

Guinness Choice

E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial



FLY-BY-NIGHT E.T. WAS BROUGHT TO LIFE USING MODELS AND ACTORS IN COSTUME, SUCH AS 0.75M (2 FT 7 IN)-TALL TAMARA DE TREAUX

115 mins, USA, col
Dir Steven Spielberg
Henry Thomas, Dee Wallace,
Peter Coyote, Drew Barrymore



Director Steven Spielberg described his touching fantasy about one boy and his pet alien as a film 'for kids, by kids', but the lovable latex space-creature has proved equally irresistible to grown-ups over the years.

Stunning special effects aside, the film's strengths lie in its youthful cast and Spielberg's careful handling of them; he allowed his child actors the freedom to improvise and react naturally to the unbelievable situations unfolding around them, and this lends their performances an air of realism which balances the far-fetched plot. Young Elliott (Thomas) is a lonely child who lives with his older brother Michael (Robert

MacNaughton), kid sister Gertie (Barrymore) and mother Mary (Wallace), who is in the middle of a divorce. Elliott makes a new friend when he discovers in his back garden a stranded extra-terrestrial, whom he names 'E.T.'. Swearing his siblings to secrecy, Elliott hides E.T. in his bedroom and attempts to help the alien make contact with his mother ship. Along the way, the children learn to function as a family again, united by their love of

E.T. and their wonderment at his strange powers. The E.T. creature itself is a miracle of special effects, making it quite easy to believe in the existence of little men from outer space. Spielberg and his designers spent weeks creating the alien, carefully selecting each feature (the eyes were based on those of Albert Einstein). The film has several fine comedy moments, such as when E.T. gets drunk on the contents of the family fridge, and his telepathic link to Elliott ensures that the boy's classroom behaviour becomes equally outlandish. However, the disturbing scenes of E.T.'s illness and apparent death are enough to guarantee that there won't be a dry eye in the house. With the exception of Mary, the youthful mother figure, Spielberg keeps adults out of the picture until quite late on. Grown-ups are glimpsed as dark, predatory figures, hunting E.T. with torches, and jangling jailer's keys. Of the kids, Henry Thomas gives a remarkable performance as Elliott (he was selected on the spot after reducing the casting producers to tears during his screen test), while a wide-eyed Drew Barrymore steals her scenes as Gertie. Her performance is delightfully spontaneous; for example, her initial reaction to E.T. – 'I don't like his feet' – was not scripted. All in all, *E.T.* is exceptionally entertaining viewing, but keep the hankies handy.