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## "The Sopranos" prediction pool

**Who will survive the big finale? Jonathan Ames, Berkeley Breathed, Jennifer Egan, Daniel Handler, Heather Havrilesky, Erica Jong, Laura Lippman, Frank Rich and others weigh in.**

By Dipayan Gupta and Thomas Rogers

Jun. 08, 2007 | **Heather Havrilesky is Salon's [television critic](#).**

A.J. puts himself in harm's way out of a misguided attempt to right the world's wrongs and gets killed, Sil dies, and Tony decides to rat out New York, sending Phil Leotardo to jail forever and ever, which he so richly deserves. Tony, meanwhile, lands in his personal version of hell: a mediocre suburban existence, somewhere in the Midwest, under an assumed name. Carmela, lost without a steady flow of luxury gifts, drives her Porsche Cayenne into the side of the local Chili's, then takes to hanging out at the mall in a drunken stupor. Meadow stays behind and marries Parisi Jr., becoming the old Carmela. Last shot: Dr. Melfi, being served roasted duck while learning from Elliot that Tony has disappeared. Her face tells us that she blames herself, but we all know that she'll double up on therapy until those irrational feelings of blame subside. *We'll* always blame her, though.

**[Berkeley Breathed](#) is a best-selling children's author, Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist and the man behind "[Opus](#)," on Salon. His latest book is "[Mars Needs Moms!](#)"**

How they'll end it: Everyone gets whacked but Tony and Carmela, who have a fight and go to bed. With the number of unfinished story arcs in the last four years, there's a high chance that Chase punts on this one too.

My preferred ending: After Leotardo cuts off Tony's limbs with a cannoli spoon, Meadow flunks out and teaches dancing at the Bada Bing, A.J. joins the Justice Department to shoot wobbly Republicans in the kneecaps, and Carmela goes mad from religious panic after doing exactly what we've been waiting to see and humps the holy water out of Father Phil from the first season. This is called moral justice. I'm writing this after reading that Paris Hilton got sent home.

Preferred Ending No. 2:

Berkeley Breathed

**[Jennifer Egan](#) is the author of "[The Keep](#)" and "[Look at Me](#)."**

I think that Mr. Chase will take the Shakespearean route, and that Tony and his entire crew will die. It's either that or witness protection, and the idea of Tony Soprano out there mowing his lawn in Middle America pretending to be John Doe is a bust. But Tony Soprano abruptly extinguished is also potentially anticlimactic, so I'm guessing that his death will be preceded by a bout of unconsciousness

that will allow for a last dream sequence in which some moral and spiritual reckoning will occur (I love my family; I'm basically a good guy; but then there are all those people I've murdered ... and what does it all mean, anyway?). As impatient as I've been with some of the long dream sequences, I find it hard to see how a resolution of Tony's inner life can happen *outside* the dream realm.

I can't believe that Tony will die just to clear the way for a cranky old mobster (though, my God, what a face), so my guess is that Phil Leotardo will go down, too. Maybe the feds will step in and grab him.

That leaves the question of who ends up with the power. Here's where I think something truly surprising is going to happen. A.J.? C'mon. Carmela? Nah. My vote is Janice. We've seen what she's capable of, and for all her crocodile tears, the woman may actually be tougher at heart than Tony. She could run New Jersey, easy.

### **Stephen Elliott is the author of "My Girlfriend Comes to the City and Beats Me Up."**

Here's what I think is going to happen. I don't want it to happen. What I want to happen is for Tony to whack Phil and for Meadow to assume control of the family business. But what I think is going to happen is Phil and Tony are going to call a truce and agree to work together into the future. I hope it isn't so, but that's what I think. Still, the sight of Tony Soprano in a white wife-beater, laying on an unmade bed staring at the ceiling, the bed facing the door, machine gun across his large chest and stomach, stray hairs poking from the sleeveless straps, is something I plan to hold on to always.

### **Erica Jong is a poet, novelist and essayist whose most recent book is "Seducing the Demon."**

Darker and darker. Tony Soprano's life will come apart as he loses his immunity and all his loved ones are in mortal jeopardy. If I were David Chase, I would take everything from him but his life and doom him to live out his days in utter despair. Death is much too good for him.

### **Rich Cohen is the author of "Sweet and Low: A Family Story."**

Tony is shot in the street and collapses, but does not die. Some goons come to the hospital to finish him. Playing against type, Anthony Jr. chases away the enemy crew, which includes a crooked cop. Much blood is shed before Phil finally agrees to a sit-down. Anthony Jr. is sent as the family rep, even though Tony never wanted this life for him, as the kid is a civilian and also because no one expects much from him.

In the middle of the meal, Anthony excuses himself to take a pee, and Jr. always took a long pee, and quickly locates the gun Paulie has taped behind the old-style flush basin -- you know, the kind where the metal chain hangs down? The boy comes out blasting, wastes Phil, wastes the crooked cop, lets the gun drop out of his hand to the floor and does not stop walking until he gets to Sicily. Does Anthony fall in love in the old country? Of course he does! (The girl, played by Lindsay Lohan, is a Jewish Sicilian, and speaks in Sicilian dialect with subtitles.) Anthony brings her home to Jersey and, to make her family happy before the wedding, converts to Judaism.

In the scene in which we see him being circumcised, with blood flung across the Torah, we also see, inter-cut, enemies being whacked all over town. Anthony consolidating power like Michael in II, but also like Solomon in I. In the end, as he comes out of the schul, we see a great sense of power in his eyes -- but only for a moment, for then the entire tri-state area is swallowed by a mushroom cloud, as

those Arabs who hung out at the Bing have finally accomplished their plan.

**Jonathan Ames is the author of "I Love You More Than You Know." His next book, "The Alcoholic," will be published in 2008. He will be boxing writer Craig Davidson at Pier 84, in New York City, as "The Herring Wonder," on July 26.**

Full disclosure: I have a television but I never watch it. It is incapable of picking up any channels; it has to be connected to cable or something. But due to years of living hand-to-mouth, though things are better lately, I have never felt like I could afford a cable subscription.

So my useless TV (why do I even have it?) is kind of like a three-dimensional piece of trompe l'oeil, creating the illusion that I am a normal American human being with a television. All that said, I have managed, through cultural osmosis, to follow "The Sopranos." I have actually seen the show a half-dozen times, either while visiting my parents, who can afford cable and have many channels, or on the odd occasion when I've been in a hotel room. But, primarily, I have followed the show by reading about it in the newspaper and listening to my friends' conversations.

So I am fully aware that in this last season, everything is coming undone for Tony and all the characters are being killed off. I was told by a friend that Tony killed Christopher by holding his nostrils together, but I wasn't shocked to learn this. I've never liked Tony. I once met Steve Buscemi on the subway (we both live in Brooklyn) and he was very friendly, and then in a hotel room I caught the episode where Tony shot Steve and this upset me. Another time, I was invited to a lunch on the roof of New York's SoHo House, and James Gandolfini was there, poolside, in just a bathing suit, looking very menacing, and I had this odd compulsion to call the police.

Anyway, I think everyone close to Tony is going to get whacked. Carmela will die in his arms; his children will get killed. Tony will run to his psychiatrist, Dr. Melfi, having nowhere else to go.

And they will finally make love. The transference will be complete. There'll be a shot of Tony on top of her, his frightening and enormous back covering her. Then a masked hit man will come into her bedroom and shoot Tony, killing him, and he'll die on and in Dr. Melfi.

The gunman will look at her, decide to spare her, and leave. There will be a final shot of her trying, futilely, to get out from under Tony, as his lifeless eyes stare ahead darkly, seeing nothing.

**Anthony Gottlieb podcasts for The Economist and writes about philosophy. He is the author of "The Dream of Reason: A History of Philosophy From the Greeks to the Renaissance."**

Tony is a mildly superstitious man, but there is no fate in "The Sopranos": The final episode turns on the spin of a coin. Tony has an uncanny instinct for survival, though, so the odds are that he outlasts the finale. My hunch is that it is Paulie whose coin is wobbling more precariously now, and his fall may help to keep Tony spinning. Paulie's mother was a Cheneyesque unknown unknown: He didn't even know that he didn't know who she was. Tony knew his own mother, Livia, all too well. She said that you die in your own arms, and her abyssal pessimism is the source of his lust for life.

The son of the Roman Livia, Tiberius, whom she, almost like her Jersey counterpart, plotted to kill, ended his days in exile on Capri. New Jersey isn't Rome, and Tony's empire was small to start with and is shrinking by the minute. Perhaps that is why he will be able to lumber off as it fizzles to nothing, like

a bear into the woods.

**Laura Lippman is the author of "What the Dead Know."**

Previously on "The Sopranos" ... In Season 1, Episode 8 of "The Sopranos," Joseph R. Gannascoli appears in the role of "bakery customer," who is forced to leave empty-handed so Christopher can shoot a rude clerk in the foot. In Season 2, the same actor shows up as Vito Spatafore, the closeted captain whose lifestyle choices will eventually (Season 6) cost him his life. I mention this fact not to establish my bona fides as a "Sopranos" fan, but because it points up an undeniable truth about David Chase: He is willing to break the physical rules of his own universe, and therefore no one can predict what might happen in the final episode of "The Sopranos." All I can do is offer up a prayer that Chase stays true to the startling freshness of the early seasons, when the Mafia was presented as another besieged institution, and the top job was a tarnished prize at best.

With all the whackage in the penultimate episode, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that the fight between the New York and New Jersey families is on a par, businesswise, with whether Dunder Mifflin closes the Scranton or Stamford branch on "The Office." For the finale, I don't want Titus Andronicus. I need something sad and small, a living hell, a Sisyphean fate for this sociopath who has wormed his way into our horrified imaginations. And I'm trusting Chase to leave us with many dangling threads and unanswered questions, because I believe that his narrative cul-de-sacs -- the Russian in the Pine Barrens, Carmela's spec house, take your pick -- were one of the series' great strengths. Call it Chase's Second Law of Thermodynamics: Everything falls apart -- but not everything gets resolved.

And please, no dream sequences.

**Frank Rich is a columnist for the New York Times and the author of "The Greatest Story Ever Sold: The Decline and Fall of Truth From 9/11 to Katrina."**

Nancy Marchand comes back, and not a moment too soon.

**Tom Tomorrow is the creator of This Modern World.**

Tony turns state's evidence and goes into the Witness Protection Program, which relocates him to Utah and finds him a job working sales in a Home Depot. Final shot on Tony, his expression a mixture of resignation and disgust: "Can I help you find something, sir?"

Actually I have no idea, and don't really care, as long as David Chase gives us some sort of satisfying dramatic resolution, rather than falling back on his "real life doesn't always have neat conclusions" shtick (as in the Russian hit man episode). The most annoying way to end this show would be to just let it fizzle out, but Chase's choices are often perverse enough that this is a real possibility.

**Tucker Carlson is the host of "Tucker" on MSNBC.**

My guess: A.J. kills Tony. I've thought that for the past several episodes, ever since they played "The End" by the Doors in a Bada Bing scene.

**Steve Almond is the co-author of "Which Brings Me to You" and the author of "My Life in Heavy Metal."**

If David Chase has the stones, Tony's mob world finally comes crashing into Melfi's. With Paulie

driving him nuts, and the stress of being hunted driving him to panic attacks, Tony convinces Melfi to meet him one last time. The feds, hoping to protect Tony so he can stand trial, tail him. But he loses them by taking his patented route through the donut shop.

Phil's soldiers, not so easily fooled (they have inside info), burst in and finish him off. And her. A.J. then makes a mess of trying to avenge pop's death (Hamlet without a brainlet) and gets himself and Meadow killed. This is almost enough to shatter Carmela's self-delusions. Janice and Paulie Walnuts either find love together, or impale one another with butter knives.

The central question is to what extent Chase wants to force us viewers to recognize the depth of our own complicity in deifying Sopranos culture: the ways in which we, too, have been seduced by a psychopath, drawn into a world of garish, secondhand violence that allows us to indulge in vicarious aggression while feeling superior. Tony Soprano shouldn't just get whacked. He should be humiliated, unmanned, made to simper and beg first. His infantile omnipotence (and our own) needs puncturing once and for all.

More likely he gets lucky again, thanks to the television gods, while those around him go down in flames.

**Lisa Lutz is the author of "The Spellman Files."**

I stopped predicting what would happen with "The Sopranos" after late last season when I became convinced there would be a spinoff called "Vito in Vermont."

**Regina Barreca is a professor of English literature and feminist theory at the University of Connecticut. She edited "A Sit-Down With the Sopranos," a collection of essays about the show.**

Carmela, Meadow and Ro end up in Paris; they are joined by the fabulously smart and sexy Italian boss Tony met when he was in Italy, the woman who explained to him that she was head of the mob (was it in Naples? I think so) because all the men were in jail or were mama's boys -- that they respected feminine authority, having been raised on it. Janice, now widowed, stays in Jersey and runs the family from there -- maybe not at the Bing anymore, but that's not impossible -- and this, of course, happens because she has *no* problem killing Phil and the rest of the Brooklyn boys (especially since she could use Bobby's death as an excuse, just as she used Richie's violence as an excuse to kill him and we all know that his whacking was the occasion but *not* really the cause of her whacking him).

Let's face it: The show, the character of Tony himself, was built on the foundation of Livia's evil, pathological emotional greed, envy and hatred of men. "The Sopranos" is, finally, a discourse on the crisis of masculinity in America. Abandoned by his mother, his shrink, his whores, his family, Tony will end as the last of the men -- like the last of the Mohicans, but without feathers (see Woody Allen and Emily Dickinson). His son is useless. His daughter is the *new* Michael Corleone, the Ivy League grad who takes the family into the new generation. Unlike Puzo, Chase insists on placing female characters at the center -- as they have always been in Italian American life; Puzo based the character of the Godfather on his mother, not on any man he ever knew. For "Sopranos" fans, this is not a surprise.

**Daniel Handler is the author of Lemony Snicket's "A Series of Unfortunate Events" and, most recently, "Adverbs," a collection of short stories.**

I've never seen a full episode of the HBO program, so my guess is that come Monday, Renee Fleming will still be our finest living soprano. I saw her in the title role of Susanna at the Met and it moved me to tears.

**-- By Dipayan Gupta and Thomas Rogers**

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