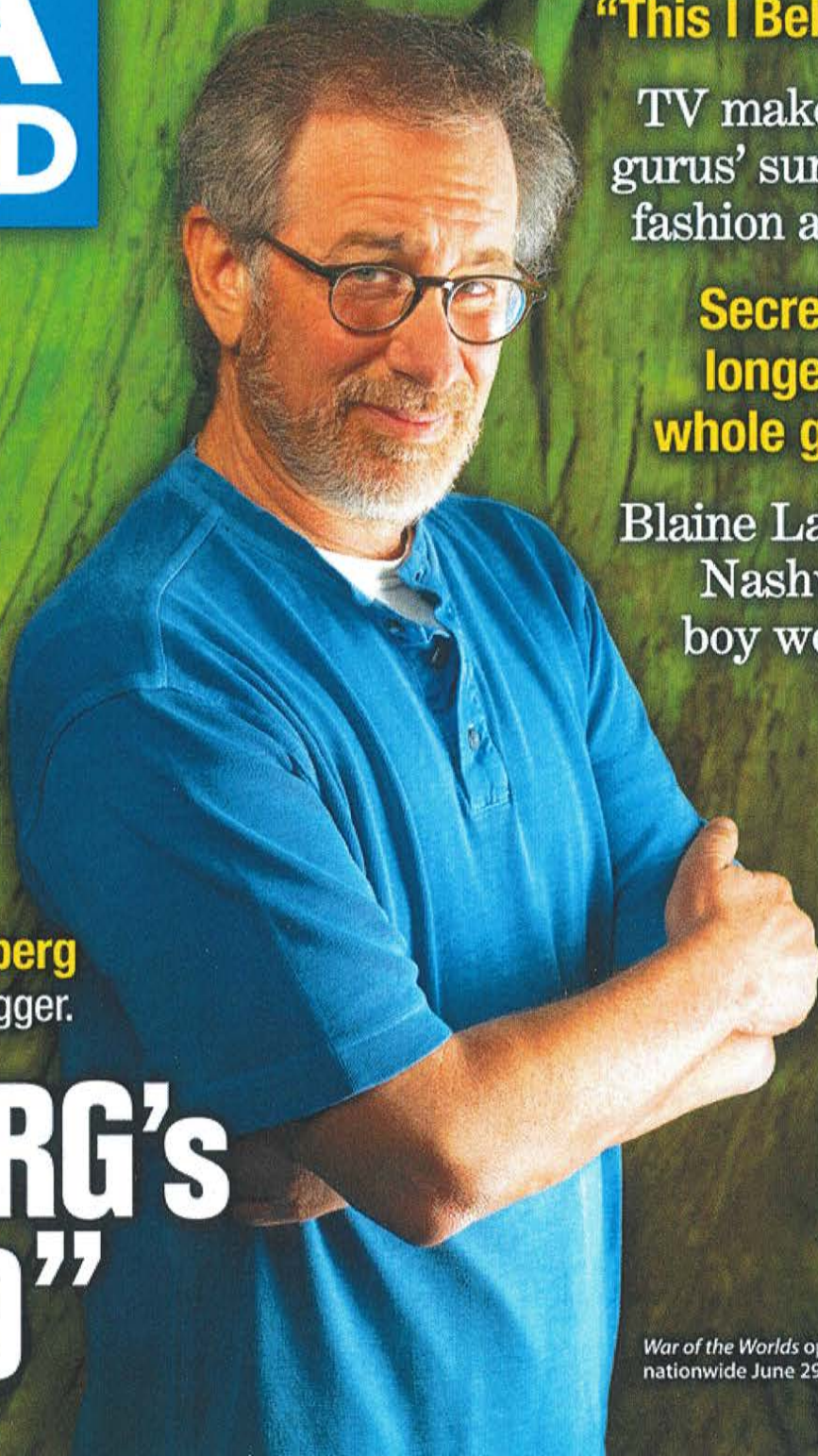


A photograph of Steven Spielberg, a man with grey hair, a beard, and glasses, wearing a blue polo shirt. He is standing with his arms crossed against a background of green, textured tree trunks.

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Find out how **Steven Spielberg**
made the big screen even bigger.

SPIELBERG's "WORLD"

War of the Worlds opens
nationwide June 29.

"IMAGINATION IS INFINITE"

Hitmaker **Steven Spielberg** launches *War of the Worlds*, a century-old tale retold for today — and designed to scare the wits out of you.

BY CRAIGH BARBOZA

It is a chilly night in early spring, and Steven Spielberg is doing something he has made a career of: imagining what's out there. The director is sitting under a small tent in a hilly farmland-like area of the Santa Clarita Valley, 45 minutes north of Los Angeles, pointing with V-shaped fingers at a video monitor he uses to view the action as it happens. With him are his closest collaborator, Janusz Kaminski, the cinematographer on his Oscar-winning films *Saving Private Ryan* and *Schindler's List*, and his visual-effects supervisor, Pablo Helman. They are inspecting a replay of a just-completed scene from *War of the Worlds*, his new \$133 million alien invasion movie. In the shot, Dakota Fanning waits nervously by a tree for her dad, played by Tom Cruise, as hysterical people rush past. Explosions and gunfire flash around her.

Spielberg calmly puffs on a Davidoff cigar. "More sky," he says, gesturing to the top of the frame. "The camera needs to come down and stop so we can see the effects." There is nothing out there, of course — only the vast, clear sky. But Spielberg is planning ahead for his visual-effects team, who later will add the A-10s and F-16s battling the alien attack.

Aliens have shown up in earlier Spielberg films, including *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, his 1977 phenomenon about the arrival of a mother ship on Earth, and five years later in *E.T.*, the story of a lonely suburban boy who befriends a child-size space visitor. Both immortal sci-fi classics introduced celestial creatures who wanted to get to know us, not obliterate us. They were sweetly benign, even lovable.



Yet here is Spielberg, surrounded by hundreds of extras, several tanks and a dozen Humvee-mounted Avengers manned by real-life soldiers, putting a contemporary spin on H.G. Wells' 1898 best seller. Spielberg grew up on Wells-inspired cinema. He was born in Cincinnati on Dec. 18, 1946, and came of age with the '50s sci-fi explosion that produced B pictures like *Invaders From Mars* (one of his favorites). As a kid, he was particularly struck by *Atomic City*, and afterward went around the house filling tubs in case a nu-

clear catastrophe contaminated the water supply.

It was his father, Arnold, an electrical engineer, who nurtured his love of science fiction. "My dad was the one who got me my first telescope," he says. "He built it by hand. And he's the one, when I first began reading in earnest, that turned me on to *Amazing Stories*, *Analog* and other periodicals that were all about science fiction." Spielberg wanted to make a movie that would recall the heyday of sci-fi, when aliens were presumed sinister. "In my heart, I don't

believe that," he tells me, "but I stepped out of character to make a really scary summer movie."

At 58, Spielberg is still boyish, with a slightly larger-than-normal cranium and a neatly clipped white beard. He has a wide, easy smile, and his manner is surprisingly disarming. Between camera set-ups, he sits with Kaminski, singing a cheerful Yiddish tune and joking with the crew about needing a "non-caffeine drink." Spielberg has never liked coffee. "How about a Mountain Dew?" someone offers.

"That's nothing but caffeine," he snaps, with mock indignation.

"Red Bull," says the next guy.

"Maybe a Jolt," another crewperson says, causing a group chuckle. Spielberg settles on a Sprite, and work resumes.

During the 85-day shoot, Spielberg roughed up his actors. They were covered in mud and water, sometimes in frigid temperatures. But they played just as hard as they worked. During scary scenes, Cruise would tickle Fanning. And off camera, everyone acted out scenes from *Napoleon Dynamite*. "The scarier and darker a film becomes, the more giggle room you have," Spielberg says. On *Jaws*, "when we weren't homesick and throwing up over the side of the Orca, we were laughing hysterically at how silly it looked to have two boats tugging a 26-foot, non-working model

of a great white shark through the water." *Jaws*, which turns 30 this summer, is the movie that made Spielberg famous — and people afraid to go into the water. But it was such a production disaster he thought his career was finished. "I had little idea I was making a good movie until I put it in front of an audience and got the happiest shock when they were screaming and tossing popcorn into the air — some running for the exit," Spielberg laughs.

Over the years, he has had his share of failures, beginning with *1941* and as recently as *The Terminal*. But when his movies work, they're a license to print cash. The 21 films he's directed have a total estimated box office of \$3.2 billion, the most of any director.

Part of what has made him so successful is his flair

for storytelling. He seems to know by instinct the visual language audiences speak. He can create characters that are instantly empathetic (*Raiders of the Lost Ark*), or invest machines with personalities (the 18-wheeler in *Duel*). Another part of his genius derives from his uncanny capacity to identify the zeitgeist, the spirit of the times. Few directors have been able to tap into this vein of energy flowing through the

got tickets! I had to bring the usher down to verify it. It was hilarious."

War of the Worlds opens with Cruise, a dock-worker too busy being a kid himself (he keeps the engine for his '66 Mustang in the kitchen) to be a father. His ex-wife brings the kids for the weekend. Shortly after, aliens hurl an electromagnetic pulse that shuts down the planet. This makes the populous much more manageable for the aliens, who then come out of the sky and ground. "It's more terrifying when it's a life form of great intelligence," Spielberg says, "and I think we emphasized how well coordinated these attacks are."

Science fiction, at least the best of its kind, is a metaphor for contemporary issues. No wonder each iteration of *War of the Worlds* has arrived in a period of public angst. At the start of the Cold War, audiences saw George Pal's 1953 movie

SCIENCE FICTION OFTEN IS A METAPHOR FOR CURRENT EVENTS.



War of the Worlds, 2005



Close Encounters of the Third Kind, 1977



E.T., 1982

From top: In Spielberg's latest alien pic, with Tom Cruise, the visitors aren't as friendly as in *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* His terrifying TV movie *Duel* jump-started his career.

culture and give it form the way Spielberg has. Even *Amistad*, hardly a hit, is credited with fueling the national debate on slavery reparations. Henry Louis Gates Jr., the Harvard intellectual who worked as a consultant on that film, calls him "an almost poetic kind of director."

Cruise still recalls the time he went around recruiting people at a family picnic in Kentucky to eat early so they could stand in line to see *Jaws* before it sold

out. When *E.T.* previewed, Cruise says, "I saved 14 seats with my sister, Lee Anne, because I wanted my whole family to see Steven Spielberg's new movie as soon as possible." Waiting for them to arrive, "I almost got into a fight with some guy. He was like, 'Where are the people?!' I said, 'They're coming. I've

about aliens crash-landing on Earth and thought one thing: The commies are coming to get us! Fifteen years before, as the Nazis menaced the world, Orson Welles created a panic with his radio broadcast. "After 9/11," Spielberg says, "*War of the Worlds* is [again] a reflection on how scared we are. This movie turns American families into refugees; it's something America has never experienced."

There is another way to read the movie, one closer to H.G. Wells' intentions. The novel was an allegory about the death of over-reaching British colonialism, where Wells cast the English as the invaded instead of the invaders. "You can read our movie several ways," says screenwriter David Koepp. "It could be straight 9/11 paranoia. Or it could be about how U.S. military interventionism abroad is doomed by insurgency, just the way an alien invasion might be." Audiences will have to decide for themselves.



Duel, 1971

One afternoon in April, I sat with Spielberg for 70 minutes and chatted casually about what forms him. Spielberg is electric to be around. He's witty and gracious, a man who thinks about many subjects.

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Yet, as his close friend Richard Schickel says, "there's a part of him that can plug back into the 10-year-old kid he was." Spielberg has an insatiable passion for video games ("I play them on the set, at home or at the office between meetings"), collects movie memorabilia (a few years ago he bought the Rosebud sled from *Citizen Kane*) and says geeky things like "Everything about *2001* was within the grasp of scientific probability, except for discovering the monolith."

Later, we talk about his old friend George Lucas ("My big boss man") and movies. Spielberg is already planning his next three, including *Lincoln*, a biopic with Liam Neeson. "What I like directing above everything else are movies about history," he says. "Second most fun is science fiction. With sci-fi, the imagination is the storyteller, and as we all know, the imagination is infinite. It stretches your thinking almost to the breaking point, and then you haven't even started thinking yet."

To say Spielberg has a hyperactive imagination is an understatement. When reading, he puts himself so squarely in the story that if it starts not to work, or a character does something he doesn't believe, he actually gets mad at the character. He tends to see the world 24 frames per second and could probably form a movie out of the back of a cereal box. He still reads them over breakfast. "It would be a short movie," he quips.

Between films, Spielberg spends a lot of time with his family. He and his wife, Kate Capshaw, have seven children, who keep him in stitches. "I have a daughter that is so not aware she's following in the footsteps of Jim Carrey. She gets into a routine with my 13-year-old son,

MAN OF A MILLION HATS

As the head of an entertainment empire that includes movies, TV and merchandizing, Spielberg wears many hats. In fact, he collects them — the guy could probably open a museum one day. For now, they

are crunched up in an armoire. One favorite (he wore it for about seven years!) is from *Class of '61*, his failed pilot for

ABC. Most are gifts from family, friends or civic groups he's worked with.



and I am on the floor. Then I'm going for the video camera to try and capture lightning in a bottle."

By all accounts, Spielberg is the consummate mensch. He car-pools in his Lexus SUV, is generous with friends, and tells bedtime stories. "I always make them up," he says.

Spielberg was an energetic, ambitious child who loved an audience.

He was 12 when he began making amateur films. At 16, he directed his first feature-length film, *Firelight*, about aliens abducting humans for an extraterrestrial zoo. For that movie, he asked his mother for a pressure cooker explosion, so she bought two dozen cans of cherries in heavy syrup. "He had the scene set up in the kitchen with the camera and the lighting," mom Leah says, "and, on cue, I hurled the contents all over my new cabinets." She's chuckling, now. "I lived there for eight years, never got the juice out of the cabinets." (A clip from *Firelight*, which only recently was rediscovered by Spielberg's personal archivist, can be seen on the upcoming TCM documentary *Watch the Skies!*)

"I wanted *Firelight* to be a real movie in theaters someday," Spielberg says. "But parts of it became *Close Encounters* and *E.T.* and, looking back, even *War of the Worlds*. So, I've kind of cloned that movie three times now."

Spielberg may be returning to old ground, but much has changed in the last century. "We can't go back to that old Hollywood word I loved growing up, 'Martians,'" he says, then smiles. "I was disappointed to learn we didn't have a close neighbor. Happy at the same time that [no one was] going to do anything about us!" **EW**

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