

= Pilot (Veronica Mars) =

The pilot episode of the television series *Veronica Mars* premiered on UPN on September 22 , 2004 . It was written by series creator Rob Thomas , and directed by Mark Piznarski . Set in the fictional town of Neptune , the pilot introduces Kristen Bell as the title character , a high @-@ school student moonlighting as a private investigator under the wing of her detective father . Two separate mysteries are presented in the episode , which are explored throughout the season and resolved in the final and penultimate episodes .

Thomas originally wrote *Veronica Mars* as a young adult novel , featuring a male as the protagonist . He changed the gender of the protagonist because he thought a noir piece told from a female point of view would be more interesting and unique . The original pilot script was darker in tone than the one filmed , and several details were changed . Although it ranked low in the ratings , the pilot was critically acclaimed and Bell 's performance as the protagonist was praised .

= = Plot = =

Flashbacks reveal Veronica 's backstory : in small @-@ town Neptune , California , Veronica - daughter of well @-@ respected County Sheriff Keith Mars (Enrico Colantoni) is a typical teen who was dating Duncan Kane (Teddy Dunn) , and was popular with loving parents . But when her best friend and Duncan 's sister , Lilly Kane (Amanda Seyfried) , is murdered , Veronica 's life falls apart . Keith accuses software billionaire Jake Kane (Kyle Secor) , Lilly 's father , of being involved in the murder . This provokes Neptune 's wrath , and Keith is ousted from office and replaced by Don Lamb (Michael Muhney) in a recall election . Veronica 's mother , Lianne Mars (Corinne Bohrer) , unable to face the loss of status and economic security , develops a drinking problem and suddenly leaves town . Veronica 's boyfriend also ends their relationship , and her friends turn their backs on her . To prove that she is unaffected by the rejection , Veronica attends wealthy classmate Shelly Pomroy 's " 09er " party . Her drink is spiked with GHB and she is raped , but Sheriff Lamb refuses to take her report seriously . These events shock Veronica and she changes her attitude towards her former friends , becoming tough and cynical .

Estranged from all her " 09er " friends ? wealthy students from the fictional 90909 ZIP code ? including Duncan and Lilly 's ex @-@ boyfriend , Logan Echolls (Jason Dohring) , and feeling the drop in income and status that her father 's dismissal from office brings , Veronica takes a part @-@ time job in her father 's newly opened private investigation agency , Mars Investigations . Although the case of Lilly 's murder is officially closed following the confession of a former Kane Software employee , Abel Koontz (Christian Clemenson) , Veronica continues her own investigation into what happened . Her investigation discovers new evidence which suggests that Koontz is innocent .

In the present , Veronica starts her Junior year at Neptune High by freeing new student Wallace Fennel (Percy Daggs III) , who had been stripped and duct @-@ taped to the school flag pole . Wallace explains that while working at the local Sac @-@ n @-@ Pac , he alerted the sheriff 's department to two PCH (Pacific Coast Highway) bikers who took alcohol without paying . Sheriff Lamb exposes Wallace as the witness , and despite Wallace 's attempts to retract his accusation , Lamb walks away with proof from the in @-@ store video camera . Wallace 's duct @-@ taping is PCH retribution for his honesty . In a convoluted scheme to help Wallace , Veronica sets up Logan by placing a bong in his locker . Once the bong is taken to the evidence room at the sheriff 's department , Veronica triggers it to smoke and spark by remote control , leading to the arrival of the fire department . The fire chief , a friend of Veronica , switches the video from the Sac @-@ n @-@ Pac with one Veronica filmed of a deputy receiving sexual favors . When the bikers are in court , that video is shown instead , embarrassing Lamb and undermining the case against the bikers . Wallace is forgiven and Eli " Weevil " Navarro (Francis Capra) , the bikers ' leader , becomes Veronica 's occasional ally .

At Mars Investigations , Duncan and Lilly 's mother , Celeste Kane (Lisa Thornhill) hires Keith to ascertain if her husband Jake is having an affair , despite her open contempt for both Keith and Veronica . Keith is busy with other projects , and Veronica takes it upon herself to follow Jake .

Veronica takes photos of him at the Camelot hotel as he meets with an unseen woman after midnight . Once Keith sees the license plate number of the woman 's car , he stops the investigation and files the photograph . Puzzled by his actions , Veronica finds the file and learns that Keith has continued his own personal investigation of Lilly 's murder . Veronica discovers that the car belongs to her missing mother , Lianne , and begins to investigate the murder herself .

= = Production = =

= = = Conception = = =

Rob Thomas originally wrote Veronica Mars as a young adult novel for publishing company Simon & Schuster . Prior to his first television job on Dawson 's Creek , Thomas sold two novel ideas . One of these was provisionally titled Untitled Rob Thomas Teen Detective Novel , which formed the basis for the series . The novel had many elements similar to Veronica Mars , however the protagonist was male . Thomas 's father was a vice @-@ principal at Westlake High School in Austin , Texas , and the main character attended a " thinly disguised version " of the school . As Thomas had begun writing for film and television , he did not resume his teen detective idea for several years . Writing a novel could take months for Thomas , whereas a television script only took several weeks . Knowing that television scripts paid more , Thomas wrote the television version of the teen detective project as a spec script before it became a novel . Since no studio or network had asked him to write it , and he would not get paid unless it sold , Thomas said that " it was never a very pressing project for me " . Tinkering with it from time to time , Thomas wrote project notes a year before he actually started writing the television script . Most of his original ideas made it into the script , but some changed drastically . Thomas wanted to use flashbacks , and he had to shorten the timeline so that the murder could happen in a recent time . Thomas changed the gender of the protagonist because he thought a noir piece told from a female point of view would be more interesting and unique .

= = = Casting = = =

Kristen Bell was chosen to portray Veronica Mars from more than 500 women who auditioned for the role . On casting the lead role , Thomas later commented , " When you 're casting 20 @-@ year @-@ old hot girl , you see a lot of bad actors . " Bell felt that it was " just luck " that Rob Thomas saw that " I have some sass to me , and that 's exactly what he wanted " . Bell thought that it was her cheerleader looks and an outsider 's attitude that set her apart from the other women who auditioned . Bell 's life shared many similarities with that of her character ? her father had " an investigative bent " , and her best friend died in high school in a car crash .

Jason Dohring , who played Logan Echolls , originally auditioned for the role of Duncan Kane . Teddy Dunn originally auditioned for Logan , but ended up portraying Duncan Kane . Dohring felt that his audition for Duncan " was a little dark " , and he was told by the producers that it was " not really right " . The producers asked Dohring to read for the role of Logan , which involved reading Duncan 's lines . Dohring acted one scene from the pilot , in which he shattered the headlights of a car with a crowbar . During the final auditions , Dohring read two times with Bell and met with the studio and the network . When reading with Bell , Dohring acted the whole scene as if he had raped her , and tried to give the character an evil and fun feel . At the time of Dohring 's audition for Logan , the character was only going to be a guest star in the pilot .

Percy Daggs III auditioned for the role of Wallace Fennel twice before being cast , and he had to go through three tests with the studio and network executives . During his first audition , Daggs read four scenes from the pilot . Before his studio test , Daggs read with Bell and had " a great conversation " . He said that she " made me feel comfortable about auditioning " and was a big reason why he became more comfortable playing Wallace as the season went on . Thomas described Amanda Seyfried , who portrayed the murdered Lilly Kane , as " the biggest surprise of the year " . When casting a series regular , he was able to see all the best actors in town , mainly

because they all wanted to be a series regular . When casting Lilly , who would only appear from time @-@ to @-@ time as " the dead girl " , Thomas did not receive the same level of actors . Thomas said that he had " never had a more cut and dry audition " than he did with Seyfried ; she was " about 100 times better than anyone else that we saw , she was just spectacular " . He said that she ended up being so good in the series that he used her three or four times more than he initially planned .

= = = Filming = = =

The original pilot script was darker in tone than the one filmed . Thomas intended to take the script to FX , HBO or Showtime , but gave UPN " credit " as they only wanted it a bit lighter to match their standards and practices . There was also a lengthy debate as to whether Veronica could be a rape victim ; UPN eventually consented . In the aired version of the episode , Lilly Kane was found by the pool in the same spot where she was murdered . However , Thomas stated that Lilly 's body was originally going to be found in the ocean , and he had a plan for events which led to Lilly 's body being dumped . When Thomas pitched the idea to UPN , the network felt that it was " too dark and creepy " for Jake Kane to dispose of his daughter 's body to protect his son , and the idea was changed . Much of the series ' scenes were filmed at Stu Segall Productions in San Diego . During the filming of the pilot , producer Paul Kurta said that much of the filming would take place in Oceanside , California . Kurta liked that it was " a seaside town that still feels like middle @-@ class people live there ... Most of the seaside towns feel resort driven . " The setting of Neptune High , which was featured in the first two seasons , was also located in Oceanside . The school , Oceanside High School , was paid \$ 7 @, @ 750 by Stu Segall Productions for the use of the campus and extras . When Thomas watched the final cut of the scene in which Veronica realizes that she has been raped , Thomas thought that he had casted the role correctly . " I ? m watching her from the monitor , and tears start streaming down her face , and I ? m just like , ' Holy shit ! We have a star ! ' " .

= = Music = =

" We Used to Be Friends " by The Dandy Warhols was used as the series ' theme song . Composer Josh Kramon was originally going to produce a noir version of an ' 80s song for the theme . However , Rob Thomas was " pretty much set on finding a song " , and " We Used to Be Friends " was chosen right from the beginning . Kramon wrote the original background music to convey the film noir themes . For the pilot , Thomas wanted " a really atmospheric , kind of modern noir type of vibe " , and Kramon used sounds similar to that of Air and Zero 7 . Kramon used " traditional sounds " for the series , but also processed and filtered them . Among the instruments used were piano , vibraphone and guitar . When using an acoustic piano , Kramon would use compression so that it did not sound like a traditional piano . Live bass and percussion was also used , as Kramon did not like to program them . The main instrument used was guitar , but Kramon felt that piano was " by far the most important instrument for working on TV shows , especially when you 're doing everything yourself . " A week before choosing the sounds for the pilot , the crew had a " spotting session " , where they would discuss with Thomas and the producers which type of music was going to be featured . Kramon did not decide the songs to be featured , but composed and created the whole score . Since there was little orchestral music , and Kramon could play guitar , piano , bass and drums , he played the whole score without hiring a musician .

= = = Other songs heard in this episode = = =

" La Femme d 'Argent " by Air
" What You Want " by The Wayouts
" Insincere Because I " by The Dandy Warhols
" Sittin ' On Top Of The World " by Botany Boyz

" Just Another " by Pete Yorn
 " White Lines (Don 't Do It) " by Grandmaster Flash
 " Give You More " by Taxi Doll
 " Girls " by Death In Vegas
 " Bathroom Stall " by DAME Lee
 " Weak Become Heroes " by The Streets
 " (Don 't Fear) The Reaper " by Blue Öyster Cult
 " Pata Pata " by Miriam Makeba
 " Cemetary Party " by Air
 " Atomic Girl " by The Wannabes
 " Butterflies " by David Garza

= = Reception = =

The pilot was viewed by an average of 2 @. @ 49 million American viewers on its original broadcast , ranking 108 out of 112 in the weekly charts . Debra Leithauser and Amy Amatangelo of The Washington Post praised the pilot for relying " on strong storytelling and casting " , but hoped that viewers would be able to follow the multiple storylines . Barry Garron of The Hollywood Reporter said that the pilot was " so cleverly constructed , the hero so engaging and complicated and the story so filled with great dialogue that I wonder how anyone can sustain this level of accomplishment . " He said that the protagonist " has all the sass , strength , resolve and ingenuity of any of literature 's classic detectives [...] and Bell is so convincing in the role that it all somehow makes perfect sense . " He praised the pilot and Thomas ' writing , saying it had " comedy , deathly serious drama , parody and danger , ingredients not typically mixed together " , and said that " if future episodes are half as good , this still will be one of TV 's bright spots " . Kay McFadden of The Seattle Times felt that Veronica Mars was the best new series on UPN , and that the title character was potentially " this season 's most interesting character creation " . McFadden described the series as " Alias in its attitude , Raymond Chandler in its writing and The O.C. in its class @-@ consciousness " .

Phil Gallo of Variety called Veronica Mars " the smartest teen @-@ oriented drama since Freaks and Geeks " . He enjoyed Bell 's acting , describing her " as charismatic as she is tough and intelligent , giving a multilayered perf that touches on simple 17 @-@ year @-@ old insecurity and convincingly incorporates deeper issues concerning family , love and disappointment . " Gallo discussed the pilot 's reliance on flashbacks and voiceover , and felt that neither got in the way of the storytelling or felt too obvious . He praised Thomas ' writing of the " fine script " and Piznarski 's directing . Robert Bianco of USA Today felt that Veronica Mars was more akin to Buffy Summers than Nancy Drew , with " sharp wits , steely nerves and a wicked sense of humor " . Bianco praised Bell 's portrayal of the character , saying " whether you buy the idea of teen crime @-@ solvers or not , there 's no questioning Bell 's credentials as a TV star . " Melanie McFarland of the Seattle Post @-@ Intelligencer said that the pilot was " showing signs of being network television 's next Buffy " , emanating from a tough , emotionally battered heroine . McFarland found the acting to be fantastic , and said that Bell and Colantoni " create a wonderful father @-@ daughter dynamic " . Samantha Bonar of the Los Angeles Times thought that the writing was clever , and praised Bell ability to channel charisma , smarts and frustration .

IGN rated the pilot episode 10th on its list of the top ten Veronica Mars episodes , writing that " The smooth introduction to all things Veronica makes you care for her instantly . Anyone wrestling with creating a female character who is multifaceted and real needs only to study Veronica . We see many different sides , and there isn 't any stereotyping . They sell her tough exterior so well that even though Veronica has been through a pile of crap , you don 't pity her ? which is good , because she doesn 't want it anyway . "