



Send in the clones

Even the actors don't know what's going to happen next in clone conspiracy thriller *Orphan Black*, writes **Shane Gilchrist**.

THE co-creators of *Orphan Black*, Graeme Manson and John Fawcett, keep the plot "very hidden", says actor Jordan Gavaris, who stars as Felix Dawkins on the BBC America-produced show, which returns to SoHo for a second series tomorrow.

However, the 24-year-old Canadian embraces such secrecy.

"That's OK from an actor's point of view; it allows you to take more risks.

"Sometimes we only get the script a day before we go to shoot. It's an interesting exercise in imagination. You surrender yourself to whatever is on the page.

"Because we aren't given much time to react to a big reveal, all we can do is respond to it and that helps the believability for the audience."

Calling from Los Angeles, where he is based (though *Orphan Black* is primarily shot in Toronto), Gavaris is enjoying a few of weeks of downtime, at least when he is not on the phone dissecting the show.

Season one of *Orphan Black* introduced Sarah (Tatiana Maslany, of *Parks and Recreation*), whose life changed dramatically after she witnessed the suicide of a woman who looked just like her.

Sarah learned that, not only was she and the woman clones, but there were others just

like them, as well as dangerous factions set on capturing them all. She forged an alliance with fellow clones Alison Hendrix and Cosima Niehaus, all of whom have been fighting for their freedom and the safety of their loved ones.

As Felix, Gavaris plays the role of Sarah's foster brother and confidante. Employing an accent he describes as "river English, but not Cockney", Gavaris enjoys the many layers to Felix, who is an artist by day and a male prostitute by night.

"There were so many versions of the character in development," Gavaris says. "But when we landed on the idea of Felix that we know today, we knew instantly that was who he was.

"I took different things from different people. I got the body language from Mick Jagger and David Bowie. Felix is very inspired by late '70s and early '80s culture, when gender roles were being torn down.

"Androgeny and pure ambiguity is at the core of Felix. As openly gay as he is, if he walks into a club and sees a cropped-haired woman who wants to dominate him . . . well, who knows?

"I also took physical inspiration from cats. Felix is very feline; he has an arched back and is territorial about everything. When he walks into a room, he owns it."

Gavaris also has to get his head around the fact that although he is often facing the same actor (Maslany, who obviously plays several versions of her physical self), each clone is quite different.

"It definitely required some preparation and a few psychological tricks to convince



me that we had moved on to another character," he says.

"Tatiana is an extraordinary talent and is very generous as an actor.

"Sure, it can get challenging at times. But we improvise and get into the headspace. As Alison, she will verbally spar with Felix; as Sarah, she gets into more deeply emotional discussions because they are brother and sister; as Cosima, maybe there is a lack of trust so we will talk as if we had just met at a party."

The second series of *Orphan Black* opens with Sarah in a desperate race to find her missing daughter Kira (Skyler Wexler), a pursuit that brings her head-to-head with ruthless "pro-clone" Rachel.

The new season also rejoins Sarah's clone sisters, Alison and Cosima as they struggle to keep their clone world a secret and pick up the pieces of their broken lives, while dealing with the fact no-one around them can be trusted.

"I think the audience will be very surprised at where the characters go," Gavaris says of the new series.

"I know that sounds rather trite. What I mean by that is the audience might think they have an idea of who those people are. However, we throw those ideas out the window. Felix, for example, is coloured many different shades. We have left a lot of doors open.

"I think that is ultimately what brings people back.

"Even though the story is extremely interesting and thrilling and fast-paced, it's how the characters respond to what's happening that provides the connection with an audience."

The second season of *Orphan Black* premieres tomorrow at 8.30pm on SoHo.

