

No time like the present for 'The O.C.'

Twists, turns in store for uber-popular primetime series fueled by teen angst

Rick Porter
KRT CAMPUS

Marissa gets kicked out of school! Summer gets a new nemesis! Sandy takes over the business he once despised!

Just another year in "The O.C." Or, in the case of all the things just mentioned, just another month.

The Fox series, which opens its third season Thursday, plans to cover a lot of ground again this year, creator Josh Schwartz says. And after tying up a couple of loose ends (albeit not too tightly) in the season premiere, the show will dive into a year of changes for the Cohens and those around them.

"This year is senior year (for the teen characters) and with senior year comes all that sort of angst and anxiety, all that sort of epic teen drama — who am I, where am I going, what's gonna happen to us," Schwartz says. "It's going to call everyone's

identity into question and throw the show back on the family."

The premiere resolves the legal questions revolving around Marissa's (Mischa Barton) shooting of Ryan's (Ben McKenzie) brother Trey (Logan Marshall-Green). But Schwartz fallout from the incident will continue to affect the characters — starting with Marissa being kicked out of the Harbor School, thanks to a new dean of discipline ("Eyes" Eric Mabius, who will have a recurring part).

Marissa's departure will bring a new character, Taylor Townsend (Autumn Reeser, "Complete Savages"), into the forefront at Harbor. Schwartz describes her as "this sort of steaming, young Newpsie-in-training socialite who's been toiling in Marissa's shadow all these years." With Marissa banished to (gasp) public school, Taylor takes over as Harbor's social chair — much to the consternation of Marissa's best friend Summer (Rachel Bilson).

"Summer goes toe-to-toe with her as a sort of symbolic gesture to keep the Marissa flame alive at Harbor," Schwartz says. "It's going to bring back some of the classic,

bitchy Summer — there's really sort of an 'All About Eve' thing between Taylor and Summer."

Viewers will get substantial pieces of these plot threads in the first four episodes. And that's to say nothing of Kirsten's (Kelly Rowan) journey through rehab — where she encounters the mysterious Charlotte Morgan (recurring guest Jeri Ryan) — or Sandy's (Peter Gallagher) entree into the Newport Group as a sort of caretaker while his wife is away.

The big steps are by design, Schwartz says, as "The O.C.," after four episodes in September, will take most of October off while Fox televises the major league baseball playoffs and World Series. The network has asked the producers of its serialized dramas to leave viewers wanting more before they go off the air for baseball.

"For us, we've had so many cliffhangers lately, we were really looking for the final episode before baseball to be less a traditional cliffhanger and more a signal of the show being in a new place," Schwartz says. "There's a sense that the show has really moved over the course of those four episodes and set up some new dynamics."

Easy tofu pudding pie

Adam Keith
FOR THE GAMECOCK

What you need:

1 box Jell-O pudding mix, flavor of your choice (amounts can be adjusted to fit pie crust)

1 box silken tofu, firm (amounts can be adjusted to fit pie crust)

1 pie crust

Blender

Refrigerator and freezer

What to do:

Blend tofu and pudding mix until somewhat thin and gooey. Add a little water if needed.

Fill crust with blended mix.

Freeze one to two hours. Thaw.

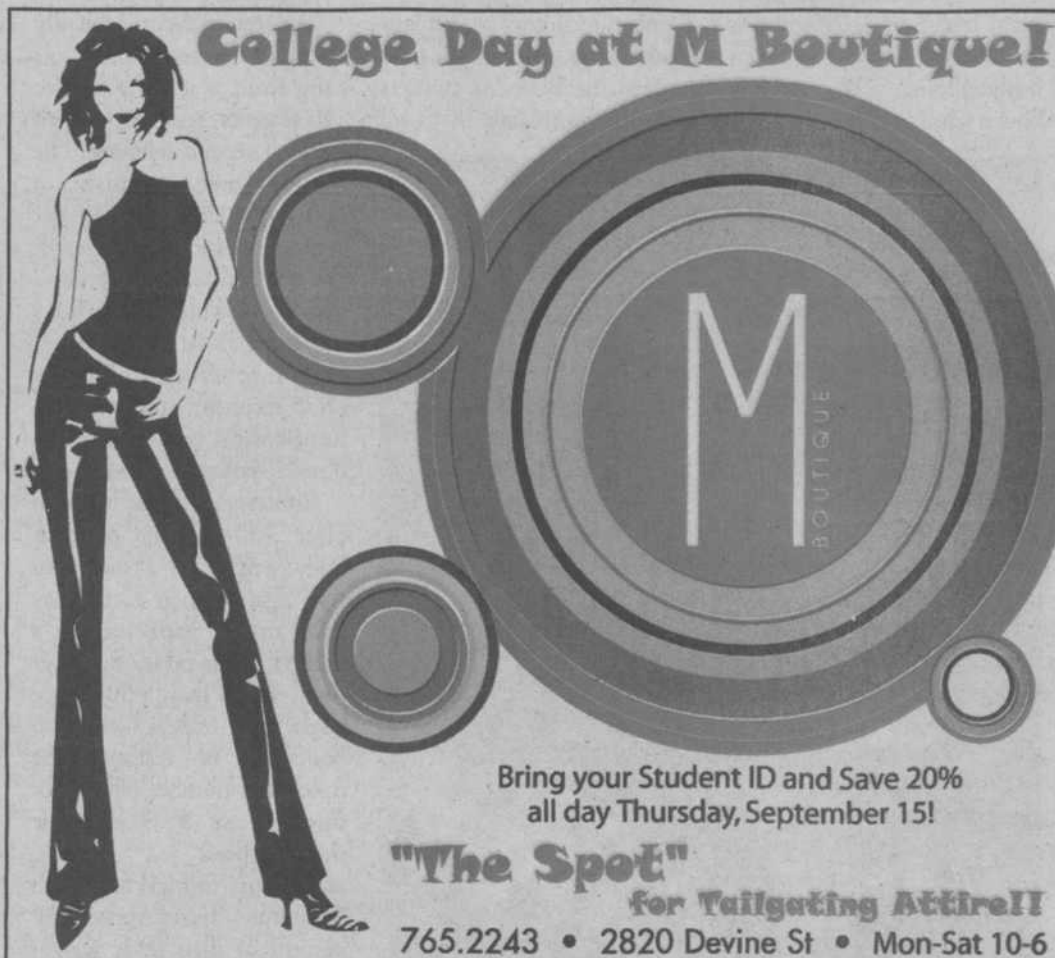
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