



#SDCC16: Van Helsing Cast Paints a Bloody Picture of the Vampire Apocalypse

Posted on July 25, 2016 by Ted Hentschke

I can't help but love Syfy. While everyone is busy trying to make the next "Breaking Bad," they are content with amnesiac space operas and magical demon-slaying gunslingers. There's something endearing about their persistent commitment to quality schlock. They know what they make, and they do a damn good job of it.

So here comes "Van Helsing," a show that just screams Syfy. Taking place in a world ravaged by the vampire apocalypse, Vanessa Helsing wakes up from a coma to find that she is one of the last remaining humans. She has no idea how she got where she is, and her daughter is missing. She soon finds that her blood is toxic to vampires, and with a bite she can turn vampires back into humans. Take that, expectations! So she and her band of hardened survivors set off on a quest to save the world and find Vanessa's daughter.

Tis a silly premise, but one that they hope to inject some seriousness into with compelling characters and darker themes. The vampires aren't sleek and sexy brooding

Twilight teenagers, depicting vampirism as a virus rather than something magic. They want to make vampires exist in the world, not make a world for vampires to exist in. So think less *Blade* and more *The Omega Man*.



“Van Helsing” made an appearance at San Diego Comic-Con 2016, so I got the chance to sit with stars Kelly Overton (Vanessa Helsing), Jonathan Scarfe (Axel), and Christopher Heyerdahl (Sam), along with executive producers Chad Oakes, Mike Frislev, and Simon Barry. I wanted to know more about the world they are creating and what they hope to accomplish with the show. First up was Kelly, who is somehow even lovelier in person. Here’s what she said drew her to the role:

Kelly: I’m lucky that there seems to be a trend with me that I get to play kickass female characters. I’m from an athletic

background, sports were my first love before acting, so getting to be physical is great. It's fun to be a badass! And honestly, I love all the fake blood. I have a lot of fun working in horror because there's so much action and intensity to it. On set, it's like shooting a comedy, because of all the absurd things you have to do and buy into to make it believable. People are going to love watching it for the same reasons I had so much fun making it.

She continued with how she prepared for the role:

Kelly: I know that there are a lot of female role models out there, but as an actor I tried not to think about it. I have to just focus at being good at the role. For that, I pulled from times in my own life where I had to be strong and did my best to honestly bring that to life. As far as my inspiration, I'd say mostly Ripley. But there are so many awesome female roles out there now that you could really pull from anywhere.



Executive producer Simon Barry had more to say on the show's action and tone:

Simon: It's not really a fun show in the typical Syfy Sharknado sense. We worked hard to ground it in the real world. Still, even in that, you can have a different kind of fun. Think about Aliens. There's real danger and threat, and in the middle of it all Bill Paxton is saying these great lines. It's fun but also makes the world more compelling than everyone just being steel-faced and somber. We wanted to bring a spectrum of emotions and characters, throw them into real dangerous situations, and have them react their own way.

Mike Frislev had more to say on this danger:

Mike: When we did "Hell on Wheels," there was a sign that said "Population: one less every day." We wanted to bring that kind of intensity and danger to "Van Helsing." No one is safe in this world. Fans are going to meet characters and say, "You can't possibly kill them!" And they'll be wrong. But it's that constant sense of danger that makes the show more compelling than others like it.

Chad Oakes had more to say on why he felt people would find the show compelling:

Chad: The danger would be meaningless if we didn't have characters you were rooting for. Pulling from our connections on shows like "Hell on Wheels," we got together a great cast and wrote the characters in a clever puzzle. Unpacking those characters is what's going to take you to the end.



From Left to Right: Simon Barry, Kelly Overton, Jonathan Scarfe, Chad Oakes, Christopher Heyerdahl, Michael Frislev, Holly Hines

Speaking of cast, Jonathan Scarfe had similar sentiments:

Jonathan: I was drawn to the project because of Neil LaBute initially. From their network, they pulled together this great cast with names like David Cubitt and Chris [Heyerdahl], and I just had to be a part of it. It's just so much talent in one project. I just knew the characters would turn out unforgettable. There's a lot you can do with vampires, but really they are just the world. In shows like "The Walking Dead," it's not about the zombies. It's about the people in that world. That idea was integral to "Van Helsing."

As an example of one of those great characters, Christopher Heyerdahl talked about how he approached his role as Sam, who is deaf:

Chris: I approached the role with the respect it deserves. The language of the deaf and hearing impaired is unique and beautiful, and I wanted to do my best to reflect that. Now obviously, I can't learn the language in just four months, so it's a work in progress, but one I'm very dedicated to. I didn't want to just do the lines on the script, so I learned what I needed to be able to banter with Mohamad, the only other character that can understand him. I'm not sure always when I was on camera, so I don't know exactly what got through. It's going to be fun for people who are deaf or hearing impaired, since I'm often talking about things that I probably shouldn't be. It's a special extra layer just for people who can understand.



Now, I wish I could talk about “Van Helsing” without having to address the bitter, obnoxious, troll-ephant in the room. I would really like to just discuss if a vampire apocalypse show can make it in an industry inundated by zombies or

how we might be able to bring vampires back in a post-*Twilight* world. But no, this is the internet, so of course this will all be under the looming shadow of Van Helsing now being a girl. Never mind that Buffy was kicking vampire ass way before *Ghostbusters* made everyone lose their collective minds. Getting mad that girls are taking over television isn't a perspective I particularly respect, so I won't go too much into the arguments. So I'll just leave you with what Chad Oakes said about it:

Chad: We're not trying to reproduce an old story and make it about a woman. We've gotten completely out of the Transylvania, pitchfork and torch kind of Van Helsing story. We really only use the lineage as mythos. We're not replacing anyone or anything. "Van Helsing" is just a name, it is a person, and "person" by default doesn't mean a man. Her being a woman contributes to the story in a meaningful way through the loss of her daughter. For this world, she was always meant to be a woman. Getting mad because she isn't the classic male character is missing the point.

And lo, no one was ever a dick on the internet about female characters again. I can dream, can't I?

So, how about you guys? Interested in "Van Helsing?" Let me know below, and stay tuned for more SDCC 2016 coverage!