

coverstory
BY GEORGE DICKIE



Ben Schwartz

The 'Space Force' is with Netflix in Carell/Daniels comedy

After their success on the 2005-13 NBC sitcom "The Office," Greg Daniels and Steve Carell knew they wanted to work together again but didn't know on what. Then faster than you can say, "ripped from the headlines," "Space Force" was born.

Inspired by the recently created branch of the U.S. military and premiering Friday, May 29, on Netflix, the half-hour workplace comedy from co-creators Daniels and Carell places the latter in the starring role of Gen. Mark Naird, an Air Force lifer who finds himself out of his element when he's chosen to head up the nascent agency. Their goal: American boots on the moon by 2024.

Under his command at a remote Colorado base are a colorful cast of characters, among them Mallory (John Malkovich, "Bird Box"), a scientist charged with advising his boss what is and isn't possible; F. Tony Scarapuducci (Ben Schwartz, "House of Lies"), Naird's overeager media relations guru; Brad Gregory (Don Lake, "Corner Gas: The Movie"), Naird's incompetent assistant; and Captain Ali (Tawny Newsome, "Brockmire"), a prospective "Spaceman."

At home, Mark must deal with his teenage daughter Erin (Diana Silvers, "Ma"), who gets under her father's skin by dating Russian liaison Yuri/Bobby (Russian pop star Alex Sparrow).

"Space Force" and "The Office" may share some of the same creative minds but that is where viewers might find the similarities ending. The comedy here is much broader than on "The Office," which often mined uncomfortable situations for laughs, and Naird, a principled though inflexible leader, is the polar opposite of Dunder Mifflin's "cool boss" Michael Scott.

Though it's been seven years, Daniels was overjoyed to be writing again for his old friend and colleague.

"It's really great fun," he says. "I mean, it's very easy for me to write for him because of all the practice and because we're the same age and you know, we both grew up in the Northeast. ... I think we have a similar sensibility and at this point I think we have a lot of respect for each other, so even if he has a suggestion that I don't understand, I know that it's going to be good and I can trust it. So that makes it easier to work with people."

Schwartz, a writer, actor, comic and producer with a strong background in improvisation, was also thrilled to be working with Carell and Daniels, whose work he has admired over the years. For Scarapuducci – given the profane moniker "F... Tony" on the show – he envisioned a borderline competent media man and needy individual who constantly hungers for the approval of his superiors.

"My character looks at Steve's character as the father he really wants to get love from, to get recognition from, and Steve never gives it to him," he explains. "... So one of the little secrets or one of the little things I have throughout the series is I so desperately want to impress Mark Naird and get his anything, get his respect because he rarely gives it.

"So there are a couple of moments in the show where I do something correct, which is wonderful, and you get to kind of see me relish in that and see that I'm actually doing something and I'm worthwhile. So I think deep down, this guy's probably a sad guy."

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