

"E.T."

Written By Steven Spielberg
Commentary (In parenthesis) by Richard Michaels

TITLES: "E.T. - THE EXTRA-TERRESTIAL"

[The letters are in soft-purple against a black background. Purple is traditionally the color of that which is sacred.]

EXT: NIGHT SKY: NIGHT

The black screen becomes a night sky. The camera angles lowers to show a forest against the night sky.

EXT: LANDING SITE: NIGHT

In an opening in the forest stands a spacecraft. The view of the craft is obscured by tree branches. The atmosphere is misty, with blue lights coming from the spacecraft.

[The opening scene is misty and diffused. This forces the audience to pay close attention to the images on the screen. The characters are not clearly seen. This engages the audience, as they attempt to see what the aliens really look like.]

One creature walks up the gang blank and into the ship.

INSERT: ALIEN HAND

A strange hand, with two long and slender fingers protruding, move aside a branch that obstructs the view.

[This concentrates the audience's attention. The creature going into the ship is being observed by another creature. Who are they? What's going on?

This is another technique that forces the audience to focus

on the action.]

INT: SPACECRAFT'S GREENHOUSE: NIGHT

The inside of the ship appears to be a greenhouse. There are sounds of water dripping. Cone shaped objects (possibly alien plants) sit among earth plants. Vapors flow up from the plants.

[These images all appear non-threatening. The aliens are inferred to be collecting vegetation, and are thereby inferred to be harmless.]

[Like many of Spielberg's other films, the opening sequences contain almost no dialogue. The story is told without verbal exposition. He forces the audience to become engaged in the storytelling process by giving them just bits of information that they have to piece together into the story. He doesn't insult their intelligence.]

EXT: SPACECRAFT: NIGHT

A group of the aliens work in front of the spacecraft. Suddenly, they hear a dog howl, and they all stop working. Red lights begin to glow in their chests. It appears as if their hearts have lit up at the sign of danger, as the red glow seeps through their translucent skin. After a moment the red lights dim and they return to their work.

[This sets up the prop of the red-lights signifying danger. These small creatures are endearing and non-threatening. They are like children, which is immediate grounds for audience empathy. The thought that they may be in danger from wild creatures in the forest, also creates empathy for them.]

EXT: FOREST: NIGHT

A small fern grows on the forest floor. An alien hand, with two fingers protruding, reaches out for the fern. The alien

groans. A rabbit turns and listens. The fingers dig up the plant as the rabbit watches. The alien then carefully uproots the plant. A small wayward alien walks alone among the gigantic redwood trees. He's dwarfed by the huge trees.

[The awesome towering trees psychologically creates audience empathy for the creature. The audience identifies with him because they too feel small when confronted by these trees.]

EXT: HILLTOP: NIGHT

The creature stands alone on a hilltop as he stares down at the city lights below. Suddenly he lets out a moan of fright. A truck, with headlights glaring, pulls up next to him.

[The quiet, peaceful alien is now in jeopardy.]

The creature runs from the lights. Several other trucks with head- lights glaring drive up. Smoke flows from their exhaust pipes. Men's legs are seen as they walk among the trucks. They step into a mud puddle as E.T. watches from behind a shrub. A man with keys jangling from his waist walks past a headlight. He carries a flashlight in his hands.

[Keys have now become a prop which identifies the antagonist of the story: the faceless government agent. Like the antagonist of many other fantasy films, his face is not initially revealed in order to hold the audiences attention.]

The man with keys walks to a truck where he and two other men review a map that's placed on the hood of the truck. The man with keys holds the flashlight up and points it at the hood. E.T watches them from the bushes.

[The fact that E.T. is observing the actions of the men also creates a psychological bond between the audience and

him, since they are also observing these characters.]

[While the audience doesn't actually see a map, they presume its existence given the actions of the characters. This style of story telling engages the audience, and gets them guessing about the characters' actions. They then create expectations, which are later often proved to be wrong. This makes the story both unpredictable and exciting.]

EXT: SPACESHIP: NIGHT

An alien stands in front of a round light and transmits a homing signal, presumably to call the other aliens back to the ship.

[These characters are all in jeopardy.]

EXT: FOREST: NIGHT

When E.T hears the sound, his red heart lights up. The homing signal reverberates in his chest.

[This establishes that his heart is used as a communication device, i.e., these aliens communicate with their hearts.]

"Keys" hears this sound and quickly turns around. He points his flashlight towards the sounds. The other men join him as they walk towards the sound. E.T. screams and runs away, which is indicated by the shaking bushes. The men with flashlights chase after him.

[So, like Dorothy in the WIZARD OF OZ, the opening scene has the protagonist being pursued by an unknown antagonist.]

EXT: SPACECRAFT: NIGHT

The lights dim on the footings of the spacecraft, presumably because the spacecraft is preparing to takeoff.

[The protagonist has the added jeopardy of being abandoned.]

EXT: FOREST: NIGHT

E.T. screams as he races for the spacecraft. The glow from his red-heart reflects off the bushes as he runs towards the white light of the spacecraft.

[The audience still hasn't seen the face of the protagonist.]

EXT: SPACECRAFT: NIGHT

A lone alien stands before a large round white light, as he signals for the other aliens to return to the ship.

EXT: FOREST: NIGHT

Men with flashlights run through the forest, as they pursue the red glowing light racing towards the spacecraft. One of the pursuers is the man wearing the keys on his waist.

EXT: SPACECRAFT: NIGHT

The grated gangplank lifts up, blocking the entrance to the ship. Behind the grate stands the alien against the large round white light. The red light of the aliens heart lights up as he stands behind the barrier.

[This image exhibits an obstacle to E.T. returning to his ship.]

EXT: FOREST: NIGHT

The men reach the edge of the clearing and stop as they watch the spacecraft lift off.

One red lighted heart races along an old country fence towards the departing spacecraft. Men with flashlights are still in pursuit. They stop at a wooden gate as they watch the spacecraft fly away.

E.T., with face obstructed by a branch, and with red-heart aglow, watches the spacecraft fly away into the night. He utters a sorrowful moan.

[He has been abandoned in a hostile alien world. This situation is guaranteed to generate audience empathy.]

The men with flashlights pointed up towards the sky watch the space- craft fly away. They hear E.T.'s groan, and in unison point their flashlights in his direction.

[Not only is the small childlike creature abandoned, but he is still in jeopardy of being captured by those who pursue him.]

[This is the inciting event in E.T.'s story: his spacecraft has deserted him.]

EXT: HILLTOP: NIGHT

Below lies the city, lit up against the dark night sky. E.T slowly makes his way down the slope.

Men with flashlights follow. They reach the hilltop, search the underbrush for the alien, then start down the slope after him.

[This concludes the prelude to the story. Both the protagonist and antagonist have been introduced, and audience empathy has been established for the protagonist. The protagonist's primary objective is to survive and find a way home, while the antagonist's primary objective is to capture the alien.]

EXT: SUBURBAN HOUSE: NIGHT

[This is an establishing shot.]

INT: ELLIOTT'S HOUSE: NIGHT

A group of boys are sitting around a table playing a DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS game. One boy is on the telephone ordering a pizza. They throw wads of paper at each other as they play.

Elliott, the youngest boy, sits behind the counter. He's separated from the other boys. After a few moments he yells that he's ready to play the game.

[The character's positions are structured to emphasize Elliott's separation from the others.]

One of the boys tells Elliott that he can't join when they are in the middle of the game.

[Audience empathy is generated for the young child who is being excluded from the game.]

Elliott walks up to the table and yells at his brother, Mike. Michael says that Elliott has to ask Steve, who is the Game Master, and who has absolute power.

[The notion of "absolute power" is set up here, for a "payoff" later when Elliott uses it to keep Michael silent about E.T.]

[Elliott's objective here is to play the game, but also to be accepted by the group and gain the respect of the older boys.]

Steve tells Elliott that first he has to wait for the pizza, then when he brings it back he can play. Steve gives him money for the pizza. Elliott picks up his baseball and glove, then leaves the room.

[The ball and glove are props that will be used in the story.]

[Elliott's sub-objective is to get the pizza. Once this is accomplished, he'll be able to play the game.]

EXT: ELLIOTT'S HOUSE: NIGHT

It's a rainy, misty night. Elliott, with ball and glove in hand wait at the bottom of the driveway for the pizza. A car pulls up and parks in the driveway. Elliott pays the driver, then takes the pizza box from him as the car pulls out of the driveway.

Elliott walks up the driveway and into the garage. He hears a noise in the backyard, then calls out the name "HARVEY," presumably his dogs name.

INT: ELLIOTT'S HOUSE: NIGHT

Elliott's mother wears an orange outfit as she works in the kitchen. She bends over to put dishes into the dishwasher. When she does this one of the young boys reaches out to put his finger on her rear. Mike yells for him to stop. He pulls his finger away.

INT: PATIO: NIGHT

Elliot walks past the ping pong table when he hears more noises in the backyard. Again he calls out the name "Harvey."

[This generates tension and suspense in the audience.]

With the pizza box in hand, Elliot walks past the patio table and towards the shed in the backyard. A bright crescent moon hangs in the night sky.

[This adds enchantment to the scene.]

There is a mist in the air, and a bright light shines in the shed. Elliott places the pizza box on the ground as he approaches the shed. He's still carrying the baseball and glove as he stands in front of the shed's entrance. He tosses the ball into the shed. After a few seconds the ball is tossed back out at him and hits him on the foot.

[This is the payoff to the setup of the baseball prop. This event surprises both Elliott and the audience.]

Elliott becomes frightened, turns and steps on the pizza box as he runs towards the house.

[This is the inciting event in Elliott's story: there is some creature hiding out in his shed that will change his whole life.]

INT: ELLIOTT'S HOUSE: NIGHT

Elliott's mother is talking to the boys when Elliott runs into the house screaming that there's something in the tool shed. He tells them that it threw a ball at him, but they continue to ignore him until he screams "QUIET!" "Nobody go out there," says Elliott. The boys immediately jump up from the table. Two boys grab kitchen knives as Michael tells his mother to stay inside. He and his friends will check it out. She yells at them to put the knives back as she follows them outside.

EXT: SHED: NIGHT

The light is still on in the shed.

EXT: PATIO: NIGHT

Elliott's mother walks into the yard with a flashlight in her hand. She is surrounded by the boys as they approach the shed. The mother says that there's nothing in there as

Michael walks through the entrance. Michael bends down and finds tracks on the dirt floor. "The coyote's come back again, Ma." he says. His mother becomes frightened and orders them all back into the house.

[Jeopardy is introduced into the situation. Even though the audience knows that it is probably the alien in the shed, the scene increases the tension.]

On his way back to the house, Michael sees the pizza box. He bends down, opens the box, then takes out a piece. He's angry at Elliott. Elliott tries to explain that it was just an accident, but his brother is still angry. When the mother asks who ordered the pizza, Elliott points to one of Mike's friends. This makes the friend mad at Elliott. Elliott tries to persuade his mother that there is a creature in the shed, but she doesn't believe him. They walk into the house.

[Empathy is generated for Elliott because the two boys are unfairly angry at him and his mother doesn't believe him.]

INT: SHED: NIGHT

The alien's fingers point out into the shed entrance, then wrap around the side of the door. The sound of his heavy breathing is heard.

[This establishes for the audience that he really is in the shed. They feel sorry for Elliott because he was telling the truth and no one believed him.]

INT: ELLIOTT'S BEDROOM: NIGHT

The clock on the end table indicates 2:00. Next to the clock is a picture of a dog, presumably Harvey. This same dog lies asleep in the bed. He hears a noise and picks up his head. He is in the lower half of a bunk bed. On the top bunk sits Elliott. He is awake as he listens to the noise outside.

[Elliott's objective is to prove there's a creature in the shed.]

EXT: BACKYARD: NIGHT

Elliott opens a gate and walks into the backyard. He carries a flashlight in his hand and shines it into the cornfield next to his house. He walks into the field.

EXT: CORNFIELD: NIGHT

Elliott walks into the cornfield. He whistles, and gets entangled in the cornstalks as he walks. He sees tracks in the dirt with his baseball nearby. He continues to walk through the field.

(The stalks are obstacles that obstruct both his path and his vision. It also clutters the visuals and forces the audience to pay closer attention. The suspense increases.)