

**TEEN SF HEROES: D.A.R.Y.L.,  
EXPLORERS & THE GOONIES**

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**NUMBER 97**

**AUGUST**



**Michael J. Fox  
zooms BACK  
TO THE FUTURE!**

**EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW  
MEL GIBSON  
on MAD MAX  
BEYOND THUNDERDOME:**

**"He's a killer with  
a code of ethics!"**

**COCOON**

Ron Howard unwraps  
his fantasy hit

**CHRIS WALKEN**

Bond villain admits:  
"I wanted to be 007!"

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Her sidekick in swordplay

**LIFEFORCE**

Soulsuckers from space

**Special Previews:**

**THE BLACK  
CAULDRON**

Disney's animated epic

**FRIGHT NIGHT**

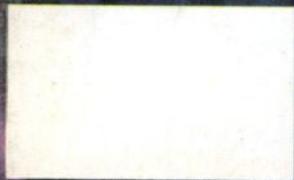
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into space**

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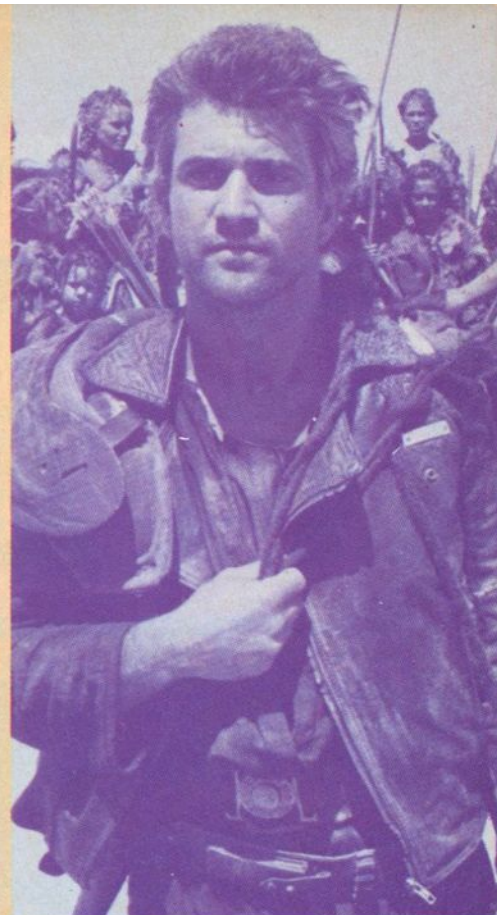
THE SCIENCE FICTION UNIVERSE

## FEATURES

- 12 "VIEW TO KILL" VILLAIN CHRISTOPHER WALKEN**  
"I wanted to be Bond!" And other secrets from the star of "Brainstorm" and "The Dead Zone"
- 15 RON HOWARD DIRECTOR OF "COCOON"**  
From Mayberry to movies, the Hollywood lifer talks about his latest hit and his former box-office "Splash"
- 23 SPAGHETTI, SPINACH, SAND & SWORDPLAY**  
Paul Smith chats about his large roles beside "Red Sonja" and "Popeye," and on the sandy road to "Dune"
- 29 COVER STORY: THE MEL GIBSON INTERVIEW**  
The man behind Mad Max offers insight into The Road Warrior and his adventure "Beyond Thunderdome"
- 34 WHO IS "D.A.R.Y.L."?**  
Barret Oliver plays this perfect boy and looks at his other genre parts in "The Neverending Story," "Cocoon" and "Frankenweenie"
- 36 THAT SPECIAL DAY IN JULY**  
Relive Disneyland's opening day and other highlights of the Magic Kingdom's 30-year history
- 38 SHRIEK PREVIEW: "FRIGHT NIGHT"**  
There goes the neighborhood when a different kind of bat man moves in
- 40 TIME OUT FOR "GOONIES"**  
Director Richard Donner recalls the pirate perils of pre-teen adventure and the problems of "Ladyhawke"
- 44 "BACK TO THE FUTURE"**  
The story behind the story of a high-school guy from '85 who's trapped in a world without MTV
- 48 INSIDE THE "EXPLORERS"**  
Meet the four young actors who experience this grand SF fantasy
- 52 STEVE RAILSBACK OF "LIFEFORCE"**  
This "space vampire" killer could have made a million as a murderer
- 65 BOILING "THE BLACK CAULDRON"**  
A behind-the-cels examination of Disney's most magical epic yet
- 68 FAST-GUN ASTRONAUT SCOTT GLENN**  
Riding the sage in Lawrence Kasdan's "Silverado," "The Right Stuff's" Alan Shepard contemplates the return of the Western



Back to the Future—Page 44



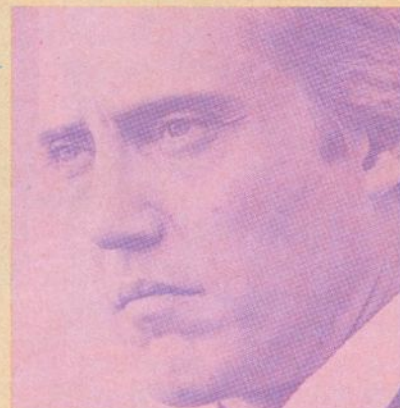
Mel Gibson—Page 29



Paul Smith—Page 23

## DEPARTMENTS

- 5 FROM THE BRIDGE**
- 6 COMMUNICATIONS**  
Reader views on "Odyssey II"
- 10 LOG ENTRIES**  
SF-TV comeback, E.T. returns & more
- 19 FAN NETWORK**  
Win some neat "Stuff"  
Plus spotlight on "Ghostbusters" fans
- 59 FUTURE LIFE**  
Sally Ride forecasts the fate of women in space
- 73 DAVID GEROLD**  
Farewell, Ted Sturgeon
- 74 LINER NOTES**



Christopher Walken—Page 12

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# BACK TO THE FUTURE

"Romancing the Stone" director Robert Zemeckis drives Michael J. Fox to 1955 in a time-traveling DeLorean for fun-filled adventure and a different kind of Oedipal complex.

By LEE GOLDBERG

The remake craze in Hollywood has reached insane proportions. *Brewster's Millions*, *Tall Blond Man with One Black Shoe* (*The Man with One Red Shoe*), *Out of the Past* (*Against All Odds*), *Unfaithfully Yours*, *The Man Who Loved Women*, *Tarzan* and *Mutiny on the Bounty* have all recently been reworked. But executive producer Steven Spielberg has outdone them all. He's remaking his film before the original is even finished.

So, in a tranquil Pasadena neighborhood, director Robert Zemeckis is doing his first science-fiction film—for the second time.

Called *Back to the Future*, this dual-life film tells the story of teenager Marty McFly, who drives an eccentric scientist's DeLorean with the added comfort feature of time travel, into the 1950s. In the past, he meets his parents as teenagers and nearly splits them up—jeopardizing his own existence.

The movie, starring Eric (Mask) Stoltz, Christopher (*Star Trek III*) Lloyd (STARLOG #82), Crispin (*Racing with the Moon*) Glover and Lea (*Jaws 3D*) Thompson was nearly complete, with six weeks of footage in the can, when Zemeckis (of *Romancing the Stone* fame), his co-writer Bob (1941) Gale, executive producers Spielberg, Kathleen (*E.T.*) Kennedy and Frank (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*) Marshall of Amblin Entertainment, and Neil (*Buckaroo Banzai*) Canton came to a devastating—and expensive—realization.

The film was not good. Eric Stoltz was all wrong.

"We realized there was a problem earlier on, but we said to ourselves, 'Let's deal with it and fix it' and we thought we were doing that. Well, dailies can be misleading," says Canton, who, like Frank Marshall, got his start as an assistant to director Peter (Mask)

Bogdanovich. "When we put it together, some shots worked, but only because they focused on other characters in the scene and not our hero."

Why did it take so long to realize *Back to the Future* should go back to the drawing board?

"Because Eric is such a good actor," Zemeckis says. "He really didn't do anything that was bad. We didn't know until we started to assemble film that he wasn't creating the right character to tell the story."

The producers were aware of Stoltz's comedic limitations at the outset.

"Eric is a very talented actor, a serious actor. We always thought his talent would enable him to handle comedy, even though he hadn't done comedy before," Canton says. "But, ultimately, he just wasn't the right person for the role. He felt uncomfortable with the character. I think he felt uncomfortable with the comedy and had second thoughts about it. Looking at the footage, we discovered that, although it was supposed to be Marty McFly's story, we weren't following Marty McFly. That made us very nervous and we just decided that it was a mistake."

Because, as Canton says, "everyone from Universal and Amblin and all of us making it agreed that it's a great project," scrapping *Back to the Future* entirely was out of the question. Scrapping Stoltz and starting over was not.

"We wanted to be as nice to Eric as we could be, but, in the end, there was no way around coming right out and saying, 'You have to be replaced.' We decided it was best for Bob Zemeckis to talk with him first," Canton explains. "I think a part of Eric was relieved that it happened and he took it well."

Faced with a July 19 release date, and an unexpected six additional weeks of shooting,

a replacement had to be found fast.

"At that point, if we had our choice of anyone in world," Canton says, "our choice would have been Michael J. Fox."

Fox, the 23-year-old star of NBC's comedy hit *Family Ties*, had originally been considered for the role but wasn't approached because of his commitment to the series. Now, the producers didn't care if Fox had to divide his energies between *Family Ties* and *Back to the Future*. They wanted him.

"He's great. He has a terrific comedy sense and sharp timing," Canton says. "He's a real '80s kid and so much of what this story is about is an '80s kid uncomfortably trying to deal with being in the '50s."

Spielberg gave a copy of the script to his friend, *Family Ties* producer Gary David Goldberg, who is writing *Reel to Real*, a script for Spielberg based on Spielberg's life.

"I went up to Gary's office and he gave me this script and said, 'They're going to call you tomorrow,'" Fox recalls. "He had set up with Steven that it would be copacetic if I did both the series and the movie. So, it worked out in just a couple of days."

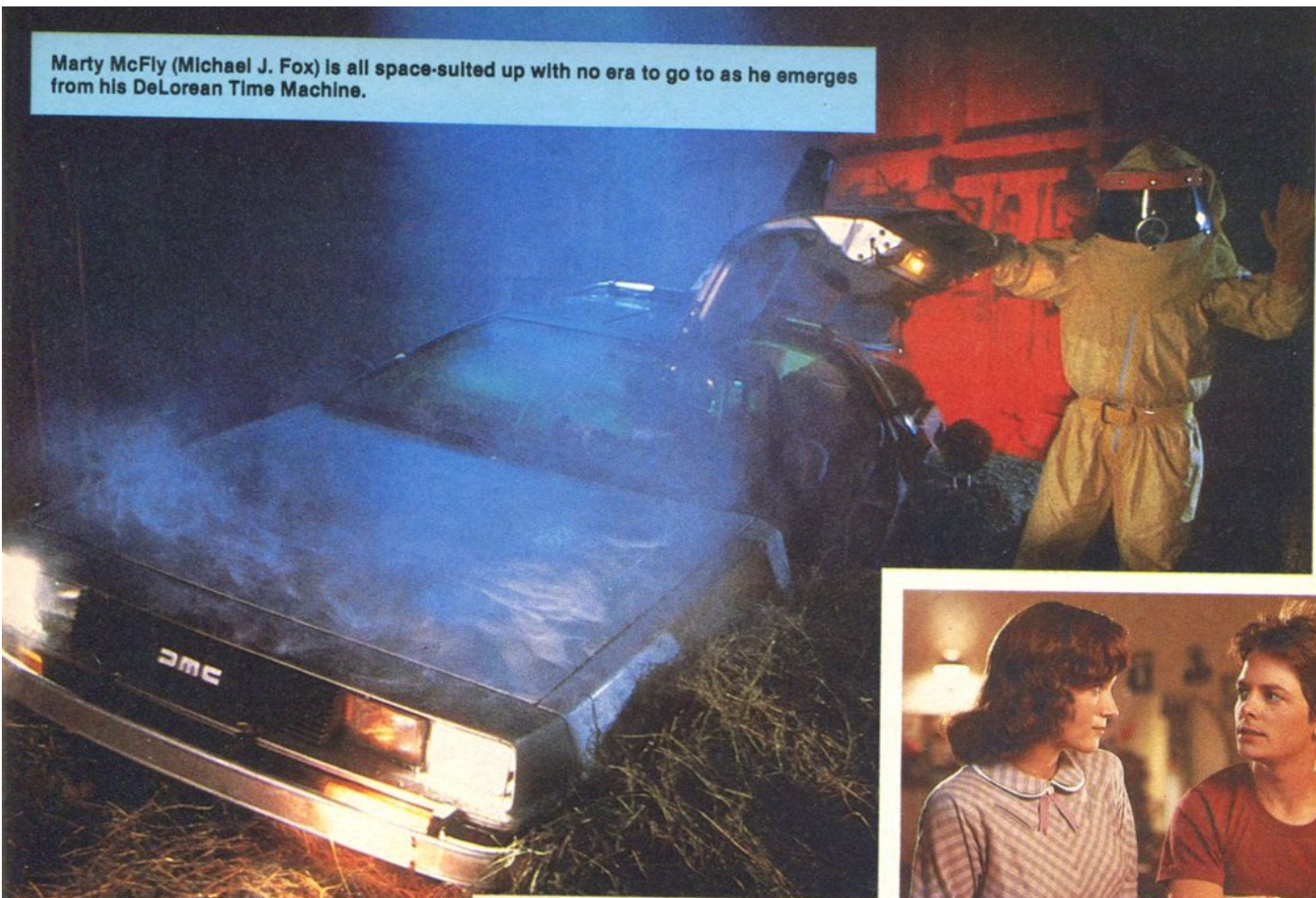
Sets that had been destroyed were rebuilt. The remaining cast and the entire crew were rehired. Millions of extra dollars were spent. And, once again, the *Back to the Future* crew transformed a Pasadena street into Elmdale, USA, 1955.

## The Drawing Board

"It's awful to be doing this over again, but it's good because we have been able to improve everything. We haven't slipped. We have been smart enough to say, 'OK, we made a mistake, let's go back,'" director Zemeckis explains between shots. He watches while crew members search for the hidden wind chimes which ruined the previous shot.



Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) is all space-suited up with no era to go to as he emerges from his DeLorean Time Machine.



Marty's mom Lorraine (Lea Thompson), a teenager in 1955, becomes infatuated with the new kid in time (Michael J. Fox).



ALL BACK TO THE FUTURE PHOTOS: RALPH NELSON. JRCOPYRIGHT 1985 UNIVERSAL CITY STUDIOS

Fox and Crispin Glover, who plays Marty's father, George McFly (in both young and old versions), sneak away for an orange soda.

"It's nice, in a way, to get to do it over, which is what every filmmaker dreams about," Zemeckis adds. "But, when you actually get there, it's very hard on everybody psychologically."

"It was sometimes depressing for everyone concerned. What we set out to do was make the scenes better," says Canton. "But, obviously, Michael brings something different to the scenes. We are feeling better about them now, but we're still back on the same sets and locations we used before."

A street usually lined with Hondas, Mercedes and Toyotas was again cleared and cluttered with Packards, Studebakers and obese Chevys. Picnic tables were set up as caterers prepared barbecued chicken and watermelon for lunch while Zemeckis shot in the backyard of a nearby house. To observers, it looked like a 1950s block picnic staged by a family who really enjoy shooting home movies.

And it was.

"If you asked anyone on the crew, I think they would say we have become a real family because people really have spent so much time together. We've gotten very used to being with one another," Canton says. "During this shoot, we've had a total of four appendectomies and four children. I had a daughter, the electrician had a little boy, the sound mixer, a girl, and the stunt coordinator, a

boy. Appendices were removed from a wardrobe person, an electrician, the first assistant director, and a production assistant."

For Michael Fox, *Back to the Future* is all new. "I just look at it as a fresh job," he says. Yet, Stoltz's presence is felt ("I wince a little when they suggest where to put the camera and someone will say, 'Last time we did this scene. . .'" ) and there's more than a passing familiarity between Marty McFly and Alex Keaton.

"I think the similarities in the characters had much to do with me being here. They wanted someone with Alex's kind of energy," Fox suggests. "I never read for them, they just watched *Family Ties* and called me up. Alex has a quality they wanted, a guy with a kind of a drive to get things done."

"I guess it's basically the same character as Alex," says Canton. "It's what Michael does best and that's why, after watching the show, we knew he was the actor we wanted."

The producers had to devise a flexible and unorthodox shooting schedule to allow Fox time to continue with the film and the TV series.

"He was doing *Family Ties* during the day and shooting with us at night," Canton says. "We shot split days, without Michael during the day and with him Mondays and Tuesday after 5 p.m. and Fridays after 10 p.m. because that's when they tape *Family Ties*."

The filmmakers were concerned that the strain would show in Fox's acting so they tried to schedule "our hardest work on Mon-

day, Tuesday and Wednesday and consequently, it took us longer than six weeks to make up our lost ground."

But it was worth it.

"Any time anyone ever wonders if we did the right thing all we have to do is watch two scenes—one with Eric and one with Michael—and it's clear we did," Canton says.

No one could be happier that *Back to the Future* is back on track than Bob Zemeckis and Bob Gale. It has been their pet project for five years. They originally wrote it in 1980 for Columbia Pictures, "which turned it down after two drafts," Gale says. "We took it all over town and couldn't get anybody interested in it because it's so unique and different from the stuff everybody was used to making."

"It's tough to know. I hope the audience doesn't think it has been done to death," Zemeckis notes. "All time travel movies are very serious, there has never been one that's fun or full of adventure and humor."

"This movie is jammed with all the great stuff you loved in *The Twilight Zone*, like the great Cliff Robertson *Zone* ["A Hundred Yards Over the Rim"] or the ones when an airplane goes into a time warp ["The Last Flight," WWI; 1939, "The Odyssey of Flight 33"]. For me, that's what's most fun about time travel. I don't particularly find it fun when a character goes to a future which is alien to us because you can't identify with anything," Zemeckis says. "*Time After Time*



was a clever time travel movie and *The Time Machine* was the greatest time travel movie ever made. What was most fun about *The Time Machine* was when the traveler went into the future we knew. When he went into a future we didn't know, it became a monster movie."

"We take some chances, which is what we like to do," claims Gale. "We believe that a knowledge of any sort of history is totally unnecessary to enjoy time travel movies. All the history you need is contained within our story. If you see *The Final Countdown*, you have to know about World War II to under-

stand it. Also, in most time movies, people accidentally go back in time and can't go home until it's convenient for the writer. Just at the point where you can't resolve the story, that's when they can go home. We don't do that. We set up the rules and then follow them."

### The Basics

When *Back to the Future* didn't generate any interest, Gale and Zemeckis abandoned it and wrote a gangster movie. "We were in pre-production with ABC Films," Gale says, "but when it was clear things weren't going

forward, Bob [Zemeckis] said, 'I'm going to direct the next decent thing that comes along.'"

The "next decent thing" happened to be *Romancing the Stone* (which Zemeckis discussed in STARLOG #85). After that film made \$70 million, Zemeckis could "pretty much call his own shots," according to Gale. The pair had planned on doing *The Shadow*, but then Universal "said we could do this movie," says Zemeckis, "and we couldn't turn that opportunity down. We've wanted to do it for years."

"*The Shadow* is something we are excited about doing, but it is, after all, someone else's character," Gale says. "We preferred to do our own thing the way we wanted to do it. We will do *The Shadow* next."

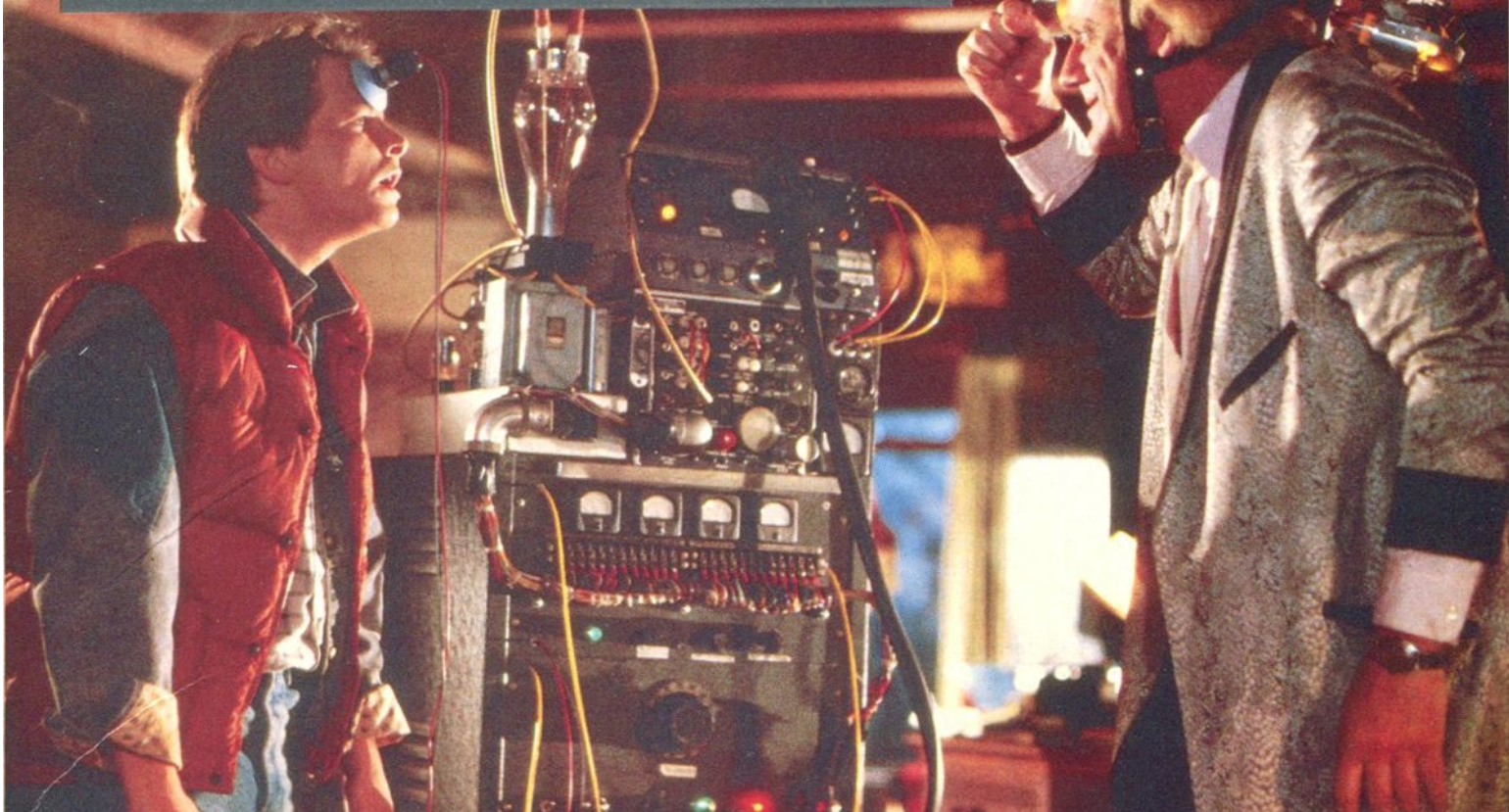
*Back to The Future* isn't quite the same story Zemeckis and Gale were pitching five years ago. Like any script, it has gone through several revisions. "It isn't wildly different now, but it *is* different," Zemeckis observes. "The time machine wasn't mobile in the first draft. It was left in the future and Marty coincidentally gets back to when the time machine was actually built in the '50s. We didn't like that idea."

"It also has a brand new ending, so we had to change the beginning, because both are tied together," Canton says. "In one instance, for monetary reasons, we decided to change the ending because it was expensive, hard to ac-

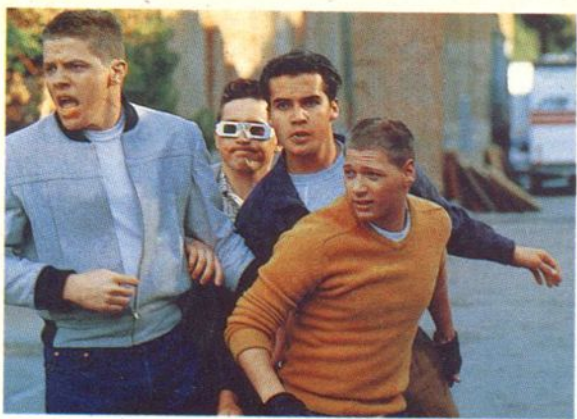


Producer Nell Canton and director Robert Zemeckis chill out with *Back to the Future* star Michael J. Fox.

Locating his scientist friend Dr. Brown (Christopher Lloyd) in 1955, Marty (Michael J. Fox) becomes the subject of the Doc's latest experiment—the brain analyzer.







**Bored with the 3-D craze, Biff (Thomas F. Wilson) and his boys (Casey Siemaszko, Billy Zane, Jeffrey Jay Cohen) track down the kid who cracked the fourth dimension, time.**

compish and required a big optical effect.”  
 In that draft, Marty had to drive his DeLorean Time Machine through a nuclear explosion at a New Mexico testing site in order to get back to the future.

“The movie is about people and that was too high-tech,” says Canton, who came on to the project shortly after the release of *Buckaroo Banzai*, the critically-praised, financially disappointing SF spoof he produced last summer.

“When I first arrived, they were casting Dr. Brown, who creates the time machine,” Canton remembers. “John Lithgow was the first actor to come to mind. He usually does for anything wacky and offbeat. John wasn’t available and I had such a great experience working with Christopher [Lloyd, who played John Bigboote in *Banzai*] that I suggested him. There were 25-30 names on the list, but as soon as Bob and Bob met Chris, they knew they had Dr. Brown. You only have to meet him once to know he’s right for the part.”

For the roles of Marty’s parents, George and Lorraine McFly, the producers decided to go with two young actors, Glover and Thompson, and age them with makeup as opposed to hiring older actors to play the teenagers as adults.

“George and Lorraine have to age from 21 to 47. It’s probably the most difficult kind of makeup there is to do. To make that look real on the screen is very difficult. It’s harder to make someone look 50 than it is to make them look 150,” says Len Chase, the makeup designer. “When you make someone extremely old, you have the advantage of being able to cover their entire face with foam latex. When you make a young girl look middle-aged, you can’t cover the whole face, you have to just cover part of it.

“If makeup isn’t good, it’s best not used at all. Bad makeup calls attention to itself,” Chase adds. “Usually, when there is that kind of an age change, they will use different actors. Using makeup is a daring thing to do, and making it believable isn’t easy.”

To make *anything* relating to time travel believable isn’t easy. But if “the public likes it and if they have a taste for an unconventional time travel story, there *will* be a sequel,” says Bob Zemeckis, who has already charted the story with Bob Gale. “Oh yeah, we have a continuation in mind. We can’t tell you about it though. We’ve got a great bunch of characters in store and more fun traveling around time.”



**Reared on MTV, Marty brings a new music edge to his rock & roll performance at a 1955 high school dance.**

And Michael J. Fox would gladly tag along for the ride.

“Hey, I’m ready to do it again,” he announces. “I like the story so much and when I read how it wound up, I went ‘All right! OK! Let’s go!’”

★