

Space Zoo Patrol – Sci-Fi Movie Review Plus “Sci Fact Behind the Sci-Fi”

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BACK TO THE FUTURE A-
1985, 116 min, PG, 8 and up

Teenager Marty McFly (Michael J. Fox) goes back in time and meets his parents when they were teenagers in this first chapter in an exciting, funny, and heartwarming trilogy. Marty is a high school student with a pretty and devoted girlfriend, a band that knows how to rock out, and something of an attitude problem. He also has an unhappy family. His father George (Crispen Glover) is ineffectual and his mother Lorraine (Lea Thompson) is impatient and unsatisfied.

Marty’s best friend is Dr. Brown (Christopher Lloyd), a mad scientist with frizzy hair and a white jump suit. Brown has adapted a DeLorean car so that it can travel through time. He sets the destination for 1955, but it ends up being Marty that takes the ride, and he is rescued by a high school senior – his own mother. As if that wasn’t weird enough, she thinks he is cute, and that is preventing her from noticing George. If Marty can’t get them together in time for a kiss at the Enchantment Under the Sea dance, they might not get married and Marty himself might never exist!

The Oedipal situation (Marty's teenage mother develops a crush on him) is played for comedy, as is the comparison of life in the 1950s with life in the 1980s. Lorraine thinks that Marty’s name must be Calvin Klein, because that is the name on the label of his underwear. And when Marty tries to order a “Pepsi Free,” the guy behind the counter at the diner is completely confused. Knowing what will happen to some of the characters from the past – from the guy with the mop who will someday be the mayor to Biff the high school bully (Thomas F. Wilson) who may – or may not grow up to be a bully of a boss, the conundrums and enticements of time travel are expertly mined for humor, adventure, and romance.

As far back as Mark Twain’s *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* and H.G. Wells’ *The Time Machine*, the idea of going back in time has captivated people, in part because of the fun of going back to earlier times – who wouldn’t like to see a real jousting match and be knighted by King Arthur? And who would not like to have the advantage of knowing what was going to happen, whether to be able to predict an eclipse, as the Connecticut Yankee does, astonishing even Merlin, or being able to bet on sporting events, knowing who was going to win, as Biff does in “Back to the Future II?” Even more appealing is the chance to revisit your own life, even though it may be poignant, as Scrooge does in “A Christmas Carol” and Emily does in “Our Town.” They cannot change what has happened and what came of it, but Marty can, leading to a happy ending that is very satisfying.

The “sci-fact behind the sci-fi”

Although traveling through time to the past is not even theoretically possible as far as we know, one *can* theoretically travel to the future. How? Well, the Theory of Relativity shows that that if you go amazingly fast—close to the speed of light—your time will actually pass more slowly than everyone else's. So if you traveled into space at blazing speeds for say one year, when you came back to Earth, tens, hundreds, or even thousands of years will have passed on Earth. The problem is that it's a one-way ticket...you can't go back. And keep in mind it's merely theoretical, since we don't have any of the capability—the propulsion, the materials, the technology—to go even close to fast enough to see a significant difference in time passage. But one day... who knows.

With all that said, although there's no real explanation for how Michael J. Fox and Christopher Lloyd travel back and forth in time, *Back to the Future* is on my all-time-favorite-movie list. If you don't think about what is real or unreal and just accept that they do travel through time, then it is simply a first-rate clever movie. Clever, clever, clever. And no other movie character I've ever seen shows just how much fun doing scientific research can be than "Doc" played by Christopher Lloyd. Five stars.