



# Van Helsing Season 3 Episode 6 Review: Like Suicide

**Vanessa and Axel defeat The B'ah, but Phil's emotional pain signals the end of his journey on a heart wrenching Van Helsing.**

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*This **Van Helsing** review contains spoilers.*

## **Van Helsing Season 3 Episode 6**

“I’m here for him, that ring, and your head.”

It’s difficult to know when dead is really dead on *Van Helsing*, and while that’s become an important and accepted aspect of the show’s mythos, there are times when we’re right to

question whether our suspension of disbelief has drifted too far off the spectrum. Tonight, there does seem to be a certain finality that rests with the deaths of Phil and The B'ah, but in the end, who really knows for sure. That said, what "Like Suicide" does so well is examine not only the emotional toll this apocalypse has taken on its victims but the mental health issues as well.

The scene at Frankie's bar epitomizes the roller coaster ride these individuals have been on, and when Frankie ramps up her flirtation with Julius, it's simply a load of fun to watch him squirm at someone as harmless as his boss. Okay, truth be told, I wouldn't want to cross her, but you know what I mean. "I think you can take just about anything you want," she tells him, but Phil inadvertently saves Julius from having to face a woman who might be attracted to him. It's here that the tenor of this arc takes a dramatic turn. Even though it's after closing time, Phil demands a drink, and it's clear he's fallen even further into a depression that will later claim his life. Each individual processes experiences differently, and though Phil continues to push Julius away, the big guy's heart won't let him disregard a man he feels saved his life.

In another attempt at a return to normalcy, Frankie's hosts an open mic night, and when Count Laughula takes the stage dressed in familiar 1930s Bela Lugosi Dracula garb, it's unclear where this scene plans to head. It doesn't take long to realize that Laughula is terrible, but his schtick offers the audience members a cathartic opportunity to release their fears and frustrations by heckling a man, who for whatever reason, decides to push the boundaries of good taste. Drunk at the bar, Phil finally has enough. "Feeders aren't funny. You want to know what it's like being one of them?" he challenges an audience that clearly has no idea of what actually awaits them outside their gated community. Taking the stage in place of the count, Phil tells the gut wrenching story of his life after *The Rising*.

It goes without saying that no one in the audience can relate to what Phil, Julius, Doc, and Jolene have been through, and it's safe to say, none of them were turned and then turned back. In fact, it's unlikely they even recognize that as a possibility, so when Phil begins his story, we know, as does Julius, that this soul bearing exercise could lead to an unmitigated disaster. And in a way, it does. We understand that *Van Helsing* deftly employs all of the basic horror elements as it tells its tale of Vanessa and her journey towards salvation, but when Phil pulls out a handgun, shoves the barrel into his mouth, and proceeds to spatter his brains onto the white backdrop, the show makes a powerful statement. It's one thing to watch Vanessa, Scarlett, and Axel fire off one headshot after another, blood flying into the air, but this is the first time we've witnessed someone so utterly distraught that the thought of carrying on, even in this relatively peaceful environment, is no longer possible.

Ironically, the audience in the bar is not as horrified as we are; they see Phil's act as part of an open mic performance, that while in poor taste, far outshines Count Laughula. As Phil rises from the floor to thunderous applause, the blood spattered curtain seemingly has no effect on the crowd which somehow sees this as a smoke and mirrors presentation. It's obvious Frankie's suspicious and Julius' explanation rings hollow, but for now, it appears that Phil can't die and his emotional agony continues. But what makes this aspect of the story so powerful is that we know Phil fully intends to end his life after unburdening his soul in front of a group of strangers that care nothing about him.

Nevertheless, as he stands near the ledge of a tall building, Phil's memories come flooding back, and coupled with the audience's reaction the night before, he's ready to end his misery. "It's too

late for me. I have nothing left,” he tells Julius whose fevered attempt to reach Phil before he can jump gives the two a chance to clear the air between them. Phil’s final words produce the most impact and reinforce much of what we already know about him; he’s a good man. “I forgive you.” Three simple words that we know will allow Julius a modicum of peace and a chance to continue putting his own life back together. Vincent Gale settled quickly into his role as a man who simply could not forgive himself for past acts, and if this is, in fact, the end for Phil, then it’s a testament to Gale that this deeply tortured individual’s life ends up affecting us to such an extent.

Whether Phil’s actually dead for good this time doesn’t really matter, and it’s entirely possible that as we look down on his supine body, blood flowing onto the pavement, he might simply shake it off, get up, and go about his business. I hope that’s not the case, but I’m prepared for it. Doc, on the other hand, wrestles with her own insecurities on several levels, but as she’s always done, makes the best of a bad situation. Her relationship with Jolene allows her access to a world she’s only seen others enter, but even there, she works, her brilliant mind constantly in motion. After a series of events leads her to posit that the vaccine actually causes violent behavior in some of the recipients, Doc sets to work to prove her theory. However, the bigger takeaway here is not that the vampire repellent comes with negative side effects, but that Blak Tek sits at the controls of what appears to be a large scale secret drug trial.

Learning that the other doctors already know about the side effects shouldn’t come as a huge surprise, after all, as one points out, it’s merely a situation of the benefits outweighing the risks. However, once we notice the Blak Tek lab coat one of the women wears, the game takes a 180 degree turn. Is this community and the drug trial part of a larger more insidious plan that involves the military? Are we witnessing the infancy of a super soldier project whose design superficially can be explained as a means to deter the vampire scourge? To this point, *Van Helsing* has avoided wading too deeply into government conspiracies, but here, the signs raise that possibility and should be heeded.

Nevertheless, our concern for Axel and Scarlett takes precedent, so when we glimpse Axel and Patterson bathed in blue light as they hang restrained, it’s natural to breathe a sigh of relief that Scarlett’s army man is still alive and hanging in there. (Sorry. Couldn’t resist.) However, in retrospect, it makes perfect sense that The B’ah (Jennifer Spence) would want to keep Axel alive knowing that Vanessa will undoubtedly come out of the shadows to search for him. Given everything he’s seen, I’m not sure why Axel chooses to taunt The B’ah with the truth about her inability to turn or feed from him, and he’s lucky he only receives a little finger pressure to the skull in return. Not surprisingly, once we get to see a more extended view of the red robed vampire, Spence’s portrayal brings out a delicious blend of creepiness and evil, owed in part to the digital enhancement of her voice. Still, there’s no question that it’s Spence behind the veil.

Dre gives Axel’s blood stained dog tags given to Vanessa, but his dismissive attitude regarding her determination to find the marine gets brushed aside by both Vanessa and the viewer. Young man, you don’t know this woman. What strikes me though is the connection, albeit tenuous, between Sam’s discarded finger necklace and Axel’s dog tags. I’m not sure yet what to make of this, but as Vanessa licks the blood from the metal, Barry watches from the side. Like the Cowardly Lion’s medal, Barry’s mask allows him to momentarily escape his fears, and this new Vanessa recognizes his need to assist her on her journey. And truth be told, she’s already witnessed the fact that he can be ruthless when necessary. We get a stunning shot of the

dilapidated buildings in the middle of this war zone framing the isolated island of Alcatraz off in the distance as she finally orders him to let her make this trip alone.

There's always been an ethereal quality surrounding The B'ah, and her appearance in cloud of wispy smoke reminds us how difficult it will be for Vanessa to defeat her. Of course, when she releases Axel from his binds with a well thrown dagger, it sends the scene into an exhilarating sequence that demonstrates not only how well these two work together, but how powerful Vanessa's become. "Where do you think you're going you ugly bitch?" Axel tells The B'ah as he finishes her off with a knife thrust allowing Vanessa to claim the Elder's ring.

I know at times I go a bit overboard ascribing significance to people and objects that might not be deserving, but when Vanessa and Axel return to Scarlett and feed her The B'ah's blood from Axel's canteen, even she doesn't miss the fact that her army man has returned to save her life. And while everything appears to be moving in the desired direction, we have to wonder whether the B'ah's blood will produce any unintended consequences with Scarlett. However, before we even have time to digest the fact that Scarlett's revival means that Vanessa doesn't have to walk alone, Axel volunteers to accompany Marybeth's group to the safety of Denver.

On the one hand, we finally get the emotional and somewhat romantic goodbye scene we've been waiting for with Scarlett and Axel, and while it's easy to dismiss this as simply another Team Vanessa separation, there's much more to it. When Axel tells her that Marybeth's people need him more than she does, we know that's only partially true. After exchanging personal totems with each other, we're fairly confident that he'll successfully make it to Denver to join Doc, Julius, and Jolene, paving the way for an eventual team reunion. In the meantime though, we're a bit flabbergasted when he walks away with only a hug. "Hold on a second," and we get the scene we wanted in the first place.

So as we move to the next stage of the journey, Vanessa informs her sister that she's "got a plan. You have to trust me," and goes on to tell her that she's not going to like the plan. Listening to Vanessa tell Scarlett what they're going to do and how they're going to do it, makes us realize that their partnership could go in any of a number of directions. It's been a long, strange trip for Vanessa, and while the end may be in sight, it won't be easy. Scarlett doesn't like the plan to take the totems, kill the Elders, and resurrect the Dark One themselves, but she has faith in her sister and goes all in on this plan to "end this once and for all." Watching the two walk side by side into the night, even knowing what obstacles they face, it's difficult not to smile at the prospect of them growing even closer together.

There's still a long way to go, but "Like Suicide" keeps the momentum moving, and now that we have a clearer idea of how *Van Helsing* plans to structure its season, the fun lies in predicting how and when the various groups eventually intersect. Just thinking about Sam making his way to Denver sends shivers down my spine, but we have to consider that possibility as Vanessa and Scarlett focus on the hunt for the final two totems. And somewhere out there the Sisterhood marshalls its forces. However, the knowledge that Blak Tek remains in the game makes it clear that Vanessa and Scarlett will again have to take on the vampire apocalypse's evil corp. And just for the record: Scarlett's "Hey, army man," never gets old.