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Beware phoney 3-D as Hollywood cashes in

Rob Woollard, Agence France-Presse
Published: Wednesday, May 12

One year after a 3-D film opened Cannes for the first time ever, Hollywood is in the grip of a revolution that has generated billions of dollars and sent cinema-goers flocking back to theatres. But industry heavyweights and analysts have warned that the 3-D bonanza could be jeopardized if studios sacrifice quality to cash in on moviemaking's most important technological milestone since colour films.

While James Cameron's science fiction epic Avatar provided ground-breaking confirmation of what 3-D at its immersive best can offer, the Greek mythology remake Clash of the Titans was an illustration of what can go wrong.

Avatar was conceived and shot using state-of-the-art 3-D cameras -- Cameron said he waited for technology to "catch up" with his imagination. Titans was shot in 2-D and hastily converted into 3-D during post production.

"A few more 3-D spectacles like Clash of the Titans and audiences will be clamouring for 2-D," was the withering assessment of the Wall Street Journal.

Jeffrey Katzenberg, the head of DreamWorks Animation, was also scathing, warning in an interview with Variety that the movie industry was at a "genuine crossroads."

Movie-goers who have been happy to pay more at the box office for quality 3-D will quickly wise up if they feel they are being served up an inferior product, Katzenberg warned.

"We've seen the highest end of 3-D (in Avatar) and you have now witnessed the lowest end of it (in Titans)," Katzenberg said.

"You cannot do anything that is of a lower grade and a lower quality than what has just been done on Clash of the Titans. It literally is 'OK, congratulations! You just snookered the movie audience.'

"We may get away with it a few times but in the long run, (moviegoers) will wake up. And the day they wake up is the day they walk away from us and we blew it," Katzenberg added.

Lew Harris, the managing editor of thewrap.com website, said the experience

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of Clash of the Titans could have implications for persistent speculation that classic films such as Star Wars and Titanic may be re-released in 3-D.

"I think it depends on how they do it," Harris told AFP. "By the time these films come out a lot of the 3-D novelty is going to be over.

"Will people go and see Titanic in 3-D? I think they might, just out of curiosity. It's a 'big' movie. You've got the huge spectacle of a ship sinking, people plunging into the water. It would be an interesting 3-D experience."

But Harris also believes Hollywood will need to be selective in determining which films from the past can be repackaged in 3-D.

"They're going to have to be careful that people don't get turned off," he said. "In a lot of cases it's questionable how much the 3-D really adds to the experience. Disney's talking about Beauty and the Beast in 3-D.

"But they're going to have to prove that 3-D adds enough of a differentiation. I saw Up in 3-D and I don't think there was anything I would have lost by having seen it in 2-D."

David Wertheimer, the chief executive of the USC's Entertainment Technology Center and the former president of Paramount Digital Entertainment, said artistic obstacles sometimes prevented films from being successfully converted into 3-D.

"The problem with converting live action movies from 2-D to 3-D is that some of the creative choices that the director and DP (director of photography) originally made are different from how you would want them in 3-D.

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