

FEATURE

JAMES CAMERON LAUNCHES

TITANIC

All *Titanic* photos courtesy of Paramount Pictures

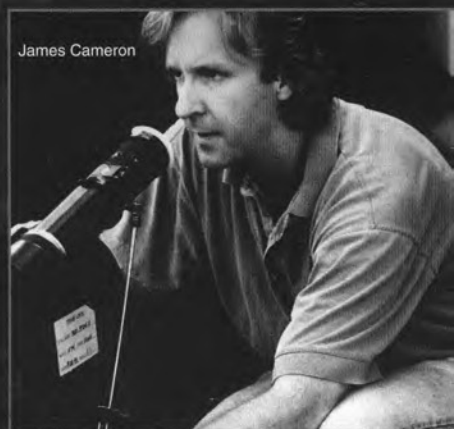


TITANIC

by
**Angela
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Los Angeles. James Cameron is ecstatic, but exhausted. He has just flown back from Halifax, N.S., where he completed 12 deep-sea dives 4,000 metres under the surface of the Atlantic Ocean shooting the wreckage of the Titanic, and he's emotionally spent.

"Being down there in a submersible is incredible," says the 44-year-old director with a smile. "But we never lost track of the fact that it's a shrine. The area in which we were diving was the bow section of the ship, and there was nobody on that part of the ship when it sank. The ship essentially broke in half and most of the people who died on the ship were on the stern section, which was about a mile away from where we were. When we finished our work we took nothing, we only photographed. We filmed all night and into the next afternoon. When we finished, we dedicated a reef to the passengers and crew of the Titanic and dropped it overboard. There's something that happens to you when you're down there. You get overwhelmed with this great sense of tragedy and surroundings."



James Cameron

Indeed. Yet Cameron was prepared to go through such emotional turmoil when he insisted that he acquire never-before seen footage of the doomed ocean liner for his multimillion dollar movie, *Titanic*. Located about 1,300 kilometres off the coast of Nova Scotia, southeast of St. John's, Nfld., the Titanic wreck isn't easy to get to. Cameron had to get his dailies via a tanker pilot who would fly over and airdrop them by parachute into a Zodiac that was 46 metres off the mother ship. Cameron would then set up a projector to view them onboard. Although he insists he took nothing from the wreckage—which, since its discovery in 1985, is not protected—he does admit to a minor accident.

Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet play a pair of star-crossed lovers in *Titanic*. Inserts: Linda Hamilton in *Terminator 2: Judgement Day*, Sigourney Weaver and Carrie Henn in *Aliens*.



"If the site is protected at all, it's from salvage, but that's only from citizens bringing those objects back into the US," explains Cameron. "There have been two French expeditions. One of them just pillaged the place, went through the debris field and picked up all the china and wine bottles and brought them all back to France. In the movie, I have characters looking for something on the ship, so we built a remotely operated vehicle (ROV) that had arms on the front, that looked like it was designed to physically take things. I got carried away on one of the dives and actually sent it inside the ship. We looked around at things no one had ever seen since the sinking, but in the process we got a piece of wood jammed in one of the thrusters and the ROV came back with a piece of the Titanic stuck through its motor, which I now have."

Based on an original script by Cameron, *Titanic* begins in modern day and flashes back to the fateful four days in 1912 leading up to the ship's sinking. Cameron adopted a handful of fictional characters who he mixed in with historical figures to tell what he calls an "epic love story à la Romeo and Juliet." This three-hour movie centres on a fortune hunter (Bill Paxton) who interviews an aged survivor of the disaster. Rose DeWitt (Kate Winslet) was a 17-year-old upper-class American suffocating within the confines and expectations of Edwardian society, who was on the Titanic with her prissy and wealthy fiancé (Billy Zane). After meeting free-spirited steerage passenger Jack (Leonardo DiCaprio), Rose discovers a wonderful world outside her gilded cage, but her happiness with Jack is short lived.

Obviously more than just a love story, *Titanic* explores the many theories surrounding the ship's final hours such as the gaps of communication, the absence of emergency procedures and the ingrained privilege of the upper classes who were given priority to the insufficient number of lifeboats.

"The tragedy of the Titanic has assumed an almost mythic quality in our collective imagination," says Cameron. "But the passage of time has robbed it of its human face and its vitality. I hope that Rose and Jack's relationship will be a kind of emotional lightning rod allowing viewers to invest with their heart and imagination and make history come alive again."



Cameron also admits that what appealed to him about the Titanic was the aspect of technology and man's disillusionment with it. "Not only disillusionment, but our tendency even beyond disillusionment to still put our faith in it," says Cameron. "I can draw a pretty good parallel between the faith that they put in a ship like the Titanic in 1912—an almost unshakable faith that science and technology would deliver us to a better age and a better life, with no penalty paid—and the current hype and hysteria about the information superhighway and how computing is going to deliver us to a brave new world. Which it probably will, but it's not without risks and I think people have to be very heads-up about the risks."

Born, in Kapuskasing, On., Cameron grew up in Niagara Falls before moving to California to study physics. ("I wanted to be a marine biologist but then I found out how much money they made," laughs Cameron.) He left his job as a machinist/truck driver and raised money from a consortium of dentists to produce a short film, which would lead him to work with Roger Corman in 1980's *Battle Beyond the Stars*. Before turning to directing, Cameron became second-unit director on *Galaxy of Terror*, another Roger Corman film, and was a production designer and special-effects coordinator. This experience later showed in *Aliens*, for which he designed the dropship (which is actually made from the shell of an Apache helicopter), the marine's uniforms, the powerloader, the pulse rifle and the smartgun. In 1982, he wrote the script for *The Terminator*. While waiting for financing, he wrote *Rambo: First Blood Part II* and the first draft of *Aliens*. Both *The Terminator* and *Aliens*, would go on to gross hundreds of millions of dollars at box offices around the world, soon to be followed by *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* and *True Lies*.

Whereas Cameron stuck to traditional effects of puppetry and miniature modelling in *The Terminator* and *Aliens*, it was with his third film, *The Abyss* (Cameron's only box-office dud to date), that his infatuation with silicon began. "It's imagination, and not technology, that sparked the attraction," says Cameron. "There was no other way to achieve the effect of making a watery tubular creature writhe in thin air." In the spring of 1995, Cameron launched his

own solid-state effects house, Digital Domain, with partners IBM, character creator Stan Winston and former Industrial Light and Magic chief Scott Ross. This is the same shop that provided the effects for *Interview With the Vampire*, *Apollo 13* and *True Lies*.

Last year, Cameron tried his hand at a 3-D short-film attraction, *Terminator 2: 3-D*, for Universal Studios Florida and says his next hurdle will be to do a feature-length, fully animated computer-generated (CG) film that's photo realistic. Meanwhile, under the banner of his production company, Lightstorm Entertainment, he's contemplating such CG-friendly projects as *Spiderman* and an adaptation of Anne Rice's *The Mummy*.

Cameron's personal life is as hectic as his professional one. He was once married to Kathryn Bigelow, director of *Near Dark*, *Point Break* and *Strange Days*, a film produced and co-written by Cameron. He also married producer Gale Anne Hurd in 1985, who co-wrote *The Terminator* and produced some of his earlier films. That marriage ended in 1989 when he embarked on an affair with *Terminator* co-star Linda Hamilton with whom he has a baby daughter. These days, however, Cameron is more concerned about the controversy surrounding *Titanic* which has been the subject of major fights between Twentieth Century-Fox and Paramount, both of which are footing the \$200-million price tag. Although rumours have it that the movie is a technological wonder, Cameron is realistic about the financial expectations of *Titanic*, which lacks any big-name action talent like Schwarzenegger or Stallone. But he's unfazed.

"My favourite movie of all time is *Doctor Zhivago*," says Cameron. "I wanted to make *Titanic* just as epic and memorable, that's why I didn't want a *Towering Inferno* kind of cast. There haven't been any real good *Titanic* movies except for [Roy Baker's] *A Night to Remember*. But even that was inaccurate in a lot of ways. A lot has been found out about the *Titanic* subsequently, especially since the wreck was discovered. Also *A Night to Remember* was what we would now call a docudrama; all the characters in it were real people on the *Titanic* and it was a

The Abyss



retelling of history, slightly dramatized, but pretty straight forward."

Slated for release this past summer—a delay that cost the studios dearly—*Titanic* was plagued with bizarre incidents during the shooting. One day, following a hearty lunch of clam chowder, nearly the entire cast and crew of the movie came down with food poisoning, which halted production for a week. Rumours were floated around in the entertainment press about a deliberate sabotage on the part of a shunned caterer, but Nova Scotia police quickly determined that it was all a case of bad clams.

Although tired, Cameron is excited to head back to Halifax to start shooting the narrative part of the movie. But before he leaves he insists on telling me about an event that happened aboard the *Keldysh*, the Russian research vessel that took him on the dives.

"Most of the Russian crew had been there before. They had dived there previously," says Cameron as I accompany him to the elevator. "I had a tape of *A Night to Remember* with me, and they had never seen it. So I had 100 Russian crew members packed into this little room watching it in English. They didn't even understand two thirds of it, but half of them came out crying. A quarter of them couldn't work the next morning because they were so overwhelmed by being there and then seeing the film. That's how I feel right now." ■