



Van Helsing: Feeders, Ferals, and Vanessa Explained

Van Helsing executive producer Simon Barry and lead actress Kelly Overton dig deep into the vampire post-apocalypse.

Michael Ahr Oct 27, 2016



As it reaches the midpoint in its first season, **Van Helsing** has proven to be the sleeper hit of the fall season for Syfy. With its own unique take on a post-

apocalyptic scenario with supernatural elements, this vampire survival drama is unlike any other of its kind. Executive producer Simon Barry and lead actress Kelly Overton, who plays the eponymous Vanessa Helsing, shared details about the characters and mythology of the show, which have deepened quite quickly in the first episodes of the show's run.

One unique aspect of **Van Helsing** is the way in which it was developed, as Barry tells it. "The process was actually quite unusual," Barry notes. "Unlike most shows that are developed by the writer and then pitched to the broadcaster or studio, this actually was generated from inside Syfy involving a pitch document that was circulated internally."

The pitch document included the seeds of an idea, which involved an "atmospheric event" that would allow vampires to emerge into a sunless world. "Yellowstone was the obvious opportunity," says Barry, "because it is the one super-volcano that we believed could, at least from our story logic, provide months and years of continuous ash that would allow for the vampires to thrive in an overcast world — sort of a nuclear winter scenario if you will."

Enter Overton's Vanessa who, in perhaps the most surprising twist in **Van Helsing**'s premise, can turn vampires back into humans by biting or being bitten by them. "I think it takes her awhile to process that that's actually happening," admits Overton, adding, "I feel like

she's taking the appropriate time to start accepting. Hopefully, she continues to accept these powers and the responsibility that she has."



Vanessa is an intriguing protagonist in that she butts heads with the male lead character, Axel, played by Jonathan Scarfe. "He's the self-proscribed protector over Vanessa, which I think she finds very suspicious at first," explains Overton. "Don't trust that guy! That's what she's thinking... it gets a little controlling. Vanessa's not going to be controlled by anybody."

The group survival dynamic may feel a bit like **The Walking Dead**, but Barry notes that the comparison, although certainly a fair one, is not entirely accurate. "One thing that we have that's very different obviously is

that our antagonists are actually characters. We get to know vampires in a way in our show that the zombies will never be part of **The Walking Dead** because they don't have real consciousness.”

In addressing the similarities, Barry asserts, “It would have been crazy to have constantly dodged any comparison, so we thought, ‘Let’s not worry about it; let’s embrace it and honor what **The Walking Dead** does well and hold ourselves to a high standard that they set.’” The antagonists have an interesting dynamic beyond having actual personalities as well, with an old guard vampire hierarchy creating new “Feeders” and “Ferals” who present a new take on the vampire myth. Barry describes Feeders as “the ones you can control and let them feed on human blood only — they remain cognizant and pure. Then there are those that would be left to their own devices, and they feed on animals and on themselves. Those would in essence become the Ferals.”

Operating in such a dark world makes the heroes, especially a reluctant one like Vanessa, fairly flawed themselves. “So often our best qualities are our worst qualities. right?” admits Overton. “Vanessa on the one hand can be incredibly loyal and fiercely passionate about those she loves... and the flip of that coin is there’s times where you just have to let go.”

Fortunately, there will be plenty of time to explore these characters and the world they inhabit since **Van Helsing** has already been picked up for a second season. “It was really wonderful when I got the call and heard that indeed they picked it up early,” says Overton. “There’s a lot of pride there.”

And the second half of the season isn’t likely to back off its signature style of violence, according to Overton. “There’s so much more blood coming,” she says, “so much more gore! If you think it’s gory now, just wait. It’s pretty intense.”

Van Helsing continues on Syfy with its episode 7, “For Me,” this Friday at 10pm ET. Look for the full interview with Kelly Overton and Simon Barry on the November edition of the Sci Fi Fidelity podcast