

## Blu-Ray Review: 'V: The Complete First Season' Exploits Modern Paranoia

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CHICAGO – Why do so many modern TV dramas fail? I suspect that part of the reason lies in the fact that a lot of these shows bend over backwards to be a major television event before they've earned that right. They cloak themselves in faux commentary merely so they can become mechanical fodder for water cooler discussion the morning after. That's why the vast majority of new TV dramas might as well be called, "The Event."

The most interesting thing about "V" is that it ended up becoming an entirely different event than the one it was intended to be. Based on the 1983 miniseries and subsequent series of the same name, "V" utilizes science fiction tropes to create an overarching metaphor for fascism. The plot centers on alien invaders who promise peace to Earthlings while slowly gaining control over all aspects of society. Though the executive producers clearly intended their show to be a metaphor for the Bush Administration, most viewers (notably Tea Party members) embraced it as a metaphor for America's most notorious illegal alien: President Obama.



Blu-Ray Rating: **2.5/5.0**

Since the show premiered on the first anniversary of Obama's election, it's become practically impossible to separate the show from its political subtext. Nearly every element in the show is overwrought, from the stereotypical characters to the preachy dialogue. Just get a load of this scene: a leader of the resistance movement charges the aliens (referred to as Visitors or Vs) with various disasters they allegedly set into motion in order to bring about mankind's destruction. His monologue sounds like a laundry list of charges often launched against Republicans: "unnecessary wars, the economic meltdown, faith twisted into extremism." By the time alien leader Anna (Morena Baccarin) started endorsing universal healthcare, I suddenly became nostalgic for the subtlety and intelligence of "Caprica," a truly provocative sci-fi show that (unlike "V") was not renewed for next season.



Logan Huffman and Elizabeth Mitchell star in V: The Complete First Season.

Photo credit: Warner Home Video



Though "V" is certainly not without its intriguing elements, none of them are all that original. No member of the large ensemble is allowed enough screen time to emerge as anything more than a caricature. The effortlessly commanding Elizabeth Mitchell ("Lost") plays Erica, a tough-as-nails FBI counter-terrorism agent concerned about her distant teenage son Tyler (Logan Huffman), and his obsession with the aliens. Of course, who wouldn't be obsessed with the aliens? The extent to which the humans immediately accept their presence is laughable in the extreme. Anyway, the ensemble also includes Ryan (Morris Chestnut), a Visitor agent masquerading as a straight-arrow Earthling; a smarmy, Billy Bush-type news anchor, Chad (Scott Wolf), who finds himself being manipulated into giving the Vs good press; and a Catholic priest, Father Jack (Joel Gretsch), whose scenes create the most troubling symbolism. Though Gretsch's performance is grounded in modest heroism, his subplot caters directly to fans from the self-righteously religious Tea Party, whose tireless paranoia about the government is blatantly mirrored in this show. The underlying message of "V" is that change is scary, foreigners can't be trusted and war is inevitable. So much for knocking the Bush Administration...



V: The Complete First Season was released on Blu-Ray and DVD on Nov. 2, 2010.

Photo credit: Warner Home Video

"V: The Complete First Season" is presented in 1080p High Definition (with a 1.78:1 aspect ratio), accompanied by English, French and Spanish audio tracks. The two-disc set includes a fair amount of extras, such as roughly twenty minutes of deleted scenes that offer more screen time to some sidelined characters, particularly Ryan's girlfriend Valerie (Lourdes Benedicto, a fine actress who spends most of the time getting knocked unconscious). In a 16-minute cast featurette, the actors make a weak attempt at defending the show's supposed moral complexity, claiming that neither the humans nor the aliens are right or wrong (even though the story is clearly a battle between good and evil). Yet there's no doubt Chestnut has his work cut out for him, since he's required to generate sympathy for a character who has impregnated and drugged his girlfriend, all the while hiding his alarming identity from her. Huffman says that the show reflects his generation's distrust of the "inner workings of government," as well as its rage over getting handed a broken system and "being expected to fix it." Mitchell says she always thought that the overarching commentary in "V" was of a religious nature, with characters grappling over their loss of faith.

There's also featurettes dedicated to the show's muddled social commentary, outstanding makeup effects and less-than-stellar digital effects. Every interior on the mothership was built as a "virtual set" and shot on green screen, which looks thoroughly unconvincing on HD. Though only one of the episodes includes an audio commentary, it proves to be the most enlightening special feature of the bunch. Executive producers Scott Rosenbaum and Steve Pearlman dissect "Fruition," the crucial eleventh episode of Season One. Rosenbaum freely admits that the episode is his favorite thus far, since it allowed the series to find its footing after plenty of missteps. By having Anna and Erica finally meet face to face, the show gained dramatic momentum in quietly tense sequences involving nothing more than hypnotic acting and dialogue. Hopefully we'll see more of that in Season Two...

*'V: The Complete First Season' is released by Warner Home Video and stars Elizabeth Mitchell, Morena Baccarin, Joel Gretsch, Morris Chestnut, Logan Huffman, Laura Vandervoort, Scott Miller and Christopher Shyer. It was created by Kenneth Johnson. It was released on Nov. 2nd, 2010. It is not rated.*

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