

= Back to the Pilot =

" Back to the Pilot " is the fifth episode of the tenth season of the animated comedy series Family Guy . The episode originally aired on Fox in the United States on November 13 , 2011 . In " Back to the Pilot " , two of the show 's main characters , baby genius Stewie and anthropomorphic dog Brian , both voiced by series creator Seth MacFarlane , use a time machine to travel back in time to the first episode of the series , " Death Has a Shadow " . Trouble ensues however , when Brian tells his former self about the September 11 attacks , causing the present to be dramatically changed , and ultimately resulting in a second civil war . The two must then prevent themselves from going back to the past in the first place , but soon realize that it will be much more difficult than they had originally thought .

The episode was written by Mark Hentemann and directed by Dominic Bianchi . It received high praise from critics for its storyline and many cultural references , in addition to receiving some criticism for its portrayal of the September 11 attacks , an example of 9 / 11 humor despite being self @-@ aware . According to Nielsen ratings , it was viewed in 6 @.@ 01 million homes in its original airing . The episode featured guest performances by Lacey Chabert , Chris Cox , Ralph Garman , Christine Lakin , Phil LaMarr and Fred Tatasciore , along with several recurring guest voice actors for the series .

= = Plot = =

When Brian approaches Stewie about helping him find a tennis ball he has buried , Stewie asks if Brian remembers the date that he lost it . Brian tells him that he buried it on January 31 , 1999 (the day that the first episode of Family Guy originally aired) . Using Stewie 's time machine to travel back to that date , the two soon come upon the Griffin family , but notice that their past looks more strange than they remembered it : the family continually pauses for cutaways , the animation style is different , Peter 's right eye inexplicably pops out over his nose when he turns his head slightly , television sets are unplugged from the wall , and Meg 's voice sounds different . Stewie comments that " She sounds like someone who 's about to give up a huge opportunity . "

Telling Brian that he must not alter the past by getting the tennis ball and that he should instead memorize its location , Stewie goes into his room to set up their return to the present before Past Stewie suddenly enters . The two Stewies then meet , and Stewie tells Brian to come out from his hiding place after explaining himself to Past Stewie . However , hanging outside the window , Brian falls onto past Peter 's car as he drives to the stag party at Past Quagmire 's house . Stewie finds Brian and the two then attempt to return to the present , but find that the transportation device 's batteries are running low and moved only a bit forward in time towards their destination (Stewie converted the return pad to run on batteries instead of uranium because of their situation in Germany) .

Later , the two manage to take advantage of Past Peter dumping his extra welfare money out of a blimp above Super Bowl XXXIII to collect the money needed to purchase new batteries . Before their return , they have an encounter with the Kool @-@ Aid Man and ruin his entry during the " Oh yeah ! " part at Past Peter 's court session . Brian and Stewie return to the present .

Upon their return , Stewie discovers that Brian intentionally disobeyed his instructions and warned his past self about the upcoming September 11 attacks ahead of time allowing Past Brian to stop the event and alter the timeline as a result , much to Stewie 's frustration . While watching the local news with footage on Brian stopping the terrorists , Brian is honored as a hero . The news also revealed that former President George W. Bush returned to Texas after losing the 2004 election and reformed the confederacy , along with eight other states from the southern United States resulting in a Second Civil War . On a side note , it turns out that Pat Tillman (who in this timeline is still alive as he never went off to fight in the War on Terror) was " tackled by his own team " .

Brian insists that things will still be better in the end , but when they travel five years into the future they find a computer generated post @-@ apocalyptic future caused by nuclear attacks all across the United States , which also hands everything to the viewers on a silver platter which Stewie finds

to be lazy . Cleveland is back in Quahog , Joe is a robotic policeman , and Quagmire is a mutant frog called Frogmire before being obliterated by Joe for breaking a law . Stewie discovers online that the civil war escalated to a nuclear attack across the entire Eastern Seaboard , killing over 17 million people , including Cesar Millan . Brian admits that he made a mistake , and the two return to the past to prevent Brian from telling his past self about the attacks . They then return to the present , whereupon Stewie learns that Brian has instead taken credit for the Harry Potter series instead of J.K. Rowling .

Seeing that Brian has learned nothing from Stewie 's warnings , they again go back to prevent themselves from telling any future events . Before they do , however , a Stewie and Brian from the further future arrive to tell them not to stop their past selves from talking about the future . This in turn causes dozens of Stewies and Brians (one including a confused Peter as well) to appear , each pair telling the previous ones not to do what they are about to do . Having had enough of this , Stewie tells his numerous future selves to take their respective Brians and return to their time after they all decide to allow 9 / 11 to historically take place for obvious reasons . From there , Stewie takes Brian back a minute before their past selves arrive and demands for them to return to their time by shooting Past Brian in the knee . With that , the altered timeline ceases to exist along with its corresponding Stewie and Brian , and everything goes back to normal .

At home , the original Brian and Stewie mull over what has just happened , unaware of how they would have affected the timeline but grateful that they have returned to their own time without changing anything , but they get confused when Peter arrives with Quagmire , and the rest of his friends from the stag party in 1999 with Peter mentioning them unplugging the TV .

= = Production and development = =

Series creator and executive producer Seth MacFarlane first announced the episode at the 2011 San Diego Comic @-@ Con International in San Diego , California on July 23 , 2011 . It was directed by series regular Dominic Bianchi , in his second episode of the season . Bianchi also previously served as director for the series 's landmark 150th episode " Brian & Stewie " . The episode was written by series showrunner and executive producer Mark Hentemann , who joined the show as a writer in its third season . Series regulars Peter Shin and James Purdum served as supervising directors , with Andrew Goldberg and Alex Carter serving as executive story editors , and Spencer Porter , Anthony Blasucci , Mike Desilets , and Deepak Sethi serving as staff writers for the episode . Composer Ron Jones , who has worked on the series since its inception , returned to compose the music for " Back to the Pilot " . The episode was originally intended to be the seventh installation in the series 's hallmark Road to ... episodes , but it was changed before airing . The episode featured several examples of the old animation style that was used in the episode 's pilot episode , with the Griffin family all appearing in the lesser quality animation style in the past universe that Stewie and Brian travel to .

In addition to the regular cast , voice actor Chris Cox , actor Ralph Garman , and actress Christine Lakin guest starred in the episode . Archival recordings of actress Lacey Chabert , and voice actors Phil LaMarr and Fred Tatasciore from " Death Has a Shadow " were used , although they still received credit . Recurring guest voice actors Patrick Warburton and writer John Viener made minor appearances throughout the episode . Chabert 's role in the episode was that of Meg Griffin in the pilot episode . Chabert had previously voiced Meg , before eventually being replaced by actress Mila Kunis , who had a role on the television series That ' 70s Show during Family Guy 's first season . Chabert left the series after completing the first production of episodes in order to focus on her schoolwork , as well as her participation in the television series Party of Five , with Kunis taking over the role after the first season .

= = Reception = =

" Back to the Pilot " was broadcast on November 13 , 2011 , as a part of an animated television night on Fox , preceded by The Simpsons and Allen Gregory and followed by Family Guy

MacFarlane 's second show , American Dad ! . It was watched by 6 @. @ 01 million viewers , according to Nielsen ratings , despite airing simultaneously with Desperate Housewives on ABC , The Good Wife on CBS and Sunday Night Football on NBC . The episode also acquired a 3 @. @ 1 / 7 rating in the 18 ? 49 demographic , beating Allen Gregory and American Dad ! , in addition to significantly edging out both shows in total viewership . The episode 's ratings increased by nearly 200 @, @ 000 viewers from the previous week 's episode , " Stewie Goes for a Drive " .

Reviews of the episode by television critics were positive , with Kevin McFarland of The A.V. Club calling it " an episode of Family Guy that rewards every viewer who liked the show in the past . " McFarland also gave high praise to the episode , writing , " At first , I was simply pleased that ' Back to the Pilot ' didn 't screw things up at the beginning , but as the episode went , I kept looking at the clock and being amazed that it hadn 't dropped the ball yet . It used short cutaways and a plethora of self @-@ referential jokes the writers must have stockpiled for years about the animation quality , voice quality , and structure of the pilot to every possible advantage . " He continued , " It wasn 't perfect by any stretch of the imagination , and it 's not on the same level as the occasional brilliance that South Park reaches on about one occasion per season nowadays , but it 's the most fun I 've had watching the show that didn 't involve a Star Wars parody in many years . " McFarland concluded his review by giving the episode a grade of A- . Kate Moon of TV Fanatic also enjoyed the episode , noting , " ' Back to the Pilot ' was a great meta episode of Family Guy . From poking fun at its own flaws in the original series to acknowledging how silly the cutaway gags can be , Family Guy shone at its layered best tonight . " She continued , " Treating its animated characters like real actors was a nice touch as well . Watching the original family showed how much the characters evolved and changed throughout the series ' long run . " Moon concluded her review by giving the episode a 4 @. @ 2 out of 5 .

The episode was also the subject of criticism for its portrayal of the September 11 attacks , in which Brian and Stewie go back in time to make the attacks happen again , ultimately resulting in a high five when they are successful (despite Stewie immediately remarking that would sound terrible out of context) . The Daily Mail reported on the episode writing , " Nothing is ever off limits for Family Guy and its creator Seth MacFarlane . No topic is taboo , not the Holocaust , not drunk driving and not even abortion , but last night 's episode may finally have crossed the line . " Terri Pous of Time also wrote of the episode , " It sounds custom @-@ made for a ' too soon ' label , and it probably is . But avid Family Guy viewers live for " too soon " moments , no matter how sensitive the material . " Other news organizations , including Aly Semigran of Entertainment Weekly , also thought the show had gone too far with the reference . Nellie Andreeva of Deadline also commented that it " squeaked past the Fox standards and practices department but is sure to raise as many eyebrows . " MacFarlane was scheduled to be on one of the planes that hit the Twin Towers but overslept allegedly due to being hungover .