

= Threat Level Midnight =

" Threat Level Midnight " is the seventeenth episode of the seventh season of the American comedy television series The Office , and the show 's 143rd episode overall . It originally aired on NBC on February 17 , 2011 . The episode was written by B. J. Novak and directed by Tucker Gates .

The series depicts the everyday lives of office employees in the Scranton , Pennsylvania branch of the fictional Dunder Mifflin Paper Company . In this episode , Michael Scott (Steve Carell) screens his action film Threat Level Midnight to the office after eleven years of writing , shooting , re @-@ shooting , and editing . This film within a film features Michael as Agent Michael Scarn , Dwight Schrute (Rainn Wilson) as Scarn 's robot butler , and Jim Halpert (John Krasinski) as archnemesis " Goldenface " .

The episode 's genesis stems from the second season entry " The Client " , in which the office discovers Michael 's incomplete screenplay for Threat Level Midnight . The episode features the reappearance of several actors and actresses who had not appeared on the show in years . Due to the nature of Michael 's film , scenes were filmed to create the illusion as if they had been shot years prior to the episode . " Threat Level Midnight " was viewed by 6 @. @ 41 million viewers and received a 3 @. @ 3 rating among adults between the age of 18 and 49 . The episode was the highest @- @ rated NBC series of the week that it aired , and received acclaim from critics , many of whom enjoyed the humor and the continuity references to the show 's past .

= = Plot Synopsis = =

Michael Scott (Steve Carell) screens his action film Threat Level Midnight to the office after eleven years of writing , shooting , re @-@ shooting and editing .

The plot for the movie is as follows . After Scarn is forced into retirement due to the death of his wife Catherine Zeta @- @ Scarn , the President of the United States of America requests that he prevent Goldenface from blowing up the NHL All @- @ Star Game and killing several hostages . Scarn goes undercover and learns how to play hockey , killing another hockey player to make it into the game , but after confronting Goldenface , he is shot . He later recuperates but learns that the President was in on it all along , leaking footage of Scarn killing the hockey player . Guilt @- @ ridden , he goes to a bar to drown his sorrows . The patrons of the bar sing a song called " The Scarn " and do an accompanying dance , which cheers Scarn up immensely . With his courage restored , Scarn is able to save the day and blow up Goldenface in the process .

Michael had shown the office a " work in progress " cut of the film years ago , but the employees all mistook it for a comedy , and Michael was so offended by their laughing that he shut down the screening . Everyone is very eager to see Michael 's film , albeit only because they all appear in it , and Pam Halpert (Jenna Fischer) warns everyone to be mindful of how sensitive Michael is and not laugh . However , Pam is unable to keep herself from crying out in horror when she sees her mother cast in the film as a scantily clad nurse , and Jim Halpert (John Krasinski) fails to fully suppress his laughter at " The Scarn " scene , so Michael angrily stops the movie and takes it away . Michael asks Holly Flax (Amy Ryan) what she thought and she does not seem impressed . Michael gets angry at her because he considers the film his " dream " , and he then offers the rest of the office the opportunity to finish seeing the film , which they happily accept . While watching , Michael begins noting how the film is not really very good ; he steps outside and tells Holly that it is a bad film but also one that people are having fun watching . They sit down and laugh with the rest of the office through the film 's conclusion .

= = Production = =

= = = Writing and casting = = =

This episode was written by executive producer B. J. Novak , who also portrays Ryan Howard on the show . It was directed by Tucker Gates , his fourth directing credit of the series . Michael 's screenplay for Threat Level Midnight was the subplot for second season episode " The Client " , and had subsequently been referenced to in " E @-@ mail Surveillance " , " Product Recall " , " Money " , " Dinner Party " , and " Prince Family Paper " . The idea for the episode came from series ' star Steve Carell , who was leaving the show at the end of the season . He said that he enjoyed the idea behind the " Threat Level Midnight " script and wanted to do a story centered on it .

Several former recurring and minor characters make reappearances . Rashida Jones , who portrayed Karen Fillipelli , noted that it felt like " a time warp " to be asked to appear on the show . Jan Levinson , Michael 's former boss and lover played by Melora Hardin , reappeared in the " Jan @-@ as @-@ diva " mode . Tony Gardner , portrayed by Mike Bruner , cameos as a pianist . Novak rationalized that , despite Gardner being fired on his first day , the character might have appeared in the movie because he was " intrigued " and " flattered " that Michael ? after apologizing " profusely " ? asked him , or that he might have been " lonely " .

Andy Buckley , who portrayed David Wallace , former CFO of Dunder Mifflin , was originally billed as a guest star for this episode and his character was supposed to have a part in Michael 's movie . When NBC first aired the episode , Wallace 's scenes were not shown . It was revealed by Novak that , in the script , Wallace was Michael 's first choice as Goldenface , but turned it down because " it wouldn 't look good to people at Corporate " . Furthermore , Buckley filmed a talking head interview , which had his character exclaiming his regret in not taking the role . This scene was deleted due to time constraints . The scene does not appear on the Season 7 DVD . The script also had a scene that brought back Amy Adams ' character Katy , but it was cut because Adams was working on a movie during the time this episode was filmed . Ellie Kemper , who portrays Erin Hannon on the series , did not appear in the movie ; Novak reasoned that Michael had finished his filming long before she arrived at the office , and had spent the remaining years " editing and procrastinating " .

= = = Filming = = =

Writer Novak cites the episode as the " most conceptually ambitious " in the show 's history . More than half the episode consisted of footage from the film . Originally , the producers considered showing just the movie , but they felt that it " would feel like a gimmick or experiment " , and so it was decided that the film would be intercut with shots of the office reacting to the film . In order to make the film seem as if Michael had created it , the film used was colorized in post @-@ production to make it seem as if it were of a cheaper quality than the normal high @-@ quality film that the series used . Certain shooting methods , like hand @-@ held and zooms , were nixed , except for in cases where they could be presented in a " poorly @-@ executed " manner . This was done in a way to make it appear that Michael at least knew what he was doing ; Novak explained that the crew " didn 't want the joke of the episode to be how bad he was at filmmaking " because it would " be a little easy and a little out of character " . To create the fake dummy of Toby that exploded , Paul Lieberstein was required to spend several hours in a full @-@ face mold that reportedly " unnerved him greatly " . Two molds were taken . Both were filled with explosives , but one was filled with fake blood . Both were shot with slow @-@ motion cameras . However , the dummy with the fake blood in it was considered " too disturbing for us and arguably too disturbing for Michael " , and so the tamer explosion was used .

Due to the nature of Michael 's film , Novak realized that scenes would have to be filmed as if they had been shot years prior to the episode . In order to successfully pull this off , editor David Rogers and script supervisor Veda Semame were tasked with " mapping out " every scene to make sure the continuity of the series was preserved . Novak later elaborated on the continuity during an interview with The Office fansite OfficeTally . The scene featuring " The Scarn " would have been filmed after the corporate merger that occurred during the third season ; this would explain Karen 's willingness to deliver her lines , as she would be " eager to fit in " . Stanley 's voiceover was recorded " on a lunch break " sometime after the fourth season episode " Local Ad " because he had " got a big kick

out of seeing himself " in Michael 's commercial . Helene 's scenes were filmed sometime when Michael was dating her during the early part of the sixth season .

In addition to the mapping out of sequences , the episode features a short sequence that was shot to look as if it had been filmed during the show 's second season , although the scene itself was filmed in 2011 . Novak explained that , in order to recreate the shot , great lengths had to be taken to ensure the authenticity of the footage . Series Department Head make @-@ up artist LaVerne Caracuzzi @-@ Milazzo and Hair Department Head Kim M. Ferry " put great care and effort into recreating the characters ' looks from earlier seasons " ; Novak , for instance wore " the same bright blue shirt that Ryan used to favor " and fake sideburns were glued onto the actor 's face to " match the era " . He also stated that the actors " remembered those dynamics [from the second season] and fell right back into them . " This is not the first nor the last time this trick has been utilized on the show . For instance , during the cold opening for the sixth season episode " Shareholder Meeting " featuring " Recyclops " , a montage of Dwight harassing past receptionists was shown . Furthermore , the episode " Customer Loyalty " from the ninth season featured a montage of Jim setting up a prank supposedly during the show 's second season . Appropriately , the montage was filmed to look as if the documentarians were using archival footage of Jim ; his hair matches the style that Jim had during the first few seasons of the show .

= = Cultural references = =

According to the clippings on the wall , Scarn had previously saved the NFL , the MLB , and the NBA all @-@ star games . Several Billy Joel songs play throughout the episode , such as " Running on Ice " and " Pressure " . A Dave Barry page @-@ a @-@ day calendar is featured in a montage to illustrate the passing of time . Michael mentions both Oceans 11 and Antz in defense of his movie . The latter is featured in a diatribe Michael delivers about Woody Allen and how you should always listen to your fans . The murder scene in which Scarn kills the unnamed hockey opponent (portrayed by Oscar Martinez on the show) parodies Walter White 's first direct murder of Krazy @-@ 8 from the episode " ... And the Bag 's in the River " from Breaking Bad .

= = Reception = =

In its original American broadcast on February 17 , 2011 , " Threat Level Midnight " was viewed by an estimated 6 @.@ 41 million viewers and received a 3 @.@ 3 rating / 9 percent share among adults between the ages of 18 and 49 . This means that it was seen by 3 @.@ 3 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds , and 9 percent of all 18- to 49 @-@ year @-@ olds watching television at the time of the broadcast . This marked a decrease in viewers from the previous episode . The full film , which has a runtime of 25 minutes , is available on the seventh season DVD and Blu @-@ ray , and was made available on iTunes on February 18 , 2011 .

IGN writer Cindy White awarded the episode a 9 out of 10 ? denoting an " amazing " episode ? and praised the self @-@ awareness of Michael Scott and Steve Carell 's performance . She ultimately said the episode was good enough to be Carell 's last episode . Bonnie Stiernberg of Paste wrote that " there wasn ' t a ton of action this week , but it was just enough to keep Michael ' s personal growth on our radar as we continue to brace ourselves for his grand finale . "

Dan Forcella of TV Fanatic awarded the episode five out of five stars , and called it one of " the best episodes in years " . Forcella praised the " continuity and callbacks " . He also noted that the tension between Michael and Holly were " easing the viewers towards the end of Carrell 's [sic] stay at The Office " . Alan Sepinwall wrote that , despite the episode being " goofy [?] silly , and [and] about as nonsensical as the film itself " , " Threat Level Midnight " was " a fun , sweet tour through the history of the Michael Scott era " .

Myles McNutt of The A.V. Club awarded the episode a " B " and wrote that " there is no question that [it] is a fan service . " He called it a " mixed bag " ; on one hand , he noted that some of the scenes were clever , such as Darryl 's opinion on portraying a black president before Obama was elected . On the other hand , however , he felt that Michael 's " juvenile " response to Holly was

uncharacteristic , and the " oddly high production values and camera work " were unrealistic for the show . He also felt the inclusion of some characters ? such as Roy , Jan , or Karen ? did not make sense in the context of the series . He concluded , however , that while the episode had issues , " the actual content of Threat Level Midnight was successful in more ways than I had expected " . Rick Porter of Zap2it gave the episode a more mixed review , saying that it " had moments that were a huge amount of fun , both inside Michael 's labor of love and in people 's reaction to it . But it also felt a little bit clip @-@ showy . "