

= The Master Plan ( Parks and Recreation ) =

" The Master Plan " is the 23rd and penultimate episode of the second season of the American comedy television series Parks and Recreation , and the 29th overall episode of the series . It originally aired on NBC in the United States on May 13 , 2010 . In the episode , Pawnee 's major budget problems result in state auditors ( Adam Scott and Rob Lowe ) arriving to make major cuts , much to Leslie 's horror and Ron 's delight . Meanwhile , Andy contemplates asking April to be his girlfriend , and Tom seeks a new girlfriend .

The episode was directed by Dean Holland and written by series co @-@ creator Michael Schur . " The Master Plan " featured the first series appearances by Scott and Lowe , who became permanent cast members as characters Ben Wyatt and Chris Traeger . The episode also introduced Natalie Morales as Lucy , Tom 's new girlfriend , and featured guest appearances by Ralph Richeson as " the ghoulish man " and regular series guests Ben Schwartz , April Marie Eden and Alison Becker .

The idea of Pawnee 's governmental problems were inspired by news reports at the time of a number of states shutting down schools , parks and other services due to the global recession . " The Master Plan " marked the end of the romantic relationship between Ann ( Rashida Jones ) and Mark ( Paul Schneider ) , which allowed for the eventual departure of Schneider from the series . A subplot featuring romantic elements between Ann and Chris was a late addition to the script to better connect Lowe to the cast .

This episode features six characters ( five main characters ) meeting their eventual spouses for the first time . Ann and Chris meet , Leslie and Ben meet and Tom and Lucy meet .

According to Nielsen Media Research , " The Master Plan " was seen by 4 @.@ 28 million household viewers , a five percent increase in viewership compared to the previous episode , " Telethon " . The episode received generally positive reviews , with several commentators praising the addition of Scott and Lowe to the cast , although some said Scott had more long @-@ term potential as a character than Lowe . " The Master Plan " and the rest of the second season of Parks and Recreation was released on DVD in the United States on November 30 , 2010 , which included an extended 30 @-@ minute " producer 's cut " of the episode .

= = Plot = =

Leslie ( Amy Poehler ) excitedly prepares to present the parks department budget proposal , or " master plan " . However , city manager Paul ( Phil Reeves ) , announces due to Pawnee 's huge budget deficit , all proposals will be postponed indefinitely . State auditors have been sent by the governor to solve the impasse , which makes Leslie fear severe cuts . Ron ( Nick Offerman ) is delighted because he hates any government spending , which leads him to heated arguments with Leslie . Meanwhile , April ( Aubrey Plaza ) is turning 21 and is having her birthday party at Tom 's ( Aziz Ansari ) favorite nightclub , the Snakehole Lounge . Andy ( Chris Pratt ) debates whether to ask April to be his girlfriend , but worries about the age difference because he is 29 . Ann ( Rashida Jones ) has broken up with Mark ( Paul Schneider ) , who was left confused because they never fought or even argued with each other . Ann explains their relationship simply did not have the right chemistry for her .

State auditors Chris Traeger ( Rob Lowe ) and Ben Wyatt ( Adam Scott ) soon arrive , and the extremely cheerful Chris paints an optimistic picture of how they will fix the budget , but leaves the details to the more serious Ben . When Ben explains they will need to slash the budget of every department by nearly 40 or 50 percent , Leslie angrily lashes out at Ben , who responds to her that the poorly managed government is to blame . Later , at April 's party , Tom desperately tries to pick up women , but to no avail , while Leslie and Ann get extremely drunk together . Andy and April appear to be getting along , but when he goes to the bar to get a drink for April , a drunken Ann flirts with him . An upset April flirts with Tom 's annoying friend Jean @-@ Ralphio ( Ben Schwartz ) to make Andy jealous . Andy gets upset , believing he misread April 's signals all along , and April later regrets what she did . Ben arrives at the party and tries to smooth things out with a drunken Leslie ,

but she again angrily lashes out at him .

The next morning , Ann fears she made out with someone at the party but cannot remember . She eventually learns she made out with Chris , who shows a romantic interest in her . Tom returns to the Snakehole Lounge to close his tab , where he meets the bartender , Lucy ( Natalie Morales ) , who makes fun of his efforts to pick up women . The two get along and Lucy gives Tom her phone number , to his immense pleasure . Leslie decides to apologize to Ben , and he invites her out for a beer . As they finally start to get along , Leslie realizes Ben was the mayor of a small town called Partridge , Minnesota . It was national news because he was only 18 when elected , and he promptly drove the entire government into the ground . Ben became a state auditor to prove he can be responsible and restart his political career . Later , at the parks department budget meeting , Chris and Ben reveal Pawnee 's budget crisis was far worse than previously thought and that the Pawnee government will shut down until further notice , horrifying Leslie and delighting Ron .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing = = =

" The Master Plan " was written by Parks and Recreation co @-@ creator , Michael Schur . It was his fifth writing credit for the series after , " Pilot " , " Greg Pikitis " , " Christmas Scandal " , and " Galentine 's Day " . The idea of state auditors visiting Pawnee , and the subsequent government shutdown , was inspired by news reports at the time of a number of states considering shutting down schools , parks and other services due to the global recession . In particular , Schur cited stories about Kansas City closing down several of their public schools , and Idaho threatening to shut down the state parks department . Similar measures were being discussed in such states as New York , New Jersey and California . This was in keeping with efforts by the Parks and Recreation writers to be more topical with second season episodes . Upon learning of the spending freeze , Ron and Leslie engage in heated arguments over the function of government , with Leslie insisting the government is meant to provide social services and Ron advocating as little government intervention as possible . Throughout most of the second season , much of the relationship between Leslie and Ron focused on the two developing a mutual respect for each other . However , with the introduction of the Ben Wyatt character and the conflict over budget problems in Pawnee , the writers included these arguments between Leslie and Ron to illustrate their conflicting political ideologies and develop tension amid the character and the city hall setting .

" The Master Plan " marked the end of the romantic relationship between Mark and Ann , which had lasted throughout the entire second season . This allowed for the eventual departure of Paul Schneider , who was leaving the series at the end of the second season . The title of " The Master Plan " stemmed from the fact that real @-@ life municipal planning documents in small American towns are often called the " master plan " , like the one Leslie refers to in the episode . Schur said of this , " It seems so funny to call the municipal budgets and planning documents for a small city in Indiana the ' master plan ' . " Schur said the Parks and Recreation writing staff believed the title of the episode was appropriate because the subplots of " The Master Plan " revolved around the various plans of the characters . While Leslie is dealing with the literal master plan for the Pawnee budget proposal , April 's plan is to seek a romantic relationship with Andy , and Tom 's plan is to find a girlfriend at April 's birthday party .

The idea of Ann making out with Chris Traeger was not part of the original screenplay , but was added after the first cast read @-@ through of the script . The writing staff felt that while Ben was immediately connected to Leslie and the other characters through his role in eliminating wasteful spending at Pawnee , Chris still needed something to more strongly connect to the cast , and the subplot with Ann was determined to be a funny way to do it . In one scene , after Ben explains the need for severe budget cuts at Pawnee , Ron asks Leslie , " What 's a not gay way to ask him to go camping with me ? " That line was not in the first draft of the script , but was added during filming as a possible alternative line for the editors to choose from later . The staff found it so funny , however ,

that they chose to use it and the original line was never filmed .

During another scene at the Snakehole Lounge , a drunken Leslie angrily yells to Ben , " I just talked to everybody in this bar and nobody wants you here . " That line was written by Harris Wittels , who wrote past screenplays for other Parks and Recreation episodes . During the end credits , Andy sings a song he wrote for April called " November , " which includes the lyrics , " Let 's spread our wings and fly on a date . " This is also a reference to " Woman of the Year , " in which Andy explained every song he writes includes either the lyrics , " Spread your wings and fly " or " You deserve to be a champion . " Schur , who wrote the words to " November " , said it was especially challenging working one of those phrases into a love song .

= = = Casting = = =

" The Master Plan " marked the first appearance of Adam Scott , who also appeared in the subsequent season finale " Freddy Spaghetti " and became a regular cast member during the third season . Scott left the Starz comedy Party Down to join the Parks and Recreation cast , a decision he made in part because it was unclear whether Starz would renew the series : " It was a matter of me asking Starz if it was going to continue , and them saying they weren 't ready to make that decision . I couldn 't pass up the opportunity on Parks and Rec for a show that could possibly not exist anymore . " Schur said when the Ben Wyatt character was written , Scott was envisioned as the " dream scenario " for casting . Schur described Scott as " brilliant and funny " and praised his comedic range : " There just aren 't that many people with a comedic range that spans ' Step Brothers ' to ' Party Down . ' " . Several commentators said Ben Wyatt closely resembles the character Scott played on Party Down , Henry Pollard . While Ben was a politician who found great success at a young age then suffered a downfall , Henry was an actor who became a caterer after his acting career declined . Scott , however , said he feels they are " vastly different characters and circumstances " . The idea of a character trying to rebuild a government career following a humiliating public failure was one of the original ideas for the series of Parks and Recreation in general , but one that was ultimately not used until the Ben Wyatt character was introduced . During the scene when Ben explains his failed mayoral tenure , shots of a newspaper clip with images of the character 's prom pictures are shown . Those pictures are the actual high school prom photos of actor Adam Scott .

The episode also featured the first in a string of guest appearances by actor Rob Lowe , who had recently departed from the ABC drama series Brothers & Sisters . As a joke , Rob Lowe 's credit during the opening credits reads " and introducing Rob Lowe " . Unlike Scott , Lowe was originally not expected to join the regular cast , but rather make guest appearances in " Freddy Spaghetti " and six third season episodes before departing the show . However , after those episodes were filmed , Lowe later joined the show as a regular cast member . Lowe said he loved playing the part , which he described as " a big fat nerd " and " the most positive person in the world [ with ] unrelenting enthusiasm " , adding , " He is also very , very intense and specific . So whether he 's ordering how he would like his water or describing the kind of colors he wants on a graph , everything means the world to him . " Throughout the episode , whenever he meets someone new , Chris Traeger points directly at their face and slowly repeats their name . Schur said this habit was the first element the writers conceived for the character . In one line of the episode , while describing his exercise regimen and supplements , " Scientists believe that the first human being who will live 150 years has already been born . I believe I am that human being . " That line was inspired by Schur 's wife , J. J. Philbin , who had recently read an article about that scientific prediction and felt it applied to the character . Parks and Recreation was suffering in the Nielsen ratings when " The Master Plan " aired , and it was hoped Lowe 's appearance would help increase viewership . Lowe 's performance was heavily publicized in advance of the episode 's original broadcast .

" The Master Plan " featured several other guest appearances . Ben Schwartz returned to his recurring role as Tom 's fast @-@ talking friend , Jean @-@ Ralphio . Natalie Morales , best known for her role in the ABC Family science @-@ fiction dramedy The Middleman , made her first Parks and Recreation appearance in the episode as Lucy , a Pawnee bartender and romantic interest for

Tom . The scene between Lucy and Tom at the Snakehole Lounge was the same scene Natalie Morales read during her audition for the part , although the dialogue was rewritten slightly before filming . The line with Lucy asking Tom if he flirted with so many women because he was expected to have a " 43 @-@ way " was added during the rewrite . Ralph Richeson , best known for playing the unkempt hotel employee Richardson in the HBO drama series Deadwood , briefly appeared as an unkempt man seeking a marriage license in the Pawnee town hall . Richeson is credited as " Ghouliah Man " in the episode 's end credits . April Marie Eden , who played beauty contest winner Trish lanetta in the episode " Beauty Pageant " , reprised that role in " The Master Plan " , in scenes where Tom flirted with her relentlessly at the Snakehole Lounge . Alison Becker , who played local reporter Shauna Malwae @-@ Tweep in several past episodes , filmed several scenes where she and Andy flirt , but he ultimately rejects her due to his feelings for April . All of these scenes were cut from the final episode due to length restrictions , which Schur said he regretted because he found Becker very funny .

= = = Filming = = =

" The Master Plan " was directed by Dean Holland , his third directorial credit after " Greg Pikitis " and " Sweetums " . The script read @-@ through and filming took place in March 2010 . Rob Lowe 's first day of filming took place on his birthday , March 17 , which was the same day the scene where he kissed Rashida Jones was shot . The original cut of " The Master Plan " was a full 30 minutes and had to be cut down to 22 minutes for broadcast . The staff of Parks and Recreation had difficulty editing the episode down because the script involved so many interconnected subplots between the characters . Screenwriter Harris Wittels said , " As soon as you 'd cut one thing , you had to cut something else because it was tied to another piece . " Among the scenes cut were an extended cold open in which Ron gives April a handgun for her 21st birthday , much to the chagrin of Leslie . Also cut was a scene in which Ron chastises Leslie for yelling at Ben at the Snakehole Lounge and orders her to apologize to him so she will not be fired . Instead , the episode was changed to reflect that Leslie decided to apologize to Ben herself , with the line from Leslie " I have to go swallow my pride " added just before she spoke to Ben .

During one scene , Ann and Mark have a discussion at J.J. ' s Diner , a Pawnee restaurant that had previously been featured in the episodes " The Reporter " and " Summer Catalog " . In all three episodes , a different interior set is used , although the exterior building shots are the same . At the Snakehole Lounge , Tom flirts with a woman by giving her a bottle cap " to remember him by " , then later unsuccessfully tries to find her again in the nightclub . This was not part of the script , and was conceived and added to the episode about 10 minutes before the scene was shot . During one of the final scenes , when Ben informs Leslie and Ron that the Pawnee government will be shut down , Ron looks directly at the camera and makes a comical grin . Although Leslie is supposed to be horrified by the news , the scene had to be re @-@ shot many times because she kept laughing at Ron 's facial expression .

= = Cultural references = =

Andy says of Jean @-@ Ralphio , " That Ralph Macchio guy 's a total douche . " This is a reference to Ralph Macchio , an actor who appeared in the 1983 drama film The Outsiders , which also starred Rob Lowe . The line was improvised by actor Chris Pratt . In another scene , Ben tells Leslie the song he played after getting sworn in as an 18 @-@ year @-@ old mayor was " Whoomp ! ( There It Is ) " , a 1993 hip hop song by the duo Tag Team . The episode features several quotes from author and outdoorsman Jack London . Among them , which Leslie reads from her master plan proposal , is , " You can 't wait for inspiration . You have to go after it with a club , " and " So I say the function of man is to live , not to exist . I would rather that my spark should burn out in a brilliant blaze than it should be stifled by dry @-@ rot . " The original script included about one dozen different London quotes , but most were cut from the final draft . Schur said he used London quotes because he believed the author was one both Leslie and Ron would admire . At one point in the

episode , while discussing April 's birthday , Leslie says , " Damn the wheel of the world ! Why must it continually turn over ? " to which Ron replied approvingly , " Jack London . " The line was improvised by actor Nick Offerman .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast , " The Master Plan " was seen by an estimated 4 @. @ 28 million household viewers , according to Nielsen Media Research . It marked a five percent increase in viewership compared to the previous episode , " Telethon " , and was the only NBC series on May 13 to show an improvement in ratings over the previous week ; the comedies The Office , Community , 30 Rock and The Marriage Ref all saw declines . HitFix writer Daniel Fienberg did not believe Rob Lowe 's guest appearance significantly helped the Parks and Recreation ratings , calling the increase " a statistically irrelevant bump " . " The Master Plan " received a 2 @. @ 7 rating / 5 share among overall viewers , and a 2 @. @ 0 rating / 6 share among viewers between ages 18 and 49 . Parks and Recreation ranked third in its timeslot , behind the CBS reality series Survivor : Heroes vs. Villains and the Fox crime drama Bones , but received higher ratings than the ABC science @- @ fiction drama FlashForward and the first season finale of the CW Network supernatural fantasy series The Vampire Diaries .

" The Master Plan " received generally positive reviews . Matt Fowler of IGN said the budget problems created strong character development potential for Leslie and comedic opportunities for Ron . Fowler also enjoyed that the normally @- @ dissolute Tom formed an authentic romantic connection , and said Chris Pratt brought " a certain naturalness " to a role that could otherwise have been overly idiotic . Todd VanDerWerff of The A.V. Club strongly praised the episode , praising Rob Lowe and the entire regular cast . He declared Parks and Recreation the best television show since Arrested Development , and said , " As much as I like the ' 50 jokes a minute ' style of comedies ... I 'm a sucker for a show where the characters are as well @- @ wrought and as purely funny as they are on this show . " HitFix writer Alan Sepinwall praised the implementation of the new characters , particularly the fact that the script did not rely too heavily on them . Sepinwall also said the episode balanced well the workplace humor with the romantic subplots between Leslie and Ben , April and Andy , and Ann and Chris .

New York Daily News writer David Hinckley said Lowe and Scott were strong additions to the show , and that Scott 's character in Parks was better than his character in Party Down . Hinckley said the humor " remains happily rooted in the show 's eccentric characters " , although he said some of the jokes , like Andy 's " November " song " sometimes feels like a series of short sketches instead of a show " . New York magazine writer Steve Kandell described Lowe as entertaining but " one @- @ note " , but said Adam Scott was " much more promising and nuanced " , with better potential for a romantic interest for Leslie than previous guest stars like Will Arnett and Justin Theroux . Kandell felt Schneider 's imminent departure from the series seemed unceremonious , and praised Nick Offerman 's reactions of " unbridled ecstasy " at the idea of cutbacks and the government shutdown . Eric Hochberger of TV Fanatic expressed doubt about the long @- @ term effectiveness of Lowe 's character , and said the April and Andy subplot felt " dragged out for yet another week " . However , he praised the script , the addition of Scott , and the performance of the entire cast , especially Rashida Jones and Aziz Ansari . Hochberger said , " I 'm not convinced Parks and Recreation could have a bad episode at this point in the season . " TV Squad writer Kona Gallagher felt " The Master Plan " was an especially important episode due to the addition of the Lowe and Scott characters , the beginning of Mark 's exit from the series and the economic problems for Pawnee . However , Gallagher also said the episode felt mostly like a preparation for the third season .

= = DVD release = =

After " The Master Plan " aired , a producer 's cut of the episode was featured on the official NBC website . It included eight extra minutes , which consisted of deleted scenes , an extended ending and additional footage with Lowe and Scott . This version of the episode , along with the 22 @- @

minute television version and the other 23 second season episodes of Parks and Recreation , was later released on a four @-@ disc DVD set in the United States on November 30 , 2010 . The DVD included deleted scenes for each episode . It also included a commentary track for " The Master Plan " featuring Nick Offerman , Adam Scott , Dean Holland , Michael Schur , Harris Wittels and Parks and Recreation producer Morgan Sackett .