

Emerald City: NBC's New Lackluster Show

By Paula Tudor

There is a current trend in storytelling where well-known and often beloved tales are restructured and reimagined. This trend has been going on for quite a while in movies, books, television shows, etc. For the most part I enjoy the occasional retelling of stories that I have heard countless times over the years. When done correctly it can breathe new life into old stories and make you look at them from a different perspective. Being a fan of shows like *Once Upon a Time* and *The Librarians*, as well as the *Dorothy Must Die* book series, I was naturally intrigued by the prospect of a show entirely built around *The Wizard of Oz*. This story, while timeless, is so fantastical that it practically lends itself to potential reworks. I imagine that is why so many people have been successful in putting their own spin on it. NBC's *Emerald City* may be the exception.

Emerald City premiered on January 6th with a 2-hour episode, where the audience learned that in this version Dorothy is an adult, a nurse who wants to help people. Having been raised by another couple, she is also trying to work up the courage to meet her biological mother. When she finally meets her, a tornado promptly sweeps Dorothy up and delivers her to Oz by way of a police cruiser; along with a German shepherd she later calls Toto. Upon landing in Oz, Dorothy's cruiser crashes into East, aka *The Wicked Witch of the East*, presumably killing her. East, however, is still alive. It is only later that she dies when Dorothy tricks her into committing suicide.

Much like the original story, Dorothy sets out on a journey to meet the wizard, believing he can help her get home. The wizard, however, wants her dead because she killed East. This sets up many of the events Dorothy encounters along the way, but the show itself is very difficult to follow. It is full of poorly established characters that pop up unexpectedly, which further complicates an already confusing plot. Despite that, the show contains various political overtones that are hard to miss. Several familiar characters are present in *Emerald City*, but this show is dark, twisted, and at times disturbing. *The Wicked Witch of the West*, for instance, runs a brothel and is addicted to opium. At one point, she and Glinda (the good witch), who has an orphanage, compete for custody of a young girl. The show makes it clear that the girl's opposing fates are meant to represent the contrasting choices society imposes on all women. This is just one of the many political statements that *Emerald City* infuses, almost frantically, into the storylines. The tin man is a young boy who was accidentally pushed off a balcony, only to be put back together with pieces of metal. He is later given over as property to a princess. The scarecrow, in this version, doesn't have a brain in the sense that he cannot remember who he is, though it is suggested he was once one of the wizard's soldiers and may have violent tendencies. The whole show is really quite grotesque. In addition, as if *Emerald City* was not confusing enough, the dialogue is difficult to understand. I am not sure if

this is a sound problem or if the actors are not enunciating effectively. Whatever the issue, it certainly contributes to the show being difficult to follow.

As of now I believe Emerald City is scheduled for 10 episodes, with 4 having already aired at the time of this writing. I am assuming the ratings will determine whether it is brought back after those 10 episodes. With Grimm being cancelled, NBC may be hoping to replace it with Emerald City, which currently follows Grimm in the Friday night lineup.

If you haven't watched Emerald City yet and would like to check it out for yourself, episodes are currently available on NBC.com. New episodes air on NBC Friday nights at 9|8c.

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