

TV Review: HBO's 'True Blood' Has Lost Its Pulse

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CHICAGO – Does anyone else remember when “True Blood” was fun? When it was about a special girl falling for a brooding vamp and not ALWAYS about the fate of the entire world? When it had a sense of humor, especially in characters like Jason & Lafayette? When the blend of sexuality and commentary on gay rights sometimes brilliantly interjected themes of tolerance into escapist entertainment? Watching the start of the sixth season of “True Blood,” I’m struck by one overwhelming criticism — it’s just not fun any more. Maybe there are too many supernatural entities floating around Bon Temps, dragging it down into melodrama, but this show needs to find its entertainment value again by stop taking itself so damn seriously. It may be too late.



Television Rating: **2.0/5.0**

At the end of the fifth season, Bill (Stephen Moyer, who also directs the sixth season premiere, “Who Are You, Really?”) bathed in the blood of Lillith and became all powerful. So powerful that Eric (Alexander Skarsgard) told Sookie (Anna Paquin) it was time to RUN! What does an all-powerful Bill mean to the world of Bon Temps? It’s not immediately clear. Everyone in Bill’s circle, including Pam (Kristin Bauer van Straten), Nora (Lucy Griffiths), Tara (Rutina Wesley), and Jessica (Deborah Ann Woll), are left to wonder what happens next with “Billith” now that he seems to be capable of mass destruction.



True Blood

Photo credit: HBO

Perhaps if the humans knew that a primordial vampire had been reincarnated in Louisiana, they wouldn't start war with the bloodsuckers. With the shortage of True Blood causing more human deaths, the government cracks down on vampires and vampire-run businesses with Louisiana Governor Truman Burrell (Arless Howard) leading the charge. It's another war with the humans although this one includes some new weaponry that scares even Eric and Pam into thinking it could be for real.



True Blood
Photo credit: HBO

Meanwhile, Jason (Ryan Kwanten) is still on the warpath to avenge his parents' death at the hand of the stupidly-named Warlow (seriously, every time someone says it with a serious tone in their voice it sounds like a character from The Wiggles) when he comes across his Faerie Godfather (Rutger Hauer), Alcide (Joe Manganiello) is dealing with the pros and cons of being pack leader, and, in the only plotline to really crack a smile, Andy (the great Chris Bauer) has to manage his four Faerie children, who grow faster than he expects.

There are glimpses of the sexually-charged, clever Gothic that could still emerge from the cluttered muck that "True Blood" has become. Deborah Ann Woll always finds a way to make her portrayal of Jessica fascinating in its blend of innocence and ubridaled power. She's become arguably the most engaging character on the show, especially since she'll be the one closest to Bill, her maker, as he becomes something altogether new and terrifying. Nelsan Ellis, Chris Bauer, Alexander Skarsgard, Anna Paquin — this is still a really strong ensemble, and I think that leads to more disappointment when they're not used in a way befitting their talents.

The theme of the sixth season of "True Blood" is clear — power and everything that comes with it. Bill is powerful, Alcide is in charge, the "big bad" for the season is the Governor, there's a war brewing, etc. It's nice to see the writers pull back a little bit from the non-stop parade of creatures that dragged down the show the last few years and focus on relatable themes but it's being handled in such a self-serious manner. Conversations circle the same thematic drains over and over again, and the show just lacks that spark that made it such a guilty pleasure for at least three seasons. Since then, one could feel Alan Ball losing interest in his own creation (and he left before this season). I'm with him.

"True Blood" stars Anna Paquin, Stephen Moyer, Ryan Kwanten, Sam Trammell, Rutina Wesley, Chris Bauer, Nelsan Ellis, Alexander Skarsgard, Carrie Preston, Todd Lowe, and Deborah Ann Woll. It returns on Sunday, June 16, 2013 at 9pm CST on HBO.



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