

TV Review: 'V' Gains Momentum, Lacks Urgency in Second Season

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on January 4, 2011 - 2:33pm

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CHICAGO – Here's the sort of self-important primetime drama that tries so hard to be a bona fide event that it quickly grows irrelevant. After ABC reduced its episode order from thirteen to ten, it became clear that the second season of "V" could easily be its last if it fails to generate sufficient interest or increase flagging ratings. Lingerin fans will be pleased to know that tonight's premiere episode holds considerable promise.

While the first season got bogged down in the complexities of its plot, the second season opener is taut and compelling from beginning to end, tightening the story after a saggy setup. The show's best moments are its all-too-brief encounters between two powerful female characters, each sporting a tantalizing poker face. As FBI counter-terrorism agent Erica, Elizabeth Mitchell ("Lost") looks every bit as flawless as the "peaceful" alien invaders led by Anna (Morena Baccarin). The first few new episodes offer clues to why that might be the case, and both actresses excel in scenes where raw emotions begin to puncture their cool reserve.



Television Rating: **3.0/5.0**

Unfortunately, "V" still carries the vaguely stale aroma of reheated leftovers, much like the needless Hollywood remake of a beloved hit. The original 1983 miniseries and subsequent series deserved their status as a cult TV classic. The premise was a straightforward metaphor for fascism, as the aliens (referred to as Visitors or Vs) slowly took control of Earth. Yet the show itself proved to be hugely influential, with its attention-grabbing visuals, gleefully grotesque alien makeup, jarring plot twists and excitingly fresh approach to familiar material. One of the show's most infamous moments was the scene in which the radiantly ravenous alien queen Diana (Jane Badler) scarfed down a live guinea pig. The special effects were less than convincing, to say the least, but the shocking image proved to be indelible. In the new "V," the element of surprise is no longer possible. When Anna devours a rat in episode 2 of the new season, the moment merely feels like digital overkill.



ABC's V

Photo credit: ABC

A bigger problem with the reboot is its muddled political commentary that often finds cheap ways to exploit modern paranoia. What began as a metaphor for the widely loathed Bush administration has now become an audience-influenced allegory for the increasingly unpopular Obama administration. Season two opens with the silent Anna's approval ratings at an all-time low, as her seemingly wrathful "red sky" rages overhead. Why has she injected the clouds with ambiguous malice? Because at the end of season one, an unknown human obliterated her eggs while onboard the mothership. That human was Erica, a member of the anti-V movement, Fifth Column, who desperately wants to keep her hidden identity a secret from Anna. Yet when the red sky breaks open to unleash a torrential downpour, Anna assures mankind that the rain is all a part of her "blue energy" initiative to "reverse global warming." With Al Gore now firmly in her corner, Anna is once again applauded as a peaceful goddess (boy are these Earthlings gullible).



ABC's V

Photo credit: ABC

Yet the best thing about season two is the extent to which it subverts the standard "good versus evil" conflict by bringing in a healthy dose of moral complexity. Rebellious Visitor agent Ryan (the terrific Morris Chestnut) must decide between assisting his friends in the Fifth Column and aiding Anna so he can gain access to his newborn baby. Smarmy news anchor Chad (Scott Wolf) seeks redemption from his dishonesty by aiding the Column, as it seriously begins to consider finding allies in an international terrorist network. The all-too-angelic Catholic priest, Father Jack (Joel Gretsch), is left deeply shaken after his fiery sermons inspire a member of his flock to become a suicide bomber. Even Anna's recently impregnated daughter, Lisa (Laura Vandervoort), begins to show signs of internal conflict, as she starts to find herself becoming more and more like her hated mother. It's perhaps no coincidence that this season carries an overarching feeling of history repeating itself, particularly when Anna's mother shows up, a twist sure to delight fans of the original "V" series.

For all of its brooding tension and foreboding dialogue, it still remains to be seen whether this "V" truly has anything meaningful to say, or if it's merely feeding into the fashionable paranoia of the moment. The greatest loss here is any trace of humor, save for a lame new comic relief named Sidney (Bret Harrison) who says sarcastic or blunt things like, "Anna's a lizard? That sucks. She's hot!" while everyone else grins accordingly. This character is most emblematic of the show's nagging hollowness. There's several sentimental monologues in season two about the intangibility of the human soul, and how it proves to be the greatest threat to the aliens. Yet it's also proven to be the most elusive element for the show to acquire. Though this season promises to be an improvement over the first, with its swift pacing, strong acting, and new levels of complexity, it still lacks the urgency and focus necessary to give it a soul.

'V,' which airs on ABC, stars Elizabeth Mitchell, Morena Baccarin, Joel Gretsch, Morris Chestnut, Logan Huffman, Laura Vandervoort, Scott Wolf, Christopher Shyer, Bret Harrison and Jane Badler. The show was created by Kenneth Johnson. The second season premieres on Tuesday, January 4, 2011 at 8PM CST.



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