

## TV Review: 'The Following' Pits Kevin Bacon Against a Killer

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on January 21, 2013 - 10:22am

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CHICAGO – The fascination with extreme criminals basically fuels the most popular prime time TV dramas. In “The Following,” it’s a serial killer – in the mold of Hannibal Lecter – that befuddles an FBI agent portrayed by Kevin Bacon. The premiere is on FOX on January 21st, at 9pm ET/8pm CT.



Television Rating: **3.0/5.0**

The series is based on an extremely high concept – that an incarcerated multiple victim killer would be able to build an army of “followers” (copycats that will do his bidding) through internet recruiting. The tone of the proceedings are psychological, with the murderer being a former college professor obsessed with Edgar Allan Poe. Kevin Bacon’s FBI agent is flawed as well, having been haunted by the case ever since investigating it years before. The action is tense and gory, with bloody corpses everywhere, and the story line has to jump through too many hoops to keep the conflict believable. This is the type of TV show that wants its evil to be so perfectly organized that the “good guys” will have to do something sensational to stop it every week.

The stylish opening to the pilot immediately establishes the rogue element of convicted serial killer Joe Carroll (James Purefoy). He escapes death row from a maximum security Virginia prison, leaving four dead guards. This starts the phone ringing of ex-FBI investigator Ryan Hardy (Kevin Bacon), who put Carroll in prison. The bureau needs Hardy’s expertise to recapture Carroll, even though the agent is haunted by the events of the case.



Kevin Bacon (foreground) Anchors the Cast of “The Following”  
*Photo credit: FOX*

The background is that Carroll was an college literature professor, whose teaching of Edgar Allan Poe became the feverish basis for his killing sprees, initially of young co-eds. His incidents are supposedly so high profile, that a cult of followers emerges. They are sharply organized over the internet, ready to take orders on how to exact revenge on the persons who incarcerated their killer hero. Complicating matters is that Agent Ryan had a brief fling with Carroll's wife Claire (Natalie Zea), so this time the copycat crimes can get personal.

The buy-in for this drama is accepting that law enforcement essentially cannot protect anybody. There are two victims in the first couple episodes that have around the clock watch, but still the superstar killer can infiltrate their guarded perimeters (even Kevin Bacon's character reacts in frustration to this). Like Hannibal Lecter in "Silence of the Lambs," the Joe Carroll character is suppose to be brilliant and unstoppable, a veritable god above men. This is the only way to explain how he could get an army of people to give up their lives to follow him.

In the landscape of any new TV series, characters and events have to be initiated at a breakneck speed, thus there are hints of Kevin Bacon's angst, but on the other hand he has to almost immediately fall into investigator mode, with no backlash on the eight years he has been on leave. Bacon is a good enough actor to maintain a tenuous balance on this, but hopefully the series will exploit his flaws more as the case progresses, because it's hard to imagine an agent going back to such murderous intensity without some blowback. Also the tie-in to the killer's ex-wife is very improbable, and even though it is mentioned that their affair lasted only two months, the wife still holds a candle for the guy who put her husband in jail.

There is an edge-of-the-seat quality to this justifiably thriller situation, as many things can go bump in the night when an army of serial killers is cut loose. The background of these followers is odd, meant more to shock – a tattooed woman, a red-headed prison guard/cop, a gay couple – than to be realistic. There is much disbelief to suspend in this series if it is to work, but it does deliver on the shocking (and gory) nature of sociopaths who kill in cold blood because a mastermind has seemingly brainwashed them from far away.

This is the bloodiest non-cable TV crime drama in memory, graphically depicting the results of the killing sprees. Without more motivation than just the murders themselves, the blood might be the only thing the show will be noted for, regardless of being just one degree from Kevin Bacon.

*The premiere of "The Following" is on Monday, January 21st, at 9pm ET/8pm CT on the FOX network. Check local listings for channel location. Featuring Kevin Bacon, James Purefoy, Natalie Zea, Shawn Ashmore, Annie Parisse and Maggie Grace. Created by Kevin Williamson.*



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