

SAVIOURS FROM OUTER SPACE

Close Encounters of the Third Kind. *Now showing in Sydney, Melbourne. Coming to Perth, Adelaide and Brisbane in May.*

Reviewed by Libby Barratt.

"I don't care where they're coming from, as long as they're here. As long as they're coming to help us before we reach the point of future shock". (An American UFO observer from "The Sun Machine is Coming Down" in **Ram** magazine, April 7, 1978.)

Judging by its fantastic impact the makers of **Close Encounters** correctly assessed the mood of the people in choosing UFOs as a theme. UFOs are the new religion, promising deliverance from alienation, insecurity and fear of the future.

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The message of the film is one of total, unquestioning trust in the benevolent nature of the aliens. It is a spiritual trust. Fears (represented by darkness, billowing clouds, lightning flashes, havoc in the kitchen) are countered by an intuitive faith in the good intentions of the UFOs.

In the very first image the two eerie lights speeding towards us are discovered to be simply the headlights of a landrover in a dust storm.

And the powers of the UFOs are introduced in an almost sentimental way: all the toys in the child's room start to work, while the child himself is drawn laughing into the night by some mystical understanding.

The scene in northern India of the Sardus singing and pointing to the sky where the UFOs appeared establishes a link between traditional mysticism and the new neo-religion.

When the UFO does descend to earth, it's to a background of

religious music. As it strikes the

communicating organ-notes, its lights (like sunlight through stained glass windows) play also. Throughout the movie, we are encompassed by the sounds of Johnnie Mathis' *When you wish upon a star* and the sound track of *The Ten Commandments*.

Even the scientists themselves regard the aliens, who look like cute-looking big-headed children, with awe-filled sentimental smiles.

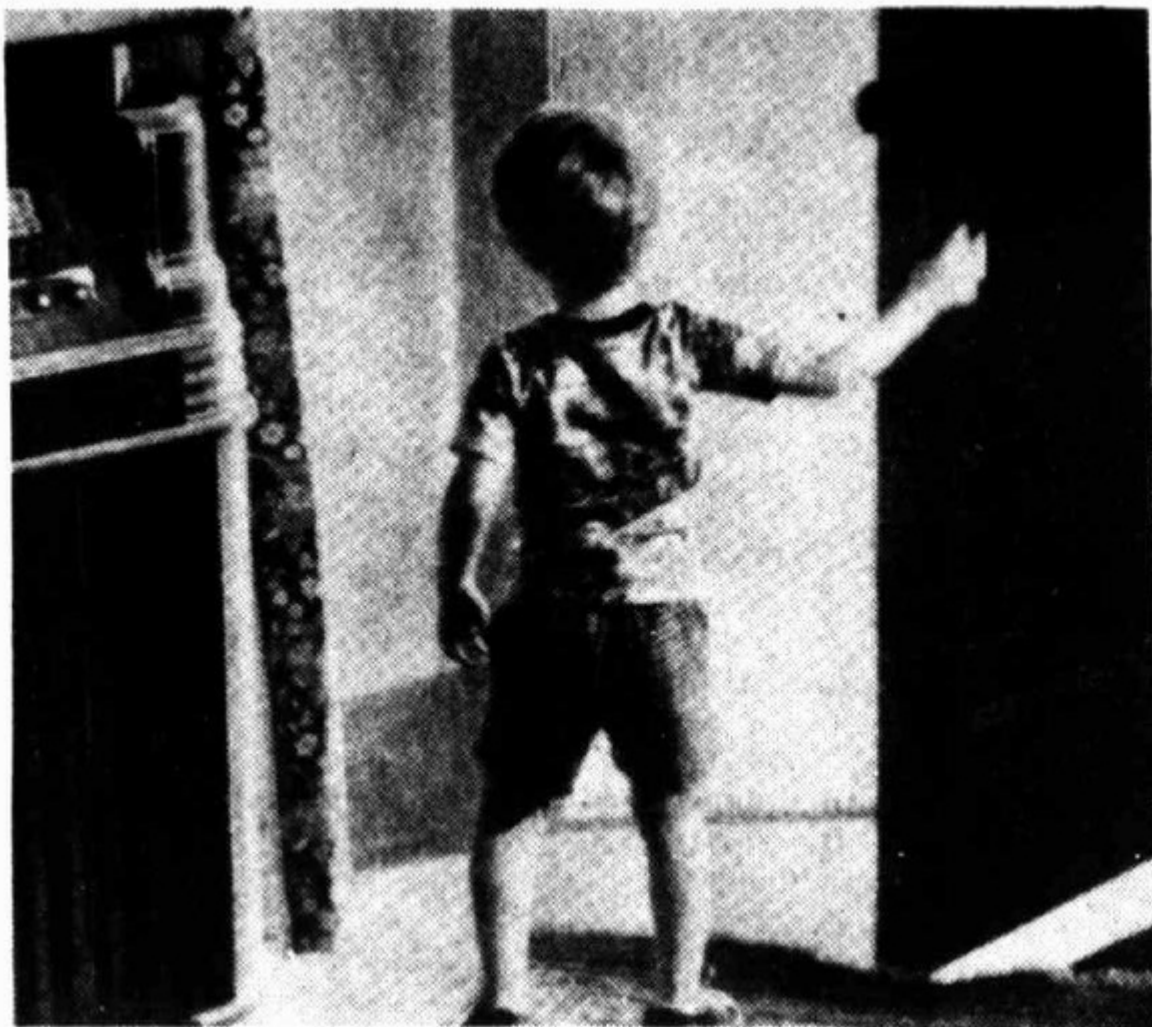
Halos and trust

As the hero rises into the UFO he glances back and dazzling halos of light illuminate his head. He doesn't know why he is going, or where, or with whom. He exhibits complete unquestioning trust and acceptance of the aliens.

Close Encounters reverses the tradition of science-fiction films which presented UFOs as intrusive and threatening. The machine is no longer an enemy but a saviour.

a saviour.

The makers of **Close Encounters** are unconsciously legitimising this new religion. At the same time they are securing an attitude to technology which will prepare people for the next period of rapid technological change, seen by capitalist economists as one way out of the recession. □



• Cary Guffey 'sees the light'