

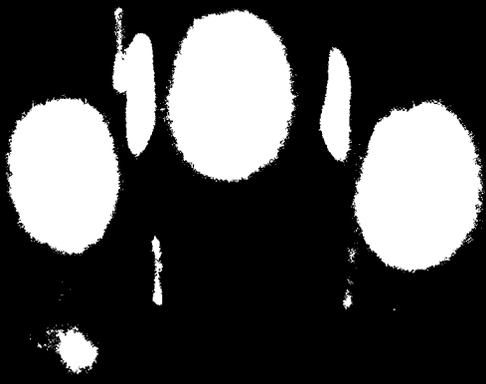
SCHOLASTIC

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January 12, 1978

Volume 62, No. 9

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SCHOLASTIC VOICE

A SENSE OF WONDER. Cary Guffey, 4, plays a child fascinated by a UFO in *Close Encounters*.

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JANUARY 26—THE NEXT ISSUE OF VOICE

"The Biggest News Story of the Century—And How I Nearly Blew It," by Dan Rather. The CBS newsman tells of his accidental involvement in covering the assassination of President Kennedy. An excerpt from his best-selling new book *The Camera Never Blinks*.



CLOSEST ENCOUNTER. At the awesome climax of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* a vast vehicle from outer space rendezvous with waiting earthmen on a Wyoming butte. At right, a child (Cary Guffey) watches.

WFO



OF THE THIRD KIND

**Steven Jaws Spielberg
Tells Voice Readers Why
He Made Close Encounters
...And Why
He Made it Different**

A STAR WARS FOR '78? CERTAINLY, if you're thinking of crowds. On the day the reviews appeared in New York, sidewalks running for two city blocks and twisting around two corners held the hundreds of stony-eyed

fans determined to get in to the next show at the Ziegfeld Theater. It looked like Hollywood on Oscar night.

A *Star Wars* for '78? Certainly, if you're thinking of space hardware and hair-raising special effects. Nothing but *2001* and *Star Wars* can compare with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* in this department.

But there is a difference, a big one. *Star Wars* is outright fantasy set in the future. *Close En-*

counters treats what might be real—and right now.

The film is about UFOs—unidentified flying objects. "Yes, it's fiction," says Dr. Allen Hynek, scientific adviser for the film. "But it's based on known facts about the UFO mystery."

Even as UFOs go, the giant one in *Encounters* is different from any you've ever heard of. It looks very little like a saucer. It's more like a runaway ornament from some cosmic Christmas



CLOSE ENCOUNTER OF THE FIRST KIND—SIGHTING. Richard Dreyfuss, above, is a power lineman on blackout duty when a UFO buzzes his truck terrifyingly. The same UFO turns up, below, near the Guiler home where Barry (Cary Guffey) and his mother (Melinda Dillon) react differently.



tree. It's as big as a football field, and lit up like the rising sun. Glittering spires rise from its middle, and 100 glowing windows encircle its rim.

No doubt you're familiar with UFOs in earlier science fiction films, especially the Fifties films that turn up on the Late Show. "Saturday afternoon popcorn pictures" is what Steven Spielberg, writer-director of *Encounters*, calls them. "They were not very serious," he says, and a glance at their plots shows just what he means.

In *War of the Worlds* a whole fleet of UFOs brings Martians here to conquer Earth. In *The Thing*, a UFO lands in the Arctic,

and out steps a carnivorous, man-sized... carrot. UFOs buzz Washington in *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*. They carry little green men to Florida in *Invasion of the Saucer Men*.

And all of these movies, says Spielberg, have a single message: "Watch out for the invaders who want to take over." The Fifties were a period when America was ripe for such a message, according to Spielberg. "The outer-space invaders were usually stand-ins for what Americans were really worried about at the time—takeovers by Communist regimes."

The first kind of UFO, then, was a hostile invader. But there

was a second kind, typified by that sci-fi classic of 1951 *The Day the Earth Stood Still*. A UFO from Venus brings an interplanetary wise man who urges earthlings to quit waging war and start making peace.

The unearthly visitor in *Close Encounters* is a UFO of yet another color. It is a friendly visitor that welcomes enterprising earthlings to its world in another dimension of time and space.

"I meant *Close Encounters*," Spielberg told me, "to be a serious, up-front look at the possibility of UFOs. The first two-thirds is based as much as possible on actual reports of UFO encounters related by real people. The last third is what the title is all about—a meeting between earthlings and extraterrestrials. I want to give audiences a realistic experience of an event that hasn't happened yet, but could happen in our time."

SCIENCE FICTION?

"*Close Encounters* is science fiction if you don't believe in UFOs," says Spielberg. "I like to call it 'science speculation,' an educated guess. I've never seen a UFO, so I don't believe or disbelieve in them. But I do believe in the possibility of life elsewhere in this universe.

"As for extraterrestrials flying around in UFOs to check us out, I'd have to have a close encounter of the first, second, AND third kind before I could believe that!"

In case you hadn't heard, Dr. Hynek has classified three kinds of close encounters with UFOs: First Kind, sighting at close range. Second Kind, sighting plus physical evidence. Third Kind, contact with "occupants."

"I didn't make the movie to convert anyone," Spielberg told me. "I was just telling a kind of cosmic mystery story. But as I began to research UFO reports, I began to want the movie to have

another purpose. I wanted people to go out of the theater with a sense of wonder about our universe."

Spielberg says he had always wanted to make a movie about UFOs ever since he missed a "close encounter of the first kind" when he was a child in Arizona. "I was sick and couldn't go on an overnight Boy Scout trip. The kids came back all excited about seeing a UFO—a big, glowing object in the sky. Somehow I had to make up for missing out on that!"

ARE THERE REAL UFOs?

To help keep the facts straight on the movie, Spielberg brought in Dr. Hynek. Probably no one knows more about UFOs. An astronomer who taught at Northwestern University, Hynek for 20 years checked out UFO reports for a special Air Force agency called Project Blue Book.

Since 1947, 15 million Americans have filed UFO reports. Says Hynek, "Most of these UFOs turned out to be IFOs"—identified flying objects, everyday objects, not wonders from outer space. Some of the things people mistook for spaceships turned out to be reflected lights on clouds, kites, weather balloons, stars, planets, airplanes, meteors, and helicopters.

"But," Dr. Hynek adds, "there were many UFO sightings—about 500 of them—that we couldn't explain away. These reports didn't come from kooks, either, but from such reliable witnesses as policemen, airline pilots, military observers, teachers, and businessmen. Most of these people had been skeptics until they saw a UFO for themselves."

So Dr. Hynek is convinced that there are objects flying around our atmosphere that we can't really explain. Does he also believe that they are spaceships from another solar system? In



ON THE VERGE OF THE THIRD KIND—CONTACT. Air traffic controllers in a Wyoming installation track a UFO on the radar screen. Below, Roy Neary (Dreyfuss) is interrogated by French scientist Claude Lacombe (right, played by director Francois Truffaut) and assistant David Laughlin (Bob Balaban).



fact, he does not. "As an astronomer, I know that the distances in the universe are too vast. I'm very skeptical about any race anywhere having the technology to travel so far."

Besides, he adds, "why should a small planet like Earth receive so many visitations? If UFOs were really spaceships, we'd be lucky to get one visit every hundred years—not hundreds every year."

If UFOs are *not* spaceships, then what are they? Perhaps, says Dr. Hynek, they are some kind of psychic phenomenon. Maybe they're "projections" from our own minds, hallucinations we long to believe—because in this age of science knowhow, there are so few unsolved mysteries left.

BELIEVING CLOSE ENCOUNTERS

For some people, believing in UFOs may be a pleasure. For the characters in *Close Encounters* it's anything but, at least at first. Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss) is a power-company lineman. On the job during a blackout, he is terrified when a UFO buzzes his truck. A short time later, the child of a neighbor (Melinda Dillon) is kidnapped by a UFO.

The experience causes Roy to lose his job and his marriage. He is also obsessed by the vision of a mountain peak that he feels he must get to. Later, he finds that others who have had UFO encounters share the vision. It leads all of them to a strange rendezvous in Wyoming.



UFOs OF THE FIRST & SECOND KINDS: *Invasion of the Saucer Men* (1957), a comic-strip approach to UFOs. At right, *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951), with Michael Rennie as an interplanetary peacemaker.

"I think of Roy Neary as representing American individuality," says Steven Spielberg. "He knows what he has seen and experienced, and nobody can tell him to think differently. At the end, there's nowhere for him to go but on to a new frontier."

THE UFO CREATOR

But to create a UFO so exciting that it can obsess a man is something that even Spielberg, the director of *Jaws*, cannot accomplish on his own. For this he relied on Douglas Trumbull, the man who created the special effects for *2001* and *Silent Running*.

Close Encounters is the ultimate light show. The first UFOs we see onscreen appear as fast-moving lights, and don't seem to have solid cores. But they are solid miniatures, powered by electronic motors, and built by Trumbull.

"The firefly effect," he told me, "is too complicated to explain. To put it simply, we move the UFOs up and down in a

black-draped room, while a computerized camera synchronizes their movements.

"The cloud effects I can explain more easily. You take a 12-foot-square glass tank of water, and fill it half with fresh water and half with salt water. Being lighter, the salt water floats on top. Then you tinge the fresh water blue, and squirt in some white paint through a tube. The surface tension between the two kinds of water accelerates the effect. Finally, you shoot through the tank with the camera and get incredible cloud effects. It's like painting the sky."

For making outer space seem like deep space, says Trumbull, *2001* was the breakthrough movie. Yet he claims its problems were "child's play compared to what we had to go through on *Encounters*."

Many of the shots were assembled from four separate parts: (1) live action in the foreground, (2) a miniature background, (3) a superimposed UFO, and (4) an artificial sky, as

in the water tank trick. "The computerized camera allows us to do things we couldn't do 10 years ago in *2001*." He used it to record six kinds of movement on tape cassettes and coordinate them with the UFO models. "Everything must fit together perfectly. Size, color, lighting, perspective must all match between background and foreground."

Everyone who worked on *Encounters* had to take a vow of silence. No details were to be leaked to outsiders. Spielberg said he didn't want to see his idea ripped off as a TV movie-of-the-week before *Encounters* was even completed. "Also," adds Trumbull, "audiences must believe that what they see on-screen is real. They mustn't be murmuring to themselves, 'Oh, yeah, that's a miniature hanging by a wire.'"

Trumbull and his disciple John Dykstra of *Star Wars* are Hollywood's top special-effects wizards. So far, their competition is still out in left field. But Trumbull thinks students who have a knack for drawing and engineering should go into the business. "That's the way I started out. And it helps to be a magician!"

Trumbull and Spielberg have a gift for making audiences believe the unbelievable. True, Spielberg denies that *Encounters* is meant "to convince people that every light in the sky is a UFO." Maybe not. But let's not forget that two years ago he made a movie starring a mechanical shark. Phony or not, there was nothing phony about the terror *Jaws* generated. It kept thousands of people away from America's beaches all summer.

So if new thousands start glancing at the night sky with a little more curiosity than before, don't say Spielberg isn't partly to blame.

—MARGARET RONAN

BEHIND CLOSE ENCOUNTERS: Dr. J. Allen Hynek, technical consultant. Steven Spielberg, 29, writer-director, who earlier directed *Jaws*. Douglas Trumbull, visual effects; he did the same for *2001*.

