

SPENCE AND KATE... TOGETHER AGAIN

By Randy Carter

The 1957 production of *Desk Set* was the eighth of nine films that Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn would make together. This lighthearted comedy came at a time of great personal turmoil for the screen duo that had first met on the M-G-M lot in 1941 when Hepburn was setting up production of *Woman Of The Year* for Louis B. Mayer. During production of the film that would bring Ms. Hepburn her fourth Oscar™ nomination, the couple began an intimate affair that lasted until Tracy's death in 1967.

Tracy and Hepburn had not been in a film together for five years following the successful sports comedy *Pat And Mike* (1952). The pair was deeply affected by the death of their close friend Humphrey Bogart and Tracy was staggering under the strain of Jack Warner's attempt to bring Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man And The Sea* to the screen on location in Cuba. Tracy was unhappy with original director Fred Zinneman and weather problems had plagued the production, forcing them to shut down and return to California. Hepburn, who was on the Havana location with Tracy, suggested they do a film together and chose *Desk Set*, William Marchant's Broadway

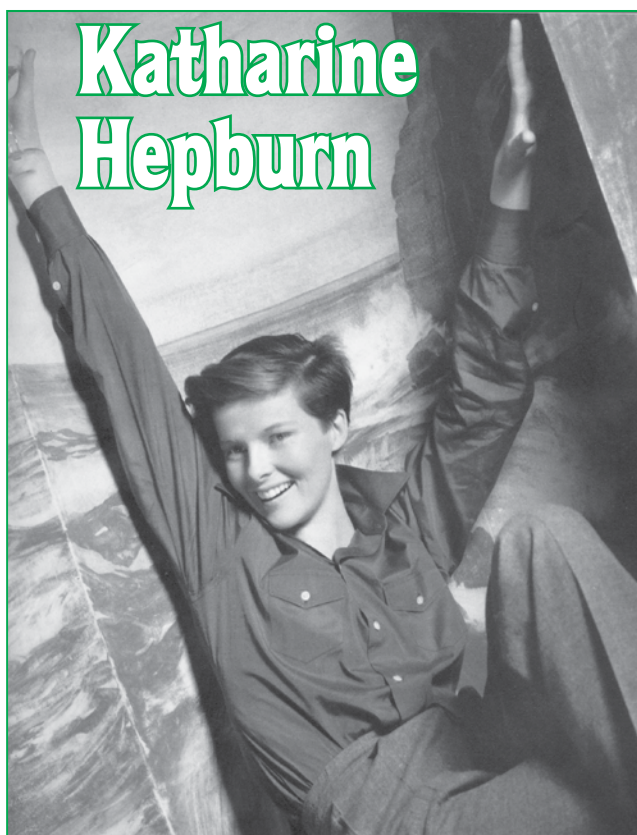
success of 1955. Originally slated for New York location work, the comedy was shot on sound stages on the Fox lot. This was their first film in color, and since it was a Twentieth Century Fox production, it was shot with Fox's anamorphic CinemaScope lenses.

Garson Kanin who wrote *Adam's Rib* (1949) believed that he knew the formula for a Hepburn success: "A high-class, or stuck-up, or hoity-toity girl is brought down to earth by an earthy type or a lowbrow

or a diamond in the rough, or a cataclysmic situation." This is a classic story line that plays well in all of her successes, but in the Tracy-Hepburn films she always gives as good as she takes.

Tracy and Hepburn appeared together in: *Woman Of The Year* (1942), *Keeper Of The Flame* (1942), *Without Love* (1945), *The Sea Of Grass* (1947), *State Of The Union* (1948), *Adam's Rib* (1949), *Pat And Mike* (1952), *Desk Set*, and *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* (1967). ■





Katharine Hepburn spent seven decades on stage and screen mostly playing independent women with minds of their own. These characters were not too far removed from the real-life Katharine Hepburn who throughout the 30's and 40's chose to wear slacks and no make-up when neither style was fashionable and refused to play the Hollywood game by denying interviews and autographs. Yet, despite her unconventional behavior, Hepburn reigned at the box office being nominated for 12 Oscars™ and winning four, the latter record unbroken to this day.



Hepburn was born in Hartford, Connecticut on May 12, 1907. From the beginning her parents, a wealthy doctor and suffragette, encouraged her to speak her mind. A tomboy throughout most of her childhood, she excelled at numerous sports. While attending Bryn Mawr College, where many believe she adopted her distinct New England accent, she became interested in acting and was offered her first part on Broadway shortly after graduation.

Hollywood eventually beckoned and she started her film career at the top playing opposite John Barrymore in *A Bill of Divorcement* (1932) leading to a contract with RKO. The next year she won her first Academy Award™ for *Morning Glory* (1933) and starred as Jo in the hugely successful *Little Women*. With the exception of *Alice Adams* (1935), which brought her a second Oscar™ nomination, the mid to late thirties provided Hepburn with a series of box-office flops and she became known as box-office poison. In 1939 she returned to Broadway to star in "The Philadelphia Story". The play was a huge success and Hepburn quickly bought the film rights knowing Hollywood would be interested in the property. Hollywood was, and M-G-M was forced to star Hepburn in the 1940 film version, which paired her with Cary Grant and brought her third Oscar™ nomination. Hepburn's lucky intuition had paid off. 1942 paired Hepburn with Spencer Tracy in *Woman*

of the Year, bringing her fourth Oscar™ nomination. The Tracy/Hepburn partnership continued successfully throughout the 40's.

The 50's and 60's showcased Hepburn in a variety of memorable films. Those which garnered additional Oscar™ nominations include *The African Queen* (1951) in which she battled the river and the Germans with Humphrey Bogart; *Summertime* (1955) as a lonely secretary who falls in love with Venetian Rossano Brazzi; *The Rainmaker* (1956) as a plain Jane wooed by con-man Burt Lancaster; *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959) playing a wealthy southern matriarch trying to have niece Elizabeth Taylor committed to an asylum, and *Long Day's Journey Into Night* (1962) in which she plays a dope-addicted New England mother.

In 1967 she co-starred with Tracy for the last time in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner* and won her second Oscar™. The next year she won yet again for *The Lion in Winter*. Her twelfth nomination and fourth Oscar™ came in 1981 for *On Golden Pond*. Hepburn's last big-screen appearance was in 1994's *Love Affair*. She died at the age of 96 on June 29, 2003. ■



Spencer Tracy

With nine Oscar™ nominations and two wins to his credit, Spencer

Tracy was sufficiently qualified to play opposite his most famous co-star Katharine Hepburn. Equally adept at light romantic comedy as well as heavy dramatic material, Tracy was one of Hollywood's most beloved stars from the 30's to his death in the 60's.

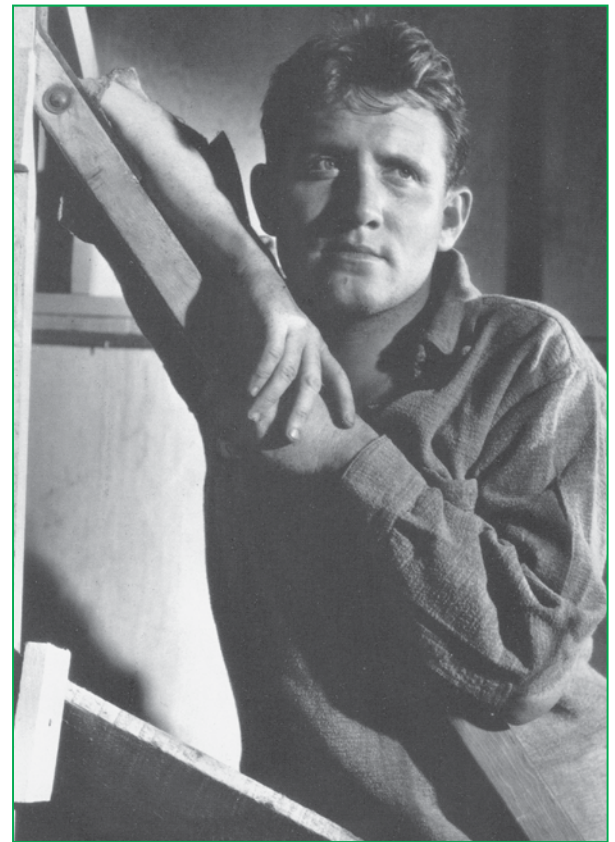


Spencer Tracy was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin on April 5, 1900. He spent much of his early life palling around with future fellow actor Pat O'Brien. Both attended Marquette Academy, enlisted into the Navy at the outbreak of World War 1 and roomed together in New York City where they both had non-speaking parts as robots in the play "R.U.R".

Tracy eventually moved to Hollywood where he made his film debut in *The Strong Arm* (1930). John Ford was impressed with the actor's work and starred him in *Up the River* (1930), and his work landed him a contract with Fox. In 1935 Tracy moved to M-G-M and it was at that studio that his film career really took off. After receiving his first Oscar™ nomination playing

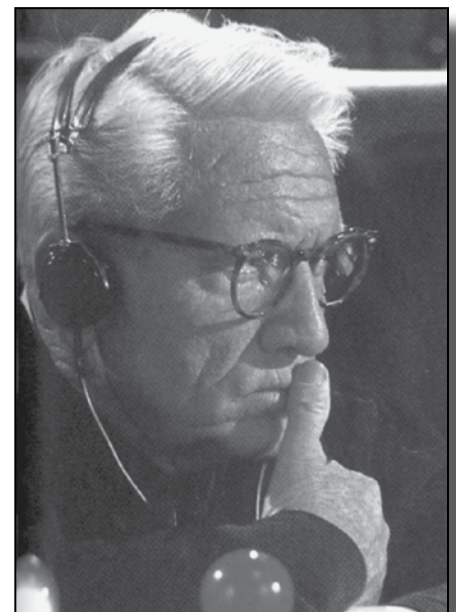
Clark Gable's man-of-the-cloth pal in *San Francisco* (1936), Tracy became the first actor to win two Oscars™ back-to-back: as the good-hearted fisherman teaching young Freddie Bartholomew about the important things in life in *Captain's Courageous* (1937) and winning over juvenile delinquent Mickey Rooney as Father Flanagan in *Boys Town* (1938).

Tracy's film career in the 1940's was dominated by his films opposite Katharine Hepburn and by such box-office hits as *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1941) opposite Ingrid Bergman, *A Guy Named Joe* (1943) opposite Irene Dunne and *Thirty Seconds Over Tokyo* (1944). The decade of the fifties proved how versatile an actor he could be and brought another five Oscar™ nominations: he demonstrated his great comedic timing in 1950 as Elizabeth Taylor's *Father of the Bride*, he was believable as a one-armed veteran in *Bad Day at Black Rock* (1955), as an aging fisherman battling the elements in *The Old Man and the Sea* (1958), as a lawyer arguing the Scopes Monkey Trial of 1925 in *Inherit the Wind* (1960) and as a US judge presiding over German war criminal trials in *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961). After heading the ensemble cast in the hit comedy *It's A Mad Mad Mad Mad World* (1963), Tracy's last Oscar™ nomination came in 1967 when he played opposite Katharine Hepburn for the last time in *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*. Tracy died on



June 10, 1967, just two weeks after shooting of that film completed. ■

Photos: (counterclockwise from top left page 2) Hepburn at 28 in *Silvia Scarlet* (1935); *Desk Set*; *Stage Door* (1937) with Ginger Rogers and Adolphe Menjou; Spencer Tracy in *Judgment at Nuremberg* (1961); Tracy in 1935; on a Woody wagon with a Setter.



Desk Set

in CINEMASCOPE

DeLuxe Color – 1957 – 103 min
20th Century Fox
Print Courtesy of 20th Century Fox



Cast

Spencer Tracy.....Richard Sumner
Katharine Hepburn.....Bunny Watson
Gig YoungMike Cutler
Joan BlondellPeg Costello
Dina MerrillSylvia Blair
Sue RandallRuthie Saylor
Neva PattersonMiss Warriner
Harry EllerbeSmithers
Nicholas JoyMr. Azae
Diane Jergens.....Alice
Merry Anders.....Cathy
Ida MooreOld Lady
Rachel Stephens.....Receptionist

Bill DurayMember of the Board*
Harry Evans.....Member of the Board*
Jesslyn FaxMrs. Hewitt*
Richard Gardner.....Fred*
Charles HeardMember of the Board*
Jack G. Lee.....Member of the Board*
Renny McEvoy.....Man*
Martin MilnerBit part*
Shirley MitchellMyra Smithers*
King MojaveMember of the Board*
Sammy OggKenny*
Don Porter.....Elevator operator Don*
Lou Southern.....Dancer*
Hal Taggart.....Member of the Board*
*uncredited



Credits from IMDB.com

Directed byWalter Lang
Writers
Original Play byWilliam Marchant
Screenplay byPhoebe Ephron,
Henry Ephron & Cole Porter
Produced byHenry Ephron

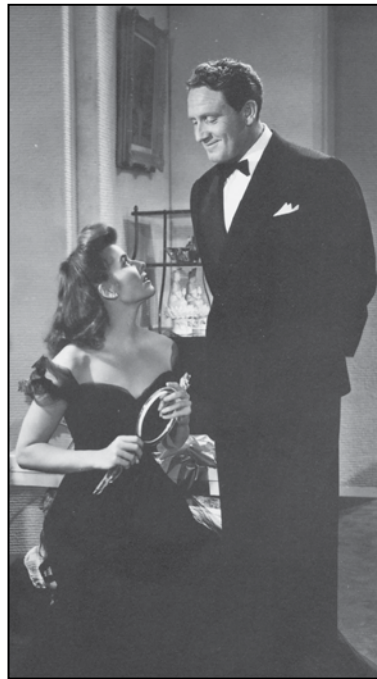
Original Music byCyril J. Mockridge
Conducted by.....Lionel Newman
Orchestrated byEdward B. Powell
Cinematography byLeon Shamroy
Edited byRobert L. Simpson
Art Direction byMaurice Ransford & Lyle Wheeler
Set Decoration byPaul S. Fox & Walter M. Scott
Costume Designed by ..Charles Le Maire
Make Up byBen Nye
Sound byHarry Leonard & E. Clayton Ward
Special Effects byRay Kellogg
Gaffer.....Clyde Taylor*



PLEASE join AFS!
SEE PAGE 8
FOR INFORMATION.

Research on short subjects courtesy
of the Cine-Loa Archives.

Photo Gallery



Photos: (counterclockwise from top left) Tracy and Hepburn from *Desk Set*, Hepburn on the *M-G-M* lot; again from *Desk Set*; Tracy in *Fury* (1936), Tracy from *Desk Set*, Hepburn in *Guess Who's Coming To Dinner* (1967), the couple in *Woman of the Year* (1942) and, in center, *Without Love* (1945). *Desk Set* Images courtesy of 20th Century Fox.



NO SHUSHING ALLOWED! A Look at Librarians in Film

Mention the word “Librarian”, and the stereotype comes to mind: a meek spinster, her gray hair in a bun, clutching an ancient monograph in one hand and shushing a noisy patron with the other. Interestingly, Hollywood



has been alternately reinforcing and challenging this view almost as long as films have been produced.

As early as 1923, in *Only 38*, May McAvoy's Lucy Stanley challenged the stereotype by beginning to dress more stylishly and becoming a “wild woman” after becoming a librarian.

In 1932's *No Man of Her Own*, Clark Gable's leer at Librarian Carole Lombard's legs as she reached for a book was so scandalous that it resulted in the founding of the Hollywood League of Decency.

But also in 1932, the meek stereotype appeared with Barbara Stanwyck's Librarian Lulu Smith in *Forbidden*. In it, Smith is an unattractive and unhappy woman, only finding love and happiness when she leaves the Library.

Unfortunately for the profession, the portrayal of the meek spinster librarian predominated as in

Donna Reed's alternate Mary Hatch in 1946's *It's a Wonderful Life*, Shirley Jones' Marion “The Librarian” Paroo in 1962's *The Music Man* and Barbara Eden's Angela Benedict in 1964's *The 7 Faces of Dr. Lao*. Even in “a galaxy far, far away” Althea McGrath's Librarian Jocasta Nu is an older woman sporting the classic silver bun in *Star Wars, Episode II: Attack of the Clones* (2002).

Occasionally, the movies would portray librarians against the stereotype. While Bette Davis' initial

One of the strongest and most positive portrayals of Librarians is found in 1957's *Desk Set*.

portrayal of Librarian Alicia Hull in 1956's *Storm Center* reinforces the submissive stereotype, Hull ultimately risks everything to stand by her professional ethics and refuses to remove a “questionable” book from the Library shelves.

Jason Robards' small town Librarian Charles Halloway, in 1983's *Something Wicked This Way Comes*, breaks with the stereotype not only by being a man, but by being one



of strong enough character and resolve to resist the temptations of Dark's Pandemonium Carnival, thereby saving an entire town.



Recently, Rachel Weisz's Librarian challenges the mousey stereotype in 1999's *The Mummy*, declaring “I may not be an explorer or an adventurer or a treasure seeker or a gun fighter, but I am proud of what I am. I am a Librarian!”

One of the strongest and most positive portrayals of Librarians is found in 1957's *Desk Set*. Katherine Hepburn, Joan Blondell, Dina Merrill, and Sue Randall portray attractive, intelligent, and capable professionals working in a male-dominated television network. Hepburn's “Bunny” Watson clearly does not only her job, but also that of on again/off again suitor Mike Cutler (Gig Young). She is shown to have an encyclopedic memory and both tremendous problem solving and managerial skills while navigating her staff through treacherous corporate waters.

In the real world, Librarians run the entire gamut; both men and women from meek and mousey to strong, capable, and attractive. And what better way to see them in film than as masters of the *Desk Set*. ■

Daryl Maxwell, an AFS Board Member, holds a Masters in Library & Information Science from UCLA and works as a professional Archivist at Walt Disney Feature Animation's Animation Research Library.

Counting Cards: computers in the 1950's

By Frank Gladstone

EMMARAC (aka: "Emmy") the Electromagnetic Memory and Research Arithmetical Calculator computer featured in *Desk Set* is probably the very first anthropomorphized computer to appear in motion pictures and, like the sinister computers to come, most famously HAL in *2001 A Space Odyssey*, is a machine that has to be defeated by its human creators.



But what were computers really like in 1957? Well, first of all, it would be another fourteen years before the first microprocessor would be available, so computers were pretty huge. The UNIVAC system, for instance, weighed 29,000 pounds and the "Clyde" series tipped the scales at an amazing 275 tons each! These machines relied on banks of vacuum tubes or, at the cutting edge, the new-fangled transistors, which allowed for a more manageable size. Though the ubiquitous punch cards would soon disappear as memory capacity relied more on magnetic tape or magnetic drum, by today's standards, these machines had a limited capacity and were not very flexible.



Nevertheless, computers had broken Germany's codes in WWII and had successfully predicted the new president on election night in 1952. By 1955, practical business machines were on to the market with improvements like magnetic disk drives, simple graphic displays and typewriter keyboards. With transistors becoming readily available, price and size were coming down too.

Bendix offered a less-than-garage-sized business machine for a mere \$45,000. In a year or two, Bank of America would install a data collection machine called ERMA, which recognized and recorded information printed on checks, leading to the development, over the next dozen years, of the first ATM's. The computer-generated genie was clearly out of the bottle.

Today, arguing over the computerization of

society seems nearly a moot point. The monolithic machine in *Desk Set* is now a laptop in your briefcase or, even more insidiously, the Blackberry buzzing away in your pocket as you read this. No longer dwarfing us in size, but perhaps dwarfing us in influence, the fear that computers would take away our jobs seems a quaint notion now, especially when it seems that we are working harder and longer than ever. ■

Including Short Subjects

Vesuvius Express

Mother Goose Goes Hollywood

MOTHER GOOSE GOES HOLLYWOOD

Walt Disney Silly Symphony, Technicolor – 1938 – 7 minutes

Print courtesy of Walt Disney Pictures

WALT DISNEY

Produced by.....Walt Disney

Directed by.....Wilfred Jackson

Story by.....Erdman Penner, I Klein, T Hee

Animation.....Johnny Campbell, Ward Kimball, I Klein, Richard Lundy
Grim Natwick, Ray Patterson, Robert Stokes

Characters.....T Hee

Layouts.....Terrell Stapp

VoicesElizabeth Talbot-Martin, Dave Weber, Ann Lee

Al Bernine, Thelma Boardman, Lee Murray

Clarence Nash, Cliff Nazarro, Forest "War" Perkins

Scott Whitaker, Steve White, The Four Blackbirds

Music.....Edward H. Plumb

Pages from *Mother Goose* come alive with famous motion picture stars, including Spencer Tracy and Katharine Hepburn, caricatured as nursery rhyme characters.

1938 Academy Award™ Nomination for Best Cartoon

VESUVIUS EXPRESS

20th Century Fox – 1953

DeLuxe Color – CinemaScope – 15 minutes

Print courtesy of 20th Century Fox

in CINEMA SCOPE

A breathtaking journey aboard one of the worlds' most modern streamliners from Milan to Naples with stopovers enroute to admire Italy's fabulous scenic beauty and topped by a trip to the very rim of Mt. Vesuvius itself. You are there!!!

1953 two reel Academy Award™ Nomination, Otto Lang, Producer

Society News

Thoughts on our 13th Season

As we enter our 13th season of showcasing classic films at the Alex Theatre, I would like to recap a bit of our history. Today is our 76th program. Since 1994, over 83,000 patrons have attended these screenings. During this time, the Film Society has paid nearly \$70,000 in film rentals to copyright holders along with \$294,000 to the Alex Theatre for rent and labor. We have welcomed over 1150 members in this time and 27 of the original 100 members continue to be active. Our board is proud of these accomplishments and we look forward to being a Resident Company at the Alex for another 13 seasons.

Randy Carter, President

We've updated our web site to include more information and past issues of the *Voice of the Theatre*. Check it out at and sign up for our email list.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

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☐ I (WE) CAN VOLUNTEER, Please call.

☐ Enclosed is my (our) donation of \$

(discount admissions good for every screening)

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(Eight discount passes)

☐ Family/dual \$40

(Four discount passes)

☐ Individual \$25

(Two discount passes)

☐ Senior/Student \$15

(One pass) Senior over 60,
F/T student graduation date:

Please list your two favorite films:

www.AlexFilmSociety.org

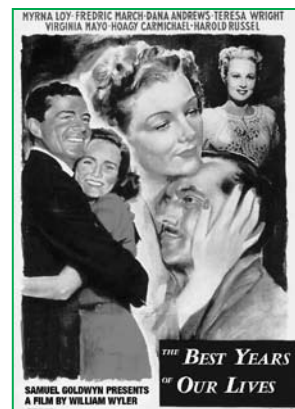
Tickets: 818.243.2539

Saturday, April 28, 2007 at 2 and 8 pm

Winner of 7 Oscars including Best Picture!

THE BEST YEARS OF OUR LIVES

Three American servicemen return home after World War 2, to find their lives irrevocably changed by their military experience. Together, the three must find a way to come to terms with their experiences and pick up the pieces, lest wartime turn out to be "the best years of their lives". Directed by William Wyler, starring Myrna Loy, Fredric March and Dana Andrews, it swept the Academy Awards. RKO (1946).



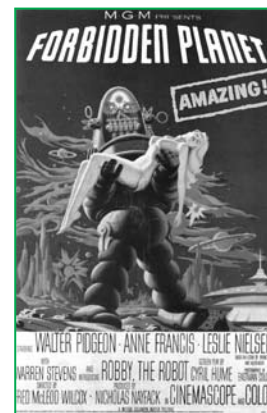
Saturday, July 7, 2007 at 2 pm & 8 pm

On the Big Screen of the Alex Theatre!

FORBIDDEN PLANET

At once intelligent and campy, Forbidden Planet is an intriguing sci-fi classic that borrows from Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and strongly anticipates "Star Trek" in its sci-fi milieu.

Set in 2200 AD, a spacecraft from Earth arrives at a distant planet to investigate the status of a missing colonizing party. What Commander John Adams (Leslie Nielsen) and his crew find is a single survivor, the secretive, uncooperative Dr. Morbius (Walter Pidgeon) — and his virginal but uninhibited daughter Altaira (Anne Francis). As Adams' crew prepares to relay their discoveries to Earth and receive further instructions, the deadly force that decimated the first crew reawakens. Key members of Adams' team are found murdered and Dr. Morbius may not be revealing all he knows... Forbidden Planet was nominated for an Oscar™ (special effects) and is presented in CinemaScope with Color by DeLuxe. Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer (1956).



VOICE of the THEATRE

Published by and for members of the Alex Film Society

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\$3 (mailed free with membership)

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distribution

andrea humberger

printer

patterson graphics, burbank

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