

Film worth encountering

'Close' is peace epic

By JEFF GILLEY

Klaatu Barada Nicto. All science fiction buffs will recognize these three words as the command given by Michael Rennie, the extraterrestrial, to Gort the robot in the 1951 film "The Day the Earth Stood Still." The first movie to deal seriously with the topic of flying saucers, it suggested what our first contact with their occupants would be like. Now, 26 years later, Hollywood has given us a new version of the theme, but this time with all the spectacular special effects modern technology and \$18 million can support. "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" — the antithesis of the war movie — is a delightfully innocent picture which might best be described as a peace epic.

It would be improper, it not criminally, to reveal too much of the plot of "Close Encounters of the Third Kind." Suffice it to say that it revolves around three main characters, each of whom are involved or better yet involved with UFOs. The first is Roy Neary (Richard Dreyfuss), a farmhand, Indiana farmhand who has an encounter of the second kind (physical evidence) with a UFO. His session with visions of a strange, metal-shaped object leads to the

breakup of his family and to a fantastic pilgrimage to a government installation in Wyoming — and beyond. He shares his vision, and his affections, with Jillian Guiler (Melinda Dillon), an actress whose four-year-old son is kidnapped by a UFO. Claude Lacombe (Francois Truffaut) is the head of an international team that investigates such

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unexplained phenomena as the appearance of seven torpedo bomber airplanes in the Mexican desert, lost during World War II but unmarked by any signs of age. In the film's awesome climax, these three people are among the chosen few to witness the most significant event in the history of Man: contact with beings from another planet.

The creative force behind this ambitious film is director/writer Steven Spielberg, who directed "Duel," "The Sugarland Express," and "Jaws." I still believe "The Sugarland Express" to be his best, most human work, but "Close Encounters" is certainly the most numbing. The eye-popping special effects, conceived by Spielberg and

Douglas Trumbull, are the best created to date. Not only are the "flying saucer" scenes dazzling, but Spielberg deftly used matte shots to manufacture spacious views of the starry night sky never before achieved. These scenes, besides adding a touch of realism to a fantastic subject, create the eerie impression that the humans on screen are being surveyed by an unseen presence. The atmosphere it creates could be ladled.

Spielberg is at his peak developing tension and suspense, and this he does, at least as far as the script allows. The 35-minute climax, although overlong, is spellbinding. And for sheer, harrowing suspense, the cosmic kidnapping of the small boy is unbeatable.

Those who have seen "Jaws" may recall that comedy and suspense were blended with equal portions. Comedy is used in "Close Encounters" perhaps a bit too much for such a profound film, but one scene in particular shows the understated humor reflected in "Jaws"-ian lines like "I think we need a bigger boat." Richard Dreyfuss stops his truck in the middle of a dark country road to read a map. The headlights of a car pull up behind him and stop, and with a wave of Dreyfuss's hand the car goes around. In a moment a second set of "headlights" approach from the rear and stop; again he motions to "pass, pass." They do, soundlessly rising — straight up and over.

Where this otherwise superb film

suffers is in Spielberg's script. Like "Jaws," I feel the first part of "Close Encounters" is the best, when the antagonist is unseen. But when the film concentrates on the breakup of Roy Neary's family, it sags under its own weight, largely because the meaning of Neary's vision is revealed to the audience early in the film. The viewer then has to wait for Neary to figure it out at the cost of Neary's marriage. Likewise, his race to Wyoming, once he deciphers his vision, arouses little suspense since there is not doubt he will make it. And why doesn't he at least show regret over the loss of his wife and children?

Dreyfuss's easy-going performance helps lend credence to the role of Roy Neary. The supporting cast of Melinda Dillon as Jillian Guiler, Francois Truffaut as Lacombe, Teri Garr as Dreyfuss's befuddled wife, and Cary Guffey as the boy is equally fine.

"Close Encounters of the Third Kind," while certainly not flawless, is an enjoyable in its visual delights as in its innocence. For those expecting to see earthlings zapped to a cinder by exotic ray guns, note that this film is as far removed from "The War of the Worlds" as "Pinocchio"; this is not a war story but an idyllic peace story. It suggests that the future will see all creatures in the universe under the same banner, co-existing with cooperation and understanding. And who wouldn't trade a few ray guns for a message so refreshingly optimistic?

Scientists reroute course of probe

WASHINGTON — The federal agency has decided to opt for a safer path because they want to use Pioneer II as a pathfinder for two larger Voyager spacecraft set to explore Saturn in 1980 and 1981.

Voyager 1, now 102 million miles from Earth, is scheduled to approach Saturn Nov. 12, 1980 after flying past Jupiter in March of that year. Voyager 2 is due to reach Jupiter July 9, 1981 and Saturn Aug. 27, 1981.

NASA hopes to send the second Voyager on to Uranus and possibly even to Pluto, but to do that, the craft must successfully negotiate by Saturn and its rings.

If Pioneer II were to run into something at Saturn, NASA would have to reassess its plan to send Voyager on to Uranus.

"Alternatively, a successful Pioneer will greatly increase our willingness to commit Voyager 2 to the Uranus option, even if Voyager 1 has perhaps not achieved all of its objectives at Saturn," said Thomas Young, director of planetary programs.

"Thus, either survival or non-survival of Pioneer on the outside trajectory can have an important influence on Voyager plans, and thus on achieving the maximum science return from all three spacecraft."

The plan now is to direct Pioneer 11 18,000 miles away from the outer of Saturn's four known rings and then have the spacecraft swing in to within 15,000 miles of Saturn's surface.

Pioneer II began its voyage to the outer planets when it left Cape Canaveral, Fla., April 5, 1973. It passed Jupiter in December 1974 and is scheduled to reach Saturn Sept. 1, 1979. Pioneer 11 is now 519 million miles from Earth.

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\$60,000 given to geosciences fund

Donations totaling \$60,000 have been made to the Geosciences and Earth Resources Endowment at Texas A&M University, boosting the current level of support past the one-million dollar mark, said department officials.

Chevron USA presented \$50,000 to the fund, announced H.J. Hines, chairman of the board of Standard Oil of California and a 1946 A&M graduate.

A gift of stocks and money totaling \$10,000 were given as a personal gift to Mr. and Mrs. Robert H. Allen Houston, Allen, a 1950 graduate, chairman of the board of Gulf Rees and Chemical Corp.

The \$250,000 endowment will be overseen by a special council organized last year and consisting of 10 members of Texas' top industrialists and petroleum executives.

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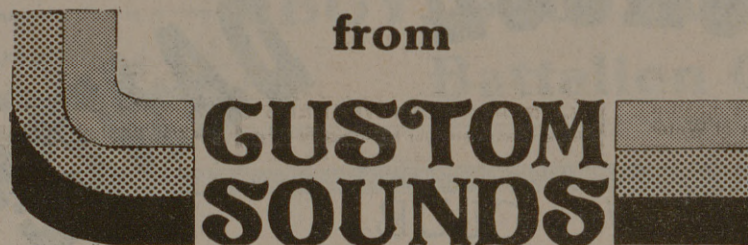
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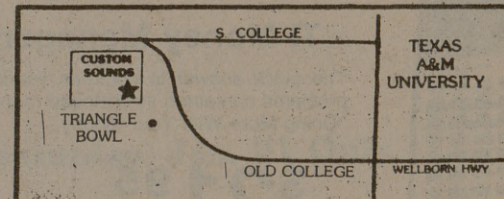
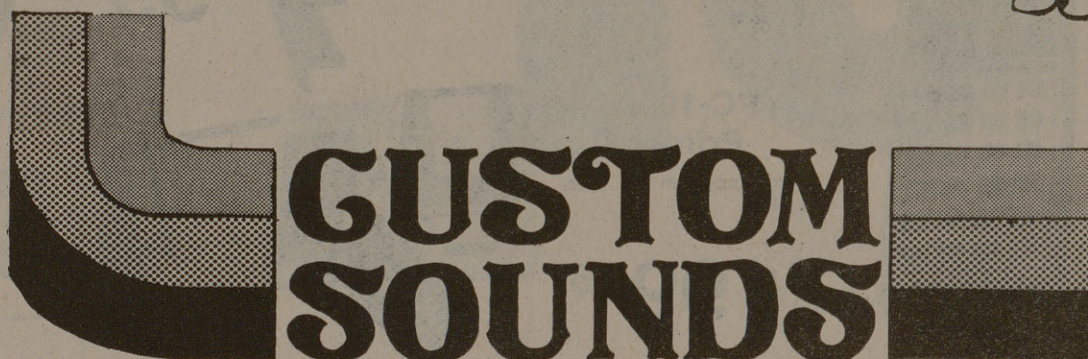


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