



# STEVEN SPIELBERG

Since you are scriptwriter and director of this film, you must have a certain attitude to the UFO phenomenon. Do you believe in close encounters?

I believe in the possibility, in the 30 years of evidence. I am not 100 per cent convinced, and I haven't had any direct experiences; my attitude has always been "Prove it". But I am more convinced now than I was three years ago.

Was it your intention to make other people aware as yourself?

Yes; aware that this was one answer to the UFO mystery, that UFOs are extra-terrestrial entities and not just projections of the collective imagination of the world.

There appears to be a strong relationship between this and your other films, in that you take a horror that is always with us, and bring it out into the open, presenting it in realistic terms...

Absolutely. In every film I have made I have taken something which is very uncommon to our everyday lives, and therefore hard to believe, and tried to make it as believable as possible. I enjoy creating a reality from a kind of fantasy. In *Duel*, for example, there was the challenge of creating a character out of a truck and making it appear like the classic villain in the Western.

Steven Spielberg's "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" is at present outpacing "Star Wars" at the box-office and may possibly become the biggest grossing film of all time. If so, Spielberg will have twice achieved that feat; the other time being with "Jaws".

Spielberg graduated from UCLA in 1970 and went straight to Universal where he directed episodes for several television series, including: "Marcus Welby, MD", "Columbo" and "Name of the Game". He also directed two television features — "Duel" (1970) and "Something Evil" (1972) — the former becoming a cult film and being re-released theatrically in the U.S.

Teaming with producers David Brown and Richard D. Zanuck, Spielberg then made "Sugarland Express" in 1973 and "Jaws" in 1975. "Close Encounters", for producers Michael and Julia Phillips, is his third feature.

While in Denmark for the recent opening of "Close Encounters", Spielberg spoke to *Cinema Papers'* Scandinavia correspondent Gail Heathwood about the existence of extra-terrestrial beings and the problems involved in mounting this \$U.S. 19.2 million project.

Generally, I am much more interested in those things when they affect ordinary people, than I am in, say, Spiderman or Superman.

How did you research "Close Encounters"?

I went to the magazine and newspaper section of the public library and read old copies of *Life*.

For 40 years *Life* was probably the most popular magazine in the U.S., and it was very interested in UFOs. It followed them more closely than any other publication and printed large photos, as well as stories from different scientists.

I traced these authors and discovered that many had written books. I read a number of them, and began to meet the authors. Then I talked to four or five pilots

from major airlines, air traffic controllers, U.S. Air Force officers, even four security people at the Pentagon who, during the early 1950s, had worked in the intelligence corps and were around when UFOs buzzed the capital; there was a great flap in Washington. It sounds like a wonderful science fiction film, but Washington took it very seriously.

The best people I talked to, however, were the average family types who never expect anything extraordinary to happen until it actually does. That was the best part of the research, because it supported my feelings about the first two-thirds of the film. The last part is just my vision, my hope and philosophy. It never really happened.

The people who come out from the space ship are similar to drawings done by eyewitnesses. Was this intentional?

Yes. While collecting descriptions from all over the world I realized that everybody reported the same thing. You would think that somebody in the U.S. would report something more chrome-plated than someone in maybe Switzerland who would report something like a grandfather clock. But all the reports are the same — the vehicles, the spheres in the sky. And the extra-terrestrials looked like they do in film, rather than fire-breathing dragons.

Do you think that the film would

Opposite: The child (Gary Guffey). "I would describe what he was reacting to and he would make pictures from my words and react to those pictures."





have been stronger if you had not shown these extra-terrestrials?

Not for most people, because they would have been frustrated at not having seen the vision completed. A lot of people think I should not have shown the shark in *Jaws*, that I should have continued the mystery of the water, so that the water itself became the threat. But that's my duality — the philosopher-filmmaker and the commercial-filmmaker-entertainer. I try to make those two things work for each other.

Did you consider not showing the creatures?

Yes, for a long time, and I personally felt a great disappointment in not knowing what piloted those things. In 2001 Stanley Kubrick considered the same thing because he shot many aliens — but he never used them in the final film. That was fine for 2001, because from the beginning it had promised an esoteric payoff; you didn't ever expect to see an extra-terrestrial.

My film isn't so technologically intellectual, and because of this it would be wrong not to show the creatures.

Why did you choose Dr Allen Hyneck as technical advisor on the film?

I knew of Hyneck when I first began researching the film because he was famous for saying how it was all a bunch of bunk. He had been hired by the Air Force to give easy explanations to complicated phenomena and he was very good at it.

Hyneck would say a phenomena was a meteor or swamp gas or Venus. Then he began coming across reports that were too extraordinary to be discounted easily. He found he could explain away 80 per cent of reported sightings, but there was still 20 per cent he couldn't, and he became fascinated by it. Finally, he went to the Air Force and said, "Hey, I think there's something here; this isn't just public psychosis."

The Air Force got very nervous and told Hyneck to mind his own business and just do his job. He got very angry and quit. He then wrote a book attacking the department.

I met Hyneck because he was a man who had suddenly learned to believe, and that was a very uncommon thing to do. I felt he was a very valuable man to have on my team because he could give me the feeling that I wasn't just making a film about chiffon; that it wouldn't be something that couldn't stand up under a hot light.

At any point during the setting



Francois Truffaut as the French scientist, Claude Lacombe, and Bob Balaban as his interpreter. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

up of the film were you more in doubt than not?

Sure, when I met a lot of kooks whose stories weren't consistent the second and third time round. I felt very disappointed, suspecting that maybe only the more intelligent people knew how to make up a good story. But fortunately it didn't happen too often.

I really found my faith when I heard that the government was opposed to the film. If NASA took the time to write me a 20-page letter, then I knew there must be something happening.

I had wanted co-operation from them, but when they read the script they got very angry and felt that it was a film that would be dangerous. I think they mainly wrote the letter because *Jaws* convinced so many people around the world that there were sharks in toilets and bathtubs, not just in the oceans and rivers. They were afraid the same kind of epidemic would happen with UFOs.

It was the same with the Air Force; they gave us no co-operation at all. So when I was shooting the scenes with the army and air force, I had to do it the old-fashioned way and go into a costume store and buy the army suits and gear.

Apparently President Carter has seen the film . . .

Yes, Carter likes it very much. He has reported UFOs on two occasions, and I think he's a believer. In fact, one of his campaign promises was that he would try and find out what UFOs were all about. But the minute he took office and was asked whether he was going to follow through the promise, he side-stepped the issue.

Since then, the White House has been very quiet concerning UFOs. It seems that every president, including Gerry Ford, who is interested in UFOs, stops being interested the minute they get to the White House.

There is something going on which many governments in the world feel that people should not be made aware of yet. France and Brazil are the only two countries whose governments have



Who's directing who? The two 'directors' — Francois Truffaut and Steven Spielberg.

admitted that UFOs exist, and that they are interested.

Was it at any point a moral issue for you — that you might cause panic?

Not really. When Orson Welles did his famous "War of the Worlds" broadcast in 1938, he was not so much writing a radio program about Martians invading New Jersey as about America's fear of invasion from Europe. War was just a few months away, but Welles' invasion was not the Stuka, it was the Martian; it preyed on the vulnerability of that time.

Today it's just the opposite. I knew that if this film was to be popular it wouldn't be because people were afraid of the phenomena, but because the UFOs are a seductive alternative for a lot of people who no longer have faith in anything.

Did you require your actors to have a similar degree of belief as yourself?

No. Melinda Dillon believes, but Terri Garr doesn't. Neither does Richard Dreyfuss nor Truffaut. When Truffaut was asked if he believed in UFOs, he said, "I believe in the cinema".



The mysterious light generated by a UFO. While a mother (Melinda Dillon) is terrified, her son (Gary Guffey) is more trusting. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.



Driven by a nightmare he doesn't comprehend, Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) recreates the Devil's Tower, Wyoming. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

#### Why did you cast Truffaut?

It occurred to me that of all the French people I knew, Truffaut was the most humane. There is a humanist view of Truffaut that I have always held — of his films and of him as an actor in his films. He has the face of the young boy grown up.

#### Isn't it difficult to direct a director?

No, because most of the time Truffaut knew what I was about to say before I said it. After a take that Truffaut and I didn't like, I couldn't even open my mouth

before Truffaut would say, "I know, I know, too much over-acting; I'll bring it down." It was easier directing Truffaut than the others.

**Truffaut wrote a book during the shooting called 'The Actor'. Have you read it?**

It's not finished, but when it is, I'll get the first copy. Truffaut often looked lost on my set because he was not used to 200 extras, 90 arc lights and all the noise and confusion. He is used to small, personal crews and casts; low budgets. When he came on the set it was the first time he had

seen the old Hollywood being run by the new. I think if you had walked on the set of *Close Encounters* you would have thought of Busby Berkeley, because it was so technically confusing. Lots of technology, but very old-fashioned.

#### Is it difficult to always be in control?

It's hard, but then that's my job. *Close Encounters* was the first time I ever managed a production this large. *Jaws* was a very intimate film — just three men, a boat and a shark. This film was large from the very first day, and that's what confused Truffaut. I am sure his book on the actor will have an extra chapter in it.

#### Given a lot of the film's special effects were done in laboratories, were the actors often called upon to react to non-existent effects?

Yes. Richard Dreyfuss was very upset with several moments in his performance because he feels that had he seen the effects, he might have reacted differently.

#### Did you ever feel insecure about being in control of all these people and effects?

I never feel secure doing anything, especially a film like this. The problem is when you have a crew that large you have to repeat yourself. If you say it once, it will never get done. If you say it

twice, there is a 50-50 chance it will get done your way. If you say it three times, it might be there when you want it. But if you say it four times, it will be there. Now if I have to say it five times, the person I am saying it to goes home on the next plane.

#### Did you change anything as you went along?

A lot. The script is only a blueprint. I plot everything ahead of time and before the first piece of film is shot; you can see the entire film on cards. So, when I eventually hired Doug Trumbull, all Doug had to do was look at the ships I had painted, the colors and structures, and duplicate them technically. That's why I took a credit on the screen for visual concepts.

#### What scenes did you change?

In the original there were many more family scenes which I shot but didn't include. There were also more encounters in the first half, but that was changed because I felt I had to save — I couldn't have a jolt every 10 minutes because it would have hurt the dramatic construction. The elimination was necessary to concentrate on the final arrival.

#### Speaking of dramatic structure, do you have a special formula for creating tension? It seems that you rely on under-informing the audience, letting them be unaware of certain things . . .

Yes, I'd agree with that. I believe in not giving the audience what they want, because their collective imagination is much greater than mine. That was why in *Jaws* I decided to leave the 'Enemy of the People' part of the story not that well told.

I felt the same way about *Close Encounters*. The military cover-up, for example, I didn't want to beat to death because in the U.S. it's passe. We have lived through Watergate, the CIA, and people already find them redundant.

#### Yet the film is made for an international audience, one not necessarily versed in American lore. Did you find it hard to decide where the point of balance was?

I always consider the international market when I make a film. It was obvious to me that I would discuss the film more overseas than in the U.S. I merely discussed the flashiness and the sound, the excitement, the phenomena. Here in Europe I am discussing the story and the philosophy; the symbolism.



The child (Gary Guffey) drawn on by a strange glow in the sky. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*.

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But I had to make this film pretty much from my understanding. There comes a point where you have to forget the audience and try to please yourself.

I get a lot of letters from people who have seen the film five or six times in the U.S., and who tell me about things they missed the first or second time and got the fourth or fifth time.

**That's very good for the film . . .**

Yes, it is. It's a miracle if you can encourage people to see any film more than once.

**How much money has the film made?**

Seventy million dollars.\*

**What percentage of that is yours?**

About 15 per cent, but not 15 per cent of the \$70 million. It is only after distribution costs, after the studio has taken its share, the exhibitors theirs and so on. It's a racket. Everybody gets their money first and when it's time for the filmmakers to get their piece, it's hardly a mouthful. That's how it has always been.

When a filmmaker starts distributing his own films, that's when he can make a profit, and that's what I will start doing in the future. But then I am not really concerned with how much money I can make from the film — I never have been.

**Don't you want to be your own producer?**

Yes, very much; but the reason I wasn't my own producer on this film was because I knew it would be a gargantuan project, and I knew I needed somebody who could handle the studio and the paperwork. I didn't want to spend my time at home doing that when I should have been planning my next day's shooting. I'll be my own producer on a very small film, like my next one. It has a budget of only \$1.5 million, with a five-week schedule.

**So you are still capable of working on a small film as opposed to a monolith . . .**

Sure, I am going back to my roots with this next film. It's about what happens when you are eight to 14 years-old, and what you do between leaving school at 3 o'clock and having dinner at 6. It's



The control centre where the first of a series of UFO sightings is recorded. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind.*

about today's children, not when I was a kid, because today's children are much more advanced than when I was 11 years-old. They are reaching puberty, and discovering women and their own self-importance much earlier.

**When do you start it?**

In May, and it will be out at Christmas. I can do a very small film because my appetite for the big ones has been . . . I am full! I feel like I've had fish with *Jaws* and meat with *Close Encounters* — now I want a light dessert.

**In "Close Encounters" you worked with five great cinematographers.\*\* How did that work out?**

They never actually worked together. I should explain that I make films in an unorthodox way. I shoot the bare, essential script first, then I stop and look at it. I then see if it needs, say, a new opening or more explanation in a scene. Sometimes I go out months later and shoot two more days. And then a month beyond that I shoot another two days.

When I was shooting some of the additions, John Alonzo was available, but Vilmos Zsigmond was making another film and couldn't wait for me to be whimsical about adding extra scenes. Later on I got another idea and Laszlo Kovacs shot a few days for me. That's how it works. I don't believe that a film should stop when the schedule says "last day".

My problem is I should be handcuffed to the wall. On this film, I was still cutting only days before it was released; I took seven minutes out a week before it opened. And if I had it to do all over again, I'd take another seven minutes out.

\*\*Vilmos Zsigmond, Laszlo Kovacs, William A. Fraker, John Alonzo and Douglas Slocombe.

**Wasn't it difficult for the cinematographers to adjust to the style of the previous man?**

All cinematographers in the U.S., like all directors, are great friends. William Fraker and Laszlo Kovacs, John Alonzo and Vilmos Zsigmond are very close. We often have dinner or go to parties together. So they know each other's styles very well — that's all they discuss. And before each additional cinematographer came to work with me, they looked at the film that had already been photographed and matched that style.

**How did you get the child to react so well?**

By adopting him; we were inseparable for three months. I knew what he liked and didn't, and how to get him to smile. I would describe what he was reacting to and he would make pictures from my words and react to those pictures. He was an extraordinary kid, and for a three year-old, very bright.

As much as I adopted the little boy, Truffaut adopted the creature. You'd find him standing there talking to this inanimate object in French. He is a wonderful man, but I don't understand all of him. I spent a year with Truffaut, but I really don't know him. Very nice, but very mysterious.

**Was it difficult for Truffaut to understand the film and his role?**

Yes. Truffaut wanted to know more about Lacombe because in the film I suggest that the story has been going on years before the film begins. I wanted to give the impression that this meeting had been in preparation for a long time. But Truffaut wanted to know what had happened over the past 30 years. So I designed for Truffaut, and I've never shown it

to anybody, a scenario about Lacombe's life leading up to the sandstorm in the desert. Then he understood.

**Do you think the U.S. government today would really be so open-minded in their reception of a visitation?**

Yes. I think if scientists had received proof 20 years ago, they would have had maybe 15 years to condition themselves to it. That's why the people on the base of operations were so scientific, so blasé at the time, because they spent all those years preparing for this one meeting.

The time and the date was a surprise, but the eventuality was not. I think if it were announced today that contact had been made, scientists all round the world would remain sceptical until every one of them had been brought into a room and introduced. Scientists down through the ages have been the most sceptical of people.

**Have you any more ideas like "Jaws" or "Close Encounters" that you want to put before the public eye?**

Not at the moment. *Close Encounters* was premeditated, *Jaws* was not. *Jaws* was a book I stumbled across in an office. I read it and almost capriciously said I'd like to make it — I didn't know what I was letting myself in for. *Jaws* was an accident, but this film wasn't.

Right now I would like to make a musical; an old-fashioned musical where the story stops for a song. Lots of heavy tap-dancing, smoke coming out of the shoes. The problem is that films were as influential in the 30s and 40s as television is today. Because of Fred Astaire, parents forced their children to learn tap dancing. But tap dancing has not been in vogue for two decades, so when you make a musical you can't find any tap dancers. It'll be hard casting.

**SPIELBERG FILMOGRAPHY****TELEVISION FEATURES**

1970 *Night Gallery* (ABC Movie of the Week)  
1970 *The Psychiatrist* (ABC Movie of the Week)  
1970 *God Bless the Children* (ABC Movie of the Week)  
1971 *Duel* (released theatrically outside the U.S.)  
1972 *Something Evil*

**TELEVISION EPISODES**

1970 *Name of the Game*  
1970 *Marcus Welby, MD*  
1970 *Columbo*

**FEATURES**

1973 *Sugarland Express*  
1975 *Jaws*

\* As of early February, 1978.