

= True North ( Once Upon a Time ) =

" True North " is the ninth episode of the first season of the American fairy tale / drama television series Once Upon a Time . The series takes place in the fictional seaside town of Storybrooke , Maine , in which the residents are actually characters from various fairy tales that were transported to the " real world " town by a powerful curse . In the episode , Sheriff Emma Swan ( Jennifer Morrison ) helps two children ( Karley Scott Collins and Quinn Lord ) track down their father before they are placed in a foster care system , in a parallel with the story of Hansel and Gretel . Along the way , they encounter the Evil Queen ( Lana Parrilla ) , and the Blind Witch ( Emma Caulfield ) .

" True North " was co -@-@ written by Liz Tigelaar and David H. Goodman , while being directed by Dean White . Co -@-@ creators Edward Kitsis and Adam Horowitz chose the story of Hansel and Gretel to help reveal Emma 's difficult backstory , as the character lacked a fairytale counterpart . They cast Caulfield because they were fans of her work on the television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer . The Blind Witch 's gingerbread house had a computer -@-@ generated exterior , while its interior set was based on concept art designed by production designer Michael Joy .

The episode first aired in the United States on ABC on January 15 , 2012 . An estimated 9 @. @ 84 million viewers watched the episode on its original broadcast . It earned a Nielsen ratings share of 3 @. @ 3 / 8 among adults , meaning that it was seen by 3 @. @ 3 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds , and 8 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds watching television at the time of broadcast . This was a decrease of 11 percent from the previous episode . Critical reception was largely mixed to negative , with critics praising Caulfield 's performance but critiquing other elements .

= = Plot = =

= = = Opening Sequence = = =

A gingerbread house is shown in the forest .

= = = In Storybrooke = = =

In a Storybrooke drugstore , Henry ( Jared S. Gilmore ) meets a young girl named Ava ( Karley Scott Collins ) . Henry is stopped by the store owner for shoplifting , which reveals Ava and her brother Nicholas ( Quinn Lord ) were using Henry to smuggle stolen merchandise . Regina ( Lana Parrilla ) and Sheriff Emma Swan ( Jennifer Morrison ) arrive to handle the juveniles . Emma discovers the siblings are living without parents and almost no food . In need of help , Emma resolves to find Ava and Nicholas 's father ( Nicholas Lea ) out of a desire to keep them out of the foster system she herself was raised in . Regina calls social services , but the system would have to place the kids in two different homes in Boston . Determined to keep her promise not to separate them , Emma asks them for something that had belonged to their father . Ava provides her with a compass .

Emma asks Mr. Gold ( Robert Carlyle ) about the compass and he searches his records . He finds a card that supposedly says Michael Tillman purchased the compass , and gives Emma this name . The card is revealed to be blank . Michael is the garage mechanic , and tells Emma he can barely handle the garage let alone twins . Emma has no choice but to take Ava and Nicholas to Boston on Regina 's orders , despite Henry 's warnings that no one can leave Storybrooke . That evening as the three are leaving , the vehicle breaks down as they reach the city limits , prompting Emma to call for help . Moments later , Ava notices her compass working . Michael arrives in his tow truck , and Emma explains that he at least has to see his children , as she could not leave Henry after seeing the life he had . Seeing Ava and Nicholas face to face changes his mind , and Michael accepts them into his life . Later , Emma shares Henry 's theory with Mary Margaret ( Ginnifer Goodwin ) , that she is Snow White 's daughter and Mary Margaret is Snow White . Mary finds this laughable , but seeing

Emma 's blanket triggers some sort of reaction from her . After a minute , however , she is quick to dismiss it as nothing .

In the meantime , Henry asks Emma about his father . Emma tells Henry that his dad was a trainee fireman who used to frequent the diner where she worked . The two of them " hung out " a few times , resulting in Emma being pregnant with Henry before she went to jail . Once there , she tried to tell him about Henry , only to discover that he had died while saving a family from a burning building . However , she later admits to Mary the story she gave Henry was a lie and he should never know the truth about his father . After Emma 's reunion of the children with Michael that evening , Henry arrived with pumpkin pie to give Emma in order to thank her for explaining about his birth father . They are interrupted by a stranger ( Eion Bailey ) on a motorcycle with a unique box . Without giving his name , he asks Emma about finding a place to stay . After referring him to Granny 's Bed & Breakfast , she reminds Henry that he said no one else ever comes to or leaves Storybrooke and Henry replies that they don 't .

= = = In the Characters ' Past = = =

In the Enchanted Forest , Hansel ( Lord ) and Gretel ( Collins ) , are searching for kindling while their father ( Lea ) chops firewood . He gives Gretel a compass so they won 't be separated , but when they return , he is nowhere to be found . As they search they run into The Evil Queen ( Parrilla ) and are captured . She tells the two that she can help find their father , on the condition that they retrieve an item belonging to her from The Blind Witch ( Emma Caulfield ) . They must enter her gingerbread house when The Blind Witch is asleep and fetch The Evil Queen 's leather satchel , but they must not eat a thing . They break in safely , but Hansel gives in to the temptation of taking a bite of a cupcake , causing The Blind Witch to wake up . While she cannot see the children , she can smell their scent . The Blind Witch locks them up and prepares the oven to roast them . The two , working together , are able to push the witch into her own oven as The Evil Queen gleefully watches from her mirror .

When the two return to The Evil Queen 's palace , she opens the satchel to reveal a poisoned apple . The Evil Queen offers Hansel and Gretel a home at the palace , but they are adamant about returning to their father . She sends them back into the forest and summons her newest prisoner , Hansel and Gretel 's father . The Evil Queen asks why the children turned down the luxurious life of the palace and he answers that they are family , and family finds each other . Frustrated , she sends him away to see if they indeed find each other .

= = Production = =

" True North " was co @-@ written by co @-@ executive producers David H. Goodman and Liz Tigelaar , while being directed by The Shield veteran Dean White . In an interview with Comic Book Resources , co @-@ creator Edward Kitsis noted that it was difficult to pick iconic stories such as Cinderella and Hansel and Gretel because " the challenge becomes revealing a piece you never knew before or putting a fun twist on it . " According to actress Jennifer Morrison , they chose this particular story as a way to further reveal Emma 's history , as she lacked a fairytale counterpart . Morrison explained , " They ? re using Hansel and Gretel as they did Cinderella to reveal some of Emma ? s backstory . So what Emma goes through to try to help these children ends up becoming very personal for her , as her own life [ as a foster kid ] is in a sense revealed . "

For the Blind Witch , Kitsis and co @-@ creator Adam Horowitz cast actress Emma Caulfield , as they had been " huge fans " of hers since she had co @-@ starred on Buffy the Vampire Slayer . Kitsis commented , " We couldn ? t think of anyone better to trap two children in a house and try to eat them . " Caulfield had previously worked with series writer Jane Espenson and producer Liz Tigelaar on Buffy and Life Unexpected . Morrison remarked that while viewers do not see the Blind Witch in Maine , " Everyone who is in fairytale land definitely has a Storybrooke counterpart . Whether or not we see them immediately doesn ? t mean they don ? t exist . "

The exterior of the gingerbread house was based on concept art created by production designer

Michael Joy . While this ended up being computer @-@ generated , Joy and set decorator Mark Lane created a physical set for the interior using an " inside @-@ out cake " as inspiration . The two always enjoyed adding in small details for careful viewers to notice , so in " True North " they used the cookies Hansel and Gretel baked in Storybrooke as part of the house 's interior design . Joy explained , " We 're always trying to find ways to link the two worlds . The audience loves that kind of stuff . "

In October 2011 , TV Guide reported that Eion Bailey would be joining the series in a multi @-@ episode arc ; " True North " featured his first appearance as the Stranger . Other guest stars included Quinn Lord as Nicholas / Hansel , Karley Scott Collins as Ava / Gretel , Nicholas Lea as Michael Tillman / Woodcutter , Gabe Khouth as Mr. Clark / Sneezy , and David Bloom as Mr. " K " Krzyszkowski . Lord and Collins had previously guest starred in two Fringe episodes , as younger versions of Peter Bishop and Olivia Dunham . Collins appeared in " Subject 13 " alongside another actor who played Peter .

= = Cultural references = =

Besides the main storyline being a retelling of the Hansel and Gretel fairytale , the episode contained a number of other cultural references . A rack full of Marvel Comics , including Ultimate Wolverine vs. Hulk , are shown in the opening scene , a double reference to both Marvel 's parent company , Disney and the comic book 's writer , Damon Lindelof , co @-@ creator of Lost . An Apollo Bar was among the stolen items , and the Stranger 's motorcycle license plate reads 23 , both also references to Lost . Other comic books seen on the convenience store rack include various issues of Dazzler , Power Pack , West Coast Avengers , and Ka @-@ Zar .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" True North " first aired on January 15 , 2012 in the United States . It earned a Nielsen rating of 3 @. @ 3 / 8 among adults between the ages of 18 and 49 , meaning that it was seen by 3 @. @ 3 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds , and 8 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds watching television at the time of broadcast . It was viewed by an estimated 9 @. @ 84 million people , down 11 percent from the previous episode . Once Upon a Time finished fourth in its timeslot among total viewers and third among adults . It aired at the same time as the 69th Golden Globe Awards , which earned 16 @. @ 8 million viewers . In Canada , the episode finished in thirteenth place for the week with an estimated 1 @. @ 5 million viewers , an increase from the 1 @. @ 297 million of the previous episode .

= = = Reviews = = =

" True North " received mixed to negative reviews from television critics .

Entertainment Weekly writer Hilary Busis wished the episode " had done more to move the show 's master plot forward , especially since watching it meant missing the first hour of the Golden Globes . " Busis also wished that Caulfield had received more screen time , calling her performance " superbly creepy . " IGN columnist Amy Ratcliffe rated the episode 6 @. @ 5 / 10 , explaining that the tone was " over @-@ the @-@ top " and Emma 's actions to hide the children , rather than report them , " out of character . " Ratcliffe added on a more positive note that the Hansel and Gretel storyline was a " safe choice , but they made it work . " Cassandra Scrimgeour of The Huffington Post found " Parrilla 's emotional reaction to the children 's rejection [ to be ] so effective that despite her evil ways , I actually felt sorry for her . " Scrimgeour concluded that " the most intriguing thing to happen " in the episode was the arrival of the Stranger .

Oliver Sava of The A.V. Club was more critical of the episode , and gave it a D. He called the visual

effects " hilariously bad , " likening the CGI to " a ' 90s computer game . " Sava added , " As mediocre as the series has been , it was on a bit of an upswing with the last few episodes , but ' True North ' is a big step backwards ... The problem isn't that these kids can't act ( although that might be the problem ) , it's that the writing for their characters is horrible ... This week's episode is straight @-@ up children's television , and not in the way that it can be enjoyed by all ages . You need to be a child to suspend your disbelief long enough to watch ' True North . ' " Despite the critique , Sava did enjoy Caulfield 's scenes , as well as Emma and Mary Margaret 's conversation concerning motherhood . Writing for The Wall Street Journal , Gwen Orel opined that the Hansel and Gretel " parallel is clear and rather sweet , with touches of the ongoing story of Emma and Snow White , too . " Orel felt the episode seemed " like a demented episode of Chopped , " and called the gingerbread house " just like it should [ be ] , colorful and candylike . "