

RMS Titanic and the Moon

By Clark Thomas

When the epic disaster of the Titanic was recreated in 1997 by Hollywood more money was spent making the movie than making the original ship. Worldwide, the box office brought in over one billion dollars.

In ancient Greek mythology the Titans fought the newer Olympian gods, losing to Zeus and his allies. The modern Titanic debacle accented the end of the gilded era, heralding the approach of mindless world war. It symbolized mankind's arrogance and equal disregard for natural laws, along with their consequences.

Because here was a real historical event, these movie makers should be held to a much higher standard, while still allowing them to show their actors not in total darkness. They succeeded, but with some excess lumens within the ship.

Day shots were properly lit. Serious lighting questions appear during the critical hours after the ice was hit.

The weather near Iceland was clear before impact. However, were there enough lumens to see the tip of the iceberg in time to avoid it? We know THAT answer. Next, the ship took about two hours to sink. The movie shows plenty of light, even after the ship starts to drop into the deep. Is this luminosity accurate?

It is at this point where we must turn to astronomy for our answer. I went to my trusty

Equinox planetarium software, setting the skies for April 15, 1912, near Newfoundland, at 41 degrees 44 minutes North, and 49 degrees 57 minutes West. Four days into the crossing, at 23:40 on 14 April 1912, RMS Titanic struck an iceberg, and sank at 2:20 the following morning of April 15. Here is what the dying and the survivors saw:

First, there was NO MOON. Nearly at the zenith was Arcturus, and Vega was up about forty-five degrees. Jupiter and nearby Antares were up just over twenty degrees. As the

Titanic sank, Jupiter, slayer of the Titans, and Antares, rival of the god of war, seemingly surveyed their gruesome handiwork.

About 6 a.m. the thin crescent Moon appeared very close to Venus. This lovely duo heralded the arrival of the Sun less than an hour

later. Those fortunate to be in life boats could have enjoyed their dawn pairing as a symbol of hope for their own rescue.

Back to the sinking itself — the absolute horror of impending death in a frigid, black sea after the ship's lights failed would have been intensified by the absence of any Moon light.

As bad as this naval disaster was, it was small scale compared to the coming horrors of World War One, where millions died for national vanity, on land and sea, under starry skies.

