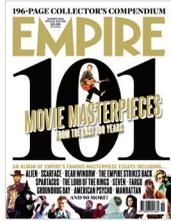


Back To The Future

1985 / RATED PG / DIRECTOR ROBERT ZEMECKIS / SCREENWRITERS ROBERT ZEMECKIS, BOB GALE / CAST MICHAEL J. FOX, CHRISTOPHER LLOYD, LEA THOMPSON

THE POWER OF (OEDIPAL) LOVE PLAYED FOR LAUGHS IN ROBERT ZEMECKIS'S TIMELESS CLASSIC



FITTINGLY, THE HISTORY OF *Back To The Future* is littered with intriguing 'what ifs': what if co-writer Bob Gale never found his father's high school yearbook in his parent's basement, prompting him to wonder if the two would be friends had they been classmates? What if 1984 mega-hit *Romancing The Stone*, directed by *BTTF* director/co-writer Robert Zemeckis, was a flop, thus denying him the Hollywood currency to get whatever he wanted made (pre-*Romancing The Stone*, the *BTTF* script had been rejected by every studio in town)? What if Universal head Sid Sheinberg got his way and had the film retitled *Spaceman From Pluto*, and it was released starring original Marty McFly Eric Stoltz (whose four weeks of filming were famously binned when the filmmakers realised the method actor wasn't nailing the comedic tone)?

Back To The Future's gestation and eventual birth may seem miraculous, but on paper, so does its ultimate critical and box office success. Here was a film that brazenly threw science fiction, comedy, romance and a rose-tinted dollop of

nostalgia into a blender, the resulting mix siphoned through a skateboarding 1980s teenager who we were asked to believe was friends with a middle-aged, time travel-inventing mad scientist. Oh, and the story revolves around the time-travelling teen meeting his teenage mother who promptly *falls in love with her yet-to-be-born son*. Even without the Oedipal plot, nothing about *BTTF* screams 'destined to become beloved by millions and spawn two hit sequels'.

Yet, that is precisely what happened thanks to a stellar, inventive script (for a masterclass in deft, fat-free storytelling where each scene propels you forward and stakes are duly raised, look no further), perfect cast and skilled director. And while it's possible to credit timing with the film connecting with audiences (*BTTF's* optimistic, prosperous baby boomer 1950s would've arrived as the perfect tonic for a 1980s middle-class America fatigued from Reaganomics), it ultimately rested on the slight shoulders of a 162cm Canadian born Michael Andrew Fox. Largely known at the time as young Republican Alex P. Keaton on sitcom

Family Ties, Fox came equipped with an innate likeability usually reserved for kittens and a formidable comedic timing honed to perfection via the rigours of episodic television. His breezy, affable charm almost single-handedly glosses over the inherent preposterousness of *Back To The Future's* plot. And consider this: Fox's energetic performance was delivered over a 100 day shoot where he was getting five hours of sleep daily thanks to shooting *Family Ties* during the day and *BTTF* nights and weekends.

Fox's boyish energy may have kept the pace up, but it was Christopher Lloyd, then 47, who set it with his gigawatt-producing turn as wild-eyed, wild-haired inventor Emmett 'Doc' Brown. The entire cast may be note perfect, but it's ultimately Lloyd's show: his Doc is a hyper-caffeinated lunatic-genius, emitting an eccentric charisma usually reserved for cult leaders. Doc's appeal to a teen who could be hanging out with his girlfriend instead is apparent, and it's their unlikely loyal friendship and mutual admiration that serves as the film's true heart.

On release, nobody had more riding on *Back To The Future* than the writing team of Robert Zemeckis and Bob Gale: three of their comedies — *I Wanna Hold Your Hand*, *Used Cars* and *1941* — flopped despite Steven Spielberg's involvement (executive producing the first two and directing the latter). The pair must've felt significantly better after initial test screenings saw audiences, according to EP Frank Marshall, go "up to the ceiling". The August premiere was moved to July 3 — just over two months since the film's wrap — requiring extra editors to work 24 hour shifts. Their hard graft paid off: *BTTF* spent 11 weeks at number one and became 1985's highest grossing film.

Thirty years later, the cultural impact of the film and its sequels is undeniable: October 21, 2015 was celebrated globally as 'Back To The Future Day', Nike are releasing *Part II's* 'powerlace' shoes and actual R&D has been done to make hoverboards a reality. Cool? No doubt, but still window dressing on what is simply a near-perfect film whose wit, charm and manic sense of adventure remain timeless. **JAMES JENNINGS**

"This sucker's nuclear!" Doctor Emmett Brown (Christopher Lloyd) explains power sources to Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox).

