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as Marty McFly



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# BACK TO THE FUTURE II

Director  
**Bob Zemeckis**  
takes another  
timely trip

# STARLOG®

NUMBER 150  
JANUARY 1990  
THE SCIENCE FICTION UNIVERSE

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It's tough work, but Bob Zemeckis found he had to head "Back to the Future" time and again.

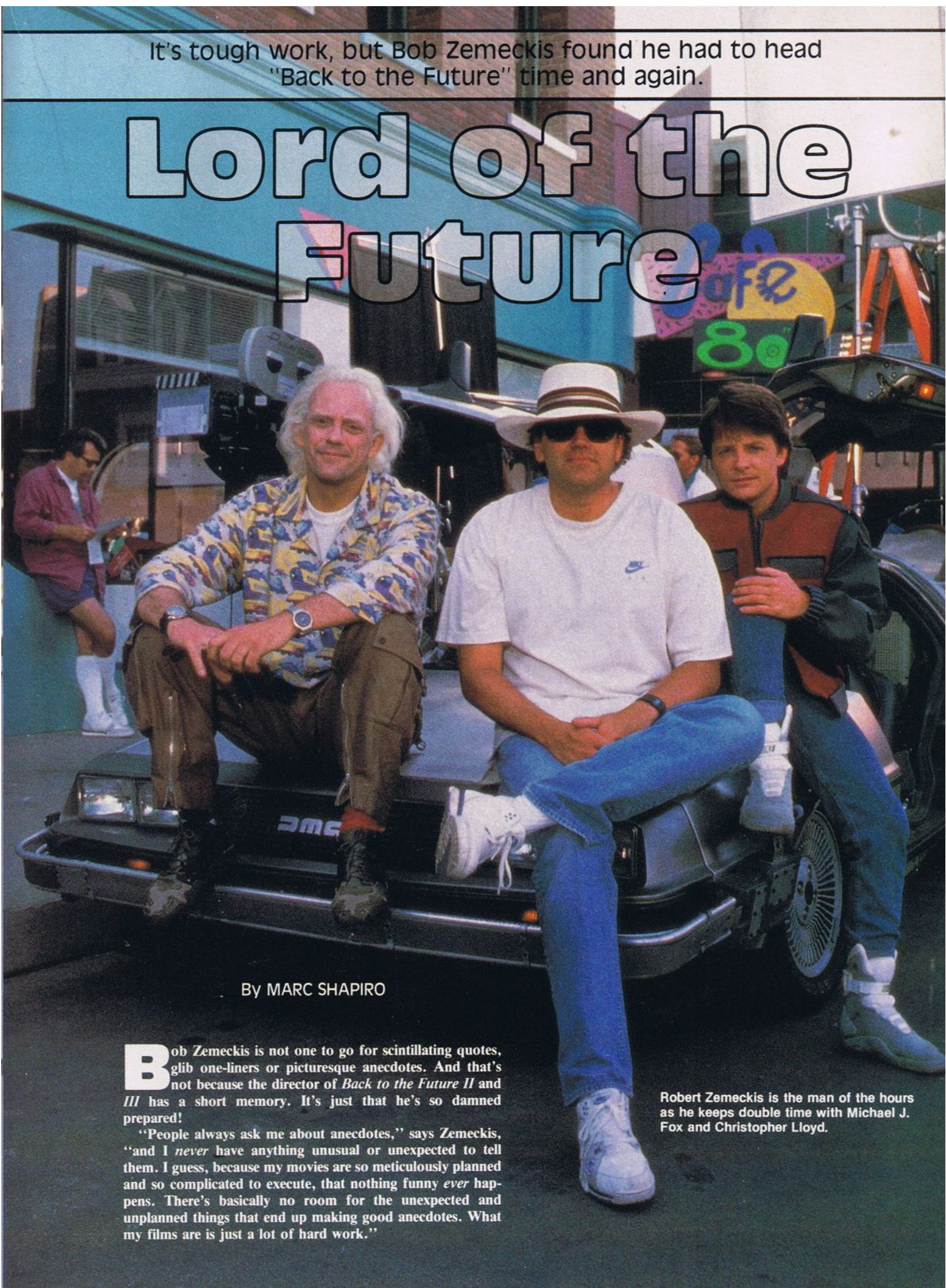
# Lord of the Future

By MARC SHAPIRO

**B**ob Zemeckis is not one to go for scintillating quotes, glib one-liners or picturesque anecdotes. And that's not because the director of *Back to the Future II* and *III* has a short memory. It's just that he's so damned prepared!

"People always ask me about anecdotes," says Zemeckis, "and I *never* have anything unusual or unexpected to tell them. I guess, because my movies are so meticulously planned and so complicated to execute, that nothing funny *ever* happens. There's basically no room for the unexpected and unplanned things that end up making good anecdotes. What my films are is just a lot of hard work."

Robert Zemeckis is the man of the hours as he keeps double time with Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd.





Zemeckis put his actors through some interesting situations: aging Lea Thompson (right) and making a kinder, gentler, prettier Michael J. Fox.

Indeed, the original *Back to the Future* was no picnic. Neither was the wildly successful *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* (which he discussed in STARLOG #134). His contribution to HBO's *Tales From the Crypt*, entitled "All Through the Night," was a relative vacation from the back-to-back grind of *Back to the Future II* and *III*, which had Zemeckis editing *II* while shooting principal photography on *III*.

"I'm definitely starting to feel like I'm in a time warp," Zemeckis chuckles, "but that's the reality of filmmaking: being dead on your feet and still working hard to get things done."

Zemeckis points out, however, that the transition between *Back to the Future II* and *III* has not been the rough ride his fatigue would lead one to believe.

"Things have been going pretty smoothly. The second film, with the exception of some minor sound things, is edited together and in good shape. If there has been a drawback for me as a director, it has been missing the nice parts of filmmaking like being at the scoring sessions rather

than having to listen to the score after it's already finished."

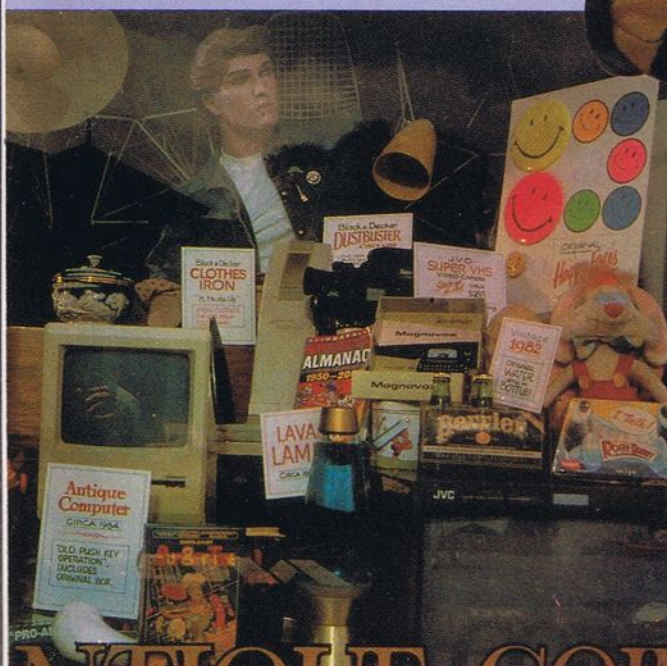
Zemeckis offers that the immediate jump into the next sequel, rather than depleting the cast and crew's mental and emotional resources, has had the opposite effect.

"Everybody's attitude has remained good," he says. "Nobody's running out of gas, in fact, the third film is so epic in scale and so full of classic, romantic and American images that the cast and crew have been totally re-energized."

Zemeckis' *Future* jaunt has been a little less of a trial since almost everybody who worked on the first *Back to the Future* and *Roger Rabbit* is aboard for the sequels.

"Having Bob Gale, Dean Cundey, Alan Silvestri, Michael J. Fox and Chris Lloyd back certainly makes this much easier to do. We've done this before. We know each other's styles and moves.

"It's really like a family," he continues. "But, that first day on the set, it was like old home week. The first day's filming on *II* was on the town square and it was really weird. Crew people were wandering around the set recalling things like what kind of supports and wiring should go where and basing their comments on what they remembered from the first film."



The future Hill Valley's antique store offers some quaint (and familiar) collectibles, but beware the Sports Almanac.





While doing both sequels at once to complete the trilogy, there has been little time for Fox to look back and think about this farewell to Doc and Marty.

Zemeckis once more insists that *Back to the Future III* is the film series' last hurrah and that nobody connected with the movie has waxed nostalgic. At least not yet.

"There's still too much going on to start thinking about this being the end. We're all anticipating the opening of *II* and there's still a lot we've got to do on *III*. Nostalgia and tears haven't had a chance to kick in. I think that will probably happen around the first of the year."

### Time Tripper

Zemeckis' own efforts on *Back to the Future II* and *III* are getting high marks from co-workers.

"I jumped at the chance to work with Bob again," says Michael J. Fox. "Bob has such a distinct style of directing that it has been a real education for me just to be on the set with him."

"Who else could they get to direct these films?" wonders writer/producer Bob Gale. "Obviously, we needed Michael and Chris to return. But what people liked about the first *Back to the Future* was the result, to a very large extent, of Bob's talents. So, it would have been *crazy* to ask somebody else to direct. And he's definitely giving us the same high quality and imagination he gave on the first film."

How Zemeckis became involved in *Back to the Future's* sequels was chronicled in STARLOG #149. What was not was the director's feelings when he discovered that the two films would be shot back to back.

"Who else could they get to direct these films?" asks writer/producer Bob Gale of his collaborator Bob Zemeckis.

Shades of Pottersville, a certain almanac causes a serious paradox.



"I hadn't really planned on it happening this way," he notes, "but now, I would say this is probably the best way to do it. Everybody pretty much envisions the *Back to the Future* series as being a trilogy. But where these people will be in a year or two and whether they would even want to do a third film is totally up in the air. Better to do them now while everybody is enthusiastic about doing them."

Zemeckis claims that the characters in *Future II* and *III* "are basically the same. The only difference is that we see a different side to them."

Ditto his approach to directing.

"No, I haven't really changed that," says Zemeckis. "If my style has changed at all, it's because of my growth as a director and the fact that I've learned different things."

"We were able to utilize some of the things we did with *Roger Rabbit* on this film. On *Roger*, we used a primitive computer-controlled camera for a couple of shots. When it came time to do these films, we saw the possibilities of updating what we did on *Roger* for this film. So, we commissioned Industrial Light & Magic to create a computer-controlled dolly system to go with the camera and bring it up to state-of-the-art level. *Roger* was also a help for me in that I

MARC SHAPIRO, STARLOG's West Coast Correspondent, previewed *Back to the Future II* in issue #149.



In this twisted reality, Marty's mom (Thompson) gives Jessica Rabbit a run for her um... money.

know more about using special FX."

One would think the challenge of making back-to-back *Futures* would be exacting an emotional toll on the director. But Zemeckis claims emotion had little to do with it.

"The challenge is not so much emotional as it is just trying to keep all the balls in the air. There's just so much to do and so little time to do it in that there just isn't much time left over to be emotional."

Zemeckis has previously explained that his goal on the *Back to the Future* sequels was to make them with the audience who enjoyed the first film in mind. To make that

happen, "continuity" proved to be the watchword.

"We were very conscious of having these films be a seamless continuation of the first. We've had a videotape of the first movie in every department. We've even looked at outtakes from the first movie because we felt the angles would show us things that the first film didn't show us. We've been real big on not having mismatches. I defy anyone but a true aficionado to find any inconsistencies between these films."

Zemeckis offers that having Michael J. Fox on the movies from the beginning has also made his creative life easier.

"Michael's a pro and when he's on the set, he gives it 100 percent. With *Family Ties* winding down, it was easier to have him on the set without having to juggle the schedule. With the first film, that wasn't always the case."

### Time Master

Zemeckis turns his attention to his previous effort, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* and what it has done for him.

"You know, that's really a tough one to call. I deliberately set out to make a timeless sort of film and, by association, I might end up with a footnote in history. But the way I look at it, that would just be a bonus. Just getting through the film and having it work was a big enough reward for me."

(continued on page 73)

# Zemeckis

(continued from page 40)

"Everything about that film was difficult to do and it became more difficult as the filming progressed," he observes. "We weren't dealing with minutes and seconds like you do in normal films. In *Roger*, we were dealing with frames all the time. It was one of those things that if you knew it was going to be that hard, you *never* would have done it."

The adaptation of *The Shadow* has been a rumored Zemeckis project for a while now. With Universal recently putting the movie in turnaround, Zemeckis has little to report.

"From what I hear, I'm *not* currently in the picture," says the director. "I think it would be fun to do, but I haven't been contacted by the people who are heading up the project."

"It would definitely be an interesting film to make. I would probably give it a gritty, dark quality and make it very stylized. Whoever winds up making that film, I hope they do it right."

Zemeckis feels he did right by his stint on the HBO series *Tales from the Crypt*.

"Doing that show was like a vacation after the major projects I've done," says the director. "I got to direct my wife [actress Mary Ellen Trainor] and work under a shortened time schedule, which was a challenge to me. Basically, I had a good time doing the episode. As soon as I get more time, I'll probably be directing more episodes of the series."

Zemeckis isn't looking beyond completing the *Back to the Future* sequels, but it's a sure bet that there's a pile of scripts already trying to get his attention. So, just what might Bob Zemeckis be looking for?

"There is no specific kind of film that appeals to me," he responds. "The bottom line is the script. If the script moves me, in whatever way, then I'm interested. People think they should send me things with lots of special FX, but I'm *not* a special FX nut."

"When I did *Roger Rabbit*, I wasn't a cartoon fanatic and I certainly was not a nut for *film noir*. *Roger* was just something that worked for me. So, for all you people out there getting ready to send me scripts, all I can say is I'll know it when I see it. There's just no formula for getting my interest."

True to form, Zemeckis was first attracted to *Back to the Future II*, and subsequently *III*, because he thought "it was a good idea."

"I felt the project's integrity was intact because we were able to get the original cast back. I also felt we were on the right track by making *II* an immediate continuation of the first film. And I was really high on the fact that we weren't wasting any time retelling the back story or reintroducing all the established characters. This is a film for the people who flocked to see the first one."

**Directing this yuletide *Tales from the Crypt* gave Zemeckis the chance to terrorize his wife, actress Mary Ellen Trainor.**



Finally, after much speculation, the tale of two Martys begins to unfold.

Zemeckis says he learns something from every project he does.

"And what I've learned from doing these films is that doing sequels back-to-back is a lot of hard work, but ultimately, it *can* work. I know I had some doubts early on, but now I know that this type of filmmaking is possible."

But does Zemeckis, doing sequels to an already established film, necessarily have a pair of hits?

"No, not necessarily," says Bob Zemeckis. "I'm nervous about the prospects for these movies just like I'm nervous about any movie I make. Sure, there's a built-in

audience for these films, but that doesn't mean automatic box office. I would never presume to know what people want to see. Anyone who thinks they do is not being truthful. It's too much of a crap shoot. There are just too many variables.

"But I think we've pretty much copped our bet. We've got the entire cast and just about all the crew from the first film back. We're not trying to make a cheapjack rip-off to cash in on the original's popularity. We're making these movies with a real sense of integrity.

"All I can do with these films is what I feel and then just hope for the best." ❄️



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