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Inside the epic *9-1-1* season 7 premiere: The shipwreck, the romances, the drama

Angela Bassett, Peter Krause, and more preview the cruise ship (and love-life) disasters ahead as the first-responder drama moves from Fox to ABC.

By [Patrick Gomez](#) Published on March 6, 2024

“Yeesh.”

That’s the first word that comes to mind when [Angela Bassett](#) recalls the 14-hour days spent in a water tank for her latest *9-1-1* adventure.

Over the past six seasons, Bassett’s Los Angeles Police Department field sergeant Athena Grant has weathered an absolutely staggering number of calamities including, but by no means limited to: [a tsunami](#), [a citywide blackout](#), [a 7.1 magnitude earthquake](#), and, yes, [a blimp crash](#). This is in addition to [surviving an attack by a serial rapist](#) (who, it should be noted, also kidnapped her son) and then facing a mudslide caused by a dam break on her very first day back on the job.

That’s a lot, which makes it even more impressive when the star and executive producer tells *Entertainment Weekly* they wanted to do something “big and grand” for the opening disaster of season 7. “I think this might be our biggest,” adds EP [Peter Krause](#), who also stars as fire captain Bobby Nash. “It’s fun making these disaster movies for TV.”

Playing out over the first three episodes of the season, this latest disaster is a direct homage to 1972’s *The Poseidon Adventure*, with [Bobby and Athena on their belated honeymoon cruise when pirates take control of the ship and things go topsy-turvy](#) — literally.

“We have this giant bingo tumbler, and we’re the bingo balls inside of it,” Krause says of shooting scenes in a rotating set called a roll room. Besting [the one built for Christopher Nolan’s *Inception*](#), it’s the largest roll room ever constructed. Fitting for

Fox's highest-rated drama. Except that [season 7 will actually air on ABC](#) (starting March 14 at 8 p.m. ET/PT, before [Grey's Anatomy](#) and [Station 19](#)).

"It's almost like a homecoming," [co-creator Tim Minear](#) says of how [Disney's 2019 acquisition of 20th Century Fox](#) (the studio behind *9-1-1*) but *not* the Fox network created a domino effect that ultimately led the series to Disney-owned ABC. "Our studio and network are tied together again."

All involved speak kindly of their time on Fox, but ABC is treating *9-1-1* "like a first-year show," says Minear, who will serve as sole showrunner for season 7, with previous co-showrunner Kristen Reidel remaining involved as an EP. "They're relaunching everything and they're super excited, really supportive. It's all shiny, and the enthusiasm is through the roof."

One of the benefits of being the shiny new thing is, apparently, heated water tanks.

"The water was a nice, warm 93 degrees — but the weather outside wasn't, so you wanted to stay in the tank," Bassett says of filming the season 7 extravaganza. "Just imagine a nice 14-hour bath."

That bath is a far cry from the water tanks used during season 1.

When *9-1-1* launched in 2018, the series was framed as [Glee](#) co-creators [Ryan Murphy](#) and [Brad Falchuk](#)'s take on a procedural. Teaming with their [American Horror Story](#) EP Minear, they developed a story centered on the 118 fire station and other Los Angeles first responders. Bassett, Krause, and [Connie Britton](#) brought star wattage to the project, but the promised disaster spectacle was an equal draw.

The series' first mini-disaster movie came in episode 4, when a plane crashed into the Pacific and Bobby led Hen ([Aisha Hinds](#)) and Buck ([Oliver Stark](#)) in rescue efforts that left the actors in far cooler water than Bassett and Krause are experiencing now.

"Aisha, Oliver, and I would huddle together in the luggage compartment of the plane [between takes]," Krause recalls of that December 2017 night shoot where temperatures dropped into the 20s. "I put a scarf in there, and we'd wrap it around our heads to stay warm."

"We were up to our waist in freezing water, braving all of the elements," Hinds confirms. "But I will tell you this: That experience set the bar for what this experience

on the show would be. And so anytime we have to do the hard work, I'm always like, 'But it's not the airplane. But it's not the airplane...'"

What's your emergency?

Minear says they originally planned to shoot the season 7 premiere on an actual cruise ship, "but cruise ship companies were like, 'Well, does anything *bad* happen on the ship?' And it's like, 'Have you seen the show? It's not going to go real smooth.'"

Not that things are going swimmingly before the ship capsizes either.

"Obviously, they're on a honeymoon, but it's not like everything is smooth in their interior lives," Minear says of where audiences will find Bobby and Athena at the start of the season premiere. "There are conflicts that maybe they haven't expressed to one another."

Those unspoken conflicts simmer beneath the surface as the couple literally get their sea legs, and run into some familiar faces — Lola (Romy Rosemont) and Norman ([Daniel Roebuck](#)) from [a season 2 episode](#) in which Lola stood topless above a freeway sign to get the attention of her distant husband — who are now cruise ship retirees.

From there, "I will just say there is a run where they are [Nick and Nora](#)," Minear says of Bobby and Athena, comparing them to the couple at the center of detective novel and movie series [The Thin Man](#). "There's a little bit of a mystery on that cruise ship, but also a chance for Peter and Angela to be a little funny together. I don't think their chemistry has ever been better."

But things don't stay *Thin* for long. "By the time you get to the middle of episode 2, it's *Titanic*," he continues. "It's an epic love story between these two people who are meant to be together, who are facing possible death."

"I've been in and out of water all week," Krause tells EW from set before rattling off his stunt badges of honor: "Yesterday, I was climbing around an upside-down world. We have an injured individual who was strapped to a roulette table in the casino, and then the ship turns over so he's hanging upside down and Bobby has to find a way to

get him back down to safety. I've got a little cut on my leg, and some bruises and stuff. Your body pays the price, but it's fun."

What's less fun is shooting up to five episodes at once as the *9-1-1* team races the clock. Speaking to EW on the final day of February, just two weeks before premiere night, Minear jokes(?) that he hasn't slept in two days: "I may have to call 9-1-1 before the day is over," he says with a laugh before detailing how they are still finishing cruise ship scenes for the first three episodes while also preparing to film episode 6.

"We're not just logistically planning a cruise ship disaster — with its many complicated rigs and sets — we're logistically planning a TV show," Minear explains. "When I have my two stars separated from the other cast, out on a cruise ship, you have to come up with stories that can service the other group of characters that can film on separate stages. And, hopefully, by the time it's all put together, you won't really feel that people are separated. It's like planning the invasion of Normandy every week."

Krause says it's "been a dream" (wet)suiting up for battle with Bassett the past two months, but he's also missed being a member of what he calls the "Firehouse Five."

"We were all smiles when we finally got to work together the other day," Krause says of reuniting with Bobby's station 118 crew — Hen; Buck; Chimney ([Kenneth Choi](#)), who was recovering from a metal rod to the head during that season 1 plane crash; and Eddie ([Ryan Guzman](#)), who [joined in season 2](#). We'll have to wait a few episodes to see the Firehouse Five back together, but the team is keeping busy on land while their captain is busy being a bingo ball at sea.

On the clock, Hen is serving as interim captain, but at home, she and Karen ([Tracie Thoms](#)) are taking another stab at expanding their family of three. ("It takes us on a very interesting path in the first few episodes, so I'm excited to see how the fans respond to our newest edition," says Hinds.)

Meanwhile, [Eddie and Buck](#) are focused on romance — and not just with their potential new love interests, hardware store flirtation Marisol (Edy Ganem) and death doula Natalia (Annelise Cepero). Eddie's son Christopher (Gavin McHugh) is dating, and the single dad will turn to his best friend for an assist. "It really is a

moment of desperation for Eddie where he is like, 'Oh my God, this is a new avenue that I'm not prepared for.... Who knows women? Oh, Buck does,'" says Guzman.

"It's been such a beautiful thing to explore Buck's relationship with Christopher because we've seen him grow up," adds Stark. "When [Christopher] joined the show, he was a kid, and now he's not. He's a teenager, and there are things that he's going to be thinking about and feeling that are brand new to him. Buck is in a good position to be there for him in a way that maybe his own father can't because he's had a lot of relationship experience — some successful, some very unsuccessful."

And which category does Buck's relationship with Natalia fall in? "That is addressed pretty early on," Stark teases. "He's just looking for his happiness, and he's willing to put himself out there again and be open to feeling things. He just wants to be happy."

Luckily, there's nothing up in the air about where Chimney stands with his fiancée Maddie ([Jennifer Love Hewitt](#), who [replaced Britton as the show's main 9-1-1 dispatcher](#) at the start of season 2).

"The wedding is happening!" Hewitt promises. But don't expect it to take over Madney's lives. "You will hear little bits about it, but honestly the emergencies are massive and exciting from the start — so being first responders keeps them busier than wedding planning," she explains. "But we know the audience is waiting for these two to get hitched, and they won't have to wait long."

Before the ceremony, Choi teases some "pre-wedding celebrations" to come in episode 6: "And in 9-1-1 fashion, especially when it comes to Chimney, things may go awry. I think it's going to be a lot of fun, and it *may* involve some of the 118 players..."

Whatever bachelor party shenanigans ensue, Minear is excited to plan a "different" kind of wedding as a capstone to this 10-episode season (shorter than usual due to last year's writers' and actors' strikes).

"Kenny and Jennifer just have amazing chemistry together, made for a rom-com," the showrunner says. "But they are both incredible dramatic actors as well. And finding an interesting way into their wedding has been a lot of fun because I had just come off [spinoff [9-1-1: Lone Star](#)] where I had done the [big wedding between TK and](#)

[Carlos](#). I didn't want to do that again. So I think I came up with something different, and I think it's going to be incredible.”

Speaking of *Lone Star*, “overlap” between the *9-1-1* shows may be “baked in the cake,” but Minear confirms there won’t be [a crossover with the Austin-based sister series](#) this season. That said, former *118ers* Tommy Kinard (Lou Ferrigno Jr.) and [Ravi \(Anirudh Pisharody\)](#) will pop up, as well as Buck and Maddie’s parents ([Gregory Harrison](#) and [Dee Wallace](#)). “And we *are* doing kind of a crossover on *9-1-1*,” Minear teases. “But it's not with *Lone Star*.” (When pressed for more details, the co-creator slyly muses, “Is it [The Rookie](#)?... Probably not, since I just said *The Rookie*.”)

So no *Lone Star* crossover, but we *will* get the series’ 100th episode — something that crept up on the *9-1-1* team.

It was the day of that aforementioned Firehouse Five reunion and “a couple hours in, we realized ‘Oh, this is the 100th episode!’” recalls Choi. “So all day we were super grateful and super thankful as to how far we've come. And I think it's a testament to the fans of the show. They've kept us on the top of the chart.”

“It is beautiful to see how they resonate with the stories, the characters, and the emergencies,” adds Hinds, who officially celebrated the 100th with the cast and crew on set yesterday (with cake!). “But underneath it all, Tim has written [characters who do have their own personal struggles](#),” Krause notes. “And the language of the show keeps growing, and the storytelling real estate keeps expanding. We do rom-com. We do thriller. We do action. We do horror. We do comedy. Until the scripts come in, we never know what we are going to do. It’s fun.”

It’s that diversity that keeps Bassett coming back season after season.

“As long as the stories keep coming and we keep delving into relationships and family matters — the extended family, the added family, divorce, kids, the empty nest, racial issues, marital issues, adoption, trying to have a child, LGBTQ issues...” she says, “there are so many life issues that we use as inspiration along with the headlines and stories that also inform us. So perhaps we can go on for quite a bit longer, because people surprise you.”

Maybe she has another 100 episodes in her — let’s just hope the water stays warm.