

# KRONOS

Not all the good science fiction films of the 1950s had huge budgets and big name directors. One sf movie of twenty two years ago was written by *Forbidden Planet's* Irving Block and starred *This Island Earth's* Jeff Morrow.



After trying to kill Vera (Barbara Lawrence) Doctor Eliot (John Emery) attacks Doctor Les Gaskell (Jeff Morrow).

## KRONOS A

STARRING  
JEFF MORROW      BARBARA LAWRENCE      JOHN EMERY  
Produced and Directed by KURT NEUMANN  
Screenplay by LAWRENCE LOUIS GOLDMAN  
A Regal Films, Inc. Production      Released by 20th Century-Fox

In 1956 during the boom of sf movies, a group of very talented film-makers teamed up to produce a science fiction film about a gigantic robot called *Kronos Conquerer of the Universe*. The film was later released in 1957 under the shorter title, *Kronos*. The same year some excellent sf fantasy offerings were unleashed on cinema audiences including *The Incredible Shrinking Man* and Ray Harryhausen's *Twenty Million Miles to Earth*. Certainly for its atmospheric visuals, *Kronos* ranks alongside these milestones of sf cinema.

The film opens with a comet-like ball of light hurtling through space. Suddenly a much smaller pinpoint of light breaks away from the comet and enters the

Earth's atmosphere. It swoops down across the barren American desert. At that moment a truck approaches along a nearby highway. Without warning the engine cuts out and an eerie whining rises to a crescendo. The driver swerves over to the side of the road and climbs out oblivious to the strange blob of light drifting towards his truck. Suddenly a blinding light explodes in the startled man's face. The engine immediately bursts into life. The driver climbs aboard and, turning his truck around, heads back the way he came.

Forcing his way into Lab Central — a large American observatory — by knocking the security guard at the gate unconscious, the expressionless driver heads for

the office of Dr Eliot (*John Emery*). As the surprised scientist questions the mysterious invader, the blob of alien light hurtles out of the truck driver into the face of Dr Eliot. At that moment the stranger collapses and dies. Eliot seems unperturbed as the recovered security guard drags the body away.

In another part of Lab Central, Dr Les Gaskell (*Jeff Morrow*), his fiancée Vera (*Barbara Lawrence*) and Professor Culver (*George O'Hanlan*) are investigating the appearance in space of the giant ball of light. Referring to the object as an asteroid, M37, they are all surprised to witness the strange ball of light alter its flight path in such a way as to endanger Earth. Not realizing that Dr Eliot is now

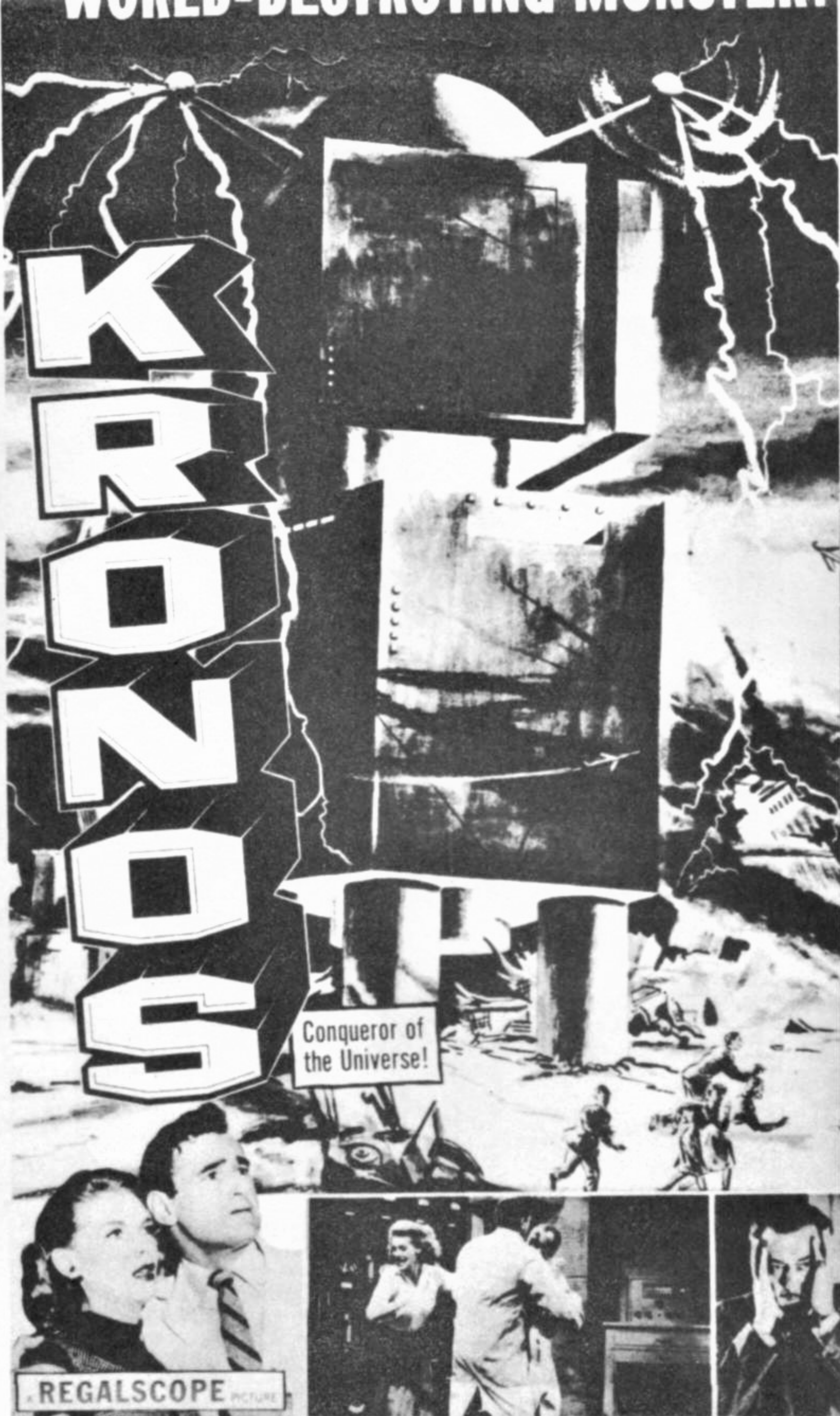
possessed by an alien life form they advise the American government to fire nuclear missiles at the asteroid and obliterate it before it crashes on Earth.

Although the rockets reach their target the explosive force of the atom bomb proves useless against the invader. Changing its direction the asteroid plummets down, crashing into the sea off the coast of New Mexico. After the attack on the invader, Dr Eliot is suddenly taken ill and transferred to hospital for treatment. Dr Gaskell, Prof Culver and Vera travel to New Mexico in an effort to catch sight of the submerged asteroid. After searching without success they are on the point of giving up when the mysterious ball of light rises out of the ocean like a huge silver disc. As darkness falls the light continues to glow far out across the horizon. When Gaskell, Culver and Vera awake in the morning they notice that the disc has disappeared, but instead on the nearby beach stands a giant machine. Standing over 100 feet high, the huge automaton glistens in the morning sun. It resembles two massive cubes mounted on a central column with four short legs. As they watch a dome rises out of the top of the cube followed by two antennae. Moving one antennae towards the sun it remains motionless.

Hiring a helicopter, the three scientists land on the top of the giant machine. Gaskell christens it Kronos, after the giant of Greek mythology. They witness some of the splendours of Kronos's interior mechanics when a section opens beneath their feet.

Presently, Kronos appears to tire of standing around doing nothing and, prompted by information transmitted telepathically by Eliot, stumps off across the countryside. Arriving at the Los Alamos electricity plant, it immediately begins to draw energy into its giant form. Once the robot has drained the station it moves on, automatically adding more steel plating to its huge bulk as it goes. Gaskell, in a flash of inspiration, realises that Kronos is not only impervious to large doses of energy but actually digests them, transforming the power into matter. The Mexican Air Force are summoned in an attempt to stop Kronos, but the planes are completely wiped out.

The possessed Eliot now sees the chance to feed Kronos the most concentrated energy source known to man, by confirming a White House order to use the atom bomb against the robot. Gaskell, still unaware that his colleague is a puppet of the alien, contests Eliot's decision realising the power it would give Kronos. Needless to say he fails and the bomb is dropped. Vera meanwhile begins to suggest there is something wrong with Eliot and decides she must inform Gaskell. But Eliot reaches her first and tries to electrocute her. Gaskell intervenes and Eliot falls into his own trap. The shock



REGALSCOPE PICTURE

starring **JEFF MORROW** · **BARBARA LAWRENCE** · **JOHN EMERY**

Featuring GEORGE O'HANLON · MORRIS ANKRUM · KENNETH ALTON · JOHN PARRISH  
Produced in association with JACK RABIN, IRVING BLOCK and LOUIS DeWITT · Special Effects Designed and Created by JACK RABIN, IRVING BLOCK and LOUIS DeWITT, MENRAD von MULLDORFER, WILLIAM REINHOLD, GENE WARREN · Based on a Story by IRVING BLOC  
Produced and Directed by **KURT NEUMANN** · Screenplay by **LAWRENCE LOUIS GOLDMAN**  
A REGAL FILMS, INC. PRODUCTION · Released by 20th CENTURY-FOX

momentarily restores his own mind and he races to warn Gaskell about the ultimate goal of Kronos.

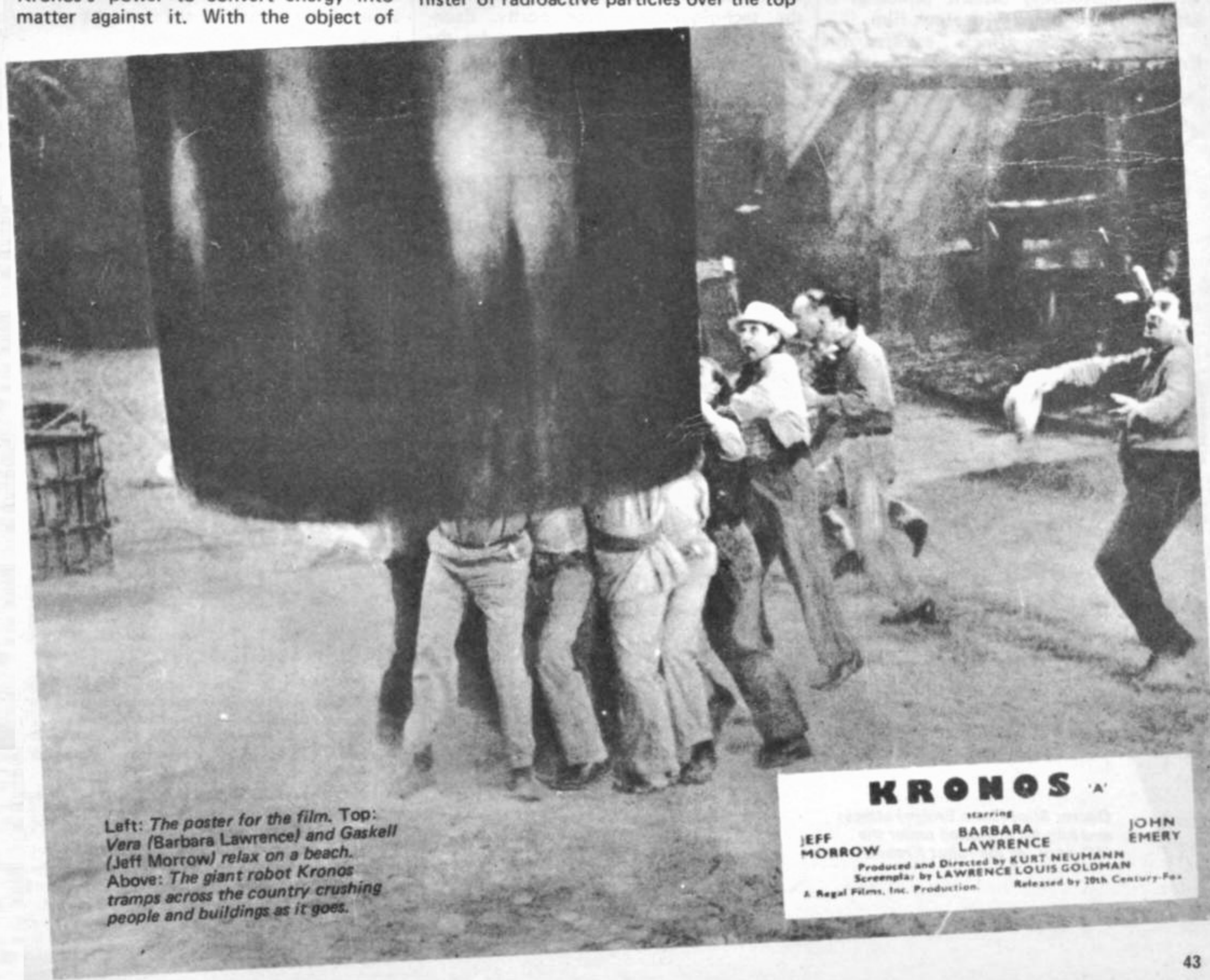
The energy-draining robot is controlled by the inhabitants of a dying planet who desperately need energy as their own natural resources are running out. The aliens plan to drain the Earth dry by sending more devices like Kronos. Gaskell realizes that the atom bomb must not be dropped but although the air force bomber is recalled, the plane is yanked out of the air by the magnetic pull of Kronos and crashes. The bomb explodes causing the giant to expand and tower over the wilderness. Kronos, now thirsty for more atomic energy, heads up the coast towards the atom bomb stockpile outside Los Angeles.

Meanwhile, the alien light escapes Eliot's body, but cannot find its way out of the underground vault where the doctor has imprisoned himself. With no one to control Kronos' movements, the giant robot stampedes out of control, crushing cities as it goes. And as the west coast of America is being trampled, Gaskell, Culver and his computer, work on how to destroy Kronos. Gaskell's idea is to turn Kronos's power to convert energy into matter against it. With the object of



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reversing the robot's polarity, a plane under Gaskell's instructions drops a canister of radioactive particles over the top of Kronos. As the monster absorbs the power of Los Angeles, the canister



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Left: The poster for the film. Top: Vera (Barbara Lawrence) and Gaskell (Jeff Morrow) relax on a beach. Above: The giant robot Kronos tramps across the country crushing people and buildings as it goes.

explodes and the particles cause a chain reaction. Kronos begins to disintegrate, finally exploding into thousands of pieces. The Earth is saved.

Kronos was a low budget film with a simplistic plot — one that has been explored in many other movies. "Something" invades the Earth, tries to destroy or enslave us and is eventually wiped out by science turning its might upon itself — just as Frankenstein was killed by his own creation.

The most fascinating point about Kronos is the robot's unusual appearance. The image of the machine standing on the beach at the start of the film is still impressive even by today's standards. Unfortunately the scenes of Kronos marching across the countryside are a little disappointing. The scene was handled by Gene Warren using a cel animation technique. Warren was a member of Projects Unlimited which was a group of special effects experts that worked on films like *Master of the World* and George Pal's *Time Machine* and *Wonderful World of the Brothers Grimm*. Not much footage of Kronos destroying cities is shown, although one shot of Kronos pulverising distant buildings is effectively combined with stock film.

Other special effects experts on Kronos included Irving Block (who also

wrote the story) and Jack Rabin. Between them they have put more fantasy films on the screen than almost any one else in the industry. Highlights from their extensive careers are *Forbidden Planet*, *The Giant Behemoth*, *The Invisible Boy*, *Monster from the Green Hell*, *Rocketship XM* and *Invaders from Mars*. Kurt Neumann, a German director who produced *Rocketship XM* and *The Fly*, produced and directed *Kronos*.

Jack Rabin's involvement with Kronos consisted of devising some of the mechanical effects. Two models of Kronos were constructed by Wah Chang and Gene Warren. A larger one for major effects and a tiny 6" version for long shots. The larger model of Kronos was not at all sophisticated. It had a couple of tiny motors that moved a pair of antennae around, but all other movement was achieved by stop-motion. As the team had no such luxuries as blue screens, alterations in the size of Kronos in relation to the backgrounds was achieved by physically replacing one scale model with another during filming.

A very complicated idea was included in the original script to show Kronos expanding after it absorbed energy, but the techniques were too costly. Eventually, the idea was abandoned for the more easily filmed superimposition of an

increasing cube over a stationary background. Irving Block who designed the robot, used simple model sets for the desert scenes. In some cases they were just sheets with sand scattered over them. But when combined with the effects of the planes attacking Kronos the sets look quite impressive. In the scene where the helicopter is supposed to land on top of Kronos, the producers utilised the top of the Hansen Dam. The sky and Kronos were superimposed on top of that.

Theobald Holsopple designed Prof Culver's laboratory and the computer was constructed out of egg cartons and other household items. The set is effective on the screen.

Of all the actors in the film Jeff Morrow comes over very convincingly as the scientist. Morrow's most famous screen role was Exeter in *This Island Earth*, but certainly his portrayal in *Kronos* is an enjoyable one. John Emery as Dr Eliot is unfortunately a little melodramatic, but likeable as the calculating villain.

With its miniscule budget of 160,000 dollars it is unfair to compare *Kronos* to such expensive major studio productions as *Forbidden Planet*. But the film certainly ranks as one of the best of the low budget sf movies of the 1950s.

Feature by Richard Holliss



*Doctor Eliot (John Emery) attacks and kills his physician under the influence of the robot Kronos.*

### Kronos (1957)

Jeff Morrow (as *Doctor Les Gaskell*), George O'Hanlan (*Professor Culver*), Barbara Lawrence (*Vera*), John Emery (*Dr Eliot*), with Morris Ankrum, Kenneth Alton, John Parrish, Richard Harrison and Robert Shayne.

Produced and directed by Kurt Neumann, Screenplay by Irving Block. Art direction by Theobald Holsopple, Photographed by Karl Struss, Edited by Jodie Copelan, Music by Paul Sawrell, Special effects by Jack Rabin, Irving Block, Lewis DeWitt and George Warren, Executive producer E.J. Baumgarten. A Regal/Twentieth Century-Fox film.