

FURTHER REVIEW



By Charles Apple | THE SPOKESMAN-REVIEW

One of director Steven Spielberg’s most beloved films — “E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial” — touched the hearts of moviegoers after it opened in theaters 40 years ago. The tale of a 10-year-old boy and the alien who missed his ride home was inspired by Spielberg’s memories of his own boyhood family torn apart by divorce.

Spielberg’s mother had fallen in love with her husband’s best friend. His parents divorced, but his father bent over backward to not tell Spielberg and his three younger sisters what brought about the rift.

Spielberg spent years nursing great pain over his broken home. As a young boy, Spielberg made up imaginary friends to help him forget his sadness for a while. It would take him 15 years before he reconciled with his father and learned the truth.

After Spielberg made it big with “Jaws” in 1975, “Close Encounters of the Third Kind” in 1977 and directing the first Indiana Jones movie in 1981, he wanted to do something that featured young characters empowering themselves and doing things that seemed magical.

So the story of young Elliott and the stranded alien he and his friends befriend fit right in to Spielberg’s interests. In a documentary included in a DVD release of the film, Spielberg admitted he felt the film was so personal for him that it might not sell: “I said, I’m probably making a big mistake.”

Happily, Spielberg was mistaken about being mistaken. “E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial” went on to gross more than \$359 million at the box office and was nominated for nine Academy Awards, including Best Picture. It would win four: Best Original Score, Best Sound, Best Sound Effects Editing and Best Visual Effects.

Facts you might not know about “E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial”...



- The script was written by Melissa Mathison, who was married to Harrison Ford at the time.
- Spielberg even put Ford into the movie as the principal of Elliott’s school. The principal is stunned when, during a disciplinary meeting, Elliott and his chair levitate. Ford’s face is not seen. Spielberg eventually cut the scene from his film.
- E.T. was not a computer-generated character. Instead, the little alien was an animatronic puppet controlled by a dozen puppeteers. When E.T.’s entire body was shown, a 12-year-old boy born without legs wore an E.T. costume while a puppeteer manipulated the puppet’s hands and arms.
- E.T.’s rough voice was supplied by former radio soap opera star Pat Welsh, who had smoked two

packs of cigarettes a day all of her adult life.

■ While most movies are filmed out of order — which can make them cheaper to produce by lumping similar scenes together — Spielberg shot E.T. in chronological order. His logic: That might help the young actors involved with their performances. Spielberg also shot much of the movie from a lower angle — to help the audience see the action from the children’s point of view.

■ The candy that Elliott uses to lure E.T. to his house was supposed to be M&Ms, but Mars Inc. declined Universal Pictures’ proposal to use its product. Universal had to go with Plan B: Reese’s Pieces. After the movie was released, sales of Reese’s Pieces reportedly tripled.

■ After the movie took off in a big way, Atari game systems landed a contract to publish an E.T.-branded home video game for its Atari 2600 console. Atari rushed the game out in just five weeks — rather than a more typical six to eight months — and then spent a record \$5 million marketing the game.

The catch? Customers found the game awful. Thousands of copies were disposed of in a landfill in Alamogordo, New Mexico. In 2014, some of those game cartridges were dug up and sold on eBay — 850 cartridges brought in nearly \$108,000.

■ Spielberg has been very firm on a follow-up film. “Sequels can be very dangerous because they compromise your truth as an artist,” he said in 2012. “I think a sequel to ‘E.T.’ would do nothing but rob the original.”

ALIENS WE MET ON THE SCREEN DURING THAT ERA

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| Visitor from “ Close Encounters of the Third Kind ”
1977
Lanky music lovers come to Earth to create a spectacular light show above Devils Tower, Wyoming, and to take Richard Dreyfuss back with them. | Mork from “ Mork & Mindy ”
1978-82
Sent from the planet Ork to Boulder, Colorado, to observe human behavior and to report his findings to his superior, Orson. He’s aided by a music store employee he befriends. | Xenomorph from “ Alien ”
1979
A fast-moving creature whose bodily fluids are corrosive to metals and who not only feeds on humans but also lays eggs in human bodies. Can be defeated only by Sigourney Weaver. | Yoda from “ The Empire Strikes Back ”
1980
A 900-year-old Jedi master overcomes his problem with proper sentence syntax to tutor Darth Vader’s son in the ways of the Force. Like E.T., Yoda also enjoys snack foods. | E.T. from “ E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial ”
1982
An interplanetary botanist becomes distracted while visiting Earth, misses his ride home and befriends a young boy so he can “phone home” for a space Uber. | Visitor from “ Starman ”
1984
An alien civilization accepts Earth’s invitation to visit, but the emissary has only three days to explore the planet. He takes the form of a woman’s recently deceased husband. | Howard from “ Howard the Duck ”
1986
An unsuspecting resident of Duckworld is suddenly propelled to Earth, where he catches the eye of a human woman, saves the world from an evil overlord and joins a rock band. | The warrior from “ Predator ”
1987
A highly skilled, technologically advanced being comes to Earth to hunt but runs smack into Arnold Schwarzenegger and a team of CIA operatives in Central America. |
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