

Cameron's 'Avatar' surpasses expectations

A review of the 2nd highest grossing film of all-time, 'Avatar.'

by **Travis Wireback**
Editor in Chief

James Cameron has done it again. Twelve years after his last film, Cameron matched and then surpassed the success of *Titanic* with his new film, 'Avatar.' 'Avatar's' storyline

is engrossing, but not groundbreaking. What is groundbreaking, however, is Cameron's seamless integration of CGI (computer generated images) technology and live action. This technology allows Cameron to create an aesthetically incredible movie that leaves the viewer in awe.

The plot of *Avatar* is reminiscent of 'Dances with Wolves' or 'The Last Samurai,' and really doesn't deviate too much from

the standard plotlines of those movies. However, the visual effects take those two story lines, dose them with acid, and then mix in an idyllic tropical forest and floating mountain scenes to create a visually stunning masterpiece.

The story is set in 2154, with humans engaging in a mining effort on a moon called Pandora, which orbits a far-off star. Humans are there due to the presence of a mineral called 'unobtainium' which, as

suggested by its name, is unobtainable on Earth.

The protagonist, Jake Sully has been enlisted to help with the effort by the corporation in charge of the mining. His job is to help connect with the indigenous population, a species called the Na'vi, who are lean, blue, around 12 feet tall and whose bones are naturally carbon-fiber.

Sully does this by controlling an Avatar, an organically grown human/Na'vi hybrid, which is matched to a specific human through their DNA. Humans connect to them by mentally inhabiting the body of the Avatar which has been matched to them.

Sully, an ex-Marine who is now a paraplegic, is chosen following the death of his twin brother because he is a genetic match

to the Avatar made for his brother and the cost in money and time of creating a replacement Avatar for a new crewmember would be astronomical.

Once the action moves to Pandora, the plot begins to look like *Dances with Wolves* or *The Last Samurai*, mainly because Sully is a member of a group whose goals will cause a confrontation between his people and that of the indigenous population. However, as in the aforementioned movies,

he develops a relationship with the natives, and also establishes a love interest.

What follows is very predictable. Sully goes native, there's confrontation with members of his species who don't get the complexity of the native culture, and Jake leads his new community into battle. With such an easily predictable plot, how was Cameron (who wrote, directed and produced 'Avatar') able to keep audiences worldwide engrossed in the film for its lengthy 163-minute runtime?

As mentioned earlier, this film is an almost psychedelic journey. Cameron takes you through beautiful landscapes and unbelievable flights on the Na'vi's domesticated steeds. Throughout the whole experience, you have to constantly remind yourself that this movie is almost entirely CGI.

Furthermore, while the plot is predictable, the way the storylines are interwoven makes the 163 minutes seem almost too short.

Another interesting part of the movie is its underlying theme of environmental responsibility. The movie showcases the immorality of destroying a planet and a culture, simply for a resource that will net you a lot of cash (read: oil).

It also has a staunchly anti-war message. The final 30 or so minutes include the seemingly needless death of numerous Na'vi and humans in an epic battle scene. Although it is one of the coolest movie battle scenes I've ever witnessed, far outstripping the end of *The Last Samurai*, you find yourself wondering if death and war are ever really necessary.

High standards most certainly apply to a man who proclaimed himself "King of the World" while accepting Oscars for *Titanic*. Nothing short of excellence would suffice, especially after 13 years of waiting for *Avatar*. As I said at the beginning, James Cameron has done it again. The bar, which was set almost impossibly high following the success of the epic movie *Titanic*, has been re-raised. The only question that remains following *Avatar* is: What will come next?

