

DEN OF GEEK!

Van Helsing Episode 7 Review: For Me

Axel's group is forced to flee the hospital in the latest episode of Syfy's Van Helsing.



Dave Vitagliano Oct 28, 2016

Van Helsing Episode 7

Before we go any further, let me just say that tonight's episode of **Van Helsing** represents everything an apocalyptic drama should be. Featuring an uncompromising leader who not only stands up to his

own people and then rallies them to fight off the invaders, “For Me,” the series’ seventh episode, articulates the incessant struggle individuals face, culminating in the long anticipated flight from the hospital.

Is there anything this episode penned by Executive Producer Simon Barry lacks? In a word, no. Too often these kinds of tales rely too heavily on action and the brutality that naturally follows, and make no mistake, there are some nasty scenes here, but each serves a meaningful purpose. As gruesome as it is, even Dmitri’s “crushing his head like a pumpkin until the eyes pop out” scene reveals a layer of his character we haven’t seen until now. He’s worried. But it’s the nuanced subtleties that truly resound throughout “For Me.”

Barry and director Amanda Tapping’s (“Nothing Matters”) portrayal of Mohamad shines as he navigates his way alone through the vampire jungle. Firing the flares appears to be an act of desperation since he certainly doesn’t want to draw attention to himself, but perhaps it’s a prearranged signal intended for his sister. Regardless, what strikes at the core of this character occurs when he sees the ambulance leave the hospital and his moment of excitement is suddenly crushed under the weight of the realization that he’s being left behind. Again.

However, nothing dampens this kid’s spirit. He watches as a group of vampires savagely attack one of Brendan’s people, yet keeps going, and even though it appears likely his days with Axel and Vanessa are done, the subtle facial expressions as he watches them drive away

convince us that he'll do whatever it takes to catch up. And you have to love the irony of his Nirvana tee shirt.

The most powerful facet of the episode lies in the subtle character nuances, some of which don't occupy that much screen time but still deliver a powerful punch in the gut. Watching the urgency of the group's plight cause Axel to momentarily falter when he realizes that all of his preparations may not be enough doesn't make us feel sorry for him. On the contrary, the beauty of this scene focuses on the revelation of his humanity. It's easy to forget that underneath his gruff, no nonsense exterior beats the heart of a man placed in an untenable situation, and though deep down, he likely understands that the others' challenges to his authority result from their own fears, it's still emotionally grueling. He pulls it together, and even though he still lacks a viable plan, his declaration that "Anybody that wants to live follow me," solidifies his leadership standing. This is a man in crisis, and it's this scene as much as any that makes me question whose show this is? Obviously, there's no lack of dissension in **Van Helsing**, and it's the internal struggles that prove the most compelling.

While we see Axel emotionally falter and Vanessa physically struggle to simply rise from her bed, John's barrier against those who've been turned back may be coming down. Doc, who has her own set of issues, drafts John to assist with a dying Vanessa's surgery, and while he's able to overlook Doc's past, his abhorrence of Flesh is put to the test. But when we examine the actions of

most of the characters, the common thread seems to be that they're reacting out fear of one type or another. John's right to be afraid especially after we see Doc's emotional agony over the fear she'll revert. The fact that we still know so little about what's truly going on outside the hospital should make it easier to forgive the actions of someone like John. Holding a gun to Flesh's head underscores the uncertainty they all live with on a daily basis, and while no one would have been surprised had he pulled the trigger, that he reconsiders provides a glimmer of hope that even the group's most outspoken critic might be coming around.

And while the bulk of our attention seems to invariably focus on Vanessa and Axel, Doc now faces arguably the biggest fight of her life. However, blood tasting aside, that admission that she's not sure she wants to go back to the way things were can only be seen as troubling. Assuming she's referring to a society still battling prejudice, income inequality, and environment related issues, that she considers the present conditions preferable to 2016 raises a new set of concerns.

Though John's contempt for Axel's leadership has always been out in the open, Nicole chooses to remain in the shadows. But when she witnesses Axel's meltdown, she has no choice but to inform the others. Again, though, given the circumstances, she undoubtedly does the right thing, just as Flesh's defense of Axel's personal monologue adds some perspective to what must be, at best, a disconcerting revelation. And in an episode that

seems to be filled with moment-of-truth situations, Nicole gets separated from the other and fights off a few of Julius' attackers before turning the gun on herself to avoid being turned. An interesting decision given that she's aware of Vanessa's "healing" power, but she has to be weary from the daily grind and can be forgiven for giving up.

These defining moments lead our characters down varied paths, and in each case, even though the act may have seemed inconsequential, subtle changes overcome them producing new sets of challenges. And that's what makes this episode so great. Amidst a dehumanizing backdrop, individuals find themselves capable of so much more, and in some cases, less, than they'd ever imagined possible. But at the end of the day, what refuses to die is their humanity. No matter how many waves of Julius' ferals rush the hospital, Doc is going put aside her greatest fear and stand tall, determined to hold onto her present state because the alternative is too horrific to consider.

Still, my favorite scene in **Van Helsing**'s seventh episode follows Axel, John, and Susan, assault rifles at the ready, facing off against the invaders. Like Flesh and Doc, having returned from the dark side, Susan's presence forces us to come to terms with the fact that these three mistakenly believe they're beyond redemption when the cruel reality is that their actions are nothing short of heroic.

Through the first six episodes viewers have wrestled with the complexities of the vampire social structure, and tonight we receive some much needed clarity. Yes, there does seem to be a war for control under way, and it's fascinating to watch "the ancients" battle for control. While we know Julius perceives Dmitri to be weak and prepares to assail his fortress, there is something to be said for having your own elite Death Squad. I wonder though, if at the end of the day, it's Rebecca who's the only one still standing.

And finally, I can't let go of the fact that "For Me" blends the flavor of the classic western last stand with the savage, house to house warfare reminiscent of the German advance on Stalingrad in 1941. Men forced to abandon everything they hold dear simply to live another day. All too often we disregard life's preciousness; **Van Helsing** refuses to allow that to happen.

5/5 STARS