosie Day) and a dying Alex Randall (Laurence Dobiesz) are living in sin in nearby Inverness. Who should then appear but Black Jack Randall (Tobias Menzies), who, in a desperate attempt to get Claire to come to his brother's aid, agrees to tell Claire the whereabouts of the British army.

This scene highlights unfamiliar facets of both these characters: firstly that Black Jack is genuinely fond of his brother and secondly, there is a toughness to Claire that never existed before. In season one it would be hard to imagine Claire bargaining over the suffering of a dying man, but as Claire points out to Black Jack, "The woman I am now is not the woman I once was."

"*Outlander's* creator Diana Gabaldon has conceived a set of characters that are anything but one-dimensional and moreover, they grow and mutate."

However, it would seem Black Jack is not fond enough of his brother to agree to his dying wish and marry Mary, thereby offering her and her unborn child a name and security. This is now the third dreadful prospective husband that has been pushed Mary's way; she's one of those fictional characters who makes even my own dire love life look as if it isn't actually going too badly in comparison.

We do get to see a softer side of Murtagh, though, when he offers to marry Mary instead. For me one of the joys of this season has been watching him play a bigger role and getting to know his character better.

There are also two deathbed scenes between brothers in this episode. The first is between Dougal (Graham McTavish) and the newly arrived Colum Mackenzie (Gary Lewis). Jamie immediately confirms Colum's respect for Jamie's guile when he learns how ingeniously Jamie has kept Dougal's thirst for power at bay.

We learn from Colum that not only is he dying but that Geillis Duncan's baby is alive. The latter comes as something of a surprise to Claire, as it does to the viewers, who last saw a pregnant Geillis (Lotte Verbeek) being marched off to be burned at the stake. It turns out her execution was postponed until after she gave birth, which seems somewhat surprising given the ugly mood of the villagers at the time and her proximity to the stake.

Colum also has news for Jamie and Dougal when he informs them that once he has died Jamie will have guardianship of the clan until his son (well technically he's Dougal's son – don't ask) is of age. Not surprisingly, Dougal is not overjoyed at the news but given the diverse leadership qualities of both men you understand why Colum made the decision that he did.

Nevertheless we get a chance to see another side of Dougal, when he visits the dying Colum. Despite having been a right royal pain in the arse to Colum throughout, it is clear Dougal feels great affection for his brother but leaves it far too late to tell him.

As for Alex and Jack Randall, Alex's deathbed scene is anything but touching. We've already glimpsed the Black Jack of old when he taunts Claire about his torture and rape of Jamie but when Alex finally dies, Black Jack deals with his grief by punching Alex's corpse in the face several times.



And it is precisely roles such as Claire, Jamie, Murtagh and Black Jack that make *Outlander* so enthralling, and must be such a delight for the actors to portray. For *Outlander's* creator Diana Gabaldon has conceived a set of characters that are anything but one-dimensional and moreover, they grow and mutate.

Outlander is also a story that highlights the importance of history. In order to avoid Culloden, Jamie plans a surprise night-time attack on the British forces. Evidently Claire's knowledge of 18th-century British battles didn't extend to knowing that this is exactly what happened and that the attack ended in disaster.

Thus Jamie in a last-ditch attempt to avoid the massacre of Culloden is unwittingly making matters worse: forcing a tired and starving army to march all night to Nairn and back and to no avail, as Prince Charles and O'Sullivan fail to turn up at the agreed rendezvous and the attack is called off.

Thus on the eve of Culloden, the Highlander army is even more exhausted than it already was, with men lying scattered over the countryside, asleep in ditches only to awaken once a Redcoat was about to cut their throat.

With Britain this week marching out of the EU, *Outlander* is perhaps a timely reminder that we ignore history at our peril.

Follow Maureen's week-by-week *Outlander* blog [here](#).

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