

Episode 301, Mini-Review

Last week at San Diego ComicCon, Starz showed the entire hour of this coming season's first episode. Having only seen that episode once, this isn't a full review, and my feelings about some of this may change between now and the time I write a complete review, since I'll have watched it carefully multiple times. But these are my initial thoughts about it.

- The Culloden scenes were brilliant. The episode focused heavily on Jamie's despair, his hopelessness, his fervent desire to just die and get it over with. Focusing on his extremely expressive face, with no music, only the sound of his labored breathing, you truly felt how desperate he was.

- Battle scenes were appropriately gory – war isn't clean and neat. The overwhelming force that the British brought to the battle was abundantly clear – on horseback, with guns and bayonets, there was no way that the Scots could have prevailed, even though they clearly had the greater emotional desire.

- Scenes directly from the book were excellent. The Highlanders recovering for a few minutes in the small church were heartrending. Jamie asks if anyone has seen Murtagh – no one has. We assume he's lying somewhere in the fields with the other corpses that have been shown throughout the episode. Rupert sits with Jamie for a minute, and gives him what absolution he can for Dougal's death – I, like most of the other attendees, were in tears. Rupert has always been a larger-than-life character, and he isn't at all diminished in this episode.

- Lord Melton's appearance, and his dilemma – does he fulfill his younger brother's debt of honor, or does he do what he is supposed to do, and kill all the Highlanders he finds – is extremely well done. Of course, Hal is a moral and loyal character, and won't even allow the suggestion of pretending he didn't know who Jamie is and what he owes him for sparing his brother's life.

- Scenes with Claire and Frank were a bit disjointed, and expanded beyond the text of the book. I didn't at all like the introduction of a neighbor woman who is used only to explain to Claire that women are merely ornamental and are only extensions of their husbands, not really allowed to have minds and opinions of their own. And Claire uses their home's fireplace to cook a meal when the stove won't light – this was a heavy-handed reminder that she now has pioneer skills and doesn't hesitate to use them. And Claire's feminist – for the 1940/50s – outburst during a scene with Frank's dean at the University was out of place, as I've felt much of Claire's writing has been throughout the past two seasons.

- However, an argument between Claire and Frank about how she is unable to put aside her longing for Jamie, and Frank's reminder that she has stayed with him voluntarily, was very well done and true to character for both of them. Tobias was terrific at conveying Frank's heartbreak, wariness, and longing.

- Bree's birth was shown fairly quickly, and Frank's immediate love for "his" new baby daughter were evident.

The hour went by much too quickly. I'm excited to see this episode again, and don't think we have anything to worry about for this important season.