

Veronica Mars

UPN Television Network
Weekly Series 2004-2005
Starring Kristen Bell as Veronica Mars

Review by Hans Sherrer

Veronica Mars is a one-hour weekly series that premiered in the fall of 2004 on the UPN television network. It is also the name of the lead character. Veronica is a spunky, hyper-inquisitive, resourceful and persistent student at Neptune High School located in a trendy Southern California beach town. Need it be said that she is blond?

In her spare time Veronica helps her dad with his one-man private investigation firm. She also conducts her own investigations, solving situations involving classmates and other people she knows ranging from the theft of thousands of dollars during a friendly poker game, to the electronic rigging of the student elections, to threats to bomb Neptune High, to finding her missing next-door neighbor.

As she goes about solving mysteries in her everyday life, Veronica is on the look-out for information to solve a big mystery: What were the circumstances of the death of the pre-

vious year of her best friend, Lilly Kane? A former business partner of Lilly's father was convicted and sentenced to death after confessing to her murder. Veronica, however, has assembled enough facts to become convinced the man didn't kill Lilly. Among other things, she learns he has an airtight alibi that wasn't disclosed at his trial: He was with his girlfriend far from the crime scene at the time of Lilly's death.

The challenge Veronica has set for herself is to find proof of who killed Lilly. Her pursuit of the truth about her friend's death is personal for another reason: Her dad lost his job as sheriff after refusing to rule-out Lilly's wealthy and politically powerful dad as a suspect.

While it may sound improbable that a high school student could keep her grades up, work on the school newspaper, and be a super-sleuth in her spare time, the program works. It is somewhat believable because Veronica, played by Kristen Bell, primarily gathers information to solve a mystery by relying on her wits and hands-on techniques that include taking photographs, examining records, and interviewing people. Veronica is a cross between Sherlock Holmes and Erin Brockovich.

A person who has done something wrong or is involved in something nefarious most definitely doesn't want Veronica methodically tracking him or her like a bloodhound. Especially because she has a finely-tuned sense of handling things herself. At the end of one episode, for example, a young thief gleefully made his getaway with his girlfriend and what he thought was a bag of stolen steroids. However his mood most likely changed after discovering that Veronica switched his bag of steroids for one containing lots of saltwater taffy. Heh, the gal's got a sense of humor to go with being an ace investigator.


The episode broadcast on April 12, 2005 is an example of how Veronica solves puzzling situations. While working on an article for the school newspaper about an unusual number of fire drills - Veronica discovers they are actually being triggered by bomb threats phoned into the school. Veronica starts snooping around and discovers that a loner male Neptune High student appears to be tied to a website that has a clock counting down to an apocalyptic event predicted to occur in a few days. After Veronica sees the loner with another student who looks like a thug, she tails the thuggish guy to a store. Using a tele-photo lens, she takes pictures of him loading four bags of fertilizer in his trunk, in which a semi-automatic rifle is also visible. Veron-

ica soon finds out the "thug" is a BATF undercover agent who brags to her about his high number of arrests. A day or so later, as the website's clock is winding down to zero, a Swat team descends on the loner in Neptune High's parking lot. When the Swat team opens his trunk, Veronica sees and photographs the fertilizer and rifle that she had seen and photographed the day before in the BATF agent's trunk!

With photographic proof the loner had been framed as a terrorist bomber by the BATF, Veronica wrote an article for the school paper. The article generated enough negative publicity about the government's mishandling of the loner's case that all the charges were dropped against him. It is left for the viewer to infer that the BATF agent built his impressive arrest record by planting evidence - such as the fake apocalyptic website, fertilizer and weapons - against innocent people who were "frameable" because they could be considered on the fringe of society.


Veronica solved the mystery of Lilly's murder in the season finale. After figuring out where Lilly hid her personal items, Veronica found three sexually explicit video tapes showing Lilly in bed with a middle-aged movie actor. Lilly took the tapes, and when she told the man she was going to turn them over to a TV tabloid program he hit her in anger. Falling from the blow, she was killed when her head hit a concrete pool deck. The killer found out the hard way that his desperate efforts to conceal the truth of Lilly's death were no match for Veronica's sleuthing and survival skills. By solving her friend's murder, Veronica also sprung an innocent man from death row who police, prosecutors, judges, jurors and the press had all mistakenly been convinced was Lilly's killer.

Veronica Mars is a fresh and bold program featuring a smart and earnest young woman who gains the respect of her peers and adults because of her investigative skills, and also because she is willing to put herself on the line to rectify a wrong or help a person in need.

The second season of *Veronica Mars* begins on September 28 on the UPN television network. It is not known if it will continue with the first season's themes of innocent people being framed and imprisoned, but it will be worth checking out to see how the writers follow up on the first season's success. 

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- assigned counsel system controlled by judges.
- As to why 247 Texas counties don't use a public defender office, a witness testified, "We have to overcome judicial fear about their loss of control over attorneys [and] we have to overcome the private defense lawyers' fear that a public defender office will result in a loss of business."
 - In a substantial number of Texas counties, defendants who are released on bond are presumed not to be indigent and either are denied appointed counsel or strenuously pressured to retain counsel in direct violation of state law. "In some cases, appointed counsel is withdrawn once a defendant posts bond," said one witness.
 - Witnesses testified that "judges in Texas sometimes improperly encourage prosecutors to seek waivers of counsel and subsequent pleas of guilty from unrepresented indigent defendants."

In 2000, the Texas Fair Defense Coalition issued a comprehensive report about indigent defense in Texas and made 48 recommendations for change. Very few of those recommendations have been implemented and compliance has been spotty at best. 

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