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‘Van Helsing’: Neil LaBute Challenges Expectations With Bloody, Surprising New Syfy Series

Changing the lead vampire hunter's gender wasn't all Neil LaBute did to subvert expectations for what looks like a bloody good Syfy series.

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Jul 21, 2016 9:48 pm



Syfy

“This is a show about pacifists.”

So claimed executive producer Simon Barry after fans at Comic-Con watched a particularly gruesome scene from the upcoming Syfy series “Van Helsing.”

Clearly, nothing could be further from the truth.

But what’s truly shocking about “Van Helsing” has little to do with blood (even though there’s a lot of it). Neil LaBute is actively bucking expectations fans may have regarding vampires.

The award-winning playwright — who’s making his debut as a showrunner on this one-hour drama — decided early on things would be different with this interpretation of Bram Stoker’s age-old vampire hunter. For one, he would be a she. Syfy’s “Van Helsing” tracks Vanessa Helsing as she learns to deal with a “secret power” that helps her oust nightwalkers, and actress Kelly Overton couldn’t have drawn from a better source.

“The biggest inspiration I drew from was Sigourney Weaver in Aliens,” Overton said. “I went back to Ripley for this.”

The footage screened certainly supported the theory, as Overton was seen fighting off a horde of vampires

with her fingernails...except those fingernails worked more like claws. She sliced open a throat in one swipe before going to town on another would-be attacker. Later, we saw her wielding a machine gun and a flamethrower; already making Vanessa Helsing far more of a badass than the last big screen Van.

VAN HELISING

“I think we really embraced the idea of more is more,” LaBute said in response to the violence. “It was important to be true to the graphic spirit of it and the genre that dates back to Dracula. Blood is the source of everything. It’s good, it’s bad, it’s life, and we wanted to spray the screen with it.”

“We really said, ‘Let’s go for it. Let’s paint the town red.’”

The biggest difference from other vampire adventures is that Vanessa can bite vampires in order to bring them back to life — a big change in general, but

especially since vampires still have memories from when they were humans.

“We stole the best parts,” LaBute said.

Emphasis was also placed on what Barry referred to as “science and speculative science.”

“We pull from the more viral nature of vampirism and the more scientific reasons vampirism could work — you know, use your imagination.”

There are “tons of twists and surprises in store,” Overland added, and fans will get a special sneak peek when “Van Helsing” debuts its pilot July 31 after Syfy airs “Sharknado 4.” The pilot presentation will be commercial-free, so be warned: There will be blood, and it won’t stop flowing.

“Van Helsing” officially starts its 13-episode first season September 22.