

## Van Helsing: Tricia Helfer Talks Biting Into the Role of Dracula

Van Helsing's Tricia Helfer discusses making her own unique version of Dracula, and what attracted her to the role in the first place.

**BY BRANDON ZACHARY** PUBLISHED APR 23, 2021



*Van Helsing* has returned for a fifth and final season. The Syfy series pushes the heroes of the vampiric world to the absolute brink to try and stop the near-unstoppable force of evil Dracula, aka the Dark One. *Van Helsing's* version of Dracula, played by Tricia Helfer, has already proven to be a ruthless and cunning monster despite having elements of her former humanity as the innocent Olivia centuries before. During an exclusive interview with CBR, Helfer delved into the process of bringing the Dark One (and her human form Olivia) to life, how she made sure to put her own stamp on the classic concept of Dracula and what attracts her to a role.

Despite taking on the major role of the Dark One -- who is eventually revealed to be this universe's incarnation of Dracula -- Helfer admitted that she was pleasantly surprised when she learned just how fully the fifth season would incorporate the origins of the character. "I didn't know when I signed on to play Dracula, I didn't know that we were going to be doing this backstory. So, when I was told that it was going to happen and looking at it... we filmed the first three episodes as just one big movie. So, it was all intermingled, and it was so much fun. I think it just brings so much heart to the character. I think it brings... I can't say too much, but it brings an element for me to play the rest of the season as well."



Helfer teased that "something that happens in these first three episodes, which we saw a hint of at the end of the first episode. It brings an element for me to play as Dracula later and throughout the rest of the season." Reflecting on getting to play Olivia as well as the Dark One, Helfer said, "It was just so much fun to play the complete opposite of what we know as the Dark One. I wanted to make sure that Olivia... she epitomizes light and goodness. To try and make her the opposite of that, and to bring in this darkness, I found the contrast very interesting to play. It is such an inherently compelling [story]. We know that this is going to end with her as the Dark One. Getting to see this really soft side to her is a really cool, compelling idea and thing to play."

Dracula is one of the most adapted characters in modern fiction, appearing in all sorts of different genres, styles and forms. Helfer isn't the first performer to play a version of the character and won't be the last. Helfer revealed that while preparing for the role, she made sure to avoid overanalyzing other versions of the famous vampire. "I did want to do my version of it. I didn't want to get held up, trying to watch every other form of Dracula that there's been. And I wanted to watch the first season of *Van Helsing* and get the tone of our show and see where I can fit in and what I can bring to this Dracula. I was just going off of the first script, mid-season, last season. I didn't know all that was

happening in Season 5. And even in the finale, I didn't know I was going to end up in the guise of the President of the United States."

"I purposely didn't go and watch a bunch of other Dracula performances, I read. A friend had given me a book on Dracula throughout cinematic history, from Nosferatu and all the... that was really interesting for me to read. But again, I was reading it. I wasn't watching it. I didn't then go watch a bunch of these shows. Now that I'm all finished, I probably should. But part of me didn't want to get into the trap of like, 'Oh, I should play it like so-and-so played it.' I just wanted to get on set and feel, do what felt right for us in the scene."

Thanks to Helfer's performance and the world that *Van Helsing* has created, the Dark One feels like a unique take on the concept. Along with the innate darkness to such a villainous character, there's an ancient element that gives her a definite weight when she's introduced. "There is an ancient kind of quality through there," Helfer revealed. "I didn't want her to feel modern. She's been around for a while, and we'll see in the next episodes just how long and what kind of version she's been. I always saw her as a little bit more kind of creature-y. I wanted to stay away from just coming in femme fatale as Dracula. That's not what I wanted. I wanted her to be a little bit more. I just wanted dark to seep out of her. She's the epitome of darkness, and our show really is dark versus light."



Helfer has dived into a number of different genres over the years, with starring roles in shows like *Battlestar Galactica* and *Lucifer*. Looking back at what attracts her to a project in the first place, Helfer said, "For me, I have to feel a connection somehow to the character. I have to feel some sort of excitement about wanting to dig into this character. Right now, I'm on a Starz series playing a Fulton County district attorney. And there's an element to her that I've never played for. I've played lawyers in quite a few things before -- in *The Firm*, in *Suits* -- but there's an element to this character that

I haven't played before. I think it's just if even reading something, there have been times where my team go, 'Well, I don't really know about this.' And no, I just feel like I want to explore this character."

"I think there's a bunch of factors that go into whatever job people end up doing. Obviously, the team has to want you and timing has to work out and everything. But for me, I don't like just taking a paycheck. I mean, I like being paid. I have bills to pay. So of course, that factors too, just wanting to work and needing to work. But just getting to play all different types of characters -- I think that I would find it boring if I only ever played the same type of character. It's sort of like, 'Do I want to know more about this person? Can I learn something from them?' It's more about being intrigued by the character and wanting to explore who that character is."

Filming for the fifth season -- as with much of the entertainment industry -- ran into challenges during 2020 amid the global pandemic. Looking back though, Helfer was quick to say, "I have to give huge kudos to the production team for doing all this during COVID. We got shut down, the entire industry did, right when we finished the first three episodes in Slovakia. When they started back up with it in July, I think they were the first show in North America back up and running. I think there are things that they had to alter because of COVID, take more people out of scenes, make episodes smaller, but I think they did it without compromising their view and their story for the fans."



Looking ahead to the rest of the fifth and final season, Helfer explained that she's "excited for the fans because there'll be things placed throughout the show, where you'll see where something they set up in an earlier season pays off. Even in the next episode up, in Episode 2, there's someone who Jack comes into contact with and there's something infused from that character that is integral in earlier seasons. And you can finally get to see how this came to be and where it originated from. I think that's the liberty they had, knowing that this was going to be the final season."

"I think that because the showrunners and writers had that knowledge, that it can really pay off in a nice way for the fans. Because if you don't it's going to be the final season, you might not necessarily answer all the questions or cross all your T's and dot all your I's, right? Because you might want to hold something over if you get another season. So that's the benefit of knowing it's going to be your final season is you can answer all these questions of all the things that you've set up a long way. And that definitely happens in this season."

*Van Helsing stars Kelly Overton, Jonathan Scarfe, Tricia Helfer, Nicole Munoz, Keeya King, Neal McDonough, Vincent Gale, Rukiya Bernard and Aleks Paunovic. Season 5 airs Friday nights on Syfy.*