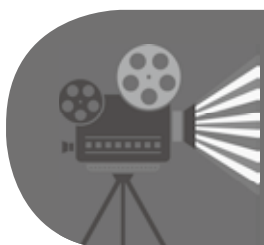




UNIT ONE



SCI-FI MOVIES IN THE 1970S



Part A

America in the 1970s

I Politics



The Cold War (1945–1991)



The Cold War was a period of geopolitical tension between the Soviet Union with its satellite states (the Eastern Bloc), and the United States with its allies (the Western Bloc) after World War II. The conflict began in 1946 and ended between the Revolutions of 1989 and the collapse of the USSR in 1991. The term “cold” is used because there was no large-scale fighting directly between the two sides,

but they each supported major regional conflicts known as proxy wars^①.

Although during the Cold War, the Soviet Union and the United States, two superpowers with profound economic and political differences, never engaged directly in full-scale armed combat, they both were heavily armed in preparation for a possible all-out nuclear world war. Each side had a nuclear strategy that discouraged an attack by the other side, on the basis that such an attack would lead to the total destruction of the attacker—the doctrine of mutually assured destruction (MAD). Aside from the development of the two sides’ nuclear arsenals, and their deployment of the conventional military forces, the struggle for dominance was expressed via proxy wars around the globe, psychological warfare, massive propaganda campaigns and espionage, far-reaching embargoes, rivalry at sports events, and technological competitions such as the Space Race.

① A proxy war (代理战争) is a conflict instigated by opposing powers who do not fight against each other directly. Instead, they use third parties to do the fighting for them.

Before the 1970s, the US had enjoyed distinct advantage in the cold war, in terms of economy and military forces. However, the Soviet Union has gradually gained upper hand in the competition against the United States, especially in the field of nuclear weapons. Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 left Americans nothing but huge fear of nuclear war.

The US President John F. Kennedy spoke before reporters during a televised speech to the nation about the strategic blockade of Cuba, and his warning to the Soviet Union about missile sanctions, during the Cuban missile crisis, on October 24, 1962 in Washington, D.C.

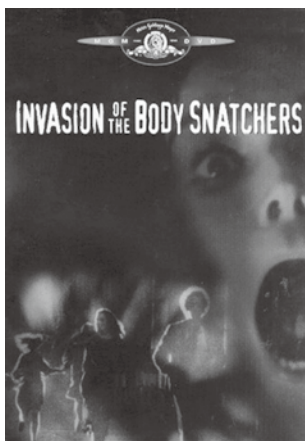
The Cold War and its events have left a significant legacy. It is often referred to in popular culture, especially in media featuring themes of espionage (notably the internationally successful James Bond book and film franchise) and the threat of nuclear warfare. Meanwhile, a renewed state of tension between the Soviet Union's successor state, Russia, and the United States (including its Western allies) in the 2010s has been referred to as the Second Cold War.



* * *



Invasion of the Body Snatchers (1978)



The tagline of this film is "Watch out! They get you while you're sleeping!", which clearly gives warnings to the possible incursion. The hero Matthew Bennell notices that several of his friends are complaining that their close relatives are in some way different. When questioned later, they themselves seem changed as they deny everything or make lame excuses. As the invaders increase in number, they become more open and Bennell, who has by now witnessed an attempted "replacement", realizes that he and his friends must escape or suffer the same fate.



The Vietnam War and the Anti-War Movement

The Vietnam War was an undeclared war in Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia from November 1, 1955 to April 30, 1975. It was officially fought between North Vietnam and South Vietnam. North Vietnam was supported by the Soviet Union and its communist allies; South Vietnam was supported by the United States and its anti-communist allies. The war is considered a Cold War-era proxy war from some US perspectives. It lasted some 19 years with direct US involvement ending in 1973 following the Paris Peace Accords.



The US started providing financial and military supports for the South Vietnamese state in the 1950s and its involvement escalated in the 1960s. By 1964, there were 23,000 US troops in Vietnam. The People's Army of Vietnam (PAVN), also known as the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) engaged in most conventional warfare with the US and the South Vietnamese forces. The US and the South Vietnamese forces relied on air superiority and overwhelming firepower to conduct search and destroy operations.

Gradual withdrawal of the US ground forces began as part of "Vietnamization", which aimed to end American involvement in the war while transferring the task of fighting the communists to the South Vietnamese themselves and began the task of modernizing their armed forces. Direct US military involvement ended on August 15, 1973 as a result of the Case-Church Amendment passed by the US Congress. In 1975, South Vietnamese were defeated and the North and South Vietnam were reunified the following year.

The war exacted a huge human cost in terms of fatalities. Within the US the war gave rise to what was referred to as Vietnam Syndrome, a public aversion to American overseas military involvements, which together with the Watergate Scandal contributed to the crisis of confidence that affected America throughout the 1970s.



During the four years following passage of the Tonkin Gulf Resolution (August 1964), which authorized US military action in Southeast Asia, the American air war intensified and troop levels climbed to over 500,000. Opposition to the war grew as television



and press coverage graphically showed the suffering of both civilians and conscripts. In 1965 demonstrations in New York City attracted 25,000 marchers; within two years similar demonstrations drew several hundred thousand participants in Washington, D.C., London, and other European capitals. Most of the demonstrations were peaceful. Much of the impetus for the antiwar protests came from college students. By 1967, the Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) invoked the language of revolution in its denunciations of the war in Vietnam as an inevitable

consequence of American imperialism. In 1968, President Johnson, who was challenged by two antiwar candidates within his own party for the presidential nomination, chose not to run. The election of Richard Nixon in 1968 and his reduction in US ground forces did little to dampen the antiwar movements. His decision to invade Cambodia in 1970 led to massive demonstrations on college campuses, most tragically at Kent State University where four people were killed by members of the Ohio National Guard. The legacy and meaning of the massive protests against the Vietnam War are still debated.



The Watergate Scandal

The Watergate scandal was a major political scandal that occurred in the United States during the early 1970s, following a break-in by five men at the Democratic National Committee (DNC) headquarters at the Watergate office complex in Washington, D.C. on June 17, 1972, and the subsequent attempt of President Richard Nixon's administration to cover up its involvement. After the five burglars were caught, the FBI investigated and discovered a connection between cash found on the burglars and a slush fund used by the Committee for the Re-Election of the President (CRP), the official organization of Nixon's campaign. The investigation revealed that Nixon had a tape-recording system in his offices and that he had recorded many conversations.



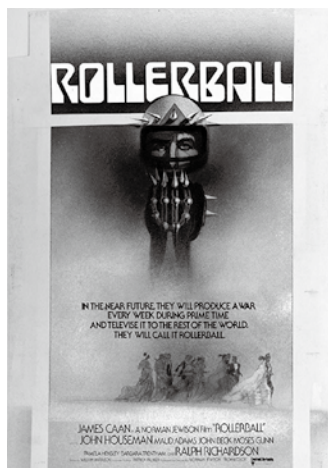
Facing virtually certain impeachment in the House of Representatives and equally certain conviction by the Senate, Nixon resigned the presidency on August 9, 1974.

The name “Watergate” and the suffix “-gate” have since become synonymous with political and non-political scandals in the United States, and some other parts of the world.

* * *



Rollerball (1975)



Norman Jewison's extreme-sports future shock bundles together a paranoid political thriller, a media satire, ultraviolent exploitation and reverent respect for athletic pursuits. In this dystopian future, corporate rule has toppled the nation state. While in the 1970s the biggest corporation—the US government—also lost the support and belief of its people for the Vietnam War and the Watergate Scandal.

II Economy

In America, the post-World War II years are thought to represent the best economy the US has ever enjoyed. It was a time of low unemployment, a housing boom, and—



in general—a time of great stability for the country’s economy.

The 1970s, however, would bring that prosperity to a halt. The economy at that time experienced trouble for a number of reasons.

One of the prime reasons was the Oil Embargo in 1973^①, which had a very serious effect on the American economy. The price of

oil quadrupled in just a short period of time and it was immediately felt at the pumps. Americans had to sit in long lines at the gas stations to fill up their tanks because of a national gas rationing program imposed. As a matter of fact, for a long period of time you could only buy gas every other day, depending on the last number of your license plate. It was a time of great stress for most Americans, particularly for those who depended on their automobile for daily transportation.

Some economists believe that the troubling economy of the 1970s was due to the decline of the work ethic at the end of the 1960s. Crime rates were higher than in previous decades, people spent more time in front of the TV, and divorce was becoming more prevalent. Many believe that a desire to work less and play more contributed to what economists in the 1970s liked to call “stagflation”^②.

Stagflation occurs when inflation and unemployment rate are very high—as they were in the 1970s—and economic growth is quite low. In other words, the economy isn’t growing but prices are. The beginnings of stagflation occurred when Nixon imposed wage and price controls in 1971 and persisted through the decade into the 1980s. Unemployment was higher than it had been for quite some time. The average unemployment rate during the first half of the decade was about 5.4 percent and by the second half it soared to just under 8 percent.



① The 1973 oil crisis began in October 1973 when the members of the Organization of Arab Petroleum Exporting Countries proclaimed an oil embargo. The embargo was targeted at nations perceived as supporting Israel during the Yom Kippur War. The initial nations targeted were Canada, Japan, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom and the United States with the embargo also later extended to Portugal, Rhodesia and South Africa. By the end of the embargo in March 1974, the price of oil had risen from US\$3 per barrel to nearly \$12 globally; the US prices were significantly higher. The embargo caused an oil crisis, or “shock”, with many short-and long-term effects on global politics and the global economy. It was later called the “first oil shock”, followed by the 1979 oil crisis, termed the “second oil shock”.

② It is an economic condition of both continuing inflation and stagnant business activity, together with an increasing unemployment rate.

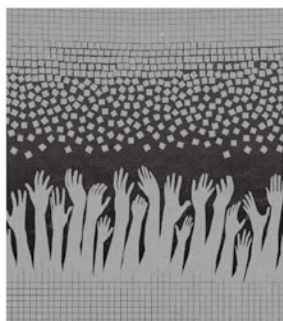
The economy of the 1970s was also marred by a number of large labor strikes and dissatisfaction among workers in a variety of fields. In 1970, more than 200,000 postal workers walked off the job. A year later, a massive longshoreman walk-out closed ports on coasts and in the Gulf of Mexico. It was also during the 1970s that the first legal strike by state workers occurred in Pennsylvania in 1975, involving 80,000 workers. Miners also conducted one of the longest strikes in the history of that industry during the late 1970s.

(Retrieved from <http://classic70s.com/1970s-economy.html>)

* * *



Soylent Green (1973)



SOYLENT GREEN

In 2022, Earth is overpopulated and totally polluted; the natural resources have been exhausted and the nourishment of the population is provided by Soylent Industries...

III Science and Technology

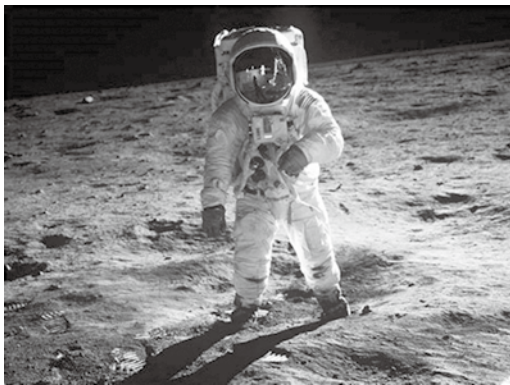


The Apollo Program

The Apollo program, also known as Project Apollo, was the third United States human spaceflight program carried out by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), which accomplished landing the first human on the Moon from 1969 to 1972. Apollo was dedicated to President John F. Kennedy's national goal of "landing a man on the Moon and

returning him safely to the Earth” by the end of the 1960s, which he proposed in an address to the Congress on May 25, 1961. It was the third US human spaceflight program to fly, preceded by the two-man Project Gemini conceived in 1961 to extend spaceflight capability in support of Apollo.

Kennedy’s goal was accomplished on the Apollo 11 mission when astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin landed their lunar module (LM) on July 20, 1969, and walked on the lunar



surface, while Michael Collins remained in lunar orbit in the command and service module (CSM), and all three landed safely on Earth on July 24.

Apollo set several major human spaceflight milestones. It stands alone in sending manned missions beyond low Earth orbit. Apollo 8 was the first manned spacecraft to orbit another celestial body, while the final Apollo 17 mission marked the sixth Moon landing and the ninth manned mission beyond low Earth

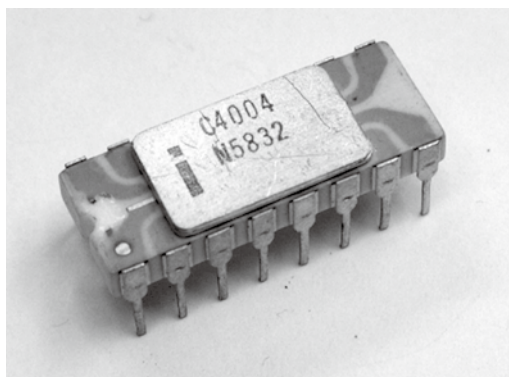
orbit. The program returned 842 pounds of lunar rocks and soil to the Earth, greatly contributing to the understanding of the Moon’s composition and geological history. The program laid the foundation for NASA’s subsequent human spaceflight capability and funded construction of its Johnson Space Center and Kennedy Space Center. Apollo also spurred advances in many areas of technology incidental to rocketry and manned spaceflight, including avionics, telecommunications, and computers.



The First Microprocessor

When Intel brought out the first microprocessor in 1971, the Intel 4004 started the evolution of the home computer. Up until this time most computers were in the hands of fans and scientists with few members of the public really paying attention.

Intel was contracted by Japanese calculator maker Busicom to build a chip to reduce the costs of their calculator. Instead of merely



developing a chip set specifically for use in one machine, the 4004 turned out to be a very early general-purpose programmable chip, capable of much more than mere basic math.

Measuring only 1/8th by 1/6th of an inch it was, according to Intel, one of the smallest microprocessor designs to go into commercial production.

It's hard to believe that something so small could have started something so big.



The First Cell Phone Call

The first handheld mobile phone was demonstrated by John F. Mitchell and Martin Cooper of Motorola in 1973, using a handset weighing 2 kilograms (4.4 lbs). In 1979, Nippon Telegraph and Telephone (NTT) launched the world's first cellular network in Japan. In 1983, the DynaTAC 8000x was the first commercially available handheld mobile phone.



Apple Computer Company

Apple Inc., the American multinational technology company that designs, develops, and sells consumer electronics, computer software, and online services, is considered one of the Big Four of technology along with Amazon, Google, and Facebook today.

Apple was founded by Steve Jobs, Steve Wozniak, and Ronald Wayne in April 1976 to develop and sell Wozniak's Apple I personal computer. It was incorporated as Apple Computer, Inc., in January 1977, and sales of its computers, including the Apple II, grew quickly. Within a few years, Jobs and Wozniak had hired a staff of computer designers and had a production line. Apple went public in 1980 to instant financial success.



Apple Computer



Physics

In the field of physics, the 1970s was a time of great discovery. Renowned physicist Stephen Hawking developed two major theories concerning the nature of the universe in the 1970s, i.e. his theory of the existence of black holes, and his theory on the Big Bang, which was the beginning of the universe some 15 billion years ago. Physicists also had new tools at their disposal with the development of massive experimental machines like CERN's Super Proton Synchrotron, first turned on in 1976. This machine, nearly seven kilometers long, allowed for experiments that tested the nature of matter and antimatter.

IV Culture

The incompetent president, bad costumes, and lame hairstyles are the impression that the United States left in the world in the 1970s.

Women entered the labor market in large numbers, the old family order collapsed, and liberal economics was on the road. Church, the Christian right began to rewrite the American political blueprint. The 1970s is now seen as the beginning of the emergence of the American modern lifestyle.

In 1978, Broadway staged a play. It was about all the absurd things happening in the dormitory where men and women live together. This was a typical reflection of the values of young people in the United States in the 1970s. It showed how the changes brought about by sexual liberation were reflected in ordinary life. Nothing reflected this change more than marriage. In 1910, married families accounted for 80% of the total number of families in the United States. In 1970, 69% of the population were still married. Since then, this number has fallen sharply, leaving only 52% in 2000. In 1965, 2.5 out of every 1,000 Americans divorced, and 3.5 in 1970. In this era of medical, legal, technological, social, and economic changes, people had a new perspective on marriage.

Not only that. In 1977, Utah's ruling on Gale Kimo marked the restoration of the state's death penalty, which in turn led to another debate about life and death. This debate continues to this day.

There was also a proliferation of media in the 1970s. Americans in this era witnessed the birth of the National Public Radio in 1970, the emergence of commercial cable television in 1972 and the emergence of many so-called alternative newspapers. The pursuit of fashion swept the entire American culture, and cable television swept the television industry in the late 1970s. Because of the economic depression and cultural transformation, in the 1970s, people defined themselves in small groups, with culture as the dividing line, and today it is also true.

In the early 1970s, 95% of American households owned television. This square box almost changed the American view of everything: people can witness the vivid history. It is no wonder that the most influential "Saturday Live" in the 1970s was essentially a TV show about TV. The outstanding humor of the show is still the mainstream style of TV programs. The media has penetrated into every corner of society and is pervasive.

In an article of a New York magazine in 1976, this era was called "my century" that the world knows. After some eccentric popularity such as "screaming therapy" faded, many changes in the seventies survived, such as jogging and jeans.

The rhythm of disco music began to rise in American ballrooms and soon became popular around the world.



A large number of American women took to the streets to launch a feminist movement to protest against discrimination of women in American society and to demand more freedom and independence in their work and life.



Although the 1970s started with Hollywood experiencing a financial and artistic depression, the decade became a creative high point in the US film industry. Restrictions on language, adult content and sexuality, and violence had loosened up, and these elements became more widespread. The hippie movement, the civil rights movement, free love, the growth of rock and roll, changing gender roles and drug use certainly had an impact. Hollywood was renewed and reborn with the earlier collapse of the studio system, and the works of many new and experimental film-makers during a Hollywood New Wave.



The counter-culture of the time influenced Hollywood to be freer, to take more risks and to experiment with alternative, young film makers, as old Hollywood professionals and old-style moguls died out and a new generation of film makers arose with new story-telling techniques and more meaningful “artistic” options.

* * *



Star Wars (1977)



Star Wars (later retitled *Star Wars: Episode IV—A New Hope*) is an American epic space opera film written and directed by George Lucas in 1977. It is the first film in the original *Star Wars* trilogy and the beginning of the *Star Wars* franchise.

Star Wars was a technical watershed that influenced many of the movies that came after. It began a new generation of special effects and high-energy motion pictures. The film linked genres together to invent a new, high-concept genre for filmmakers to build upon. Along with Steven Spielberg's *Jaws*, it shifted the film industry's focus away from personal filmmaking of the 1970s and towards fast-paced, big-budget blockbusters for younger audiences.



Part B Case Study I

We are not alone.



CLOSE ENCOUNTERS OF THE THIRD KIND (1977)





I Introduction

**Title:***Close Encounters of the Third Kind***Runtime:**

138 min.

Year:

1977

Awards:Academy Awards^① for Best
Cinematography**Country:**

USA

Saturn Awards^② for Best Director and
Best Music**Production Co.:**Julia Phillips and Michael Phillips
Productions, EMI Films**Screenwriter:**

Steven Spielberg

Genre:

Sci-Fi, Drama

Director:

Steven Spielberg

Rating:PG^③**Principal Cast:**Richard Dreyfuss, François Truffaut,
Teri Garr, Melinda Dillon

① The Academy Awards, also known as the Oscars, are a set of awards for artistic and technical merit in the film industry, given annually by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences (AMPAS), to recognize excellence in cinematic achievements as assessed by the Academy's voting membership. The various category winners are awarded a copy of a golden statuette, officially called the "Academy Award of Merit", although more commonly referred to by its nickname "Oscar". AMPAS first presented it in 1929 at a private dinner hosted by Douglas Fairbanks in the Hollywood Roosevelt Hotel.

② The Saturn Award is an American award presented annually by the Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy and Horror Films; it was initially created to honor science fiction, fantasy, and horror on film, but has since grown to reward other films belonging to genre fiction, as well as on television and home media releases. The Saturn Awards were devised by Donald A. Reed in 1973, who felt that work in films in the genre of science fiction at that time lacked recognition within the established Hollywood film industry's award system. The physical award is a representation of the planet Saturn, with its ring(s) composed of film.

③ In 1968, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) established the Code and Rating Administration, or CARA (later renamed the Classification and Rating Administration), which began issuing ratings for films exhibited and distributed commercially in the United States to help parents determine what films are appropriate for their children. The ratings currently used by the MPAA's voluntary system are: G (General Audiences); PG (Parental Guidance Suggested); PG-13 (Parents Strongly Cautioned); R (Restricted) and NC-17 (Adults Only).



Steven Spielberg

Steven Allan Spielberg is widely considered one of the founding pioneers of the New Hollywood era and one of the most popular directors and producers in film history.

With an abiding interest in films, Spielberg began to make amateur films in his early teens. At age 13, he won a prize for a 40-minute war film he titled *Escape to Nowhere...* using a cast composed of other high school friends. After having won the prize, he almost buried himself in learning and practicing how to make good movies. Three years later, when he was 16, Spielberg wrote and directed his first independent film, a 140-minute science fiction adventure called *Firelight*, which would later inspire *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*. The film was made for \$500, most of which came from his father, and was shown in a local cinema for one evening, which earned back its cost.

After gaining traction in Hollywood with directing television and several minor theatrical releases, Spielberg became a household name as the director of *Jaws* (1975), which was critically and commercially successful, and is considered the first summer blockbuster. His subsequent releases focused typically on science fiction and adventure films, with *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* (1977), the *Indiana Jones* series, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial* (1982), and the *Jurassic Park* series seen as archetypes of modern Hollywood escapist filmmaking. Spielberg transitioned into addressing humanistic issues in his later work via the films *The Color Purple* (1985), *Schindler's List* (1993), and *Saving Private Ryan* (1998). He has largely adhered to this practice during the 21st century.

Spielberg co-founded Amblin Entertainment and DreamWorks Studios, where he has also served as a producer for several successful films, including the *Back to the Future*, *Men in Black*, and *Transformers* series. Spielberg later transitioned into producing several games within the video-game industry.

Spielberg is one of the American film industry's most critically successful filmmakers, with praise for his directing talent and versatility, and has won the Academy Award for Best Director twice. Some of his movies are also among the highest-grossing movies of all-time, while his total work, unadjusted for ticket-price inflation, makes him the highest-grossing film director in history.





Close Encounters of the Third Kind

Close Encounters of the Third Kind tells two parallel stories.

In the first, a group of research scientists from a variety of backgrounds are investigating the strange appearance of items in remote desert regions. In continuing their investigation, one of the lead scientists incorporates music education as a means of communication in their work, and they get response.

In the second, electric company lineman and family man Roy Neary and single mother Jillian Guiler are among some individuals in Indiana who experience some paranormal activity before some flashes of bright lights in the sky, which they believe to be a UFO. Roy and Jillian begin to have a vision of a mound with vertical striations on its side. They decide to find the answer as to its meaning.

Roy and Jillian make it to the secret landing zone just as dozens of UFOs gradually appear in the night sky, while the government specialists at the site begin to try to communicate with the UFOs by use of light and sound. Following this, an enormous mother ship lands at the site. After using light and sound to teach the specialists the aliens' basic tonal vocabulary, it releases the missing pilots who have disappeared 30 years.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind actually encompasses a large variety of themes. One widely recognized theme is technology and modernization. Science fiction films generally see technology in one of two ways: it's either going to destroy us all or it's going to save us. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is in the latter camp. It's optimistic about technology; it sees it as driving humankind's progress. And Spielberg seems to believe that technology helps establish friendly relationship between human beings and extraterrestrials.

II Listening Drills

1. Listen to the conversation when Roy and the kids are deciding what to do for fun and fill in the missing words.

(00:16:15 — 00:17:17)

- ⊗ **Roy:** Hey, you know what's playing in town? Pinocchio! The kids have never seen Pinocchio! You guys have never seen it, you'll love it!
- ⊗ **Ronnie:** I don't believe this.
- ⊗ **Brad:** Who wants to go see some (1) _____ for kids?
- ⊗ **Roy:** How old are you?
- ⊗ **Brad:** Eight.

- ⊕ **Roy:** You wanna be nine?
- ⊕ **Brad:** Yeah.
- ⊕ **Roy:** Then you're gonna see Pinocchio tomorrow night.
- ⊕ **Ronnie:** Roy, that is (2) _____ your children.
- ⊕ **Roy:** I'm not serious, I'm just saying that I (3) _____ Pinocchio, and if kids are still kids, they're going to (4) _____. Okay. Okay, I'm wrong, I'm wrong, Roy, all right?

[Roy Yells at his youngest son, who is demolishing his sister's doll.]

- ⊕ **Roy:** TOBY! You are close to death! Come out here!
- ⊕ **Roy:** Okay, now, I'm gonna give you a choice and I'm gonna be biased anyway. Tomorrow night you can either play Goofy Golf, which is a lot of (5) _____, and probably getting a "zero", or you can see Pinocchio, which is a lot of (6) _____, and you'll have a wonderful time. Okay? Now let's vote.

2. Listen to the meeting of the US Air Force with the public and answer the questions. Part of the conversation is not given below.

(00:55:45 — 00:57:49)

- ⊕ **Lady:** Folks, you can go in now. Room 3655.
- ⊕ **Officer:** Ladies and Gentlemen, ...

Question (1) What does the US Air Force want the public to believe?

- ⊕ **Man 1:** That's the one I saw. I swear it's the same one. It's the one I saw.
- ⊕ **Officer:** It's made of pewter, made in Japan and thrown across the lawn by one of my children. I just want to point that out for you to show that we're not all "polished brass" about these things. And also to make a point that last year Americans shot more than 7 billion photographs at a record of \$6.6 billion for film equipment and processing...

Question (2) What is the officer's point?

- ⊕ **Man 2:** I have been in the news business for a long time. And our cameras have never been able to take a picture of a plane crash as it actually happened or an automobile accident and get it on the 6:00 news.
- ⊕ **Senior:** There are all kinds of ideas that would be fun to believe in...

Question (3) According to this senior officer, what ideas are fun to believe in?



Question (4) According to this senior officer, why do people insist to believe what they saw are UFOs?

- ⊕ **Roy:** Excuse me, sir. I didn't want to see this.
- ⊕ **Senior:** I sure wish I had. You know, for 15 years, I have been looking for these damn silly lights in the light sky. I've never found any. I'd like to, ...

Question (5) What does the senior officer believe in?

- ⊕ **Man 3:** Why don't you guys just admit that...

Question (6) What does this man believe to be really going on?

- ⊕ **Senior:** It would be easy to say yes to that. But I am not going to mislead you. This is not the case. To tell you the truth, I do not know what you saw.
- ⊕ **Roy:** You can't fool us by agreeing with us.

III Discussion



1. Did you enjoy the movie? Why or why not?
2. Which part(s) of the movie stood out for you?
3. Do you believe that extraterrestrial beings would be friendly and playful like those in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*? Why?
4. If one day in the future aliens do come to visit the Earth, what do you think they come for?
5. In this film, human beings communicate with aliens in audio signal and colorful lights. In what other possible ways do you think human beings and aliens can circulate information with each other?
6. Do you think the film has the same impact today as it did back in 1977, when America was crazy for UFOs?
7. How do you like the ending of the film? Do you think it is best to let Roy leave his family and go on the mother ship?
8. Spielberg once told an interviewer in the TBS documentary *Spielberg on Spielberg*, "If we can



talk to aliens in *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, why not with the Reds in the Cold War?”
What do you think he wants the viewer to learn from this film?

IV Reading Reviews

Close Encounters of the Third Kind (excerpt)

James Berardinelli



In late 1977, everyone seemed to believe this. Although UFO has been a popular subject for speculation, **rumination**, and investigation for more than 50 years, at no time was the phenomenon more popular than during the 1970s. Along with the Loch Ness Monster, Bigfoot, and the Abominable Snowman, UFOs were no longer the province of “**fringe**” elements, but had moved into the mainstream. There were plenty of **skeptics**, but many people, including those who had never **purported** to see anything out-of-the-ordinary, wanted to believe. Maybe it had something to do with the world order being so bleak (racial tension, the Vietnam War, the Cold War), but more and more men and women looked to the stars to find hope.

Alien visitation to Earth is a staple of science fiction. Some of the best and worst genre entries have used that subject matter as a **launching pad**. One of the things that differentiates *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* from its seemingly countless predecessors is that the aliens are friendly, curious, and even playful. Mr. Spock aside, this is not a common characterization of space-faring races. More often than not, aliens in motion pictures are shown attacking Earth, not observing and trying to make peaceful contact. Films like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, and *Contact* are exceptions to the rule.

What would the first contact really be like? That’s the scenario Spielberg imagined with the aid of Dr. J. Allen Hynek, one of the world’s foremost “serious” UFO experts. The military is involved, but they aren’t running the show; instead, scientists are in charge. The encounter is a wonderful, magical meeting of cultures—humans put their efforts not into weapons and fighting, but into the simplest and the most important of life’s basics: communication. Through colors, music, and hand gestures, we forge an understanding with an alien species.

Part of the genius of *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is that we don’t know until the end that the aliens are not hostile. Some of their early appearances in the film (when they shake Roy’s power truck and visit Jillian’s home to abduct Barry) are unsettling. Think of the furnace-like red light that envelopes Jillian’s house as the alien craft approaches. Red is traditionally not a

comforting color, and, in this case, it's **downright** frightening. Unlike *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* does not have a light, playful tone. There is an almost **ominous undercurrent** to the proceedings. Only in the end, when Spielberg pulls back the curtain on an awe-inspiring, **majestic** climax, do we finally understand that not being alone does not mean being in danger. We have to **unlearn** all that nearly every other motion picture has taught us about alien visitations.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind is one of those rare films that works equally as well for children and for adults. Kids see this film as a promise of what might be out there and have an unthreatening look at the possibilities that the universe holds. How many UFO believers today began their fascination with alien life after seeing this movie as a child? Adults, even skeptics, see *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* as an accomplished fairy tale. Whether UFOs are real or not, this movie beautifully **postulates** the best of all alternatives—that the government cares about the first contact and about the welfare of its citizens, that the aliens are benevolent, and that we can take comfort from the fact that “we are not alone”. Remarkably, a film like *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* speaks to the adult in the child and the child in the adult.

Close Encounters of the Third Kind is peerless in the field of first-contact films—its eight Oscar nominations and one win (Best Cinematography) are a testimony to that. Its universal appeal gave movie-goers something to be excited about during the winter of 1977 to 1978 as the first in a wave of post-*Star Wars* science fiction films broke. The story is fresh and compelling, the special effects are as remarkable as anything that CGI can do, and the music represents some of John Williams' best work. *Close Encounters of the Third Kind* is the complete package, and it shines as brightly in its latest **iteration** as it did in its first.

(Retrieved from <http://www.reelviews.net/reelviews/close-encounters-of-the-third-kind>)

Vocabulary

- | | | |
|------------------------|-------------|---|
| ☆ rumination | <i>n.</i> | a deep or considered thought about something |
| ☆ fringe | <i>n.</i> | the outer, marginal, or extreme part of an area, group, or sphere of activity |
| ☆ skeptic | <i>n.</i> | a person who usually doubts that claims or statements are true, especially those that other people believe in |
| ☆ purport | <i>v.</i> | to claim to be or to have done something, when this may not be true |
| ☆ launching pad | | an event, group, or activity that helps someone start something |
| ☆ downright | <i>adv.</i> | used to emphasize that something is completely bad or untrue |
| ☆ ominous | <i>adj.</i> | making one feel that something bad is going to happen |
| ☆ undercurrent | <i>n.</i> | a feeling, especially of anger or dissatisfaction, that people do not express openly |
| ☆ majestic | <i>adj.</i> | impressive because of size or beauty |
| ☆ unlearn | <i>v.</i> | to deliberately forget something you have learned, in order to change the way you do something |