



Monsters From the Id

(Documentary)

By JOE LEYDON

A [Blue Room](#) Prods. presentation of a Slings & Arrows Films production, in association with Core Fresh Reality. Produced by [Chris Gargani](#). Directed, written, edited by David Gargani.

With: Homer Hickam, Dr. Patrick Lucanio, Dr. [Leroy Dubeck](#), Gary Coville, Richard Scheib.

Neatly mixing movie-buff nostalgia and food for thought, David Gargani's "Monsters From the Id" provides entertainment and insight with an enjoyable collage of clips from classic and campy sci-fi thrillers of the 1950s. Doc examines what those pics reveal about the '50s zeitgeist, and persuasively argues that the U.S. was able to win the space race -- and, perhaps, the Cold War -- because thousands of this country's students were inspired by Hollywood's heroic depiction of scientists as visionary outer-space explorers and/or monster-zapping good guys. After orbiting the fest circuit, this provocative pic should live long and prosper on cable and homevid.

Excerpting an impressive range of sci-fiers about mutated monsters and intergalactic journeys -- everything from "[Forbidden Planet](#)" (referenced in the doc's title) and "Rocketship X-M" to "Them!" and "The Beast from 20,000 Fathoms" -- "Monsters From the Id" invites talking-heads experts to recall an era when, as film historian Gary Coville pointedly notes, faith in institutions such as the military was at an all-time high, but even military leaders needed help from scientists to end assaults by irradiated insects or boldly go where no man had gone before.

Homer Hickam -- who became a NASA engineer partly because of his exposure to lab-coated role models on the bigscreen -- marvels that, in pics such as "When Worlds Collide" and "Conquest of Space," scientists weren't nerdy geeks, but rather "heroes who knew more stuff than the next guys." (Hickman's bestselling autobiography, "Rocket Boys," was itself turned into an inspirational movie, 1999's "[October Sky](#).")

Better still, the science in much of the science fiction was surprisingly accurate -- so much so that Temple U. professor Leroy Dubeck says he has used the films to teach entry-level physics courses.

Gargani celebrates the exciting sense of infinite possibilities that suffuses key '50s sci-fiers, and cheekily suggests some of that same spirit may be influencing contemporary figures such as Virgin Airlines tycoon [Richard Branson](#), whose program for commercial space flights is wittily juxtaposed with similar proposals by scientists in "Destination Moon" (1950).

Even so, "Monsters From the Id" ends on a slightly downbeat note, bemoaning the fact that, when it comes to measuring the percentage of college students earning degrees in science, the U.S. currently ranks low (No. 25) when compared to other industrialized nations. The answer to this pressing problem? According to Gargani and his interviewees, maybe what this country needs right now is another cycle of sci-fi pics featuring heroic scientists bent on repelling monsters and conquering space.

Camera (B&W/color), [Peter Konczal](#); music, [Brian Aumueller](#); sound, [Marcel Schaal](#), [John Sawa](#). Reviewed on DVD, Houston, March 11, 2009. (At SXSW Film Festival -- Spotlight Premieres.) Running time: 71 MIN.