

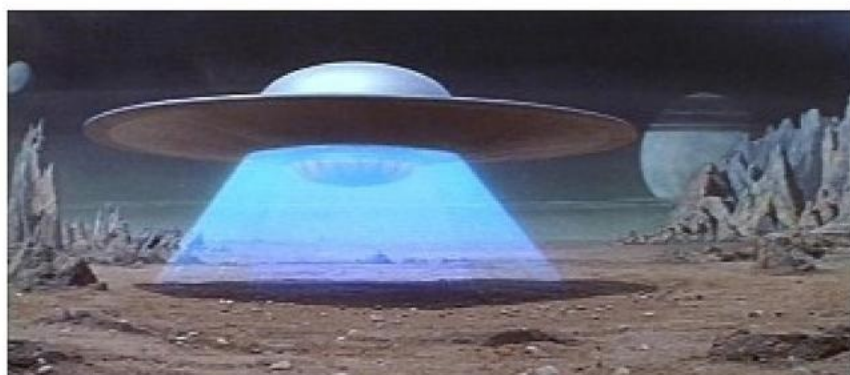
**Forbidden Planet**  
1956  
U.S.A.  
Director Fred Wilcox  
MGM



The importance of this film in the science fiction genre cannot be over-rated. It helped start the post-WW2 boom in good quality presentations as opposed to the low quality monster-attacks-Earth budget horror flick that was far more common. MGM spent a lot of money on sets and props and produced a film that still looks pretty good half a century later. The matte paintings alone (the huge backgrounds) are spectacular, especially those of the planet's surface. When you add to this Robbie the Robot (he gets his own listing in the credits) and a group of very competent actors, you have the basics for a really good film. Robbie turned up in more later SF films than I can remember.

The plot was a bit Buck Rogers, but intelligent enough for all that. An expedition has gone missing and a spaceship has been sent to investigate. When it reaches the planet, the crew receive a message warning them against landing. The Captain, John Adams (played capably by Leslie Nielsen who later found fame in the Naked Gun series), naturally disregards the warning and lands. They are met by Robbie and taken to the base of Dr Morbius (Walter Pidgeon), the last surviving crew member. He has a daughter, Altaira (Anne Francis, wearing a mini-skirt which must have been daring for those days), the result of his union with one of the crew members before they were all killed by some unseen force on the planet. For some unknown reason the malignant force leaves the Doctor and Altaira alone.

Morbius reveals that the planet was once inhab-



ited by the Krell, a now extinct race who had space travel and visited Earth before Man developed. Their huge city is still standing and still functioning and Morbius has been gradually learning their technology. Captain Adams, meanwhile, is learning more about the lovely but naïve Altaira.

The ship is attacked by the invisible presence and a savage battle ensues. The crew just barely manages to drive the creature off. Now it becomes a matter of life and death to find answers to questions like just what is the creature? Why does it attack? Does Morbius know more than he is saying?

The film is not unique for its time in intelligent sci-fi (The Day The Earth Stood Still for instance beat it by about five years) but high quality films like this one stand out for their day. Perhaps it was because the plot was supposedly based on William Shakespeare's The Tempest. It gained credibility by having an unseen creature rather than a man dressed in a shaggy monster suit. It had a man dressed in a robot suit instead.

An interesting sideline is the role of Robbie the Robot. Traditionally robots were evil monsters who dutifully set about killing their creators, in the Frankenstein's Monster style. Robbie is portrayed as benign, and a useful servant. This portrayal as a friend to mankind surfaced first in an Isaac Asimov story called "Strange Playfellow" in 1940. The robot in Asimov's story was called Robbie. Coincidence?

The music was all electronic, a first for its day, although sometimes the electronic squeaks and twiddles of the Theremin (an electronic instrument) become a bit distracting. The film became a cult classic because everything was put together so well and it was treated as science fiction, not horror. It is still readily available today. If you have somehow missed seeing it, it is well worth adding to your collection. A cleaned up and restored (sound as well) version was issued for the film's Fiftieth Anniversary. This version includes the deleted scenes that haven't been seen since the film was issued on laser-disc, and a superb set of three documentaries. Try to ignore the lurid cover, although the monster-robot-and-lightly-clad-maiden was just as much a part of the genre as multi-tentacled monsters and rayguns.