



Written by [Thomas R. Eddlem](#) on December 21, 2009

Avatar: A Visually Stunning and Perfect Historical Allegory

“You are not in Kansas anymore,” the main antagonist Colonel Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang) growls out at the beginning of the movie *Avatar*, “You are on Pandora.” The movie is about a race of blue-colored humanoid native Na’vi inhabiting a moon named Pandora. Pandora revolves around a gas giant planet of the star Alpha Centauri A, one of the closest stars to our own sun.

Earth has started a colony on the planet 150 years from now and most of the settlers are mining for a rare and valuable mineral called unobtainium “worth 20 million a kilo.” In the way of the mining operation are the peaceful but technologically backward Na’vi, who are still in the bow-and-arrow stage of civilization.



The movie features paralyzed former Marine Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), who has been drawn into the Avatar program after the death of his twin brother. Avatars are remotely controlled, laboratory-grown bodies that are a mix of human and Na’vi DNA. The Avatars can pass as Na’vi and possess all of the native’s strengths and dexterity, as well as the Na’vi’s ability to breath Pandora’s air. The Avatar program began as an innocent scientific program led by Dr. Grace Augustine (Sigourney Weaver), who wanted to study the Na’vi and learn about their civilization.

Sully takes over the Avatar designed for his twin brother because Avatars can only be controlled by those with identical human DNA. “Every driver is linked to his own Avatar,” Sully is told. While in the coffin-shaped Avatar linking chamber, the crippled Sully happily gains full use of the nimble Avatar body.

Colonial soldiers promise him an expensive operation to regain feeling and use of his human legs if he wins the trust of the Na’vi and gives Colonel Quaritch intelligence on how best to conquer the Na’vi. “I need you to learn from the savages from the inside, to gain their trust,” Quaritch tells Sully. Sully at first gives Quaritch information on how the giant tree in the middle of the Na’vi encampment grows in the middle of the mineral deposit, and that the tree is somehow a key to the entire civilization. Later, he begins to sympathize with the native Na’vi.

James Cameron, the movie’s director, is perhaps best known for directing the movies *Titanic* and *Terminator*, and his latest, *Avatar*, is a visually stunning epic that is a perfect allegory for any of a dozen or more Indian wars in American history. From King Philip’s War in New England to Tippecanoe in Indiana to Horseshoe Bend in Alabama — and all the way across the American continent, for that matter — the story was the same. Colonists simply take land from the natives, as the Sully explains: “This is how it’s done. When people are sitting on something that you want, you make them your enemy so that you can drive them out.”

“These savages are threatening the whole operation,” mining company administrator Parker Selfridge



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(Giovanni Ribisi) explains of the colonists' view of the Na'vi. "Killing them is bad. But there's one thing shareholders hate more than bad press, and that's a bad bottom line."

One might easily mistake *Avatar* as a simple tree-hugging movie, but Cameron's world is a complex one where several species are biologically linked to the network of trees in the forest, which act as a collective brain — or giant biological computer — that the colonists are bound to destroy in their efforts to collect the unobtainium under the tree's roots.

The use of Avatars in the attack on the Na'vi also makes a perfect allegory to the Indian wars of America's settlement. Many times the colonists sought the aid of native tribes in order to subdue other more assertive tribes, and the Avatars could be compared to the tribes friendly to the colonists, who were later disposed of in subsequent wars. Divide and conquer was the strategy in the displacement of native Americans, but on Pandora the biological links between the natives makes the issue much more difficult.

In the process of pressing the attack against the Na'vi, Col. Quaritch bellows out many a well-worn slogan of warmongers throughout history. "Our only security lies in preventative attack. We will fight terror with terror," he says. Preventative attack is the same argument that justified the most recent U.S. war against Iraq, and it is in plot subtleties such as these (and in the CGI graphics) that the movie really shines.

Cameron's original story includes a plan for two more sequels if the first movie is a commercial success. Such a goal is perhaps obtainable after the successful first weekend box office take for the film, favorable reviews, and a substantial buzz. But since it was a mostly-CGI movie and the most expensive movie ever made, profitability may not yet be obtained. Experts have estimated that the movie will have to gross more than three-quarters of a billion dollars just to break even, though it should be stressed that Cameron's *Titanic* was the first movie to break the billion-dollar mark in revenues.

If the sequels are half as good as the original, it's worth hoping for the first film to succeed in order to have the sequels.



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