

## Ted Kjellsson about ALONE IN SPACE

“Gimme two kids, an alien and a spaceship and I’ll make a great movie”

A giant spacecraft traveling with only two passengers on board: 12-year-old Gladys and her little brother Keaton, lingering around all day, heading towards a planet that never seems to come in sight. Until an unknown object crashes into the ship... Suddenly they are not alone in space anymore.

ALONE IN SPACE has an original format: a high-profile sci-fi adventure that is both epic (a space odyssey), intimate (two siblings in a close bond), scary (aliens firing space guns) and contemplative.

Ted Kjellsson: I like the ‘Astrid Lindgren in space’ tagline. Both co-author Henrik Ståhl and me grew up on Swedish children’s literature by Astrid Lindgren, Maria Gripe, Ulf Stark... At the same time we were fed with big Hollywood movies made by Steven Spielberg and Ridley Scott.

**How did you make those worlds meet?**

Kjellsson: It might be difficult for a

none Swedish person to recognise Astrid Lindgren in this film, but she is just in our DNA. We tell stories about the same themes, making them a bit darker, but still quite enjoyable. A Swedish children’s film in a sci-fi context might sound like something new, but it’s just a mashup of ingredients from our childhood. In our heads this combination doesn’t seem surprising at all.

**A lot of the film’s attraction is in the setting that you created from scratch.**

Kjellsson: For Swedish standards the €2 million budget was quite modest. I have done a lot of commercials and I know about set design and special effects. I know how to build stuff and how to blow up stuff. It was a matter of producers fully trusting us. I saw the images in my head and nobody thought it would be doable, but we’ve build the first Swedish animatronics mask Vfx for a main character, and a 600 square meters big space ship.

**A spaceship?**

Kjellsson: In a studio, up north in Sweden. It was important for the kids to have a set with buttons and beepers and stuff to touch, instead of green screens. And we made the alien for real, so the kids could see and feel it and talk to it.

**The design of the alien was crucial for this film. It’s a human figure with limbs and clothes, it laughs and apparently snores exactly like I do.**

Kjellsson: We wanted a humanoid creature. Surprisingly enough, my first reference was Nosferatu, later combined with the classic Area 51 alien (that was supposedly found in the American Nevada desert), a bit of Admiral Ackbar (STAR TREK) combined with the fifties comic book visuals. We wanted him to be part scary, part cute. Some even see ET in it, but I don’t. I love ET, but he is a small nudist.

**There’s two siblings, taking care of each other in a particularly touching**



**way.**

Kjellsson: We’ve put a lot of effort in making them shine. Little Keaton (Dante Fleischanderl) has quite a hard part, hitting the alien in the head and still be likeable. Gladys (Ella Rae Rappaport) carries the movie on her shoulders and she pulls it off – like a Pippi Longstocking in space! She such a cool character, in an Ellen Ripley-kind-of-way. Ripley, as the first female action hero for me, was a milestone. I want to show my daughters and other young girls that they can kick ass. To make those main characters





work, we recorded half of the movie in chronological order. That made them truly experience the story. Their first meeting with the alien, really was the first time they saw Henrik in that suit.

### **Henrik? You forced your co-author into a suit to play an alien?**

Kjellsson: Yup. He felt honoured, but in the end he had to go through a lot of training so that his neck could lift the six kilogram heavy helmet for eight hours per day, 15 days long. I somehow stopped noticing Henrik in there, I was directing the alien and forgot about that sweaty actor inside. I saw my dream coming true to have an alien on set, which was fun for me, but not for Henrik. Meanwhile Niklas Hermansson and Oscar Wallroth controlled the eyes and cheekbones of the

animatronic. Their collaboration with Henrik was one of the key elements to make the film work, together with the kids being in a real spaceship. It all related to my first pitch, when I said: *"Gimme two kids, an alien and a spaceship and I'll make a great movie"*. Everything comes back to that.

### **You did something daring and got away with it: you made the first 15 minutes of the film about being bored, without getting the audience bored.**

Kjellsson: We're demanding a lot of our young audience, but most of them enjoy those 15 minutes, because they feel some tension and mystery underneath. The first version was like Tarkovsky in space. We trimmed it down and planned it meticulously, but still

it's a risk to take.

### **What about the framework of the story, the escape from planet earth?**

Kjellsson: The reason why they escape is a classic chain: an environmental catastrophe leading to war leading to poverty... We never go into detail about it, but it is connected to the environmental situation we are in today. An even bigger mystery is the role of the mother. She stole a spaceship to rescue herself and her kids, which is a harsh thing to do. But now she's gone, and nobody knows how and why, leaving behind a daughter who has difficulties to cope with it. There's more to the mother than you see in the film, she's complex.

### **The final chase through the spaceship, with aliens firing space weapons at humans, is state-of-the-art sci-fi. How did you dose that excitement for a 7+ audience?**

Kjellsson: Some seven-year-olds have seen lots of stuff, but since this is in their own language, it suddenly feels very close. We're on a thin line there between scary and too scary. In the first test screenings we had a lot of the seven-year-olds running out of the theatre, in the last screening only one went out. We've made the music

less scary and the aliens a bit more funny, talking in a Jabba the Hutt kind of way.

### **There must have been a temptation to make it scary as hell, just for the fun of it.**

Kjellsson: This is my first feature, and I felt well-placed to make it a children's movie: I have five kids myself, and I can still relate to my inner child. But deep inside I'm more of a slasher guy. My time will come when I'll do my first slasher movie.

### **You have 'Johnny Be Good' on the soundtrack, because that song is on the golden record (that was sent into space in 1977 containing sounds and images to illustrate human life and culture on earth). What would be on your golden record?**

Kjellsson: Some really weird Swedish jokes, combined with a very personal environmental message, like *"Hé guys, don't do what we did. Take it easy out there."*

—  
Gert Hermans