

How as the 1950's  
science fiction film  
'the forbidden planet'  
been influenced by ...

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In 1956, film company MGM set aside a 1 million dollar budget to create a sci-fi film like no other in its time.

At the time, this was an unprecedented amount of money spent on a movie project, and to ensure that 'Forbidden Planet' did not end up like many dire 1950's films of its genre, the producers of 'Forbidden Planet' decided to base their film on the highly successful Shakespearian play 'The Tempest'. In this essay I will be attempting to show the similarities between both productions in addition to illustrating the ways in which 'Forbidden Planet' has implemented many of its ideas based on the storyline of 'The Tempest'. For instance, all of whom who were involved in the photography of 'Forbidden Planet' would have studied Shakespeare's play very meticulously, to be able to generate the atmosphere which Shakespeare masterfully created in 'The Tempest'. In addition to this, the interpretation made by the director of photography to Shakespeare's play would be paramount in assessing the similarities and differences of both productions. Furthermore another objective of this essay is to assess how the settings of 'The Tempest' and 'Forbidden Planet' converge with each other. Moreover I will try to show how the producers of 'Forbidden Planet' integrated the cast of 'The Tempest' into their film whilst cleverly altering a few of their characteristics. In conjunction to this I'll be analysing the plots and structures of both productions as well as trying to uncover, if any of these aspects correspond with each other. The soundtrack of Forbidden Planet played an instrumental role in the quality and the eventual successes of the film, and although during Shakespeare's productions, little sound was utilized, I believe that many of the unorthodox sounds used in the film were influenced

by 'The Tempest' and in this essay I hope to uncover what sounds these were and how they eventually were used.

In the mid twentieth century, sci fi film making was still in its infancy and 'Forbidden Planet' could be better described as a Hollywood experiment than a cinematic masterpiece. It is for this reason why throughout the duration of the film, the producers over complicated the filming techniques and as a result compared to Shakespeare's 'Tempest' which has only one setting and could be watched by audiences a few meters away from the same angle, 'Forbidden Planet' makes use of a variety of close up, medium and long shot camera angles. Having seen the theatre version of 'The Tempest', it is clear to me when the main characters are saying something important, the other characters in the scene discreetly make themselves scarce and the person speaking raises their voice. Due to the resources which 'Forbidden Planet' had at its disposal, it could zoom in on when characters like Jay Jay Adams and Robby the robot were speaking. This was done so that prominence was directed to every word the important characters were saying, and when not speaking, a medium or long range shot was used, to give an added sense of realism to the film, to make the audience feel that they are right on board with the rest of the crew. It is a proven Hollywood fact that one of the main factors which determines a bad film from a good film is its casting, and it can be said that Shakespeare's 'Tempest', had an huge influence on the casting of characters in 'Forbidden Planet'.

For instance the main characters in Shakespeare's play were the magician Prospero, his yin-yang attributed helpers Ariel and Caliban, the jokers of the

pack Trinculo and Stefano, the beautiful daughter of Prospero, Miranda, and finally the man who wins her heart, Ferdinand. The producers of 'Forbidden Planet' did not directly duplicate the cast of 'The Tempest', however the makers cleverly adapted these characters, and integrated the cast to be suitable for a motion picture based in the 23rd century. For example the role of Prospero in 'Forbidden Planet' was undertaken by Dr Morbious, who unlike Prospero is a scientist who is the only human inhabitant of the planet Altair 4 with his daughter fittingly named Altaira, who like Miranda has "never known any human being except her father". There is then Robby the Robot "The housewives dream" who has divine attributes and is totally obedient to his master. Therefore it could possibly be said that he undertakes the role of Ariel. However because of the fact that there is no malice or evil in Robby, then it seems as if there is no Caliban figure in 'Forbidden Planet'.

Next there is the captain Jay-Jay Adams, the unflappable figure who like Ferdinand, falls for the daughter of the father figure, in this case Altaira, and who also like Ferdinand, stays in favour with the magical, or now scientific Dr. Morbious. Despite this however, the makers of 'Forbidden Planet' however, despite their successes were human after all. This is shown in their pathetic attempt to emulate the humour which Stephano and Trinculo produced in 'The Tempest'. The cook of the ship tries and fails in an attempt to combine two roles into one, therefore despite his best efforts, he was unable to humour the audience like Shakespeare's Stephano and Trinculo. As well as the similarities which I have already mentioned, the settings of '

Forbidden Planet' and 'The Tempest' despite being centuries apart share the same basic ideas.

For example, 'The Tempest' is mainly set on a remote uninhabited island; whereas 'Forbidden Planet' is also set on an uninhabited location, but instead of an island, the producers cleverly changed this to a planet to conjoin perfectly with the sci-fi genre. A review of "Forbidden Planet" by a well respected film critic described it as having one of the most "original and unorthodox" soundtracks of its era, and was probably down to the influence which "The Tempest" had on it. This can be said because in "The Tempest", Caliban stated that "The isle is full of strange noises". This quote was probably the catalyst for the directors of music to adopt an extremely unique and canny soundtrack whilst filming 'Forbidden Planet'. This was done in various ways. Firstly when Dr Mobious sub conscience is lurking near, a sonar like sound is deployed, with the louder more consistent sounds being implemented to signify how close the 'id' actually was.

Moreover when Alteria used the high pitched whistle to call her animal friends, an inconsistent, almost annoying sound can be heard. This was done to capture the imagination of the audience, and to integrate the "strange noises" which Shakespeare had placed in 'The Tempest'. Despite not predicting as accurately as Jules Verne did in what space travel would be like in the future 'Forbidden Planet', just like 'The Tempest', tries to convey a hidden message or morale within their productions. For example, 'The Tempest' was made by Shakespeare at a time where many people believed in magic. Not only by conveying the theme of reconciliation, Shakespeare

indirectly warns against the power of magic. This is empathised when Prospero breaks his magic stick (the source of his power) when he returns with the sailors to take his place as the rightful Duke of Milan. I believe that Shakespeare did this to warn his audience that power can never be underestimated and it is better to have none at all and to be at peace with yourself than to be power driven, but still not being contented with your life.

'Forbidden Planet' however concentrates on a different theme. Instead of reconciliation 'Forbidden Planet' focuses more on the idea of space travel and discovery. Despite this, just like Shakespeare's production, 'Forbidden Planet' has a hidden message which it tries to show its audience at the end of the film. Basically the message it tries to get across is the same as 'The Tempest', only altered for a contemporary audience. Instead of warning against the powers of magic, the producers decided to discreetly warn its audience against the power of science, or more specifically, knowledge.

They were trying to say that although science can be used for many good purposes (building a 187 language speaking electronic Jeeves for instance), too much of this can lead to greed and selfishness. Fifteen years before 'Forbidden Planet' was made it was proven by Adolph Hitler that greed with knowledge blinded by morality can lead to destruction. In this case the destruction occurred when Dr. Morbious sub conscience murdered many innocent people who threatened his position on Alteir 4. Eventually this wealth of knowledge given to him due to taking the 'brain booster' combined with the fact that he could not handle his new found wealth of knowledge, lead to the complete destruction of Alteir 4. In conclusion, after

thoroughly analysing 'Forbidden Planet' and 'The Tempest' I can deduce that 'Forbidden Planet' was heavily influenced by 'The Tempest'.

From the inarticulate sonar soundtrack, to the definitive characters, who unfortunately for the millions of people who flocked to the cinema, and indeed for Shakespeare, did not act as well as the material given to them. MGM clearly took a risk in spending one million dollars on one film in the 50's, however with the genius of Shakespeare's ideas in the film, eventually it turned out to be a very wise investment.