



Van Helsing Season 4 Episode 1 Review: Dark Destiny

Van Helsing returns, and Vanessa and Lillian face off against the Fourth Elder and the Oracle.

Dave Vitagliano
Sep 27, 2019



This **Van Helsing** review contains spoilers.

Van Helsing Season 4 Episode 1

“Destroy that which seeks to destroy us.”

Hopefully, the crew at SyFy’s vampire drama *Van Helsing* didn’t spend all its special effects and stunt budget on the season premiere because writer and showrunner Jonathan Lloyd-Walker

holds nothing back in the next chapter of Vanessa Van Helsing's hero's journey. Season four's "Dark Destiny" wastes no time throwing us back into the fray with a compelling cold open featuring Vanessa and Lillian Van Helsing that reminds us why we love this gritty show so much. Unfortunately, only one makes it to the end of the episode.

It's fascinating to watch Vanessa (Kelly Overton) and her great-great grandmother start to get to know each other, and the thought that this new familial connection will help assuage the pain of Scarlett's loss offers a ray of hope. Going toe to toe with Sam in his new incarnation as the fourth Elder, Lillian (Julie Lynn Mortensen) more than holds her own, and her somewhat stilted declaration to Sam still powerfully resonates. "In the name of my grandfather Abraham Van Helsing, I send you to Hell," she tells him just before nearly severing his head.

Blood flows early and often in "Dark Destiny," but never feels forced or out of place. The eyeball thumb crush has become a staple in the horror world, and Sam's long, sharp fingernails add a gruesome touch to an already disturbing act. And even though we correctly suspect that Vanessa will recover from this attack, the situation requires Lillian to immediately take charge and guide her great-great grand-daughter to safety even though she's still adjusting to life outside her coffin. These two hold a lot of promise together, but regrettably Vanessa will be continuing her quest to bring down the Dark One alone.

Before we reach that point, however, Lillian lays out more background detail and family history that can only help moving forward, but also sets us and Vanessa up for the crushing blow that follows. When the two emerge from the shadows into the sunlight, Lillian spots a ravaged bus with an air flight ad on the side and while staring into the distance, wonders "how did it go this wrong." However, what really emerges here is the reality that's so easily forgotten. Steeped in vampire and family lore, Lillian and Scarlett were raised to fight vampires, and it's easy to forget the path Vanessa has travelled to reach this point in her arduous journey.

The Van Helsing family book returns and offers critical information about a ceremonial location between Earth and the shadow realm to which the Dark One was supposedly exiled. Having Lillian by her side gives Vanessa a fresh perspective that even Scarlett couldn't provide, and the retelling of the experiments that led to her unique abilities are positively heartbreaking. But this is *Van Helsing*, so there's no time to wallow as they're attacked by a small group of ferals giving director David Winning another opportunity to show off the tightly constructed action sequences the show does so well.

Blood spattering and severed limbs flying, their success is short lived, however, when Lillian suffers a fatal wound that prompts a moral decision Vanessa has already faced several times. We don't know how much Lillian witnessed before going into her hibernation, but it's unlikely it rises to the levels Vanessa encounters facing daywalkers, ferals, the Sisterhood, disciples of the Dark One and even Blak Tek. Even if it means she gets to cheat death, turning vampire, even momentarily, is too much for Lillian to accept, and the finality of the impromptu burial we've seen too many times already, simply fuels Vanessa's already raging fire. "They won't win, Lily. I won't let them."

Unlike Buffy Summers who can always count on the Scooby Gang for support in her fights against a seemingly endless series of Big Bads, Vanessa now goes it alone once again. It's been an agonizing journey, and other than her sister, no one has unequivocally truly been in Vanessa's corner. Who can she really count on for support at this stage of the mission? Doc's scattered motives can't be counted on, and after Scarlett's death, Axel may not be ready to stand by Vanessa's side. The body count around her continues to rise, and only Julius appears to embody the loyalty she so desperately requires. Time will tell, but for now, she's on her own.

Now that Sam (Christopher Heyerdahl) has become the Fourth Elder and seemingly operates at the behest of the Oracle (Jesse Stanley), the narrative becomes even more complicated as Vanessa, Sam, and the Oracle all seek an audience with the Dark One. Of course, each possesses a different motive, but it's Sam's new persona that generates the most interest and intrigue. Is it possible for this new version of Sam to be even more evil than the psychopath we already know? "Let me show you what you can become," the Oracle tells him leading us to wonder just how bad things will get for Vanessa.

It's easy to focus on Vanessa's desire to eliminate the Dark One and Sam's first acts with his new found powers, but Scab (Rowland Pidlubny) and the Sisterhood present an interesting third spoke in this fight. Once they overrun the Denver compound, it's up to Doc's blue tipped bullets and Julius' determination to prevent the onslaught. And while the ever valiant Julius (Aleks Paunovic) takes on the group alone to buy time for the others' escape, Doc's miracle compound produces minimal impact.

Still, it's Julius' challenge of newly minted sister Scab that sets the tone for the remainder of the episode. As the firefight between the Sisterhood and the soldiers rages, Ivory takes the quintessential survivor Callie captive as Julius and Scab go at it. It's difficult to watch the once weak feral dominate the big guy, and once he has Julius on the ground, the situation looks bleak all around. That said, Julius executes the move of the night and explodes a grenade between Scab's legs, leaving his intestines exposed, and the big guy's former minion does his best to hold them in place. We don't often see Ivory (Jennifer Cheon Garcia) caught off guard, but even she's sickened by what she witnesses leaving an opening for Julius to grab Callie and escape. Though her actions continue to confound, Doc (Rukiya Bernard) defies orders and opens the gate to allow Julius and Callie to momentarily escape the sisters. It's what we love about Doc; you never know what she's going to do.

Never short of villains, *Van Helsing* maintains the military/industrial complex story arc and makes full use of Neal McDonough's Hansen and Maddox (John Cassini) to keep the government conspiracy narrative in place. We've seen innumerable post-apocalyptic heroes make the difficult decision to sacrifice some for the good of the many, but the ease with which Hansen drops nerve gas on the human survivors just adds to his evil street cred. On the other hand, he's not completely wrong. Since his troops have lost control of the situation, any human survivors will likely be turned by the sisters and random vampires hanging about.

There are answers out there, and while Vanessa and Sam search for theirs, Doc and the scientific angle remain in play. We know Blak Tek's experiments created the daywalkers, and now that the situation continues to spiral out of control, Doc's expertise, such as it is, becomes a valuable

commodity despite her fluid loyalties. It's difficult to watch Doc essentially offer Julius up as a subject for her continued experiments because it's likely she's simply stalling for time. Her suggestion that Julius may hold the key to developing an anti-virus doesn't bode well for him.

But Julius recognizes the situation, and though his decision to try to fight his way out may not, at first, appear to be a wise move, it does give Hansen another idea and perhaps get Julius away from Doc's lab. Of course, when we're introduced to his ultra-violent daughter and learn that Julius is to become her new sparring partner, as usual, we get more questions than answers. Will Julius now serve two masters?

Too often media critics evaluate a television show based on what they think it should be rather than what it is. As a contemporary horror tale, ***Van Helsing*** succeeds not only through its charismatic titular lead character but because it understands the delicate balance of narrative elements demanded of the genre. "Dark Destiny" throws another emotional roadblock in Vanessa's path, and the race to the Dark One is on. But it's the ideal blend of action, bloodlust, and a tortured hero's journey that drives the series.