

= Desperate Souls =

" Desperate Souls " is the eighth episode of the first season of the American Fairy Tale / Drama television series Once Upon a Time . It was written by consulting producer Jane Espenson , and was directed by Michael Waxman . Espenson wrote it to give viewers some " crucial facts " about Rumpelstiltskin 's origins . Guest stars included Brad Dourif , Giancarlo Esposito , Beverley Elliott , Ty Olsson , Meghan Ory , and Dylan Schmid .

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 this episode , Emma Swan ( Jennifer Morrison ) runs for Sheriff against Regina 's ( Lana Parrilla ) candidate , Sidney Glass ( Esposito ) . Meanwhile , in the episode 's flashbacks , Rumpelstiltskin 's ( Robert Carlyle ) backstory is revealed .

" Desperate Souls " first aired in the United States on ABC on January 8 , 2012 . Its broadcast was watched by an estimated 10 @.@ 35 million viewers , a 29 percent increase from the previous episode . Television critics gave mostly positive reviews to the episode ; most praised Carlyle 's performance , but one noted that the storytelling was beginning to " feel stale . "

= = Plot = =

= = = Opening Sequence = = =

Zoso is shown in the forest .

= = = In Storybrooke = = =

It has been two weeks since Sheriff Graham 's ( Jamie Dornan ) death , and the citizens of Storybrooke continue to mourn . Mr. Gold ( Robert Carlyle ) convinces Emma Swan ( Jennifer Morrison ) she ought to be sheriff , but Regina ( Lana Parrilla ) has already appointed Sidney Glass ( Giancarlo Esposito ) for the job . Henry ( Jared S. Gilmore ) suspects Regina is responsible for Graham 's death and starts to believe good cannot defeat evil because good plays by the rules . Gold offers Emma his support and reveals to her the town charter which states the Mayor can only choose a candidate for Sheriff and therefore an election must be held . Emma decides to run , so Regina declares Sidney Glass will as well . Henry becomes worried when he finds out Gold is Emma 's benefactor , considering how dangerous it is to owe him one favor , let alone two . Regina is furious that Gold would work against her .

Gold 's plan was to set a fire at the Mayor 's office with Emma there , knowing her conscience would force her to save Regina and look like a hero . This goes off perfectly , making Emma the town favorite going into the debate . When she finds out that Gold did this , Emma realizes Henry might be right about evil not playing by the rules . At the debate , Sidney explains what would make him the best sheriff following Regina 's script to the letter . Emma reveals to the public that Gold set the fire , demonstrating her own honesty and integrity as well as Gold 's ruthlessness . Later that evening at Granny 's Cafe , Emma consoles herself with liquor when Henry walks in with the walkie talkies , saying that he was proud of her and they might continue " Operation Cobra . " Regina , Archie ( Raphael Sbarge ) , Mary Margaret ( Ginnifer Goodwin ) and Sidney arrive to tell Emma she was elected Sheriff . Regina gives her the badge and admits they have one thing in common : their distrust of Gold . Emma receives a visit from her new ally who reveals the rest of his plan . Gold knew Emma would do the right thing and tell everyone what he did , winning her the election . He also tells her that while the town feared Regina , they feared him more . In standing up to him , Emma became even more compelling to the townsfolk than when she rescued Regina . Now that Emma is Sheriff , Gold expects to be paid back for his favors .

= = = In the Characters ' Past = = =

In the Enchanted Forest , Rumpelstiltskin 's ( Carlyle ) backstory is revealed . During the ogre wars , children are conscripted to military service at age 14 . The Duke 's men gather young soldiers with the help of " The Dark One " who possesses great magical power . Rumpelstiltskin 's son , Baelfire ( Dylan Schmid ) , will turn 14 in three days and he is desperate to keep his child out of battle . As father and son flee from the village , they are confronted by the Duke 's men . They mock Rumpelstiltskin for running away when he was supposed to serve , and reveal that his cowardice caused his wife to leave him . Rumpelstiltskin begs for his son 's life but he has nothing to offer but fealty . The Duke 's chief soldier commands Rumpelstiltskin to kiss his boot , but when the desperate man bends down the soldier kicks him to the ground . The old beggar ( Brad Dourif ) by the side of the road sees this and offers the pair assistance since they spared him a coin . The beggar tells Rumpelstiltskin a secret , the Duke possesses a dagger that allows him to command The Dark One and all his power . If Rumpelstiltskin steals the dagger , he will control The Dark One himself . If he kills The Dark One with the dagger , he will possess his magic . Rumpelstiltskin sets fire to the Duke 's castle ( in a parallel with Mr. Gold 's actions ) and steals the dagger which reads the name of The Dark One , " Zoso " .

Baelfire is worried about his father 's plan to wield the dagger 's power but Rumpelstiltskin just sends him home . Rumpelstiltskin summons Zoso and declares he is The Dark One 's master . Zoso is not impressed and wonders aloud what the timid little man would have him do . Rumpelstiltskin 's answer is " Die ! " He kills The Dark One who reveals himself to be the beggar from before . Zoso laughs and tells Rumpelstiltskin that " All magic comes with a price . " Rumpelstiltskin becomes the new Dark One and his name is now inscribed on the dagger . He returns home and uses his power to save his son from the Duke 's men . Baelfire is terrified of this man who no longer seems like his father at all .

= = Production = =

" Desperate Souls " was written by consulting producer Jane Espenson , while Friday Night Lights veteran Michael Waxman served as director . The episode was Espenson 's second writing credit for the series at that point . She intended the episode to reveal " some crucial facts about where Rumpel comes from , " believing him to be " a wild card " whose " ulterior motives are still always very complicated . "

" Desperate Souls " partly deals with the aftermath of Sheriff Graham 's death from the previous episode . Though her character is associated with evil , actress Lana Parrilla attempted to keep Regina as human as possible . She clarified , " You will see how there is a genuine love and care for Graham ? There was a physical connection to the character . He did become sort of a boy toy in both worlds . But , you know , at the end of the day , in Storybrooke , she ? s still trying to fill this void that Maleficent warned her about . " Leading up to the episode broadcast , Parrilla also gave a preview of what viewers could expect . Of the episode 's plot , she explained , " We will be seeing some dirty politics between Regina and Mr. Gold . You ? re going to see how threatening that is to Regina , and , as you know , she really takes on these challenges full force . "

In early October 2011 , TV Guide reported that actor Brad Dourif would be making a guest appearance as a " beggar who befriends evil Rumpelstiltskin . " Other guest stars included Meghan Ory as Ruby , Patti Allan as Miss Ginger , Beverley Elliott as Granny , Giancarlo Esposito as Sidney , Dylan Schmid as Baelfire , Conner Dwelly as Morraine , Ty Olsson as Hordor , Michael Phenicie as The Duke ( scenes deleted ) , C. Ernst Harth as Burly Man , David @-@ Paul Grove as Doc , and Gabe Khouth as Mr. Clark . The episode was included in Reawakened : A Once Upon a Time Tale ? a novelization of the first season ? which was published by Hyperion Books in 2013 .

= = Cultural references = =

Morraine , BaelFire , and the Dark One are inspired by the Wheel of Time series by Robert Jordan . A large Mickey Mouse figurine and small Minnie Mouse figurine are visible during Emma 's

confrontation with Gold over the fire . Zoso , the name of the Dark One , is a reference to the band Led Zeppelin , as it is a nickname for the guitarist Jimmy Page .

= = Reception = =

= = = Ratings = = =

" Desperate Souls " first aired in the United States on January 8 , 2012 . It earned a 3 @. @ 7 / 8 among 18 @- @ 49s and an overall 5 @. @ 9 / 9 rating , with an estimated 10 @. @ 35 million viewers . It ranked second in its timeslot , beaten by NFL Overrun on CBS but ahead of Dateline on NBC and The Simpsons and The Cleveland Show on Fox . Once Upon a Time 's ratings were up 28 percent compared to the last original episode . In Canada , the episode finished in eighteenth place for the week with 1 @. @ 297 million viewers , a decrease from the 1 @. @ 6 million of the previous episode .

= = = Reviews = = =

" Desperate Souls " received mostly positive reviews from television critics .

In her first review of the series , Hillary Busis of Entertainment Weekly expressed her enjoyment of the episode , believing the following week would be " pretty difficult to top tonight 's ep . " Busis praised the final fairytale scenes as " intense , effective ... [ and ] ... awesome . " IGN writer Amy Ratcliffe rated the episode 7 / 10 , giving praise to Robert Carlyle and guest actor Brad Dourif , but criticizing Lana Parrilla 's constant " dagger stares and pursed lips " to Emma . Ratcliffe did however believe Ginnifer Goodwin and Joshua Dallas had " electric chemistry , " and wished viewers could see more scenes between the two . Like Ratcliffe , Digital Spy columnist Catriona Wightman lauded Parrilla and Carlyle 's performances , believing the latter " continues to be one of the best things about Once Upon A Time - this completely new version of Rumpelstiltskin we saw was illuminating . Turns out he does cowardly and pathetic quite well . "

The Huffington Post editor Laura Prudom and TV Fanatic 's C. Orlando also highlighted Carlyle 's acting and storyline . Prudom liked Dourif 's casting , but singled out praise for Mary Margaret and David 's poster scene , calling it " beautifully written and played , understated and filled with longing . " The A.V. Club 's Oliver Sava was more critical of the episode , and graded " Desperate Souls " with a C. He remarked that Once Upon a Time " lacks Lost 's sophistication and insight , instead laying out plot in the plainest terms possible , no matter how tedious that may be ... It hasn 't even been ten episodes , and the formula is already starting to feel stale . " Despite this , Sava saw potential for the series , noting that " the writers just need to take fuller advantage of the wealth of mythology that the fairy tale stories give them . "