

In Birmingham just after the Great War trenches veteran Thomas Shelby leads his gang, the Peaky Blinders, so named as they carry lethal razors in their peaked caps, who make money from illegal betting and the black market. Thomas, by mistake, appropriates a consignment of guns which have been stolen from the local arms factory and hard-nosed Inspector Campbell arrives from Ireland, charged by war minister Winston Churchill to recover it. Thomas's aunt Polly urges him to return it but he sees the opportunity to use it to his advantage. Thomas also quarrels with his elder brother Arthur as Thomas has devised the 'powder trick', a means of fixing horse races and Arthur is nervous as Thomas has not involved Billy Kimber, who runs the race-courses and their rackets. Thomas's sister Ada is in love with Freddie Thorne, who saved her brother's life in the war, and is now a Marxist, encouraging workers to strike over a pay cut. As far as Campbell is concerned Freddie is as much the enemy - in the wake of the Russian revolution - as the Peaky Blinders, as he looks for the missing guns.

1/1

Birmingham, England, 1919. In the first episode of BBC2's new period gangster drama/steampunk beer commercial, we learn that Brum's postwar slums were mostly peopled with actors who weren't from there.

Before we even get to the amazing set design or the slick, ad-style art direction, or the way Sam Neill keeps a straight face when he says, "It's beaver", we need to tackle two problems. The accents are all over the shop and the dialogue is often eye-poppingly bad. That said, Cillian Murphy, Helen McCrory and Sam Neill count for a lot, even when they aren't entirely sure which city they come from.

The angular and brilliantly impassive Murphy stars as Tommy Shelby, new head of Birmingham's criminal overlords, the Peaky Blinders, so named because they have razorblades in their caps which they use to, you know, blind people. He's back from Flanders Fields, the exposition tells us, minus his libido and intent on increasing the gang's profits. Aunt Polly (McCrory on her usual roaring form) has been minding the shop and sits in the unofficial driving seat of their bookmaking and robbing business, clearly doing all the thinking.

When we meet them, Tommy has just taken part in a to-order robbery during which his men mistook a consignment of four motorbikes for a load of machine guns and ammo destined for Libya. They didn't bother to open the crate first. With the Troubles in Ireland reaching the boil, it's assumed that the IRA took the guns (or "gons" as everyone pronounces it here) and Belfast's best copper CI Campbell (Neill) is dispatched to Birmingham on a noisy, hurtling steam train to sort it out.

As we leave them at the close of this week's opener, Grace the Irish songbird meets Sam Neill in an art gallery and turns out to be working undercover for him, to try and find out what happened to the gons. "That the IRA murdered my father will not affect my judgment," she says to Campbell, so we know she has an agenda. Danny, his death successfully faked, is bound for London but it's not clear whether he's taking the gons with him. And Grace and Tommy exchange looks in the street to denote their growing interest in one another.

Peaky Blinders doesn't so much sidestep gangster cliches as fling its arms round them. For a channel which can make fascinatingly impenetrable stuff like *The Shadow Line* and stylish yet substantial stuff like *The Hour*, the dialogue is just too dim. In all other respects, they're going for a British

Deadwood. Every frame is from an advert/pop video. Realism has been ditched in favour of male extras, stripped to the waist, swinging hammers in front of fiery furnaces while a covers band has a go at Ocean Colour Scene's back catalogue.

Peaky Blinders's own Way Down in the Hole is Nick Cave's Red Right Hand which tops and tails every episode. This is definitely British TV trying to do a US-style box set drama. It's got ambition and scale and considerable skill has gone into the visual side of things. But what happened with the script?

1/2

A quick recap opened the second episode, as is standard with modern drama. Luckily the first episode was almost entirely exposition so it doesn't take long to get the gist. Mr Churchill sends Chief Inspector Campbell to find the IRA "gons", and Campbell sends Grace, the angel of Galway, to spy on the Peaky Blinders as an undercover barmaid so he does. The Shelby family, we've established, are the expected mix of twitchy bullyboys and two women, one of whom has a lot to learn (Ada) and the other who has seen too much (Aunt Polly).

However clichéd a choice it has proved for some, Nick Cave's Red Right Hand does get you in the mood, although it slightly crashes into the start of tonight's episode when we find ourselves in the sunny countryside. Gone are the glowing braziers and sooty streets of Birmingham, and is that the babbling of a lovely brook I can hear? Oh look, Gypsy caravans. We must be in Ireland. The Shelbys are back in the motherland to buy a new stallion. Then they inadvertently start a war with the local Lee family who floor them with the old "your mum" line and get a peaky blinding for their trouble. Whenever a scene needs tension this week, one of the Shelbys will suddenly accuse another character of "laughing at my brother". Talk about a hairtrigger. With those haircuts it must be a regular occurrence. Continuing the self-conscious use of modern indie music, the blindings take place in slo-mo to the strains of Blue Veins by the Raconteurs.

Back in Brum, Campbell's auxiliary officers raid the street to flush out the commies. Ada and Freddy are caught in flagrante during the raid and make a dash for it, but Campbell's men link her with a known communist, giving Campbell ammunition against the Shelbys when he finally has his tearoom meeting with Tommy. By episode's end, it looks like the young couple (now with added foetus) will make for a new life in Cardiff, away from the deadly wrath of Tommy and co. But Freddy refuses to run.

Tommy plans to "strike a blow back first" before he sits down for tea and crumpets with Campbell. Their uneasy meeting ends with the two men agreeing a reluctant alliance. Tommy's race-fixing operation will be ignored in two counties and Campbell gets his "gons" back. Eventually. He and everyone else in authority is driven by their fear of revolution.

After last week's rather histrionic opening, Steve Knight is giving us a better idea of the world of the show. Apart from the singing, it feels like the pitch has altered to a less shrill one.

Bad speaking

Tommy talks to his horse to calm it down. "In France we used to say it's just the music hall band turning up. It's just trombones and tubas, that's all." When he later has to shoot the horse, he apologises to it. We get it, he has a soft side. The horse was probably relieved he didn't have to hear any more about France.

"Get yourself a decent haircut, man. We're going to the races," says Tommy to his older brother. Has he looked in the mirror?

"Owly sheet, it's Billy Kimber," says the barman in the way that a bad impressionist always announces their next impersonation with: "Allo, my name is Michael Caine."

Top flirtation tip of the week

If you fancy someone, simply hurl a bucket of spit at their shoes. It worked for Grace, who was promptly asked out to a day at the races by Tommy.

Heavy-handed exposition of the week

When Ada finally told Tommy who got her pregnant she choked out this corker: "Freddie fucking Thorne. Yeah, your best mate since school. The man who saved your life in France." We have met him.

Best featured extra

The one at the back of the cinema with his coat already over his arm when Tommy stormed in and told everyone to leave. "Come on, let's go," he says to his friend before Tommy's even got the line out.

Accent watch

When passions flare, Cillian Murphy and Helen McCrory's accents pogo from Belfast to the Wirral with barely a nod to Birmingham. Is this a historically correct detail that just wrankles the modern ear? Or was the dialect coach a victim of budget cuts?

The trouble with Grace

Grace is in the pub alone and Tommy bursts in demanding an after-hours drink. "How's your beautiful horse?" she asks. Why do they make her say the worst lines? Oh god, please don't sing to make him feel better. "So what do you sing?" he asks. She's up on a chair giving him her Black Velvet Band while he watches awkwardly. "I warn you, I'll break your heart," she says, quite big-headedly. By the end of the song he seemed to be asleep. She later meets Campbell at the opera and he seems to be in love with her too. We need to know more about her than "she's Irish" and "she sings".

Aunt Polly's wisdom

She tells a pregnant Ada: "The baby's a bastard, you're a whore, but there's no word for the man who doesn't come back."

And she deflects the threatening body language of Campbell in the church by giving him a kiss. Loved that scene.

1/3

Back to Brum's sooty terraces this week, but not for long, as Tommy and Grace are heading to the races at Cheltenham with Billy Kimber. Tommy doesn't know she's on a secret mission to "get close to him" thanks to Chief Inspector Campbell, and Billie Kimber doesn't know that Tommy is secretly planning to move in on his business with the added carrot of Grace in a new dress.

A pair of IRA men turn up at the Garrison, bold as brass, and tell Tommy they're "from the IRA" and they want to buy his "gons". He says he'll let them know if he happens to find any and then one of

them, predictably, breaks into song. If I was Irish, I'd find the constant singing a bit reductive. As punishment for singing on her turf, Grace follows him and accidentally kills him in a scuffle.

Ada and Freddie get married but still, unaccountably, won't leave Birmingham. Even when Pol offers them 200 quid and tickets to New York, they insist on staying put. They must really love soot.

Freddie and Tommy have a brief Reservoir Dogs-style stand-off by the canal but nothing is resolved and they both just sort of give up. The dramatic tension supposedly generated by the Ada and Freddie relationship just isn't there at the moment.

Meanwhile, the Peaky Blinders set off for Cheltenham in a van with Tommy and Grace heading there in a borrowed car. Even though Tommy has dropped a fair few hints ("It's not me you're dressing up for. Wear a red dress to match his pocket handkerchief") Grace is horrified to be offered up to Kimber as a sweetener if he agrees to go into business with the Peaky Blinders. Tommy's boys teach the Lee family a lesson as a display of muscle for their new protectee. Terms are discussed and Kimber takes Grace back to his house.

At the last minute, Tommy averts Grace being raped by Kimber, bursting into the room and declaring that she has the clap. Nice. As Tommy and Grace drive away, she asks him why he changed his mind about letting her sleep with Kimber. Roll credits.

Mise en scène

We're back on familiar territory visually this week as random doorways fizz with sparks and whoompfing jets of flame. What are they building in there? Whatever Birmingham's biggest export was back then, it sure needed a lot of fire and half-naked men with pick-axes.

They didn't waste money on that Chinese Quarter set from episode one after all. We're back among the red lanterns this week briefly to pick up a suit. It's probably where Tommy buys his opium, too.

Music

The fascination with Nick Cave and the White Stripes continues. Have they heard of other bands? How Tom Waits has escaped this soundtrack so far is a mystery to me.

Accent watch

The general confusion over how to talk has further deepened this week with the introduction of a peripheral character with a recognisable Birmingham accent. The police sergeant who talks to Campbell and then conveys his message to Tommy is Brummie through and through and makes all of the others sound even sillier. Are they really doing some historically correct hybrid accent to reflect the shifting population of the time or should they all have been queuing up for lessons from this guy?

Bad speaking

Once again, Grace is landed with the worst line this week. Or maybe it's the way she tells them. You could hear this clunker brewing from a mile off: "At the start of the day I was Lady Sarah of Connemara, by the end I was a whore with the clap."

It was closely followed by Kimber's random "If you are coming to the races, bring that pretty barmaid of yours." Just so we can establish he fancies her.

Best featured extra

When the gang are preparing for their assault on Cheltenham, they all take a blade from the pile. One tiny boy in a cap picks up a cleaver that's bigger than he is.

Troubling things

Grace still exists only as a conduit for male lust – Tommy's, Kimber's, Campbell's – and though this episode was basically all about her, we know nothing about her that we didn't know in episode one.

Danny is back from London apparently without a care in the world even though the Italians will kill him and start a war with the Blinders if they find him.

At the end of Tommy and Danny's scene in his bedroom, post-opium dream, Tommy appears to be talking without moving his mouth at all.

1/4

The much-talked about war with the Lee family took physical form this week, as the Shelbys' bitter rivals came to turn over the bookies and plant a grenade in Tommy's car. Meanwhile, Tommy scuppered his brother John's plans to marry a local prostitute – as it turns out, the one that Tommy has been seeing since coming back from the Somme – and instead married him off to a girl from the Lee family in order to end their so-called war as quickly as it had started.

But we could see quite a bit of time had passed, thanks to the sudden eruption of Ada's bump. Sure enough, before episode's end she has given birth to a healthy baby boy despite all the drinking, smoking and dancing. Campbell carried out a raid on Stanley Chapman's house as his communist witch-hunt continued. Tommy gave away Chapman's whereabouts to Campbell in exchange for the safe passage of Ada and Freddie out of Birmingham. But they keep coming back!

The rainy warehouse at night provided a stunning setting for the Campbell v Tommy face-off, but the exposition was as painful as ever. What began as a blatant up-sum of cause and effect so far ended with a suddenly very vicious Campbell telling Tommy what would happen to his family in graphic detail if the deal wasn't carried out on time.

Elsewhere, the brummie copper that Campbell employs to further highlight the haywire accents of the rest of the cast tortured Chapman to death, inadvertently. Campbell told him to throw the dead communist down some stairs and call the coroner. This episode has seen a sudden and not entirely convincing shift in Campbell's demeanour and the simmering, quiet confidence has been all but replaced by an outre violence and meanness.

Super-spy Grace is meanwhile quizzing Arthur about the storage of his "contraband", which sets alarm bells ringing with Tommy. But when he takes her to the church "for confession" he instead offers her a job keeping the Shelby & Co books and bringing a touch of class to his business meeting. He kisses her, but I could detect no chemistry at all between them. This could be the actors or the fact that neither character really fancies the other, they're just dancing around one another trying to find out information from the other. Still, I'm not quite sure how he's going to pass her off as his classy business manager when he announced to Kimber and anyone in a half-mile radius that she was a prostitute with the clap last week.

And moments after Ada and Freddie's son is born, the cops swoop in to make an arrest. Pol assumes that Tommy tipped them off but he looks genuinely aghast. Then his suspicions quietly turn to the Garrison's barmaid and her newly installed telephone.

With two episodes to go, Campbell needs to resolve the "gons" matter, Tommy must crush his cockney rival Kimber, and Grace needs to get out of Birmingham alive.

Lines of the week

- "Men and their cocks never cease to amaze me," exclaims Pol when John announces his engagement to Lizzie. For some reason this made me picture a line of them with sparklers and ribbons attached.
- "You're a dreamer, Freddie," says Ada as he has a bath. I smirked at this. Sometimes this script sounds like an attempt by the writer to sneak in band names and song titles, like Chris Packham did on Springwatch.
- "Sometimes women have to take over, like in the war," says Aunt Pol to Freddie at his mother's grave. It's another clanging example of "you didn't need to add that last bit".

The music

I Fought Piranhas by the White Stripes made an appearance. And then after last week's blog, I nearly dropped my toast at the use of Clap Hands by Tom Waits. I knew they'd run out of Cave/Stripes songs eventually and move on to him.

1/5

With one episode to go, this episode was all about bringing the IRA narrative thread to its climax. Campbell circled like a jaded vulture, waiting for his prey to break cover, while Tommy and the IRA man rather precipitously set up the sale of the "gons" because, as Tommy put it, they had "become a burden" to him.

However, the writers also decided to introduce new character Arthur Shelby Snr, a plot device with an impressive moustache who came and went in the space of an hour, seemingly purely to further depress Arthur Jnr. In the world's most transparent con, he turned up, took Arthur for £500 and jumped on the first train out of New Street without so much as a backward glance, leaving Arthur Jnr forlorn. His failed suicide attempt was harrowing, but those tendencies were apparently swept away by the sight of his new business cards.

I didn't see Arthur's depression coming, mainly because he always looks like that, but also because it felt like they'd tried to squeeze this subplot into a single episode. I know the constraints of hour-long, episodic drama and the need to keep things moving, but this was carried out with almost Downton-like haste.

The meeting between Tommy and the latest IRA man was a nice, tense windbreak in the usually showy visual onslaught and provided necessary stillness. It was also refreshing to meet an Irish character who didn't sing. In contrast, I was slightly baffled by Campbell and Tommy's meeting on the little-used Chinatown set. They've gone from loathing each other to full-on flirting. "My initials on your backside? That's quite an image," says Tommy when he deliberately mishears Campbell for comic effect.

The end of this episode, with Tommy donning his cap and walking out into the light, felt like the end; there's only the Grace/Campbell/Tommy love triangle to resolve now. And the small matter of Tommy and Grace having murdered two members of a particularly vengeful organisation...

Notes and observations

The guns were buried in Danny Whizz-Bang's grave. It would have been useful to see the funeral in this episode, but I don't think we did, did we? Instead, it opened with Tommy going to look at the wooden grave-marker, setting things up for the discovery of the guns later.

With Freddie in jail, Ada immediately becomes a footnote. She isn't important to the plot, other than in the context of her marriage. That's a bit disappointing, but at least we still have Pol for all our rounded female character needs.

Bad speaking

"It wasn't me who shopped Freddie Thorne," says Tommy to Pol early in the episode. Did he need to use the surname? I know it was couched in a way that suggested he was driving the point home, but this is exactly the kind of blunt-instrument exposition I object to.

"Is it him between us? Is it him?" shouts Campbell, seemingly genuinely surprised at Grace's refusal of his marriage proposal. Did he really not glean anything about her feelings when she begged him to spare Tommy for her sake?

The trouble with Grace

After the IRA shoot-out, I started to see actual chemistry between Tommy and Grace, which was a good thing. Obviously, they ended up back at her place, having gentle piano sex because she didn't have any biscuits. But this – "I no longer need to venge my father. I think our mission has come to a natural end" – was a dreadfully rushed cop-out. She'd already shot one IRA man, then another, and watched Tommy stove-in the head of a third until he looked like a dropped strawberry jelly. But we're supposed to believe that her whole MO has changed now she's slept with Tommy? I think it would have helped to know more about her from the beginning, because this all seems too pat.

The final loose ends

- Tommy puts a black star in the Shelby & Co office diary, denoting the day he will take down Billy Kimber. It's an odd thing to do when he says he hasn't told anyone else, not even his family. Maybe just try and remember the date in your head, Tommy, rather than writing it down for the cops to find.
- Campbell makes a speech to his staff, telling them their only job now is to bring down Tommy Shelby, but he doesn't say why.
- Also, the IRA are bound to be miffed that their men keep dying in his pub. That's three enemies (the Italians and the Lee family having been neutralised) all out for Shelby blood, but the show's creator is already talking about a second series, so I'm guessing Tommy will live to fight another day.

1/6

And that's it. Tommy lives to fight another day. The Peaky Blinders are going legit and Campbell's ultimate plan for revenge – to leave the gangs to kill each other – has failed. But is Grace's lifeless corpse now prone on the train platform, a triumphant but heartbroken Campbell weeping next to her? My guess is his self-loathing, helpfully highlighted in that rather unpleasant brothel scene, is so

great he turns the gun on himself, but wants Grace to see his suicide so she knows it's her fault. Also, a second series may be in the works and Sam Neill probably only signed up for one. Maybe they're already scouting for a new nemesis to pit against Cillian Murphy's unforgiving cheekbones.

We began this final episode with a last trip to Chinatown where only red lightbulbs are available. Campbell goes to the Chinese tailor and, like a teenage boy buying his first grot mag, asks for his special service. He is clearly a man at the end of his sexual tether, having been rejected by Grace and betrayed to boot. The special service apparently includes a young girl and use of a louche parlour, with a shirt-pressing service thrown in.

Meanwhile, Tommy rallies the gang and tells them that today is the day they will bring down Billy Kimber. They bump into Campbell as he tucks his shirt back in. Obviously they had to go to Chinatown to pick up their suits so they'd look nice for the battle. The raid is set for Worcester races but Kimber has been tipped off and cuts the Peaky Blinders off at the pass, bringing the fight to Garrison Lane. Those stand-off shots were beautifully directed, if derivative. That's been the problem with the whole series, I think. It could have been the British Boardwalk Empire, if only it had existed on its own terms, rather than trying to simultaneously ape a lager commercial and its American predecessor. There's no denying it looked superb, but it felt less inventive and more observant of other shooting styles.

The best Aunt Pol scene of the series was saved until this week as she suddenly explained to Ada that she'd had her children taken away over an argument about some stolen sheets. This would have been useful in establishing her character early on. The women in this series – Grace, Ada and Pol – all could have done with more flesh on their bones, figuratively speaking. But then Tommy was little more than an ex-soldier, hardened by the horrors of war. Ada mentions to Grace, when she's giving it the full Joan Collins at the Garrison, that Tommy wanted to work with horses before the war. But he's still a thumbnail as far as I can see.

It all ends thus: U2's Love Is Blindness (the Jack White version, obviously) plays as Tommy lines up headed note paper in a typewriter. He writes to Grace and tells her he'll decide whether to come to New York with her in three days. Campbell points a gun at her on the train platform. There is a bang.

Roll titles.

I did come to enjoy my weekly visits to Small Heath despite the rocky start, but I wanted more depth, more showing and less telling. If it does come back next year, like Grace and Tommy, I think I may have moved on.

Unintentional laugh of the week

Campbell reads his letter to Grace in voiceover while he bangs away at the unfortunate young prostitute in Chinatown. I see what they were trying to do but it just looks like he's dictating the letter mid-coitus.

Bad expository speaking

- "I will never forgive you or accept you or take you in," says Pol to Grace, setting up a battle between the two women if there is a series two. Clang.
- "You're bad men but you're our bad men," says the deposed landlord of the Garrison to Tommy, trying to sum up the entire series in one lumpen sentence.

- "We only found 24 of those 25 Lewis guns ..." mentions the Brummie copper when he's warning Campbell that it's all kicking off in Small Heath. A great time to remember this fact. But I did enjoy said copper's sarcasm-o-thon later on where he explained to Campbell that the Peaky Blinders would get away with murder because Campbell had cleared all police officers from the area.

Notes and observations

Ada is brought out of the mothballs for the final episode, but only because her contextual necessity (Freddy) is freed from prison. With Freddy back in the fold, he joins the Blinders for their final showdown and she appears, pushing her pram, intent on stopping their bullets with her sentimental speech. That moment made me do a full body cringe and even the actor playing Ada looked a bit sheepish.

When Campbell went back to meet Winston Churchill on his party train, it finally hit me who Winston looks like – the singer from Keane. That had been bugging me from episode one.

That squeaky sound when the cork comes out of the whisky bottle was ever-present tonight.

2/1

I know it's not to everyone's taste, but I unashamedly love this show – and not just because it's about a gang of Irish gypsies who make their money from the track, which pretty much sounds like my extended family.

Yes, it's completely over the top, highly stylised and stuffed to its razor-sewn brim with wandering accents, but it's also more enjoyable than any other drama on UK television right now. The world is full of grindingly accurate, incredibly depressing period dramas (and *Downton Abbey*, which is depressing in entirely different ways). By contrast, *Peaky Blinders* looks across the Atlantic and asks: why should we let the Yanks have all the fun? Why don't we make an action-packed crime drama in which the heroes have a surfeit of style and swagger, the lines teeter permanently on the verge of camp and the cast are clearly having a ball, then shoot the whole thing with so much pizzazz that you can't help but go with the flow?

I also love the more jarring elements of this show, especially the modern soundtrack. Creator Stephen Knight is not aiming for straight drama, but rather retelling the mythology that ruled his childhood. In a recent BBC interview, he said: "I visualised the story through the eyes of a young boy growing up in that environment, so there is a sense of heightened reality." You can see that in the outlaw swagger of Tommy Shelby and his gang. *Peaky Blinders* isn't meant to be an accurate depiction of life in Small Heath in the early 1920s, it is Stagger Lee come to life, which is another reason why Nick Cave sounds so right in the background.

Our heroes

We kicked off the new series, all six episodes of which are written by Knight and directed by Colm McCarthy of *Sherlock* and *Ripper Street* fame, at a slightly slower pace than usual. Freddie Thorne is dead (alas poor Freddie, you fought for the common man and were carried off by the common cold, as your obituary writer probably wouldn't say); Ada remains estranged from her family; and the Shelby business is doing so well that Tommy has turned his eyes towards London's glittering prizes.

To be honest, the first 30 minutes of this episode did feel a little bit like business as usual: Tommy glowered impassively, his dead-eyed stare hiding the furious machinations of his brain; Aunt Pol

continued to be the voice of reason and also not a woman you'd bet against in a fight; Arthur hit things; and John fine-tuned his continuing audition to be the Fredo Corleone of Small Heath.

Thankfully, things swiftly moved up a level after Tommy's run-in with the mysterious Irish insurgents (particularly with the reveal that they weren't Irish insurgents at all, but agents of the British state working for now-Major Campbell) and the boys' "holiday" to London. I don't know about you, but I prefer my holidays to progress at a more sedate pace, although at least the no-longer-opiated Arthur seemed happy.

The bad guys

We were also given the answer to last season's cliffhanger, as it turned out that Grace, AKA our lady of the endless Irish ditties, had got her bag up in time to deflect the bullet into Campbell's knee. I initially found this something of a cop out – what, neither of them died? – but in retrospect, I quite liked it. If Grace had died then Campbell wouldn't have got away with it, and I'm a fan of his brew of hellfire and brimstone marinated in cold, cold hate. His convalescence hasn't led to a notable mellowing of temperament, but I am interested in his (actually pretty clever) plot to ensnare Tommy, and he got off one of the night's best lines when he remarked: "The end of the rope has been this man's destiny since the night he was born."

Also proving good with a one-liner was the other notable villain, the London-Italian mobster Sabini, who introduced himself to Tommy by delivering a thorough kicking before remarking: "Take his name out of my mouth," and ordering the sort of tooth extraction last seen in Marathon Man. Eagle-eyed viewers will have spotted that Sabini was played by Noah Taylor, who recently cut off a Lannister hand as the evil Locke in Game of Thrones, and his newfound association with the removal of people's body parts is beginning to make me view Flirting in an entirely different way.

Additional notes

- Ah, those pesky Irish and their bomb-and-green-confetti prams. I'm not sure the opening scene will be winning any awards for realism, but it was classic Peaky Blinders. Welcome back, boys.
- That said, I could have done without the threat to Ada – even though it was horribly plausible, given Tommy's lack of concern for those who get caught in his plotting has been threatening to bring harm since the beginning. But oh, how I wish so many shows didn't use the threat of rape as their go-to plotline. Yes, Tommy did also receive a savage beating, but I'm not entirely convinced that's mitigation.
- Nice shot of Michael Collins in the Black Lion. It convinced me that the mysterious Irish business concerned the assassination of Campbell rather than, as it transpired, Campbell bumping off Republicans. I also liked Tommy's insouciant: "That's funny, don't you think? A war about peace." It's the way you tell them, Tommy, although the fact he lost his cool on leaving was perhaps more revealing.
- Poor Polly and her long-lost children. This is clearly a storyline that's going to end badly, although having missed out on Medea, I support anything that allows the magnificent Helen McCrory to emote.
- I vastly prefer Lizzy and her dreams of secretarial success to the winsome and thankfully absent Grace; unfortunately, Tommy doesn't appear to feel the same.
- Talking of Grace, just when I thought her absence meant I would watch an entire episode of Peaky Blinders without hearing a childhood lullaby, Danny Boy kicked in and all was right with the world.

- Anachronistic yet strangely right song of the Week – PJ Harvey’s To Bring You My Love. Just when this show couldn’t win any more of my heart, they kick off proceedings with one of my favourite songs from my absolutely favourite singer.

Quote of the week

“London’s just trouble and smoke” – oh Esme, as a lifelong resident of Shepherd’s Bush, I can only nod my head in mournful agreement.

2/2

Let no one say that it’s easy being Tommy Shelby. This week alone our man in the long black coat was shouted at, threatened, prodded with a wolf-handled silver cane, forced to treat his (considerable) injuries with horse oil and a long trip on a slow barge, dealt with guns being waved in his face twice, listened to a convoluted story about a cabinet, put up with numerous insults about his origins, tried a bit of shock therapy on his older brother, attempted a little light intimidation, faced down his demons in the form of a surprise letter from upstate New York and still found time to spend the morning after the raucous night before trying to balance the books. Major Campbell might be correct in his assessment of our Tommy as “a murdering, cutthroat, mongrel gangster” but, as Winston Churchill, the devious, determined product of an American mother and an English father, was surely itching to add: at least he’s diligent.

Our heroes

Aunt Polly Gray (Helen McCrory) in Peaky Blinders. She learned the truth about her children.

Despite all the action, and a narrative that swung between Birmingham and London, this was a less frenetic episode than last week, with the emotional focus shifting to Polly and Arthur’s ongoing woes. Both Helen McCrory and Paul Anderson were on fine form as Pol learned the truth about her children and Arthur continued to struggle with war trauma and battle rage. Yes, there were times when it came across as little more than a glorified soap opera, but part of the enjoyment of this show is the way Steven Knight ramps every scene up to 10 as though asking the audience: “Can you believe we just did that?” Thus, of course, a thwarted Polly fired her gun at the ceiling in impotent rage before heading out on a bender of epic proportions, culminating in some very sorrowful sex. Naturally, Arthur found that a toot or two of “Tokyo” (cocaine) was a good way of dulling the demons squalling through his brain. And, yes, there were times during the Garrison’s grand reopening when you couldn’t help thinking that it was twinned through time with the good old Queen Vic. But no one watches Peaky Blinders for its authenticity – we’re here for the glorious, gaudy trip, and this week there were just enough hints to suggest it’s only going to get wilder from here on in.

Enter Tom Hardy sporting a north London accent that came unnervingly close to Toby Kebbell’s turn as Johnny Quid in Guy Ritchie’s RocknRolla, a film that coincidentally saw a younger Hardy playing the (aptly named) Handsome Bob. Ritchie’s films are often used as a stick with which to beat Knight and the scene between Hardy’s Alfie Solomons and Tommy certainly shared a similar love of baroque dialogue and flamboyant swearing (the moment when Noah Taylor’s Sabini operatically lost it with his paid policeman would also not have been out of place in a Ritchie opus). How you feel about this will depend on your tolerance for cockernee gangsters and the use of rambling metaphor as a method of getting your point across. Personally, I enjoyed the meeting between Solomons and Shelby for two reasons: the nose bleed that suggested that for all Tommy’s hard-won façade, he’s

not entirely impervious to threats, and the hints that Alfie would be wrong to underestimate Tommy as nothing more than a track rat who got lucky.

Additional notes

- So Grace has married a rich banker and is living in Poughkeepsie. No word on whether she's picking her feet there but I have nothing but admiration for Tommy's ability to burn her letter unopened. I would have cracked and read it the instant I was alone.
- Top marks to the poster who suggested last week that the Ada plotline would see her returning to the fold. Property might be theft (or, in Tommy's case, the proceeds of theft) but our Ada seemed rather taken with a place of her own. Who knows, maybe Karl Marx might even have agreed.
- It transpires that in Esme's case, "it's a matter of honour" actually means "it's a matter that I will tell to your nephew the minute he returns". Polly seemed surprisingly unbothered by that, presumably because Tommy was promising to help her uncover the truth. I still wouldn't be engineering any one-on-one chats with her if I were Esme ...
- I laughed out loud at Tommy's (temporary) stalemating of Campbell's plot. I love the way he's utterly shameless about using his war record and enjoyed the parallels between him and Churchill – I suspect that while Tommy can run rings round the good Major, he might find Winston more problematic.

2/3

Fine horseflesh, troublesome women and the complications of family and foes combined to create the strongest episode of the season so far: a propulsive and very violent hour in which the tone was set with a supremely creepy opening scene featuring shadow puppets, wide-eyed children, brutal murder and excellent use of PJ Harvey's haunting new cover of Nick Cave's Red Right Hand. In an interview this week with the Sunday Times, Peaky Blinders' producer, Caryn Mandabach, said that if the first series was about Tommy Shelby playing a good hand – the consignment of guns – very well, this series is, "Tommy playing a terrible hand against skilled gangsters and revolutionaries." In other words hold on to your razor-rimmed caps, folks, because it's going to be a bumpy ride ...

Our heroes

On the surface, this was a pretty good week for Tommy: he recruited Black Country boy Billy Kitchen to join Alfie Solomons' unfabulous baker boys, creating a hitherto unheard of Brummie/Black Country alliance along the way. He put his plan to take the southern racecourses from Darby Sabini in motion, saw off Sabini's assassination attempt, and still found time to win the latest round of his snark-off with Major Campbell and meet cute, horse-appreciating aristo May Carleton (a nice turn from Charlotte Riley). Yet amid these triumphs, the seeds of trouble could clearly be seen, from Alfie's throwaway comment about never giving power to the big man to Arthur's growing disconnection from his violence. The most emotional moment of the evening belonged, however, to poor, stupid Howard Hancock, AKA Digbeth Kid, the would-be cowboy who dreamed himself a gangster and died drowning in his own blood crying: "I'm not real." That eerie, desperate scene, coupled with Tommy's stark warning to Michael – "You're young so you think what we do is all right; it's not all right, people get hurt" – demonstrated that, like Aunt Polly, this show hides steel under its gaudy trimmings, and is all the better when it lets the blade peek through.

The bad guys

Tommy collects enemies the way Major Campbell collects cliches, and with each week the list is

growing longer. In addition to the hugely unhinged Sabini and the moderately unhinged Campbell, our Tommy is also facing threats from a still-unclear Irish quarter and coping with the dubious friendships of Alfie Solomons and Billy Kitchen. And that's all before we consider the nest of vipers Tommy calls family, specifically its newest and supposedly most innocent member. Poor Tommy – it's bad enough that voice-of-sanity Polly is immersing herself in dreams of motherhood regained while the tormented Arthur will be lucky to last out the season; far worse, however, was the revelation that Polly's adored Michael is not only half in love with violence, he's able to keep a cool head while all around are losing theirs, and then use his middle-class vocabulary to lie to his good old mum afterwards. Tommy being Tommy, it wouldn't surprise me if, despite reservations, he saw in Michael the potential for a calmer, less troubled Arthur, a knife that doesn't break when you set it at your foes. Will he act on that, or does his love for Pol trump the ruthless Shelby code?

Additional notes

- Oh, Miss May Carleton with your posh vowels and love of good horseflesh and bad men, you are definitely trouble. Probably more than Grace, which is saying something, given she was a secret agent on a mission to seduce Tommy.
- Speaking of Grace, I rather like the way she's haunting this season, forever referenced and never seen – except of course in the photo that Campbell still keeps of her. Dear Major Campbell, dwelling on lost love and humiliating semi-respectable landladies is no way for a soldier of God to carry on.
- And now time for this week's brief Irish history lesson: Campbell is right to reference the IRA, which was in opposition to Michael Collins's Irish National Army and the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty. They did use garrottes, although given his eagerness to suggest them to the increasingly sarcastic Sergeant Moss, I wonder if the death is not as straightforward as suggested and merely another step in Campbell's mysterious "ultimate plan".
- It's not an easy job being Darby Sabini's right-hand man. In fact, his list of varied and impossible demands, from racecourse winners and clean suits to the fine art of assassination, brought Anna Wintour to mind. The devil's in the details, Darby, make no mistake.
- As for Sabini's big rival, I now want to see Alfie Solomons' Little Book of Rules on a shelf alongside Major Campbell's Big Book of Cliches. Admittedly most of Alfie's rules can be boiled down to "Don't talk, ever, to anyone; if in doubt, use a big metal stick", but I have a terrible feeling that he might be right about Billy and not giving power to big men. Tommy obviously believes that old war ties will hold his plans together, but we're moving into a new era and I'm not sure he's right.
- There was something very sad about watching Polly's dreams of respectability collide with Michael's desire to slum it. When he brutally remarked, "You get used to it" of her joy in ringing the bell for her maid, I winced a little and I winced again when she tried to use her husband's death as a "teachable moment". Poor Polly, I keep saying it, but this is not going to end well.
- Top marks to those who suggested Ada would fill her house with radicals and revolution – she hasn't done it yet, but if that building isn't stuffed full of the poor and dispossessed by the end of the season, then I'm a Shelby, as Ada very much wouldn't say.
- I love Charlie and his disgust at having to ship legally purchased goods, "like I'm in a fucking job".

Anachronistic yet strangely right song of the week

It was a week filled with great songs – including two cover versions of Red Right Hand and a gorgeous take on the classic folk song The Water is Wide – but this week's honours go to Nick Cave and the Bad Seeds' dark and brooding Loverman, which provided a suitably haunting counterpoint to Arthur's trauma.

Quote of the week

“You’re going to close up the shop, go out on a piss-up and blow a thousand guineas on a horse that’s not even all Arab.” It might not be entirely sensible, Polly, but it does sound like my perfect day out.

- Talking of which I am developing a theory about the proposed assassination: I think Churchill and Campbell are going to ask Tommy to assassinate Sir Henry Wilson. Wilson was a British army field marshal turned MP and security advisor to the Northern Ireland government who was assassinated in June 1922. Two IRA men were subsequently arrested but no one has ever taken official responsibility for the shooting, which has been attributed to various Irish leaders including Michael Collins, himself assassinated two months later. It’s not implausible to see a plotline suggesting probable British government involvement. Drinks on me in the newly golden Garrison if I’m right.
- Interesting that there’s apparently no problem with young Finn’s use of “Tokyo” but any sniff of a whiskey and he’s in trouble. Going by Alfie Solomons’ first law of drinking, are we to presume this is because he’s too young to do business?
- In addition to coveting her bedroom and most of her clothes, I’m also interested in Polly’s two names – why was she once known as Elizabeth Gray?
- Somewhere in his lonely room, beside his barren bedside table, next to his much-thumbed copy of the Bible, Major Campbell keeps a big book of threatening cliches, and adds to it every week.

Anachronistic yet strangely right song of the week

Arctic Monkeys’ If You Were There Beware – as rueful Garrison regulars might say: “Well, quite.”

Quote of the week

“I’m not family. I’m saying nothing” – smart boy, Isaiah. That would be my policy regarding all things Shelby-related as well.

So what did you think? Can Tommy possibly keep all sides happy? Will Polly speak to him now her son has returned to the fold? And did he really tell her that Anna died of spring fever?

2/4

I don’t like to brag, but was I right or was I right about the assassination target? OK so, squinting at the folder in much the same narrow-eyed way as Tommy, it looked as if they might have changed Wilson’s surname to Russell, but given that we’re talking about a field marshal in the British army called Henry, whom both the British government and the pro-treaty Irish might want dead, I’m calling the death of Henry Wilson as the inspiration here. Now the only issue is how I’m going to buy you all a round of virtual drinks in an imaginary pub ...

This was another strong episode, which kicked off with the heart-rending scene around Harold Hancox’s grave (a moment that was all the better for being played out in silence) and ended with the return of Grace, ensconced in the Ritz with her wealthy banker in tow and no doubt ready to re-break what remains of Tommy’s heart. Along the way, we learned some interesting things about the depth of Sabini and Solomons’ (old, school) ties, were given further cause to worry about Michael, and watched Arthur take over that home of 1920s interpretive dance that is the Eden Club with predictably hard-to-watch results.

Our heroes

The best moments, however, were the two meetings between May and Tommy, in which the sexual tension was ratcheted up to 10, as we were asked to consider whether two lonely souls, both in love with other people, could find release together, and if so was it only for a night? A commenter pointed out last week that horses and riding are too often used as a metaphor for sex, but I still enjoyed May's initial meeting with Tommy, which was charged with desire and had entertaining echoes of one of my favourite film conversations: that between Vivian Rutledge and Philip Marlowe in *The Big Sleep*.

After May had roughed it in Small Heath, it was Tommy's turn to see just how the other half live, as he drove out of his way to see her, and she in turn invited the devil over her door. She revealed that she lives alone with her grief for her dead husband, and then allowed herself to be seduced in a scorching on-screen coupling, in which the flames of attraction were further fanned by the use of PJ Harvey's sultry *Is this Desire?*. Tommy might still be in love with Grace – and is clearly going to have to face that soon – but the lonely widow in the big house might be the better bet, no matter how different their lives.

The bad guys

While Tommy was thinking of love, lust and all points in between, his enemies were continuing to circle. In an entertaining standoff between Sabini and Solomons, we learned that they were old school frenemies with a habit of falling out. Yet can we really trust anyone at this point? Alfie told Darby he'd help eliminate the Peaky Blinders, seemingly going along with the latter's argument that they're out of control ("coming down the canal like rats," as he memorably opined) but isn't it just as likely Alfie is only pretending to lend his support to his old comrade in crime? Is he able to forget Darby's insults that easily? What does he really want? Who is using who?

We know Tommy has an outstanding intelligence system and covers all the angles, but I have a feeling that in Alfie Solomons he might be about to meet his match. Not least because it must be hard for our Tommy to keep all his schemes straight. There's the horse, touchingly named Grace's Secret, targeted at the Derby and part of a plot to neutralise Sabini's influence on track; the deal with Alfie that is supposed to eliminate Sabini while strengthening Alfie and Tommy's strongholds in London; the deal with Churchill for exporting goods that masks a bigger deal to gain a toehold in US cities during the height of prohibition; Major Campbell's little assassination issue, which looks as if it will be extremely tricky to carry off; and the small matter of having attracted the attention of both the pro and anti-treaty Irish factions (although one of those may be temporarily out of the game following a tidy murder). With so many balls to keep in the air, surely one of them is going to drop? The question is when, and on whom?

Additional notes

- I don't trust Michael. He clearly enjoys violence, he's very sharp on his feet and he's outright lying about the respectable bit. The question is, has he convinced the usually-one-step-ahead-of-the-game Tommy?
- A smart poster noted last week that Polly is considerably more dishevelled this season, and the sense that her eye is very much off the ball only grew stronger when she openly compared Michael to her dead husband, a man she knows is a wrong 'un, without making that further connection. Oh Polly, love is going to be your downfall, just as drugs look set to be Arthur's.

- Talking of Arthur, it's increasingly hard to see him making it to the end of the season. All credit to Paul Anderson though – he makes you see the lost soul trapped behind the mad dog facade.
- I like Ada's attempt to establish her own mini-Bloomsbury. When you've been given a big house for free, why not fill it with writers and artists and stop getting up in the morning? It's the ultimate slacker's dream.
- The opening scene highlighted one of the things I most enjoy about this show – the suggestion that Tommy Shelby understands exactly what he is and loathes it, yet does it anyway. As someone mentioned on here last week, one of the key points of this drama is the part the war played in forming these men, and I enjoy the hints that Tommy can be hurt by death no matter how much he pretends otherwise.
- When Tommy revealed his big prohibition plans, I couldn't help but dream of a meeting between him and Nucky Thompson.
- I liked Isaiah's doleful recognition that the pub had been a nice one before John and Arthur headed off to burn it to the ground. Poor Isaiah, he only wanted to meet some girls and have a bit of fun.

Anachronistic yet strangely right song of the week

The only one possible winner here – PJ Harvey's gorgeous *Is This Desire?* proved the perfect accompaniment to both Tommy's tryst with May, and Arthur and John's brutal revenge.

Quote of the week

"No one in this room wants to breathe the same air as anyone else." Major Campbell sums up the history of Ireland in a sentence.

2/5

Tommy Shelby is hardly the first person to come a cropper after over-extending himself, but as tonight's half enthralling, half infuriating episode demonstrated, he might be the only one to literally shovel shit while thinking of how to get back at his enemies. After a brilliantly executed opening scene in which Campbell unfurled his tentacles of power, Sabini and the now gruesomely scared Mario took back control of the Eden Club, and Alfie Solomons demonstrated his rather novel take on Seder to a jovially unaware Arthur ("We've decided to name the goat?" "What have you named him?" "Tommy Shelby". Cue mayhem), our Tommy found his fledgling empire in disarray, the Black Country/Brum alliance in tatters after the untimely death of Billy Kitchen and the rest of the Shelby family threatening to fall apart amid the attendant turmoil. Naturally he dealt with this downturn in his fortunes by complicating his love life still further, taking time out to escort Grace on a date before apparently deciding not to break it off with May after all. How does the phrase go, Tommy? When the going gets tough, the tough go flirting?

Our heroes

I thoroughly enjoyed the return of Grace, now sans gun but with added polish. I've always preferred her when she drops the winsome colleen act and the meeting between her and Tommy was entertaining for the layers within layers and intrigue over just who was gaming who.

Thus Tommy aimed for nonchalant boredom as a way of stripping the conversation down to the bone and finding out Grace's true desires, but our lady of the haunting ballads continued to be his equal in scheming, waiting until she got what she really wanted (the sacred Shelby sperm) before telling him that she was actually in England to visit fertility specialists as she and her banker tried for a baby.

If Grace is all calm under pressure, the deeply damaged May Carleton revealed herself to be something almost as interesting: a consummate gambler whose willingness to throw her reputation under a bus (“You’ve told me about her like a gentleman, now kindly behave like a gangster again”) may just win her the (loaded) hand.

Whichever way Tommy’s dice falls – and if I were him, I’d probably pick Lizzie, a life of well-organised paperwork and the peace to plot against my enemies – I found it refreshing that neither Grace nor May was as straightforward as they appeared. In particular, Grace isn’t the moral angel guiding Tommy towards the light and, for me at least, *Peaky Blinders* is all the better for making that clear.

The bad guys

All of which brings me to the most problematic part of this episode: the scene between Major Campbell and Polly. While I understand some posters’ issues with the way Campbell is written, I generally enjoy Sam Neill’s performance, purely for the gusto he brings to the role. However, it’s a fine line between enjoyably over-the-top villainy and sheer pantomime, and that line was well and truly crossed this week.

I simply didn’t believe that Campbell would demand sex from Polly in exchange for Michael’s release. The scene itself was well acted as was Polly’s misery afterwards but I was never convinced, because while I believed in Polly’s willingness to sacrifice herself for Michael, Campbell’s actions seemed more of a plot device than organic character development. Yes, we know he has issues with women and power and control but I still felt that it would have been more likely for him to torment Polly with the suggestion of sex rather than demand follow-through.

As for the end of the scene, I reiterate my comments from the first week: I do wish screenwriters would stop using rape as their go-to plotline for female characters. The scene would have made just as much sense had Polly agreed to joyless sex for her son’s freedom without Campbell having to force the issue. That said, the reunion between Michael and Polly was well handled, both in his failure to understand the generosity of her sacrifice and her failure to realise that no boy is going to want to hear his mother referred to as a whore.

Additional notes

- The rivalry between Tommy and Campbell is approaching homoerotic overload. From their tense impassioned meetings in dimly lit churches to Tommy finding time to fit in a taunting phone call with the good Major ahead of his dalliance with Grace, I spent large parts of the episode muttering, “Come on boys, just get a room.”
- Poor Billy Kitchen – the real sacrificial goat in the whole affair, his throat slit simply to frame Arthur and break up the Black Country/Brum alliance.
- The Charlie Chaplin story came to light in letters discovered in 2011 – its inclusion here, apart from demonstrating that Tommy knows how to show a girl a good time, was presumably to make clear that the Shelbys are Romany Gypsies with links to the Black Patch near Birmingham.
- Similarly Esme’s intervention, with its invocation of Lees and talk of running away to France, also seemed designed to hammer those Romany origins home. (For what it’s worth I always presumed the Shelbys had one Romany parent and one Irish one, which seemed feasible given the existence of large Irish and Romany communities around Birmingham at the time, but I’m willing to hear arguments to the contrary.)

- I'm intrigued to know how Tommy intends to get Arthur out of prison. Also intrigued to see Arthur exhibiting signs of doubt in his brother – that's not likely to end well.
- One other thing not likely to end well: Tommy's plan to unleash murder and mayhem at Epsom on Derby day. I've no idea how he plans to assassinate a field marshal at the same time as bringing down Sabini and Solomons, springing Arthur from jail, choosing between Grace and May and winning the Derby with an each-way longshot, but I do know one thing – it's going to be absolutely awesome tuning in to next week's final episode to find out.

Anachronistic yet strangely right song of the week

Despite the thunderous return of To Bring You My Love, clearly Tommy and Grace's song, the honours this week go to the haunting version of Laura Marling's What He Wrote that played out as Polly kept her vigil outside the jail.

Quote of the week

"You've tried to hang yourself twice, now the king's going to do it for you." Oh John, sometimes I think you might actually be my favourite Shelby.

Can Tommy still come out on top? Will he end up with Grace, May or neither

2/6

What. A. Finale. I've really enjoyed this season, bloodthirsty though it has been, and this was a fitting end, a nail-biting, action-packed hour of tension that had me screaming at the screen more than once as Tommy Shelby's long-promised Derby day of reckoning finally arrived.

And what a day it was, packed with revelations (Alfie is double-crossing Sabini! Grace is pregnant! May is definitely not to be messed with!) and filled with casualties both deserved (goodbye Major Campbell, may your red right hand guide you to hell) and tragic (oh, Lizzy, it'll be a long, cold day before I forgive Tommy for using you in this way). The odd clunky moment apart – I may stand alone but the scene when Grace revealed her pregnancy left me cold – this was Peaky Blinders at its best, a gut-wrenching and beautifully directed climax, which was not always easy to watch but which left me, like May a few weeks ago, exhausted but begging for more.

Our heroes

Over the past few weeks I've sung the praises of everyone from Tom Hardy, Sam Neill and Noah Taylor to Paul Anderson, Charlotte Riley and Helen McCrory but this is Cillian Murphy's show and, boy, did he demonstrate that this evening. The scene in which he faced his apparent destiny, a lonely death in an unmarked grave, was a masterclass, as Tommy's emotions flickered slowly across his face, from his anger at the approaching end to his weary acceptance that death has stalked him much of his life. Shouting to the heavens with an almost Cagney-esque intensity ("Made it Ma! Top of the world"), Murphy commanded the screen, making it impossible to look away.

Spared from death by yet another double-cross (if there's one lesson to be learned from Peaky Blinders it's trust no one, ever, especially not if they claim to be a minister of the crown), Tommy then stumbled through a ditch and looked up at the sky in mute fury. It was a brilliant moment, with Murphy making viewers feel every second of impotent rage: all Tommy Shelby has ever wanted to do is be the master of his own destiny, yet the closer he comes to achieving wealth and respectability, the more his life and actions seem doomed to be controlled by others.

As to what his future now holds: Tommy might have talked to both Campbell and his assassins about love but that was before he realised that Winston Churchill is just the latest man to have his balls in a vice. He told May, "No regrets and I will find you," and asked Grace where she'd be, but, while there's an outside chance he picked Grace up before heading back to Birmingham, I'm willing to bet cold, hard cash that (if there is a season three) the wedding is to May not Grace. In the shark-infested waters in which he's moving, May provides wealth, status and the protection of power; Grace can only offer love, and if this series has shown us anything it's that Tommy Shelby has a head for business (and yes, Working Girl fans, a bod for sin).

Grace (Annabelle Wallis) revealed her pregnancy in one of the show's few clunky moments.

The bad guys

This being Peaky Blinders, Tommy managed to fit in showdowns with all three of his major enemies this week, starting off with a fantastically tense meeting in Alfie Solomons' dank underground lair (favourite line: "Olly, I want you to go outside and shoot that boy from the good family" – if that's all we get of Tom Hardy in this show then it was a good exit). He then progressed to one final snark-off with Major Campbell and a smug showdown with an apparently defeated Darby Sabini, only ruined when Campbell's Red Hand Gang rushed in to bustle him away. Of these, the middle meeting was nearly the most ruinous, as Tommy unforgivably wasted crucial minutes trading bitter one-liners with Campbell, thus condemning lovely Lizzy to her fate. As to that fate, I am in two minds about it: as I've repeatedly made clear, I am tired of rape plotlines, but it was absolutely in character of Tommy to see Lizzy as expendable – he tends to view most people as little more than pawns, as witnessed by his earlier use of James to threaten Alfie – and also realistic that he would use a woman to get Field Marshall Russell out of the way. As posters have noted in previous weeks, there has been a recurring theme this season of women destroyed thanks to the actions of the Peaky Blinders – the mother of the boy Arthur killed, the mother of Harold Hancox, Polly last week, and now Lizzy. I'd like to hope that were season three granted, this would be further addressed. Certainly, the brief, bitter scene between Lizzy and Tommy after the Field Marshall's death hinted at it.

- So goodbye then, Major Campbell; you really shouldn't have underestimated Polly, although I did wonder if she'd fall for his twisted attempts to forge a bond and fail to shoot.
- The Ulster Volunteer Force was real, formed in 1913 with the expressed aim of resisting home rule for Ireland. The group's symbol was the red right hand of Ulster. The modern-day paramilitaries took their name as a way of establishing older links.
- I loved Polly striding through the bar with a bloodstain just below her shattered heart.
- I wasn't a fan of Grace's scene with Tommy. Really Grace, you choose now – in the busiest day of the year, right before the big race – to start demanding Tommy listen to you? Even if he wasn't planning an assassination, interrupting anyone just before the off on Derby Day is unforgivable.
- I did, however, enjoy Grace's scene with May – both for the interesting revelation that May (who continues to break my heart with her bravery and the red dress) can ensure that the bookie's licences go with the Peaky Blinders and for Grace's parting shot about the horse's name. Nicely played, both of you.
- As for Grace's Secret, she was something of a red herring – given the Blinders were backing eventual winner Nom de Guerre (good name for a horse), and we never even learned where she came.
- John really might be my favourite Shelby. In my alternative Peaky Blinders, he lives happily with

Lizzy in a world free from crime where she's a secretary and he has the odd flutter down the pub.

- Against all odds, Arthur made it through the season – well done the poster who called that last week.
- Secretly, I think Tommy wants to be the Henry Root of his generation. If we don't get a compendium of Shelby letters to the rich and famous I shall feel obscurely let down.
- Finally, a quick toast from the Garrison: thank you all for posting here every week and for the great conversations. I've had a blast and I hope you have too.

Anachronistic yet strangely right song of the week

A great soundtrack this week makes it hard to single just one song out but ultimately my honours go to the Ane Brun cover of Emmylou Harris's wonderful All My Tears, which played out as Tommy faced his destiny.

Quote of the week

"I nearly got fucking everything" – Tommy rages against the dying light in the best moment of a great season.

So what did you think? Was it an ending fit for the captain Tommy Shelby has become, or has this second series left you colder than Major Campbell's grave? Will there be a third series and, if so, will Tommy choose May or Grace? And can anyone forgive him for using Lizzy?

3/1

Welcome back everyone. I make no apologies for the fact that Peaky Blinders is the garish, glorious show of my heart and this hugely confident opening episode, overflowing with swagger and coming across like the adrenaline-fuelled love child of Downton Abbey and Miller's Crossing, only reaffirmed my adoration. This is a drama at that imperious stage where it's hard to go wrong – confident in its storytelling, secure in its character development and trusting the audience to join them on what looks set to be another tumultuous journey through the back streets of Small Heath, Birmingham and the equally dangerous corridors of power.

Our heroes

It's almost 18 months since we last saw the Shelby clan. In that time, Peaky Blinders has gone from word-of-mouth hit to A-list-endorsed phenomenon. Fittingly, then, the Shelbys too have moved up in the world. It's 1924 and Tommy has parlayed his success on the track into an enormous house in Warwickshire – I was particularly taken with the fact that he relegated the family portrait to the stairs and put the painting of himself and Grace's Secret centre stage – and is now a father and soon-to-be-married man. Of course this is Peaky Blinders, so his wedding to the winsome Grace (whose husband, it transpired, awfully, had killed himself) swiftly descended into horse races, boxing matches, mayhem and murder. By the time Tommy was gazing out of the window of his mansion while Johnny Dogs and the Lees burned the body of a Russian agent, murdered by Arthur, on a pre-ordered pyre, there was little more to say than: welcome back boys! I'm glad the march to respectability hasn't slowed you down.

A wedding that swiftly descends into boxing matches, mayhem and murder.

Talking of respectability, I remain unsure about Grace. I can make a plausible case for why Tommy married her: she was pregnant with his child and family is everything; her husband killed himself –

it's not clear when exactly – which would have made walking away from her even harder; marrying Grace is less overwhelming than marrying May, who was true aristocracy as opposed to cavalry class and, crucially, ensures Tommy's autonomy is intact; he does, despite everything, appear to love her. That final point, however, is where I always fall down. Grace has lied and spied and cheated for much of this show's run, however much she plays the charity-dispensing lady of the house now. As Polly rightly remarked: "It's only Thomas that's forgotten what you are."

Cillian Murphy: 'Is this it, for the rest of my days?'

And what of the rest of the gang? I continue to feel desperately sorry for poor Arthur. When the episode opened I thought the eldest Shelby brother might have turned a corner – the credits say he's married to the god-fearing Linda and he was clearly trying to stay on the path of righteousness, albeit with mixed results. ("I'm having a couple now and then to remind myself of why I'm off it.") Unfortunately his brother didn't build a criminal empire by getting his hands dirty on his own wedding night, so yet again it was down to Arthur to dispatch the Soviet agent in a bloody scene that didn't shy away from showing us the ugly side of the Shelby organisation. Nor was he the only one feeling the stresses of Shelby life, as Polly was visited by temptation in the form of suave portrait painter Reuben Oliver. The little reveal that she took a gun to the door was cleverly done, demonstrating that all this new wealth hasn't brought the family security – if anything, the opposite is true.

Arthur, the eldest Shelby brother, is finding it impossible to stay on the path of righteousness.

The bad guys

We don't yet have a clear lead on who this series' main villain will be now that Sam Neill's Inspector Campbell is dead. But we did learn the following: Churchill has called in his favour of two years before and it involves White Russians, tanks and is probably building up to the events of August 1924 which saw an uprising against the recently formed Soviet Union in Georgia (where the supposed Grand Duchess Tatiana Petrovna apparently came from). I imagine the series is also going to deal with the Zinoviev letter, which triggered the fall of the first Labour government in 1924, a plot point that will almost certainly pit Ada against her brothers (as well as give her more to do than roll her eyes at Tommy – hurrah). However, this is Tommy Shelby we're talking about and, as he reminded us at the episode end, he's a gambling man, which means Churchill's shenanigans are not the only thing in play here. Instead, our man with the many plans appears to be on the verge of executing an enormous robbery. As to the who, where, what, when and why of that, we don't yet know but it's interesting that Grace is clearly as much in the dark as we are.

Notes and observations

A right royal Shelby wedding.

- The episode was beautifully directed by Belgian director Tim Mielants. At certain points – the boxing fights, the horse race – the whole thing looked like a painting come to life.
- I don't trust the devious Michael and his bright future. He has backstabber written all over him.
- I do, however, love John and his endless supply of cavalry jokes. Between those, Ada's socialist small talk and Arthur's stumbling wedding speech, I'm not sure I'd hire the Shelby clan as public speakers any time soon.
- Polly's would-be suitor Reuben Oliver is played by the wonderful Alexander Siddig. Here's hoping he's given more to do than on Game of Thrones.

- I loved the many horse references – in particular, the fact that Tommy’s Godfather-esque desk for posing seriously behind had a row of little horse sculptures. I like to imagine that the rest of the clan give them to him as presents.
- I’m not a huge fan of Annabelle Wallis’s performance but I do love the scenes between her and Helen McCrory’s Polly, which are always a barbed delight.
- So Tommy is the one who gets out of bed when the baby cries? If it wasn’t for the whole gangland crook, trail of bodies thing, he’d be quite the early-20th century catch.

Anachronistic but strangely right song of the week

Nice use of Nick Cave’s *Breathless* during the wedding vows, but I’m giving this to Radiohead’s *You and Whose Army*, which played out as Tommy impassively watched the body of the Soviet agent burn.

Quote of the week

“No cocaine, no sport, no telling fortunes, no racing, no fucking sucking petrol out of their fucking cars, and the main thing is – no fighting.” I’m fairly sure every single one of Tommy’s rules was broken by the end of his wedding day – most of them on his orders.

So what did you think? Are you happy to have the Shelby clan back? What exactly is Tommy planning? And will they all make it through the whole season intact?

3/2

The devil wears a dog collar and despoils children ... did Tommy Shelby just meet his ultimate adversary in Considine’s Father John Hughes?

Father John Hughes played by Paddy Considine – a man who can raise the hairs on your neck with one slow smile.

Before this series started I interviewed creator Steven Knight, who told me that “things would come back to bite the Shelby gang”. And so it came to pass, as this episode ended with Grace lying wounded in her husband’s arms as Polly ran desperately for an ambulance and Arthur and John beat the living hell out of the Neapolitan assassin called in to do the job.

As to how serious Grace’s injury is – I’m not sure. She’s always seemed pretty unkillable; I predict an Adrian from *Rocky*-style coma for much of the season. Still, it was a great climax to a strong episode as Tommy’s constantly spinning plates – Shelby business, Russian business, Grace business, Economic League business – threatened to overwhelm him once and for all. There’s a point in every series of *Peaky Blinders* where it seems that Tommy has bitten off more than he can chew, yet somehow he always manages to carve a path through. This time, I’m not so sure he can. There’s a lot at stake – and, judging by the conversation between Grand Duke Leon and his formidable wife, more than even Tommy knows.

Our heroes

Has Tommy finally bitten off more than he can chew?

With his list of enemies growing by the day, is Tommy Shelby’s luck finally about to run out?

Life would be much easier for Tommy if he could rely on his family. As it is, Arthur has lost his taste (if not capacity) for violence, Michael is clearly scheming on the side (and how convenient that the

flapper from last week turns out to have a daddy who's a big cheese in the automobile world), the Lees are siphoning off cocaine for themselves rather than doping the horses and John is arguably a looser canon than even Arthur, picking the unnecessary fight with the Italians that led to Grace's shooting.

John has always intrigued me, especially given his comments last series about having killed men in the first world war by the time he was Michael's age. Where Arthur is traumatised by his experiences in the tunnels and trenches, and Tommy has locked those thoughts deep inside him (only for them to occasionally surface almost accidentally – as they did this week when he first saw the tanks), John is almost freed by his experience. He's comfortable with his violence and revels in the power that being a Peaky Blinder brings. I'm also pretty sure he kicked off about Angel Changretta because he still has a soft spot for Lizzie, no matter how much he canoodles with the perpetually pregnant Esme in the Peaky Blinders office.

Yet it was Tommy's reaction that was really interesting here. Is Inspector Moss (fast becoming my new favourite character) right to state that Tommy "loves the sport of it"? I think yes, in part – as he reminded Polly last week, he is a gambling man and part of him will always want to roll the dice in a tricky situation (as he did with Father Hughes and the dog). But grabbing power is also considerably easier than retaining it. The Shelby's might, as John said, hold Birmingham, London and the whole of "fucking England" but can they keep that grip while being squeezed on all sides? I'm not so sure. "If we lift our heel off their necks now they will come at us," said Tommy. He was right – and making the best of a bad job once John had done the damage – but how easy is it to fight so many wars on so many different fronts?

The bad guys

Father John Hughes, played by Paddy Considine – a man who can raise the hairs on your neck with one slow smile

To the devil, a devil dog ... Father John Hughes and his unfriendly canine prepare for a visit.

Photograph: Robert Viglasky/BBC/Caryn Mandabach/Tiger Aspect

Tommy Shelby sure knows how to make enemies. By the end of episode two, the tally of people who might wish the Shelbys harm stands as follows: the Changretta family, and potentially the previously neutralised Darby Sabini; the Grand Duke Leon and his family, all of whom are clearly as slippery as eels; the sinister Father John Hughes, a man who wears his distasteful tendencies on his perfect black sleeve, and through him, the combined might of Her Majesty's Opposition and Scotland Yard. Call me a pessimist, but I'd say that's a pretty hefty bunch of opponents, particularly as none of them are demanding the same thing.

As to which will prove the most formidable – the Changrettas have just sparked a mob war which is going to make things very difficult in Birmingham; the Georgian aristocrats are tough as nails and deeply devious, but my money's on Father John Hughes (and not just because he's played by Paddy Considine, a man capable of raising the hairs on my neck with one slow smile). Fixer, go-between, maker of deals and despoiler of children, Considine made his entrance into Tommy's world with creepy relish. Those who complained about the way this show has represented those of the Protestant faith can now enjoy the tables being turned – the devil wears a dog collar and has a nice line in threatening calling cards it seems.

Notes and observations

- I really want Reuben Oliver to be on the record if only for the beautiful little scene where Polly looked at herself in the mirror and said “A woman of substance and class”. I know this is Peaky Blinders, so she’ll probably get her heart smashed to smithereens, but it would be lovely if he was just as smitten as he seems.
- John might have behaved badly this week, but he continues to have a nice line in nicknames: the Madonna of Moseley indeed.
- I was amused by the idea that Arthur has a “killing pistol”. Does he have different pistols for different types of work?
- It should be noted – just once, then never again – that Grand Duke Leon Not-Actually-A-Romanov, as played by Belgian actor Jan Bijvoet, continued this show’s tradition of insane accents that bear little resemblance to the area they’re supposed to represent.
- We also learned more about Gaithe Jansen’s Princess Tatiana, not least that she is willing to carry cursed gypsy sapphires through customs in interesting places but not actually wear them round her neck (oh Peaky Blinders, please never stop appealing to my trashier side).
- I enjoyed the snarky scene between Grace and Tatiana – my fondness for Grace would increase considerably if she spent more time sarcastically slapping people down.

I’m not sure I buy Tommy Shelby the family man ... Tommy (Cillian Murphy) with his wife Grace (Annabelle Wallis).

That unfortunate moment when you realise you’ve given your wife a cursed gypsy sapphire to wear round her neck ... Tommy and Grace.

- All of which brings me to my least favourite scene of an otherwise great episode: Tommy’s bucolic bliss with Grace and Charles. Yes, I know it was there to show us how much he has to lose now, but I’m not sure I buy Tommy Shelby the family man. I’d find it easier to believe that Arthur will get through an episode without killing someone than that Tommy really wants his very big house in the country.
- Finally, anyone interested in reading about White Russians in exile can try Vanora Bennett’s *The White Russian* for a well-researched page-turner or for a more literary tale, Vladimir Nabokov’s beautiful and haunting autobiography of exile, *Invitation of a Memory*.

Anachronistic but strangely right song of the week

Hurrah for the return of PJ Harvey’s *This Is Love*, even if I continue to find it incongruous that the show associates the bland Grace with Polly Harvey’s full-throated blues.

Quote of the week

“There is hell and there is another place below hell. I will remember everything ... I forget nothing.”
Do you guys have the feeling Tommy Shelby will unleash hell before this season’s out?

3/3

An excellent episode, with shock deaths, darkness, despair – and Tommy Shelby desperately trying not to let his monstrous side out

Tommy barely has a grip on himself.

We all grieve in different ways. Some drink to hide the pain. Some seek comfort in prayer, while others rail against God for stealing their loved one away. In the aftermath of Grace's shocking death, we learnt that the Tommy Shelby grief management method involves road trips, deals with gypsies and a spot of torture and execution. That was the plan anyway – lucky for Tommy, Arthur came to his younger brother's rescue yet again with a mercy killing that both saved Vicente Changretta from prolonged pain and prevented Tommy from crossing a line that even the Peaky Blinders won't cross. "We're not those kind of men," said John as Tommy sheathed his torture instruments and came back to himself. But how true is that really?

This was an excellent episode, drenched in darkness and despair, and making it quite clear that no matter how angelic he looks, Tommy has a monster locked deep down inside him. No wonder he asks Arthur to carry out all those murders rather than get his own hands dirty – if he let the monster out, it might never go back in.

Our heroes

Alas poor Grace, let's raise a glass and sing a quick chorus of Carrickfergus in your memory. I know I've been harsh about Annabelle Wallis's performance and Grace's purpose as a character, but the Grace of series one – the secret agent with a fine line in rebel songs – deserved better than an off-screen funeral and a photograph placed sadly in a drawer. When we first met her, Grace had agency and a mind of her own but it seems as though Steven Knight wrote himself into a corner by making her Tommy's angel on earth: once he'd reduced her to gala dinners, there was nowhere left for the character to go.

Candlelight and conspiracy ... have the Shelby gang bitten off more than they can chew?

There's no denying that her death raised the stakes sky-high, though, exposing how off his game Tommy has been and emphasising the widening gaps in the Shelby organisation – with brother turning on brother, uncles distrusting nephews and poor Polly desperately trying to keep a lid on it all. "It's the family united that will never be defeated." Wise words Pol, but they may be too late.

The Shelbys are in serious trouble, and not just because Tommy barely has a grip on himself let alone his public facade. In the past, the Shelbys have held fast to the idea of themselves as the last gang in town, outlaws against the establishment. But now, Tommy has them doing the establishment's work, and dirty work it is too – firing working men, breaking up strikes and fitting up innocents. No wonder John looked so disgusted: not only was he asked to murder Mrs Changretta, his former schoolteacher, but the legitimate business turns out to be far dirtier than all the dodgy deals on the side. I won't be surprised if the Shelbys end this series having lost everything. Tommy might be a white-knuckle gambler with a perfect poker face, but even the best gambler can't win every time.

The bad guys

Is he a secret Soviet agent? Father John Hughes remains Tommy's most dangerous enemy of all.

It doesn't help that the Shelbys are still fighting wars on several fronts. Does the obliteration of the Changretta organisation mean the family is safe? It seems far more likely that Sabini and Solomons or both will be trotting up from London any day now. Elsewhere, the Georgians continued to scheme and dream of restitution, and we had further confirmation that Izabella is the force behind the throne. Meanwhile, the most dangerous enemy of all remains the devious Father John Hughes. Is he

a secret Soviet agent? Or some kind of triple agent working for the Brits but pretending to be a Russian spy? Whose agenda is he following: Churchill's, the Georgians, the Soviets, his own? One thing is certain: regardless of what he told Tatiana, Tommy won't find it terribly easy to rid himself of this turbulent priest.

Notes and observations

- I was immensely relieved that John and Arthur spared Mrs Changretta and let her leave for Mott Street's promised land.
- Will Ada also be heading to the New World? It seems likely that she'll take Tommy's Boston bait – unless she finds out about the strike-breaking and sacking of Communists, that is ...
- "I am planning to seduce you eventually and please God sleep with you." I find Reuben hugely endearing, which means he's inevitably going to emerge as a wrong 'un.
- Also possibly not on the level: the lovely and apparently pregnant Linda – was it just me who thought she wiped her face suspiciously clean of emotion the minute Arthur turned his back?
- I loved the scene with Michael, Arthur and John both for the oddly sensual way Arthur described the weapons and the brutal kicker about the dead at the end: "It gets to the point where you can't walk into the room without bringing a load of them with you."
- The scene with Bethany Boswell was interesting too, suggesting that Tommy believed in neither God nor the cursed sapphire ... but still needed it off his hands. I enjoyed how he squared it in his mind: "All religion is a foolish answer to a foolish question." Indeed.

Tommy on a road trip with his toddler.

'I'm not much good and she's not coming back so it's just you and me' ... Tommy and his toddler on the road.

- I'm a fan of Tommy's talk-to-your-child-as-if-they're-an-adult parenting technique: "I'm not much good and she's not coming back so it's just you and me." Nothing like laying your cards on the table for a two-year-old, Tommy.
- Where's Lizzy? I'd like to see her disgusted reaction to all this mayhem given it was John's refusal to accept her dating Angel that set all this off.
- I continue to feel sorry for Ralph Ineson's foreman, who is basically an honourable man caught in a terrible position and now pretty much screwed because he took the cash.
- I'm even more worried about Arthur – that hug from Tommy at the end had distinctly Corleone undertones.

Anachronistic but strangely right song of the week

A cracking soundtrack this week including Queens of the Stone Age's Burn the Witch and Tom Waits' melancholy Soldier's Things, but Tupelo is my all-time favourite Nick Cave song so I have to give it to that.

Quote of the week

"I heard the blackbird sing." With just one line, Arthur Shelby jumps back to the top of my favourite Shelby family member list. Oh Arthur, you might be a ruthless killer but at least you have a heart.

3/4

A bleak, hard-to-watch episode, with hideous confessionals and assassination attempts – leavened with the hilarious news that the Shelby gang have a scholar's pass at the British Library

The Shelby brothers deal with the news of their father's death in their own inimitable way.

Oh dear Tommy. This was another strong episode, but about as bleak as this rambunctious show gets. Throughout this series, there has been the constant suggestion that the usually all-knowing Mr Shelby is off his game, caught between legitimate and illegitimate business, living in the Big House but still, as Tatiana said, “hiding inside it like a boy who’s broken in through the window”.

That uncertainty, coupled with his grief over Grace, has led him to make uncharacteristic errors, culminating in the decision to tell Polly about the assassination plan. As to how fatal that decision turns out to be – let’s just say we’ve never seen Tommy as low as he was in the hideous, hard-to-watch confessional scene. Given that we left him with concussion, a fractured skull, internal bleeding and a possible haemorrhage, not to mention apparently thinking kindly thoughts about his monstrous late father, I’d say there’s some way to go before things improve.

Our heroes

The Shelbys return from their stag killing.

At first I couldn’t understand why Tommy told Polly (the most trustworthy member of his family, but also the most devout) about his desire to kill Father Hughes, but then her drunken confessional made it clear: Tommy might talk a good game about not believing in God, but that childhood Catholicism still lingers. When it came down to it, he couldn’t kill a priest without checking on the state of his mortal soul.

This episode was heavy on the symbolism: the killing of the stag at the start was echoed by Tommy’s own wounded state in the final moments. (By the way Tommy, when will you learn to listen to Curly? If he says you shouldn’t have killed the stag then you shouldn’t have killed the stag – although admittedly, it might have been better to give that warning beforehand). Things were looking more rosy for the rest of the Shelby gang, albeit rosy in the sense that everything could come crashing down at any second: Arthur and Linda plan a spot of California dreaming on an Indian mission, where Linda will preach and Arthur will run a local shop. It’s a Californian version of Little House on the Prairie – what could possibly go wrong?

I was surprisingly touched by Linda’s plan – and impressed by her ability to deal with Tommy – but I’m pretty sure that Arthur hasn’t told her anything: in every scene we’ve seen, he’s obfuscated about Shelby business. Is she a spy? I could be wrong, but I think so. John had dreams too. Being John, they were simply of having a bigger house than Tommy (mind that inferiority complex as you go, John) although I was moved by his belief that Esme’s nascent coke habit would be cured by some caravan trips to the beach. Finally Polly, the unwitting architect of Tommy’s downfall, who started the episode drunkenly trying to suppress her demons – I liked the acknowledgment that she thinks of Campbell, even if she doesn’t regret his death – and ended it edging ever closer to a romance with Ruben. Please be on the record Ruben, I couldn’t bear it if you weren’t.

The bad guy

So which side is Father Hughes playing for? The suggestion was that he and the thoroughly creepy MP are both Soviet agents, though he told Tommy the opposite in his morphine haze to ensure their no doubt nefarious plan comes off. That said, I have a feeling this arrogant man of the cloth, so contemptuous of other’s thoughts and feelings, serves no God but himself. I wouldn’t be surprised to learn he was playing all sides off against each other, Tommy Shelby-style. As for the crazy Georgians, we learnt that Tatiana has some interesting ideas about what constitutes pillow talk – though I found her statement to Tommy that she was the “first one who understands you” worth

considering. She's right that he finds a certain freedom in killing, though wrong to presume that's all there is to him.

Additional notes

Move on girl ... Lizzie, sleeping with Tommy is no good for you.

- So the Shelbys are going to rob the Georgians? Interesting plan Tommy: you'd better hope those sapphires are real and not just gaudy sex toys.
- While I admire Tommy's attempts to go legit – "horses for the sport, race days for a lark" – I'm not convinced he'll keep the rest of the gang on side. Pol and Arthur yes, but John and the little 'uns ...
- Of course the crazy Georgian duchess plays Russian roulette – this is *Peaky Blinders*, which never met a Grand Guignol plot point it didn't love.
- Oh Lizzie, sleeping with Tommy is neither good for your self-respect or for his grief process. Move on girl; leave the Shelbys behind.
- I loved the slow-mo scene of the women marching off on strike and the men riding their horses over Tommy's palatial grounds. Yes, it was shot like a music video but it was a great deal of fun.
- I still don't trust Michael. I don't know whether it's the writing or the actor but even seemingly innocuous lines like "Should I be here for this?" make me shudder.
- The reactions from the three older Shelby brothers to their father's death were all nicely done, Arthur's in particular. Paul Anderson has been fantastic this series.
- The whole episode was very well acted, with Paddy Considine skin-crawlingly disturbing and Helen McCrory heartbreaking in Polly's confessional scene. But this was very much Cillian Murphy's hour. The scene in which Hughes forced Tommy to recite the Act of Contrition was sickeningly good, not least because Murphy made us so aware of just how much it was costing Tommy, physically and emotionally, to do this man's bidding.
- Finally, I am hugely tickled by the idea that the *Peaky Blinders* have a scholar's pass at the British Library – and even more so by the idea that John is the one they allow to use it.

Anachronistic yet strangely right song of the week

Not much music this week, so I'm giving the honours to *The Last Shadow Puppets' Bad Habit*, which is the sort of song that makes you feel defiled just listening to it, and thus was fittingly used as Tommy attempted to assassinate Father Hughes.

Quote of the week

"She's stolen his soul and taken it to a better place – the suburbs." Polly, queen of the one-liners, nails Arthur and Linda's relationship.

What did you think? Can the Shelbys come back from the brink of disaster? Do you trust Linda? What about Michael? Or Ruben? If you were stuck in a mansion with a crazed Georgian duchess, would you indulge her in a quick round of Russian roulette?

3/5

An orgy between enemies – complete with copious vodka and Cossack soldiers – is probably the one thing that's been missing from this series

Tommy Shelby returns to peak scheming – then indulges in a Siberian Kiss.

Welcome back Tommy Shelby. After four weeks of being off his game, we saw him return to peak scheming as it transpired that he'd spent his three-month recuperation period following that nasty head injury dreaming up a plan to combat both the mad Georgian aristocrats and Father Hughes (in addition to having some rather personal morphine-based dreams about poor Mary, whose shocked expression on being told was one of the night's funniest moments).

Poor shocked Mary, the subject of Tommy's morphine-addled dreams.

So what is the plan? As with everything Tommy comes up with, I'm sure we don't yet know the half of it. But we do know he's done a deal with the Soviets to ensure that the guns and tanks planned for the uprising will prove utterly worthless, which in turn negates the need to blow up the train. Meanwhile, operation Take the Georgians For All They're Worth is in full swing – and Tommy has assembled a tunnelling A Team of first world war veterans to ensure that they pull it off.

Tommy assembles his A Team of tunnellers.

And what of the deadly priest – Father O'Paedo, as the members of this blog have so aptly named him? That one's a little more problematic. It turns out that Michael's big secret isn't that he's planning to bring down the Shelby empire, but that he was abused by Father Hughes as a child and would like revenge. Unfortunately – as is so often the case on this show – what the Shelby men want is in direct contrast to what the women desire. Thus Tommy's plan to allow Michael his day of vengeance has put him on a collision course with a righteously furious Polly, who ended the episode declaring: "I swear to God if my son pulls the trigger, I will bring this whole fucking organisation down around your ears." In a season that has been all about family and the need to stay united for victory, I wouldn't take that threat lightly.

Our heroes

This was also an episode stuffed full of sex, most of it not desperately happy. Polly and her lovely artist finally came together in a beautifully shot scene – though I do worry that she chose to tell him about having murdered Inspector Campbell. If he is a spy, that's a huge mistake, and if he isn't I'm not sure it was quite the turn-on she intended. Meanwhile the Georgians hosted an orgy – because this is Peaky Blinders and quite honestly a candle-lit orgy involving vodka, blow jobs and Cossack soldiers is probably the one thing missing from this series. So John shamelessly enjoyed himself, Arthur got drunk, broke his vows to Linda, and was thoroughly miserable, and Tommy and Tatiana indulged in the Siberian Kiss AKA a spot of light strangulation to induce visions of Grace. Hmm Tommy, you might be doing well on the plotting against your enemies front but I'm still not sure about your grieving process.

The bad guys

Tom Hardy has a ball as Alfie Solomons, the walking quote machine.

The best news of the week was the return of Tom Hardy's walking quote machine Alfie Solomons, who was called in by Tommy to do a spot of jewellery assessment ahead of the robbery. Hardy, as always, had a complete ball in his scenes. First, speaking truth to Tommy ("You've been fucking about with the Russians, you silly boy"), then taunting Arthur over his conversion ("Congratulations Tommy you now have the finished article ... that man will murder and maim for you with God on his side") before riling up the Georgians by revealing that he spoke Russian, wasn't terribly keen on the

aristocracy – “You people hunted my mum with dogs through the snow, but today is about forgiveness innit?” – and knew his stuff about jewels. That particular revelation turned out to be pretty important, not least because it marked the first time we’ve seen the Georgians make a misstep. They underestimated Tommy and presumed they could fob him off with a bunch of fake stones. Now they know they can’t, what will their next move be?

- It was a very bad week for Michael, who in addition to revealing his secret about Father Hughes has also managed to knock up the motor heiress. I wouldn’t like to be in his shoes if his mother finds out he’s busy procuring a backstreet abortion for the young lady in question.
- Ada officially joined the family business and it’s already clear she’s going to kick some arse. I think Tommy might have underestimated his sister, given her comments to Polly about control.
- I loved Arthur’s “I’m Old Testament” line. Of course you are Arthur, I never doubted that.
- I also related to his repeated requests for vodka at the orgy. If I was shut in the room with a bunch of crazy cossacks, I’d be demanding a drink too.
- Or perhaps cossack dancing like John ... that’s also possible.
- Interesting to see John giving Stefan the pep talk. He does have his moments.
- Polly’s sarcastic remarks to Michael about his constant phoning should have struck a chord with mothers of teenagers everywhere.

Johnny Dogs, the only straight-up person on this show.

- Sometimes I think Johnny Dogs might be the only person on this show who isn’t following some sort of secret scheme (and Curly of course).
- Finally, I thought Helen McCrory was outstanding in this episode. She can make you feel Polly’s hurt and desire and desperation with barely a word.

Anachronistic yet strangely right song of the week

A strong week for music, including a brief snippet of an as-yet-unreleased Leonard Cohen song when Tatiana and Tommy had sex. But this can only go to the episode’s opening sequence, which used David Bowie’s Lazarus to mesmerising and hallucinatory effect.

Quote of the week

“I’m guessing that all the bad ideas round here are you – that’s right innit?” Mr Alfie Solomons, ladies and gentlemen, self-proclaimed wandering Jew, windup merchant supreme and astute judge of character.

So what did you think? Has Tommy rediscovered his mojo? Or will the conflict with Polly bring the whole thing crashing down? Can Ada change the company and will the Shelby brothers actually allow Arthur to leave? And given that bad luck comes in threes, what can we expect Michael to learn next week?

3/6

Tommy goes full Corleone in a cracking conclusion of kidnappings, bombshell reveals and shock arrests. Is he tunnelling straight to hell?

Facing his demons ... Tommy’s flashback to his traumatic tunnelling days.

One thing this series has always been very good at is a finale. This week’s nail-biter was no exception, as Tommy raced against time to save his kidnapped son, facing his tunnelling demons and revealing the entertaining truth about the great jewel robbery in the process. But the most powerful

moment came at the very end, as a physically and emotionally battered Mr Shelby summoned his family and went full Corleone on them, dashing money across the table, reminding everyone that if they take “the King’s shilling” then they’ve agreed to kill, before dropping the bombshell that they were all about to be arrested, but that he’d managed to strike a deal ...

It was a bittersweet, brilliant ending to what has been an occasionally patchy series, and one that made it clear that the constant sense of the Shelbys having jumped too far too fast was deliberate. Tommy over-extended himself: he believed that having the big house, the perfect wife, the adored child meant he was untouchable, and that his countryside folly meant he could take on the big boys. He was wrong.

Our heroes

A superbly tense standoff ... Alfie confronts Tommy.

This has always been a show drenched in sin, guilt and redemption, and this episode was heavy in all three. Throughout this series, Steven Knight has consistently hinted that there is a price to pay for behaving as the Peaky Blinders do. That was hammered home tonight, both during the superbly tense confrontation with Alfie – “How many sons have you cut, killed, murdered, butchered, both innocent and guilty to send them straight to hell?” – and in the final scene in which Tommy was as much priest as gang boss, reminding his family of all their sins and asking for absolution even as the police poured through the door.

The Shelby family, just before Tommy goes full Corleone on them.

Given how obsessed this season has been with family, it was perfect to end with the Shelbys being pulled apart. Family all but destroyed Tommy (Grace and Charles were very much his weak spots, understandably so) yet it also got him through: John and Arthur bore his worst crimes, Michael saved his life and killed the priest, Ada “came back for love”.

For all that, Tommy’s final bitter vision of the Peaky Blinders as a ruthless criminal enterprise, perfect players in Alfie Solomons’ wicked world, felt bleakly true. Yet there was hope: like Lizzie, Esme and Ada, I too would be very interested to hear Polly’s plan for the future of the gang.

The bad guys

The greatest reveal of the night ... Tommy gives the jewels to Tatiana.

The greatest reveal of the night was that Tatiana hired Tommy to do the robbery. As to why – the suggestion seemed to be that Grand Duchess Izabella was stepmother rather than mother, that the jewels basically belonged to her anyway, that she didn’t want her useless father and his impassive wife spunking them on a pointless revolution when she could take them and waltz off to a new life in Vienna where “a man is waiting for me”. “Poor man,” replied Tommy dourly. I can only agree.

The evening was far less kind to our other main villain: Father Hughes died choking on his own blood after fatally underestimating nascent psychopath Michael. Paddy Considine has been great in this role, sleazy and unnerving at every turn, and it’s almost a shame we had to see him go (I did say almost). As for the rest of the mysterious “Oddfellows”, they lived to fight another day, ending the evening in the ascendant with most of the Shelbys arrested. That’s the trouble with shadowy figures of establishment corruption: they’re notoriously hard to bring down.

Additional notes

Poor broken Polly.

The cruellest moment of the night was Tommy's rebuttal of Polly: "He pursued you, sought you out – why would an educated man of his standing do something like that?" True, it was said in desperation but it was also gratuitously nasty ... and, as it turned out, gloriously wrong.

- "There were things in that treasury that God himself, he spoke to me and said 'Alfie you were meant to have these things.'" Tom Hardy has so much fun with this role that it's impossible not to go along with the performance, baroque as it is.
- The moment before Arthur and John blew up the train was one of the best of the entire series. It was subtle and very affecting, from Arthur's turmoil to John's quiet "I'll do it." This series has really fleshed out their relationship well.
- It's pretty much Michael's fault the train got blown up. If he hadn't been so intent on pulling the trigger on Hughes, word would have reached Finn in time. Bad Michael.
- Also bad – the way he callously abandoned the poor motor heiress to her abortion. I have a feeling that will come back to bite him.
- The line about Lizzie stopping Tommy's heart from breaking was interesting. I find their relationship believable. It's not healthy, it's horribly unequal and it couldn't work long-term but it makes sense. They fall back on each other when times are bad.
- Poor Linda and her shattered Californian dreams. I wonder if she'll head for America's promised land anyway?
- "I'm going back to Birmingham to buy a racehorse and have it trained" – and suddenly, the ears of all the May Carleton fans in the audience pricked up ...
- I was amused that the Women's Institute were smart enough to get Tommy a horse statue. Forget sex and Siberian kisses: that's the real way to his heart.

What a performance ... a special shout-out to Paul Anderson's guilt-ridden Arthur Shelby.

- The acting was fantastic again this episode. Special shout-outs to Paul Anderson's guilt-ridden Arthur, Helen McCrory's broken Polly, Finn Cole's terrifying Michael and, of course, Cillian Murphy, who was outstanding once again.
- The whole thing was also beautifully directed by Tim Mielants. Even when this craziest of shows is at its most insane, it always looks glorious.
- Finally, if I have one real complaint about a season I've largely enjoyed, it's that they did a disservice to Grace by writing her into a lady of the manor hole then summarily killing her off to give Tommy further motivation. I may not have been particularly fond of the character or actress, but it was still poorly done.

Anachronistic yet strangely right song of the week

I'm not the biggest Radiohead fan but the use of Life in a Glass House as Tommy looked round his now empty folly was brilliant.

Quote of the week

"I've learnt something in the last few days: those bastards are worse than us. Politicians, lords and ladies, they're all worse than us and they will never admit us to their palaces no matter how legitimate we become because of who we are and where we're from." Tommy Shelby, class warrior, lays down the law.

What did you think? Did the ending satisfy you? Will Tommy really save his family or did he just get them all locked up so he could grab a bit of peace?