

TELEVISION

‘Game of Thrones’ Season 6, Episode 7: Never Too Late

Game of Thrones

By JEREMY EGNER JUNE 5, 2016

Season 6, Episode 7, ‘The Broken Man’

“Never too late to come back.”

So sayeth the High Swearengen, ministering to his followers but speaking in particular to a certain disfigured member of his flock. It was a clever bit of sermonizing, applying both to its target’s potential for salvation within the story as well as his renewed purpose, overall, in the world of “Game of Thrones.”

For Sandor Clegane, also known as the Hound, who has not been seen since the end of Season 4, has returned. You’ll recall that he was beaten nearly to death and tossed off a cliff by Brienne, who then let Arya escape anyway. Some time later, we learned Sunday, the roving warrior-turned-septon played by Ian McShane discovered and nursed him back to health. It was unclear how he did it or where they had all ended up. The group seemed to be building a church in a pastoral field but everyone was apparently wiped out by a rather prickly Brotherhood Without Banners contingent before they could explain what they were up to.

The big Hound reveal was less surprising than it might have been, thanks to Mr. McShane’s letting some clues slip a few months ago. (The resulting hubbub led to the actor’s memorably terse, but unprintable, description of the show. Enjoy searching Google!)

But it was still fun to again see the Hound, who showed up looking perhaps worse for the wear. Who could tell, really? The man was never in this tale for his beauty — what’s important is that he’s still strong and he feels as if he has some atoning to do. Oh, and he has an ax. That could come into play at some point.

The return of the Hound, revealed in a rare cold open, provided the spine of an episode that was largely about alliances productive and wearying, newly forged and torn asunder. As Sansa and Jon Snow tried to drum up support in the North, Arya dealt with the consequences of cutting ties with the Faceless Men. As Jaime worked to counteract the general numbskullery of the idiot Freys at Riverrun, Cersei watched as her former collaborator Lady Olenna called her “the worst person I’ve ever met” on her way out of town.

Those crazy Greyjoy siblings, for their part, are eying a new partnership with Daenerys Targaryen in Meereen, which would be good news for multiple reasons. (More on that in a minute.)

The alliance between the Hound and Mr. McShane’s Brother Ray was the one partnership of the night that wasn’t purely transactional, which means it was doomed from the beginning. If you had any doubt, there was Ray, on an undefensible open plain, preaching about the uselessness of violence on one of the most violent shows on television. “Violence is a disease,” he said. “You don’t cure a disease by spreading it to more people.” Which is true, but there aren’t many people in this story interested in curing that particular disease.

Morality is fluid in “Game of Thrones”; the one cardinal sin seems to be to refuse to deal with the world as it is. (Ned Stark is the enduring example of this.) Which is to say: this thing was going to go only one way. The real tragedy is that Mr. McShane, almost always the best part of whichever screen he’s on, is already gone.

And so now, the Hound and his trusty ax are off in search of new alliances. It remains to be seen whether that

leads toward revenge on the Brotherhood — they have a complicated history, remember — or Brienne or his undead brother or something else entirely.

Arya sure could've used her old protector this week. Last seen lying in wait for the Waif in the dark — at least that's how it looked to me — Arya on Sunday made travel plans in broad daylight and otherwise behaved in oddly leisurely fashion for a woman who just defied a band of deadly assassins. She strolled around Braavos, taking in the sights, and what's this? A kindly old woman wants to have a word? Soon there were a few new holes in her belly and, a quick swim later, she was bleeding in the streets among a sea of unfriendly faces, any one of which could bring more stabbing.

So what's the plan, Arya? I still think we're not done with the theater troupe so perhaps someone among them has some medical expertise. (I'm sure we all remember the young actor seeking help for his skin problem a few weeks ago.) A key scene from an early trailer found Arya taking a terrific flying leap so perhaps a future escape will make up for this week's bizarre lack of urgency.

A world away, Arya's sister tried to rally the North and only ended up with some Wildlings and 62 Mormont men for her trouble. On the bright side, Wun Wun the giant is among the Wildling supporters — "Snow!" — and I also wouldn't underestimate the latest formidable female in the story, Little Miss Mini-Mormont.

Leave it to Davos, the little girl whisperer, to win her over. (I know it came up a few weeks ago but he doesn't have the whole story of what happened to Shireen, right?) Lyanna Mormont is probably my favorite new character of the season so far, and that's even before you consider that she oversees a place called Bear Island. How did we not get to see more of Bear Island? We wallow in the muck at Riverrun, yet not an exterior glimpse of Bear Island? Throw us a bone, HBO.

Sansa was last seen writing a letter to someone, presumably asking for more help. Any guesses who it was? Littlefinger seems like the obvious choice — she appeared pretty joyless about it and we already know he has the knights of the Vale queued up and ready to ride. But what will be his price? Could Sansa (sigh) be in for yet another dispiriting marriage? "Is she a Bolton or is she a Lannister? I've heard conflicting reports," Ms. Mormont said. I do what I have to do, Sansa replied. Would she do it again?

Speaking of Lannisters, in King's Landing, the High Septon has consolidated his power by taking control of the throne, and is now eliminating threats. Last week, he had Jaime sent away. (Yes, Tommen officially did it, but he's a puppet at this point, right?) This week the Sparrow targeted Lady Olenna. "I only pray your grandmother follows your lead," he tells Margaery.

The Sparrow is loathsome, wrapping in sanctimony the same crass power craving that animates many of the show's characters. But it's worth noting how good Jonathan Pryce is at conveying a sense of superficial guilelessness that masks darker undercurrents. A phony man of God (or seven gods) can easily veer into caricature but the Sparrow's humility song-and-dance has never wavered, even as his dominion has expanded exponentially.

We received confirmation that Margaery is telling the Sparrow and Septa Unella what they want to hear — Margaery signaled her loyalty and warned away the Queen of Thorns with a drawing of a rose, the family sigil. The question is: Is she playing into the Sparrow's hands by sending away her grandmother? Not that Margaery had a choice, with the threats on the table. But I suspect the real point is to remove any possible obstacles for the Sparrow's control of the royal couple. He already has Cersei ready to face charges — the queen of the king is a potentially powerful adversary — so if he can clear out Olenna, his hold on the king and queen would be secure.

Olenna's departure also removes yet another former Cersei ally, not that the Olenna has any interest in helping her after their failed coup last week. Still friends? Cersei asks, knowing that without the Tyrells she has little hope of overthrowing the Sparrow. "You've lost, Cersei," Olenna replies, which brings "the only joy I can find in all this misery." So that would be a no.

Finally, Theon was like the lactose-intolerant guy at the fondue party on Sunday, as Yara and friends indulged in some classic sailors-on-leave behavior. Yara took a quick break for some tough love, telling her brother that she had no time for his post-traumatic stress disorder.

“I know you’ve had some bad years,” she said, in a riotous bit of understatement before making her point: Get over it or kill yourself.

Theon continues to be one of the more interesting characters this season — with Alfie Allen giving him a poignant, hollowed-out quality — because we don’t know how he’s going to turn out. His past as a feckless cad obliterated, there’s no going back to what he was, despite Yara’s urging.

We received confirmation that the Greyjoys intend to sail to Meereen to offer their services to Dany, as suspected, which is good news for a couple of reasons. One, anything that will expedite a departure from Meereen is welcome. Two, who better than Varys and the Unsullied to help Theon understand that there’s life after... well, you know?

A Few Thoughts as We Wonder if a Lannister Really Repays His Debts

- Jaime arrived at the mudpit known as Riverrun and Bronn made his first appearance of the season. (It was a big week for beloved, scraggly bearded dudes.) But otherwise it was all fruitless parleys and doofus Freys. The real action starts with Brienne’s arrival next week, promised in the preview, at the tent of her old kingslaying crush.

- As discussed in the episode, Lyanna Mormont’s uncle was Jeor Mormont, whom Jon Snow initially served under at Castle Black. But a reminder: Jeor’s son was none other than Jorah Mormont, the same lovelorn knight currently wandering Essos in search of a cure for his greyscale. Forget Bear Island. Can we just get a scene of little Lyanna talking some sense into her cousin over his Dragon Queen obsession?

- This just in: Marital relations do “not require desire on a woman’s part,” the High Sparrow tells Margaery. “Only patience.” Quite the romantic, this guy.

- What say you? Is Cersei as doomed as I think she is? What do the gods have planned for the Hound? What else in this show, besides Septa Unella, could use a good bashing? Please weigh in in the comments.