

TV Review: Strong Season Premiere For HBO's Beloved 'True Blood'

Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on June 25, 2011 - 6:41pm

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CHICAGO – Let's be honest "True Blood" fans — the end of last season was a plasma-soaked mess. It almost felt as if the writers of this often-great show had just set too many plates in motion over three years of seasons in which the plots ran consecutively. A few of them were sure to crash to the ground. Alan Ball and the team behind the Emmy-nominated hit have very wisely hit "restart" and pushed their characters forward into some fascinating new plot arcs. The first two episodes of the fourth season of "True Blood" feature the show stronger, smarter, and more fun than it's been in some time.



Television Rating: **4.5/5.0**

Don't worry. We will tread very lightly with spoilers. At the end of last season, Sookie (Anna Paquin) had decided not to deal with any more Bill (Stephen Moyer) and Eric (Alexander Skarsgard) drama and disappeared for the land of the fairies to learn more about her past. As usual, the new season picks up right there with Sookie on the other side, where she sees her grandfather (Gary Cole) and learns more about her past and her kind.



True Blood

Photo credit: HBO

Before you know it, Sookie is back in Bon Temps but the brief time she was away was much longer in the real world and over a year has passed. The push forward in time allows the writers of "True Blood" something of a clean slate. They can push forward relationships and characters beyond the typical episode to episode progression. It was a brilliant decision as the impact of what happened in season three can still play a role but the passage of time off-screen allows for a renewed energy.

What's happened while Sookie was away? The campaign to make vampires tolerable to human society in a "Post-Russell World" continues and, of course, Bill and Eric will play major roles. As soon as Sookie returns to the world of the living, the Bill-Eric dynamic sparks up again with the latter making the biggest move to become a permanent part of the fairy's life.



True Blood
Photo credit: HBO

To be honest, a lot of the threads from last season appear to have gone somewhat dormant for the year that Sookie was M.I.A. as many of the characters are in similar or related predicaments to season three. Lafayette (Nelsan Ellis) and Jesus (Kevin Alejandro) are still a couple and dabbling deeper into the world of dark magic, which brings forward the most intriguing new character of the season, the necromancer-in-training Marnie (Fiona Shaw).

In other plotlines, Jason (Ryan Kwanten) is finally a legitimate cop but he finds himself in a very dangerous situation (again). Tara (Rutina Wesley) is on the road and trying to ignore her past. Sam (Sam Trammell) is working through his anger by hanging out with other shapeshifters. Arlene (Carrie Preston) is nervous that her baby carries the demon seed of Rene. And, finally, in arguably the best subplot, Hoyt (Jim Parrack) and Jessica (Deborah Ann Woll) are dealing with domestic problems as her vampire life continues to interfere with his human one. She never cooks her husband dinner because, well, she doesn't eat food.

Most of the cast seems amped up by the promise of the new season. Skarsgard and Paquin have been the best things about the show for the last two years and they're both strong again but even supporting characters like Woll, Parrack, Kwanten, Ellis, and Alejandro have a different/stronger energy than they did last season. And Fiona Shaw is a spectacular actress, arguably the best guest star the show has yet procured. The well-known stage actress is probably best-known to modern audiences as Petunia Dursley in the "Harry Potter" movies. I still think Trammell and Wesley's subplots are the most under-written or just poorly-conceived. I'm tired of Tara's overreactions and Sam's anger but both are more underplayed at the start of this season than last time and I'm glad to see them fading into the background a bit and giving actors like Ellis and Woll more interesting arcs.

The renewed energy of "True Blood" seems focused in the right place unlike last season, where everything about the program just became more and more unfocused. The pacing of the first two episodes of this season, the dialogue, the performances — everything seems crisper, smarter, and more entertaining than where we left off. It's going to be a fun summer.

The fourth season of "True Blood" premieres on HBO on Sunday, June 26th, 2011 at 8pm CST. It stars Anna Paquin, Stephen Moyer, Sam Trammell, Ryan Kwanten, Rutina Wesley, Chris Bauer, Nelsan Ellis, Deborah Ann Woll, Alexander Skarsgard, Jim Parrack, Carrie Preston, Kevin Alejandro, and Fiona Shaw. It was created by Alan Ball.

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