

= Branch Wars =

" Branch Wars " is the tenth episode of the fourth season of the American comedy television series The Office ? the show 's sixty @-@ third episode overall . Written by Mindy Kaling and directed by Joss Whedon , the episode originally aired in the United States on November 1 , 2007 on NBC . The episode marks the return of season three regular Rashida Jones , who plays Jim 's former girlfriend Karen , now Regional Manager of Dunder Mifflin Utica .

Karen tries to " poach " Stanley from Dunder Mifflin Scranton , and Stanley informs the branch that he is leaving . In revenge , Michael and Dwight trick Jim into traveling to the company 's Utica branch , where the group attempts to play a prank on Karen . Back at the office , Pam , Oscar , and Toby try to hold their club meeting , with disastrous results .

= = Plot = =

Karen Filippelli (Jones) attempts to lure Stanley Hudson (Leslie David Baker) away from Scranton by offering him a pay raise . Regional Manager Michael Scott (Steve Carell) , believing that Karen is doing this to get back at Assistant Regional Manager Jim Halpert (John Krasinski) for " dumping " her , decides to retaliate . Michael and salesman Dwight Schrute (Rainn Wilson) trick Jim into joining them on a trip to Utica to prank Karen ? s branch . After a failed attempt to steal the branch 's industrial copier , the group is discovered by Karen , who chastises them in her office . Privately , she mocks Jim for devising such an elaborate ruse to see her . Jim ? s attempts to deflect the issue are unsuccessful , letting slip that he and Pam are happily dating . The group returns to Scranton , where Michael bids Stanley farewell . Stanley decides to stay in Scranton , revealing that his threat was a bluff to get a raise .

Meanwhile , Pam Beesly (Jenna Fischer) , Oscar Martinez (Oscar Nunez) , and Toby Flenderson (Paul Lieberstein) form a " Finer Things Club " , discussing literature , music , and the arts . Their meetings are regularly disrupted by other employees , particularly Andy Bernard (Ed Helms) , whose desperate efforts to join prove unsuccessful . Pam invites Jim to join the club but regrets the move when , during the discussion of Angela 's Ashes , Jim merely speaks in an Irish brogue and reveals that he hasn ? t actually read the book .

= = Production = =

" Branch Wars " was the second Office episode directed by Joss Whedon , the creator of the television series Buffy the Vampire Slayer and Firefly . Whedon had previously directed the third season episode " Business School " . The episode was the seventh Office episode written by Mindy Kaling , who also acts for the show as customer service representative Kelly Kapoor . " Branch Wars " marked the return of Karen Filippelli , who was a regular as a member of the Dunder Mifflin Stamford branch , and later Dunder Mifflin Scranton in the third season . Her last previous appearance was the fourth season premiere Fun Run , although she only appeared in one scene . Utica salesman Ben Nugent , although not appearing on screen , is heard via a telephone conference and shares the same name as Kaling 's former real @-@ life boyfriend , Benjamin Nugent .

= = Reception = =

" Branch Wars " received a 5 @.@ 0 / 7 in the Nielsen ratings , meaning that five percent of households were tuned in at any given moment and seven percent of all televisions in use at the time were tuned into the program . The episode was watched by 8 @.@ 39 million viewers and achieved a 4 @.@ 5 / 11 in the ages 18 ? 49 demographic . Mindy Kaling 's writing in the episode was nominated for " Outstanding Writing in a Comedy Series " in the 2008 NAACP Image Awards .

Oscar Dahl , a senior writer for BuddyTV , gave the episode a favorable review and stated that " Tonight 's Office was possibly the funniest of the season . " Christine Fenno of Entertainment

Weekly stated that " ... ' Branch Wars ' , penned by Mindy Kaling , didn 't measure up to the brilliance of last week 's episode (' Local Ad ') but served up plenty of laughs . " Travis Fickett of IGN stated that " This episode feels like it comes in two halves , one that works and one that doesn 't so much " when referring to the trip to Utica , and " The Finer Things Club " , respectively , but later pointed out that " Despite being a somewhat bumpy ride , the episode has a fair number of big laughs . " Fickett particularly enjoyed Jim 's character in the episode , and his actions and reactions to the situation that he became involved in .