

= The Road Not Taken (Fringe) =

" The Road Not Taken " is the nineteenth episode of the first season of the American science fiction drama television series Fringe . It centers on the death of a young woman (Jennifer Ferrin) , who spontaneously combusts in the middle of a street . The Fringe team 's investigation leads them to learn more about the drug trials Olivia (Anna Torv) experienced as a child , as well as other revelations .

The episode 's story was written by Akiva Goldsman , while the teleplay was co @-@ written by executive producer Jeff Pinkner and supervising producer J.R. Orci . It was directed by Fred Toye . The title is based on the Robert Frost poem of the same name . Robert Chiappetta and Glen Whitman , frequent contributors to the series , aided in the episode 's production by " find [ing] a new and gruesome way to blow people up , " and rooting its explanation in science .

It first aired in the United States on May 5 , 2009 on the Fox network . An estimated 9 @.@ 245 million viewers watched the episode , making it the network 's fifth most watched show for the week . " The Road Not Taken " received mostly positive reviews from television critics , with many praising Olivia 's visions of the other universe and John Noble 's performance .

= = Plot = =

The Fringe Division investigates the case of a woman (Jennifer Ferrin) who " spontaneously combusts " in the middle of a busy New York street . The team discovers that the victim is the subject of a ZFT experiment to cultivate pyrokinesis . As they investigate , Olivia (Anna Torv) experiences " visions " while awake . Walter (John Noble) suggests she is seeing a parallel universe which has branched off from our own . Olivia and Peter (Joshua Jackson) visit an agoraphobic website designer (Clint Howard) who is apparently aware of William Bell , the drug trials , and the coming war , although his credibility comes into question when he believes himself to be a character in the plot of Star Trek .

Using information from her visions , Olivia tracks down the victim 's twin sister , who only moments before was kidnapped for more ZFT experimentation . Harris (Michael Gaston) is revealed to be responsible for the crimes , and while closing in on him , Olivia gets locked in a room with the twin sister , whose unstable pyrokinetic abilities threaten both their lives . With Olivia 's guidance , the woman focuses her energy on Harris and incinerates him . Olivia finds out that the sisters were part of the same nootropic drug trial that she was as a child . She presses Walter to reveal why he and William Bell were developing " supersoldiers , " but Walter only shares that it was for protection against some impending doom that he regrettably cannot recall .

Meanwhile , Walter reveals that the ZFT manuscript was written by William Bell , and that the copy of the manuscript that ZFT uses is missing a chapter dealing with ethics . He locates the original , but the Observer (Michael Cerveris) shows up and takes Walter away , cryptically stating : " it is time to go . " Nina Sharp (Blair Brown) visits Broyles (Lance Reddick) to discuss the Observer , and is later shot in her hotel by two masked gunmen using a suppressed pistol .

= = Production = =

The episode 's teleplay was co @-@ written by supervising producer J.R. Orci and executive producer Jeff Pinkner , based on a story by Akiva Goldsman . Producer Frederick E. O. Toye served as director . Goldsman had joined the series half way through the season by writing and directing the mythology @-@ riddled episode " Bad Dreams " , and was instrumental in convincing the showrunners to depict more Fringe mythology earlier than planned , most notably with the depiction of parallel universes . The title of " The Road Not Taken " is based on the Robert Frost poem of the same name .

New Media consultants and scientists Robert Chiappetta and Glen Whitman aided in the production of the episode . They had worked on the series throughout the first season , with their role ranging from directly writing episodes to advising the others on scientific concepts . Whitman later explained

that they " come to us with questions : Is this possible ? Where can we go with this ? Then we go and read the very technical articles , or talk with scientists , and then translate that into the storytelling medium of our show . " For " The Road Not Taken " , he and Chiappetta were asked to again " find a new and gruesome way to blow people up , " this time by rooting it in the concept of pyrokinesis . Chiappetta explained , " They wanted to have someone spontaneously combust and burn up . So this is where we sort of leaned back into our mythology . "

They and the episode writers developed a storyline in which a victim 's childhood experimentation , when they were injected with something , was now " coming back to haunt them . " Whitman noted that the concept , like others in the show , was based on real scientific knowledge , " The notion is , some kind of a medical treatment that they were given allowed their brain to command vibrations that would take place . It really is true that essentially what heat is is vibrations of atoms , so if your brain can cause some kind of vibration to take place , eventually you could create enough heat to even create a flame . " Pinkner added , " And if you haven 't yet mastered pyrokinesis and the ability to excite molecules that are outside your body , well then your going to excite the ones inside your body and you 're going to blow up , sadly . "

For Harris ' immolation scene , first unit director Gary Rake emphasized safety , explaining that " everyone really has to think about what ? s going on and really focus tonight . This is a quintessential moment where we can ? t have any mistakes . " Everything in the scene was flame retardant , and a special burn unit crew was present . Actor Michael Gaston 's arm , immersed in a special gel , was actually inflamed and then extinguished after filming was cut . Then , Gaston 's stand @-@ in , stuntman Don Hewitt , Jr , was completely set on fire . Hewitt wore the same costume , a wig , a face shield , and was also covered in a flammable gel . It was Gaston 's final episode with the series .

Actress Jasika Nicole , who plays junior FBI agent Astrid Farnsworth , described the episode in a May 2009 interview , " It 's about spontaneously combusting . This is the episode I get to get out of the lab . I remember thinking I can 't wait to see what the set 's going to look like and how they will make it look when the spontaneous combusting takes place . And we get there and it 's just smoke on the walls , like a kitchen fire . I thought that was so funny because I thought there were going to be body parts everywhere , like a small explosion . But it 's a really good episode , which leads you into the coolest parts of the finale episode . "

= = Cultural references = =

The episode contains many cultural references , which Annalee Newitz of io9 attributed to the episode 's writers : " It was bound to happen that one day these four supernerds would get together and spawn an episode so packed with in @-@ groupy pop culture references that smacking is probably in order . " Peter and Walter reference the 1984 supernatural comedy film Ghostbusters while investigating the opening scene 's case , and later debate the origin of the term pyrokinesis , coined by author Stephen King in his 1981 novel Firestarter . Emmanuel Grayson refers to the titular character of the 1982 science fiction film Star Trek II : The Wrath of Khan , as well as Romulans and the United Federation of Planets , when describing government conspiracies to Peter and Olivia . Grayson also believes himself to be Mr. Spock . This reference is made even more appropriate by the fact that Spock 's mother was named Amanda Grayson .

= = Reception = =

= = Ratings = = =

" The Road Not Taken " was first broadcast in the United States on May 5 , 2009 on the Fox network . It was watched by an estimated 9 @. @ 245 million viewers , making it the network 's fifth most watched show for the week . The episode earned a 4 @. @ 0 / 10 ratings share among adults aged 18 to 49 , meaning that it was seen by 4 @. @ 0 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds ,

and 10 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds watching television at the time of broadcast . Fox later aired repeats of season one episodes , including " The Road Not Taken " , that featured Twitter posts by some of Fringe 's cast and producers .

= = = Reviews = = =

The episode received generally positive reviews from television critics . TV Squad 's Jane Boursaw called the episode 's case " an interesting premise " and was pleased that " things are really , REALLY starting to come together in a big way , which is good , considering that the finale is fast approaching " . Annalee Newitz of io9 declared it to be " one of the most rewarding episodes ever for people who love the show 's mythology , " and found Olivia 's universe @-@ hopping ability to be " truly cool " . Newitz concluded that " this was a truly awesome episode with a lot of payoff for those of us who have been glued to the set every Tuesday night , looking for answers . " The website later listed " The Road Not Taken " as one of the " crucial " episodes new viewers must watch to get into the show . Television Without Pity graded the episode with a A- .

Noel Murray of The A.V. Club complimented the episode 's opening scene for providing a succinct synopsis of the season to new viewers who may have been newly discovering the series after watching its lead @-@ in , American Idol . Though he graded the episode with an A- , Murray did however critique its climatic scene for being " clumsily paced and staged " . Murray mainly found positive aspects with the episode , explaining , " For a show that started out being a fairly dour procedural with wacky mad @-@ scientist elements , Fringe has really worked its way into that fantasy / sci @-@ fi sweet @-@ spot , where its own forward momentum makes the ridiculous look likely and arcane mythology seem well @-@ worth the time to sort through and analyze . " Other highlights Murray found was Noble 's performance , which he considered his " finest moment in the series to date , " and Olivia 's visions of the other universe .

IGN 's Ramsey Isler rated the episode with a score of 9 @. @ 2 out of 10 . He thought that after a " stereotypical , over @-@ the @-@ top " characterization in past episodes , Gaston " stepped up his portrayal " as Harris and was " annoying ... in a much more believable way . " Isler found the revelation surrounding Harris to be " deliciously surprising , " and wrote that the " last twenty minutes of the episode really ramped up the suspense and action . " However , the IGN reviewer thought that while the conversation with Grayson was an " hilarious homage to Leonard Nimoy , it seemed completely superfluous in terms of the overall storyline . " Isler concluded his review on a positive note by focusing on Noble 's performance , calling it " one of the best scenes [he] has ever done as Walter Bishop . It was emotional , believable , and perfectly accurate for a character that has a high level of self @-@ loathing and remorse for what he 's done , and the hopeless frustration of not being able to remember exactly why he did it . "