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Comic-Con 2016: 'True Blood' vet inspired by 'Alien' fights vampires in SyFy's 'Van Helsing'

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Cast and crew members of the upcoming SyFy vampire-hunter show Van Helsing pose for photos during the first day of Comic-Con 2016 at the San Diego Convention Center on Thursday.

By BEAU YARBROUGH / STAFF WRITER

SyFy's new vampire show "Van Helsing" opens with a beautiful woman laying unconscious on a table in a medical facility. Savage-looking vampires break into the complex and, spotting her, go in for the kill.

But Vanessa, played by "True Blood's" Kelly Overton, isn't a typical damsel in distress.

The vampire who drinks her blood turns away, gagging and confused, and the bite has woken her up from a years-long coma, and soon she's punching, kicking and clawing at the other vampires in the room.

But although Vanessa — who has no idea she's related to the vampire hunter from "Dracula" and doesn't use the Van Helsing last name — woke up with kick-ass superpowers, she also discovers that vampires have taken over the world three years ago, and has no idea where to find her daughter in this post-apocalyptic landscape.

"The biggest inspiration for me was probably Sigourney Weaver in 'Aliens,'" Overton said at San Diego Comic-Con on Thursday. "I went back to Ripley."

In the director's cut of James Cameron's 1986 film, Weaver's space-traveling character discovers that during her time in suspended animation, her young daughter has grown up and died of old age. Ripley ends up becoming a surrogate mother to a survivor of another alien attack.

"Vanessa's a mom, she has a daughter, and I have a daughter," Overton said. "She wakes up after three years and all she knows is she wants to find her daughter. ... I love that journey of self-discovery that she goes on."

Two years on HBO's "True Blood" didn't burn Overton out on vampires, which she said she's been passionate about since she was a kid.

"I loved 'The Lost Boys' — LOVED 'The Lost Boys,'" she said. "And I was obsessed with (novelist) Anne Rice." There's already more than one show featuring a post-apocalyptic world overrun by the undead, most notably the most popular show on cable, "The Walking Dead." But there's a big difference between the worlds of "Van Helsing" and "The Walking Dead," in that these vampires aren't mindless killing machines.

"Our vampires have needs, histories, backstories," said executive producer Simon Barry. "I think that'll point people away from comparisons."

The show will cut back and forth between the living and the undead, who have won the war against humans, but are having a very hard time winning the peace.

SyFy came to producers Dynamic Television looking to add a vampire show to their stable.

"They had zombies, werewolves and everything else, but they didn't have vampires," Dynamic Television senior vice-president Holly Hines said.

"Van Helsing" doesn't formally debut until Sept. 23, but SyFy will show the pilot, commercial-free, on July 31, after "Sharknado 4."