

Fairy-Tale

ABC's new fantasy
Once Upon a Time
turns children's stories
into adult drama

Spin

BY JOE RHODES

It's hard separating fantasy from reality on the set of *Once Upon a Time*, ABC's new fairy-tale-fracturing series filled with characters who are not what they seem and don't know who they really are. It's a world where the grade-school teacher is really Snow White, the guy in a coma is really Prince Charming, and the manipulative mayor is really the Evil Queen.

It's especially hard to remember what's real on a day like this, when the show is filming at a run-down, mostly abandoned mental institution outside Vancouver, which looks like something straight out of "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest," with busted

IN STORYBROOKE: "Mary Margaret has been somehow cursed and planted with different memories," says Goodwin



IN FAIRY-TALE WORLD: We will soon "find out how Prince Charming and Snow White met and how that love started," says Dallas (with Goodwin). "We will also find out what Prince Charming's real name is."



IN FAIRY-TALE WORLD: "She's a joy to play—the costumes, the hair—it really just transforms me," says Parrilla of her role as the Evil Queen

windows and a basement where they used to perform lobotomies. It would be creepy even if there weren't still a few residents wandering the grounds, indistinguishable from the hospital-scene extras.

"I know—it can get really confusing," says Ginnifer Goodwin (*Big Love*), who plays schoolteacher Mary Margaret on days when she isn't playing Snow White. But what would you expect from former *Lost* writers?

As much as Adam Horowitz and Edward Kitsis would love *Once Upon a Time* to be judged on its own merits, they know comparisons to that other show—the flashbacks, the parallel lives—are inevitable. They call *Lost* cocreator Damon Lindelof their "godfather." Says Kitsis, "We wanted to try something with a high degree of difficulty. Damon [says], 'Write yourself into a corner and then find a way out.' We've done a lot of that."

It goes like this: The fairy-tale characters we know and love (including

Cinderella, Maleficent and Rumpelstiltskin) have been banished to the real-life town of Storybrooke, Maine, by the Evil Queen's curse, which has also stopped time and taken away all memories of their former lives. But unbeknownst to the Queen (Lana Parrilla), Emma Swan (Jennifer Morrison)—Prince Charming and Snow

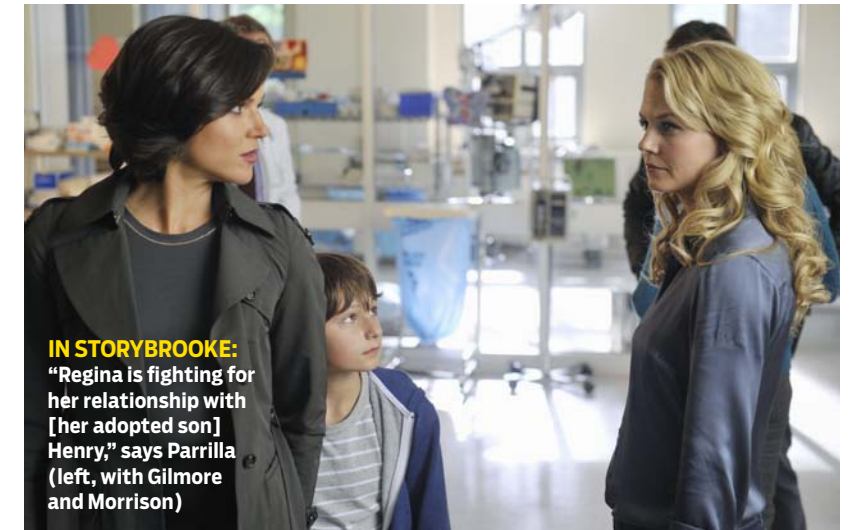
White's daughter—is also alive. Emma is lured to Storybrooke by the son (*Mad Men*'s Jared Gilmore) she'd given up for adoption, who is also the only one who's figured out what's going on. She doesn't believe the kid's stories, but she decides to stick around and investigate. Got that?

The series goes back and forth between Emma's Sto-

flawed Snow White, not as pure," she says. "She has a lot more in common with the Queen."

Prince Charming doesn't always live up to his name, either. And that's fine with Josh Dallas. "He's more of an Everyman prince who's gonna do whatever he has to do to protect the kingdom," says Dallas, who had spent the day before fighting stuntmen dressed as trolls on a giant green-screen stage in suburban Vancouver, where almost all the fairy-tale scenes are shot. "He's a real guy who gets his hands dirty. I like that."

In the adjacent ward, Regina the mayor is screaming at Mary Margaret and jerking hard on kid Henry's arm. The character is mad at someone in almost every scene. "It does take a toll after a while," Parrilla says about having to be so angry all the time.



IN STORYBROOKE: "Regina is fighting for her relationship with [her adopted son] Henry," says Parrilla (left, with Gilmore and Morrison)

rybrooke sleuthing and flashbacks to Fairy-Tale World, where we find out all sorts of things the Grimms never told us. "We aren't interested in just retelling the tales," Horowitz says. "We're interested in telling you the part you don't know."

To that end, they've taken some liberties. "This is everything that happened off the page," says Goodwin, who admits she's particularly excited that this version of Snow White gets to sword-fight. "She's a far more

"Regina's quite the bitch, isn't she? But I don't know if the Queen is truly evil," she says. It's pointed out that "Evil" is in her name. "I know," she says. "But I think it all derives from a place of pain. There's a wounded soul there."

See? It really is confusing here. The Evil Queen may not be evil, Prince Charming may not be that charming, and Snow White may have a criminal record. Meanwhile, the extras are out on the grounds again. Or maybe those are hospital residents. Also, has anyone else tried the apples? This one tastes funny....

ONCE UPON A TIME

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FROM LEFT: CHRIS HELGEMANAS-BENGE/ABC; SERGE BACHLAKOV/ABC (2); CHRIS HELGEMANAS-BENGE/ABC