

Steven Spielberg and Duel: The Making of a Film Career

By Steven Awalt



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Since the early 1970s, Steven Spielberg has directed more than two dozen films, many of which have achieved classic status. In addition to critical and commercial successes that include *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*, *Schindler's List*, *Saving Private Ryan*, and *Lincoln*, Spielberg's name has become synonymous with such thrilling adventure films as *Jaws*, *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *Jurassic Park*, and *Minority Report*. Before he became a world-renowned filmmaker, however, Spielberg established himself on television, helming episodes of *Rod Serling's Night Gallery*, *Marcus Welby, M.D.*; and *Columbo*. But it was the small-screen version of a Richard Matheson short story that brought the young director's work to the attention of critics and viewers alike.

In *Steven Spielberg and Duel: The Making of a Film Career*, Steven Awalt provides an exhaustive study commemorating the film that decisively launched the career of a major film artist. Through in-depth research and interviews with the film's creative and technical crew, the author tracks the film from genesis through production to release. Awalt conducted lengthy one-on-one interviews with Spielberg, Matheson, assistant director James Fargo, editor Frank Morriss, composer Billy Goldenberg, former MCA/Universal president Sidney J. Sheinberg, and writer-producer Steven Bochco, among others.

Spielberg provided access to many rare documents from his archives, including multiple drafts of *Duel's* teleplay, the shooting schedule, shooting logistics breakdowns, and production correspondence. The first book-length examination of this important production in the director's early career, *Steven Spielberg and Duel* also includes the original teleplay by Matheson, four additional scenes created for the international theatrical release of the film, photos, and storyboards of the film's final sequence. A fascinating look behind the scenes of an acclaimed work, this book will interest not only scholars and film historians but anyone interested in the work of Richard Matheson and Steven Spielberg.



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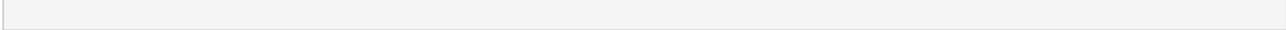
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Editorial Review

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Like *The Sugarland Express*, Steven Spielberg's first theatrical film, *Duel* (1971) is a Spielberg movie a lot of people have heard about but never seen. It was a TV movie, with a screenplay by Richard Matheson (who wrote the short story on which the film was based), starring Dennis Weaver as an unassuming traveler harassed by the faceless driver of a big rig. Doesn't sound like much, but in Spielberg's hands, as film historian Awalt notes in this very engaging and perceptive "making of" book, the film delivers fear and nail-biting tension. This is really two making-of books in one: the story of the production of *Duel*, and the story of Spielberg himself, the kid who dreamed of making movies, who was directing episodic television when he was barely old enough to drink and who leveraged a brilliant TV movie into a brilliant film career. This well-presented look at a legendary director's beginning contains, as an added bonus, the complete *Duel* screenplay, itself a small masterpiece. --David Pitt

Review

'The destruction of the truck...was just a beginning,' film historian Awalt writes in his in-depth look at famed director Steven Spielberg's first major film, 1971's *Duel*, a television thriller starring Dennis Weaver and a menacing 18-wheeler based off of a short story by Richard Matheson. *Duel* is legendary among film buffs and is regarded as both a relic from the 1970s and a cult classic. It was instantly well received and Spielberg, only 25-years-old at the time, was highly praised. Awalt is eager to share every possible piece of information on the film, including a full copy of the movie's teleplay, storyboards of one sequence, and scene-by-scene analysis. Interviews with Weaver, Matheson, the film's producers, and Spielberg himself grant unparalleled access to the process of making the film. This book will surely be beloved by film students for that very reason. (*Publishers Weekly*)

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In reflecting on the kingdom he created, Walt Disney once said, 'It all started with a mouse.' For filmmaker Steven Spielberg, it all started with a truck. That is the premise that drives *Steven Spielberg and Duel: The Making of a Film Career* by Steven Awalt. Awalt's thoroughly researched yet accessible book chronicles Spielberg's formative years and production of the film, and it contains archival treats such as storyboard drawings and a reproduction of the script. (*Chicago Tribune*)

To reconstruct the story of "Duel," Awalt interviewed both Spielberg and the screenwriter Richard Matheson (also the author of the original magazine story), along with others associated with the shoot, and accumulated a large amount of documentary material, including a draft of Matheson's teleplay. No doubt Spielberg completists and film scholars of the future will find a use for this highly detailed account. (*The New York*

Times)

Using unseen memorabilia from the director's archive plus a brand-new interview with him, renowned Spielbergologist Steven Awalt tells the tale from its origins as a Playboy short story, to its instant-masterpiece status as a movie of the week, to its canonisation on the big screens of Europe. Like the film itself, it's an economical, intelligent, unpretentious read, and brings the film alive. ... Through evocative writing and reminiscences from all the key players, Awalt does a great job of putting you in the desert on the shoot or on the recording stage laying down Billy Goldenberg's score. . . [T]he book is at its best in its close textual analysis, be it of Matheson's short story or Spielberg's M.O. Elsewhere it bombards the reader with cool trivia , peppers the story with sidebars that enrich the tale, and offers a reprint of Matheson's taut teleplay. Awalt makes the astute point that *Duel* is, at once, classic and overlooked. The book's Peterbilt passion confirms the former and, hopefully, rectifies the latter. (*Empire Magazine*)

Author Steven Awalt is no stranger to the career of Steven Spielberg, having created and run the extremely popular web site SpielbergFilms.com. It is through this web site that Awalt shared his admiration for all things Spielberg. Here he takes that admiration and shares it with the reader. In an incredibly precise step by step process he guides the reader through the process of making a major motion picture. Thanks to recent, in depth interviews with many people involved in the production, including Matheson, Universal executive Sid Sheinberg, composer Billy Goldenberg and, most importantly, Spielberg himself, the book puts you on the set and involves you in almost every aspect of the production. It is because of this attention to detail that Awalt has created one of the best 'making of' books in recent years. (*Media Mikes*)

Steven Awalt's excellent new book *Steven Spielberg and Duel: The Making of a Film Career*. . . gets deep into this film's creation, from the inspiration for and publication of Matheson's story to the film's eventual American theatrical run in 1983 in the wake of Spielberg's domination of cinemas with *E.T.* The history is complete, amusing (the 'casting' of the automobiles is documented here, as is the Incredible Hulk's theft of *Duel* footage), critical (though mostly of Awalt's fellow *Duel* theorists), and often just as thrilling as the film it details. . . . Because *Duel* is so significant a milestone in Spielberg's career, Matheson's major role in its creation is often minimized. Not so in this book, which also contains that writer's complete teleplay for his and Spielberg's film. So this book functions as both an informative—and very entertaining—resource for students of Spielberg and a nice tribute to the recently deceased Richard Matheson. (*Psychobabble*)

This book by Steven Awalt is a marvelously detailed and entertaining document of Spielberg's humble beginnings as a director-for-hire for Universal Television, ultimately culminating in *Duel*. That film belied its budget-conscious TV origins in every way imaginable, with a truly cinematic look and tone that even impressed the likes of Federico Fellini. . . . Even today, *Duel* is widely considered one of the greatest stand-alone made-for-TV films ever made, which broke traditional rules because a young, ambitious director wanted to make it something more than the usual Saturday night schedule filler. With this book, we totally appreciate Steven Spielberg's inert genius and understand how he was able to parlay *Duel*'s success into what's arguably the greatest directorial career of all time. This book is a must-read for any film fan. (*Moviepilot*)

[T]he author's exhaustive research taking in everything from Spielberg's unplanned cameo, fisticuffs in the dubbing room and the penny-pinching at Universal that led to footage being recycled in an episode of the live-action *The Incredible Hulk* TV show. Matheson's complete teleplay script and 25 pages of storyboards round out an indispensable purchase for any self-respecting fan. (*Total Film*)

About the Author

Steven Awalt holds a master's degree in cinema studies from DePaul University. Writer, film historian, and

noted authority on Steven Spielberg's career, Awalt appears in the retrospective documentary *The Shark Is Still Working* on the Blu-ray edition of *Jaws*.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Christine Frazier:

The experience that you get from Steven Spielberg and Duel: The Making of a Film Career is a more deep you looking the information that hide inside words the more you get serious about reading it. It does not mean that this book is hard to know but Steven Spielberg and Duel: The Making of a Film Career giving you joy feeling of reading. The article author conveys their point in specific way that can be understood by means of anyone who read that because the author of this e-book is well-known enough. That book also makes your own vocabulary increase well. So it is easy to understand then can go to you, both in printed or e-book style are available. We highly recommend you for having this specific Steven Spielberg and Duel: The Making of a Film Career instantly.

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