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# The good Father

## 'V' saves endangered species: hero priest

By MICHAEL GILTZ  
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The sci-fi series "V" -- which returns in early January -- offers one of the rarest sights on TV: a heroic priest.

Priests on TV are, these days, child molesters or behind-the-collar schemers. It's only natural considering recent headlines.

But "V" having a heroic priest as one of its main characters? That makes Father Jack Landry practically one of kind in prime time.

The novelty is not lost on Joel Gretsch, the actor who plays Father Landry.

"I grew up in a small town in Minnesota," says Gretsch, "and there was a seminary -- the biggest one in the country -- about six miles from there. I'd go to leadership camp there every summer.



ABC VIA GETTY IMAGES

HOLY HERO: Joel Gretsch stars as Father Jack in "V," which returns to ABC next month. Father Jack is the only character weary of the Visitors and their leader Anna

"I was around a lot of priests who were very influential in my life in an extraordinary way."

"V" is a remake of the popular, 1983 miniseries about a fleet of alien space ships that appear one day over the major cities of the world. The "Visitors," as the aliens call themselves, promise their intent is peaceful and that they only want to help humanity.

But a few humans learn early on that the Visitors are not what they claim to be.

In the opening moment of the new series -- which switched from NBC to ABC in the intervening 27 years -- people are shown flocking to their houses of worship. In times of fear and confusion, naturally people turn to faith.

That's where the novelty of the Father Jack character -- who was not in the original -- comes in, because the priest is one of the few who realize the Visitors are up to no good.

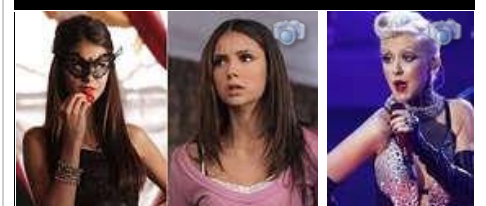
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"Father Jack can't be, 'Okay, let's just hold hands and pray,'" says Gretsch. "He knows, 'I have to do something. I have to do stuff, and people are going to possibly get hurt. We're in a war, and when you go to war there are going to be casualties.' "

The priest cannot go public with his knowledge about the aliens, so he joins a group of insurgents -- including a long-sought-after terrorist and an alien defector -- to wage guerilla war.

Gretsch -- who was raised Catholic and is married with two children to William Shatner's daughter -- is ready for a flesh-and-blood man of the cloth who fights the aliens, agonizes over "collateral damage" and, yes, finds his faith tested by a growing bond with beautiful FBI agent Erica Evans (Elizabeth Mitchell).

The 46-year-old actor is glad the show didn't take the obvious route where "the collar comes flying off," as he put it.

His priestly "naivete and trying to look at the good of people" are weaknesses the stunning alien leader, Anna, will try to exploit this season, Gretsch says.

But don't be surprised to see the attraction between Father Jack and Evans become even more noticeable when the 10 episode-run of Season 2 begins in January. (Season 1 of the series just came out on DVD.)

"Throughout this second season, you're going to see that struggle in many ways," he says.

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