

Van Helsing Review: Middling Start Leads To An Intriguing Series

BY ADRIENNE JONES



If you let first impressions be your guide when you watch a new TV show, you might want to learn a little patience if vampire tales are your thing. The new Syfy entry into vampiric lore, *Van Helsing*, starts off as a middling copy of *The Walking Dead* where you'll have more questions than answers and couldn't care less about many of the people involved in the story. But, after getting just a couple of episodes in, you might start to see a show that's made of stronger stuff prevail.

Van Helsing focuses on Vanessa (Kelly Overton), a young woman who's spent three years in a coma while the world has gone all to hell because of a vampire apocalypse. Actually, there's also a real apocalypse going on as well, seeing as how a natural disaster has destroyed a large portion of the United States. Because Vanessa's semi-dead state aroused the suspicion of the federal government, while she's been in her coma, a group of Marines has watched over her in an abandoned hospital per their pre-apocalypse orders, but by the time the story starts, only one, Axel (Jonathan Scarfe), is left on duty with Vanessa's vampirized Doc (Rukiya Bernard) being kept in a cage. It's not long before Axel lets in a rag tag group of survivors and Vanessa wakes up to find the world around her turned upside down.

The show is being billed as being *Dracula* inspired, but it shares more in common with the aforementioned *Walking Dead* and *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* than anything else. You've got a group of survivors fighting to stay alive, and some not making it, perilous trips away from their (relatively) safe current home base, threats both familiar and unknown, and, of course, a woman with the power to turn this topsy turvy world back to something resembling normal. While it's not bad that it feels a lot like those shows, it does make the first episode of *Van Helsing* seem somewhat unnecessary. Most of the vampires even act more like zombies than they do traditional vampires from the stories we've seen filmed lately like in *Buffy* or *True Blood*. Their faces are always in varying degrees of oh-crap-that-might-not-be-a-human, for one thing, and whenever they're on the hunt or feeding there's usually a lot of grunting and slurping; most of them aren't very posh at all. I think *Dracula* would be ashamed of these blood-sucking brethren.



I was able to watch the first three episodes of *Van Helsing*, and found, watching that first episode, that I had way more questions than I wanted to regarding what was going on. So many questions, in fact, that it took away from the general enjoyment of the show, and I wasn't really able to connect with any of the characters, aside from Axel because of it. The second episode is where things start to gel. It's a flashback episode that answers a lot of questions and also deepens the mythology of the show. By the time I was done with the final episode available for screening purposes I felt like the series was finally finding its footing. While it can be difficult to have enough patience when watching a new show, it can also be fun watching it develop into something more than what it appeared to be at first.

Three episodes in, you can definitely tell that the show is building toward something. And, while I admit that I still didn't have much interest in most of the other supporting characters by then, I was more fully committed to the story that was building with Vanessa and Axel. He's a perfect protector; Axel is determined to keep her safe, but once he sees what she can do (and she can do *a lot*), he

doesn't coddle her, either. Vanessa is, as someone in a coma would, very slowly beginning to come into her own. After waking up to a wacky world, she's reasonably unbelieving at the dangers that await regular people outside the hospital, but she soon comes around and proves to be even more gifted than she realizes.

The performances of Overton and Scarfe are absolutely a good reason to tune in to *Van Helsing*. The two of them make each of their characters relatable, despite some superpowers and the insane situations they find themselves in. Both actors are likable, and I can see why each was chosen to lead a series. Overton, for her part, is sure to grow into a great lead as Vanessa comes into her own.

RATING:



You can check out *Van Helsing* on Syfy this Friday, September 23 at 10 p.m. EST.