

MOB SCENES

Who's who in the most famous, dysfunctional family as 'Sopranos' returns tonight

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TONY SOPRANO

JAMES GANDOLFINI

Last seen: Checking into a hotel after Carmela kicked him out of the house. Tony also called off a hit on fellow mob boss Carmine at the last moment and tried to placate New York crew consigliere, Johnny Sack about reneging on it.

The scoop: Tony was very busy last season — he chopped up capo Ralphie (Joe Pantoliano) into little pieces, felt a little guilty when a former girlfriend, Gloria Trillo, committed suicide, politely convinced his heir-apparent Christopher Moltisanti to go into rehab ("Anybody else would've had their...intervention right through the back of their head," barked Tony), and told Dr. Melfi he'd had enough of the talking cure. He even bought Carmela a beach house. "It's for the family," he tells her.

LORRAINE BRACCO

Tony's shrink

Last seen: Trying to convince Tony he should stick with his therapy.

The scoop: It's not easy helping a killer feel better about himself, as Dr. Melfi is quickly learning. Her sessions with Tony have driven her to self-medicate, often with a bottle of vodka. She also is still dealing with the repercussions of being brutally raped, confessing to her therapist that it made her feel better knowing that Tony would "squash" her attacker "like a bug" if she wanted it. Hmmm.

DR. MELFI



JANICE

AIDA TURTURRO

Tony's sister

Last seen: Serving tearful widower Bobby Bacala, another one of Tony's foot soldiers, a plate of baked ziti — the final reminder of his late wife who died last season in a car accident. Also gave Bobby a good kick in the pants to get back to work helping Uncle Junior get his case dismissed.

The scoop: Janice has to have a man in her life — even though the men in her life tend not to stay alive for very long. So when lumpy Bobby was widowed, Janice swooped in, headed off all the competition from other women, badgered and cajoled him into sucking it up and moving on.

"UNCLE JUNIOR"

DOMINIC CHIANESE

Tony's uncle and Soprano family boss

Last seen: On trial for participating in organized crime, but getting off when the judge woefully declared, "I have no choice but to declare a mistrial." Still under house arrest and crankily trying to reassert his authority in the family.

The scoop: Uncle Junior's trial was not going well, and when he was hit on the head by a boom mike and took a tumble down the court steps, his lawyer tried to plead diminished capacity. No dice. But Bobby finally got around to strong-arming a jury member and the whole mess was reluctantly declared a mistrial by the judge.



It's been almost 15 months since that wall-shaking, Emmy-winning Season 4 finale of "The Sopranos" — where Tony (James Gandolfini) and Carmela (Edie Falco) almost came to blows in one of the most dramatic wall-punching domestic disputes on TV. And even devoted viewers could use a reminder of where we left off.

Fifteen months haven't passed on the show — it's probably more like six — but some things haven't changed: the season debut tonight at 9 on HBO makes clear what's important: family.

Tony's personal family is splintering apart. He and Carmela have fallen into a routine of bickering unease. Tony is living in bachelor-pad squalor — but still drops in on Carmela to leave a monthly allowance and to fight over money.

Tony wants to work out a separation arrangement without the help of lawyers, but apparently Carmela has already spoken with an attorney.

While Tony's married life is falling apart — his sister Janice (Aida Turturro) has jumped right back into wedded bliss, marrying the just-widowed Bobby Bacala (Steve Schirripa).

But just as one family is getting smaller, Tony's business "family" is growing uncomfortably large. And it's his mob family that looks to be the source of even more heartburn for the lumbering crime boss.

Tony is seen watching the local news, where reporters and news pundits mouth off on the release of Mafia figures who've been in jail for decades — otherwise known as "the class of 2004." They happily predict it could mark heightened tensions and internal violence for the mob.

Among the parolees are Robert Loggia as the violent Feech; Joe Santos (Detective Becker of "The Rockford Files"); and wisecracking Steve Buscemi as Tony's cousin and childhood best friend who wants to go straight and become a licensed massage therapist.

If all these problems are bugging Tony, they're not half as troublesome as the "bugs" he barely suspects. The feds are all over the place, listening in on conversations, turning weak underlings into informants and building up a case of massive circumstantial evidence that they hope will bring his entire world crashing down.

The new season brings back old themes — Christopher (Michael Imperioli) whines about not getting respect, Paulie (Tony Sirico) seems increasingly unhappy and Uncle Junior (Dominic Chianese) increasingly unstable. Adriana starts to crack under the intense pressure over her status as a stool pigeon.

And is that Tony watching scenes from Barbra Streisand's "The Prince of Tides" and quoting Dr. Phil? Something is rotten in Jersey and it's starting to take its toll.

FAVORITE

Peter Kramer/Getty Images

PAULIE "WALNUTS" GUALTIERI

TONY SIRICO

Capo in the Soprano crew

Last seen: Ripping off an old woman at the old age home where his mother lives and killing her by smothering her with a pillow — then handing the wad of cash to Tony to curry favor.

The scoop: Paulie's philosophy is simple: get everyone to kick money to him, so that he can in turn kick money back to Tony. But unhappy with a considerable drop in earnings — thanks to some recent moves by Tony — he's thinking about bolting the family. He may regret those choices.

John Barrett/Globe

JOHNNY SACK

VINCENT CURATOLA

Consigliere of New York crew

Last seen: Going ballistic when Tony called off the hit on Johnny's boss at the last minute. "I still consider you a dear, dear friend," Tony tells the fuming schemer, who's more vulnerable than ever and knows it.

The scoop: Johnny Sack played a dangerous game by urging Tony to knock off his boss. When Tony backed off at the last moment, Johnny was furious and more exposed than ever. Foolishly, he let Tony know that. But Johnny remained determined to get his revenge on just about everyone.

JAMIE-LYNN DISCALA

Tony's college-aged daughter

Last seen: Having her annual tea with Carmela at The Plaza and mocking Mom's complaints that she's become uppity since attending Columbia University.

The scoop: When her parents separated, Meadow was as distressed as any child would be. But she's resilient, excelling in school and volunteering at a South Bronx law center. But Meadow's relationship with her parents has been strained lately. And they didn't like her boyfriend, Jackie Aprile Jr., the son of another gangster. When Jackie was found shot to death, Meadow was inconsolable, placing the blame on the "family life."

MEADOW

ANTHONY JR.

ROBERT ILER

Tony's troubled teenage son

Last seen: Moping around the house playing video games. Briefly dated a girl who was interested in AJ only because his dad is a gangster.

The scoop: AJ causes his father more anxiety than the feds. He's an uninspired high school student, a video-game addict who pushed his parents' buttons. Some highlights: he crashed Carmela's car without a license; got caught smoking pot; went to gym class drunk on stolen Communion wine; and was expelled for cheating on a geometry test. He was sent off to military school, but after suffering anxiety attacks, came home.

Barry Wetcher

CHRISTOPHER MOLTISANTI

MICHAEL IMPERIOLI

Tony's nephew, a capo in his crew and his heir apparent

Last seen: Taking a phone call from Tony calling off a hit on New York crime boss Carmine.

The scoop: Christopher's devotion is vital to Tony, as he's decided to use his nephew to help protect him from the feds. Instead of issuing commands himself, Tony makes them through Christopher. But his loyalty has come into question one too many times. His heroin addiction made him a serious liability to Tony — but Tony, rather than "put him out of his misery" as Junior advised, sent him to rehab. Now he's ready to get back to work.

OSH



CARMELA

EDIE FALCO

Tony's estranged wife

Last seen: Ripping into Tony after one too many of his floozies called the house. "You've made a fool of me for years with these whores," she screams. "And now it's come into our home?!" Also found time to invest some of Tony's stash of hidden loot that he kept tucked away in the backyard.

The scoop: Carmela was ready for an affair with Tony's ponytailed foot-soldier Furio (Federico Castelluccio), but he wised up and bolted to his native Italy. It caused her to wonder what her life might be like if she were no longer married to Tony. So she did something almost unheard of in her social circle: asked for a divorce.

Abbott Genser/HBO

ADRIANA LA CERVA

Abbott Genser/HBO

DREA DE MATTEO

Christopher's fiancé and an FBI snitch

Last seen: Popping the question to Christopher. Adriana saw some salvation in legal advice gleaned from a TV show about crime — she thought that if she married Christopher, she wouldn't have to testify against him if he got pinched by the feds. She was convinced it meant the end of her career as a snitch, but an FBI agent informed her that the law doesn't work that way and her upset stomach continues.

The scoop: Adriana and Christopher make a good couple. She loves designer clothes — and he loves buying them for her. They've also supported each other in the past — she encouraged his interest in film and he bought her a nightclub.