



TRANSCRIPT

Cinema Review - Avatar

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A recent news item from the troubled Middle East reported that a group of Palestinian demonstrators had resorted to a novel manner of drawing attention to their cause. The Palestinians painted their bodies blue and wore Red Indian-style lap-laps and donned long-hair wigs.

It was a dramatic instance of life imitating art, because the demonstrators had set out to portray themselves as the *Navi* - the native jungle people who, in the movie *Avatar*, are the subject of brutal oppression by the heavily-armed colonisers of their planet.

Avatar had clearly resonated with the Palestinians and the fact that they had chosen to draw upon it as a sure-fire means of getting the attention of the media is a tribute to the power of the central theme of this movie as well as an acknowledgment of the film's astounding popularity.

The theme of *Avatar* unequivocally champions the cause of any and all native peoples who – since time began - have found themselves subject to aggression and exploitation. It is an absolutely worthy topic to explore and, although this theme has been the focus of plenty of movies in the past – some of them very good westerns – I think that *Avatar* is certain to be the one that will most readily come to mind for a long time into the future.

And that's the thing about *Avatar*: It's a watershed movie. In one bold stroke, writer-director James Cameron has re-defined the way in which movies will be made hereafter.

To sit and watch it and allow yourself to become enfolded into its breathtaking three-dimensional phantasy world is to perhaps feel something of the amazement of audiences who experienced the first talkies, or those who were delighted by the first movies shown in colour. Every development of movie technology that has followed these advances – a variety of wide screens and greatly improved sound systems - has been gradual and pleasantly satisfying, but *Avatar* represents a sudden leap into the future.

After *Avatar* we will *expect* movies to be rendered – apparently effortlessly – in three dimensions. We will *expect* movies to seamlessly blend real elements with sumptuous special effects which have the power to either simulate real life in a totally convincing manner or to create wonderfully imaginative fantasy.

Anything less will be seen as inferior to *Avatar*.

As we speak *Avatar* is setting new box office records around the world. Audiences are clearly delighting in the exciting and astounding technical side of the movie but it's doubtful that even these extraordinary technical achievements would keep people buying tickets if the movie didn't tell a good story.

And this, of course, it does.

Surrounded by all of the amazing special effects the plot is disarmingly – and perhaps reassuringly – simple. It doesn't set out to break new ground or challenge our expectations and maybe this is why audiences can feel at ease and comfortable with this movie. It's essentially a familiar two level structure. One strand unfolds a boy-meets-girl romance while the other strand pits the greedy, aggressive mining developers in a life or death struggle against the local native people and their sacred rainforest homeland.

It's a kind of *Dances with Wolves* set in the future and on another planet. And, as with *Dances with Wolves*, the hero is a disabled war veteran – a paraplegic former US Marine who finds that he can have a new lease of life, and regain his lost mobility, by inhabiting a purpose-built new body – his avatar.

The Marine is played by Sam Worthington – the latest Aussie actor to make his name in Hollywood. And what a name he will make with this movie and others to follow. Worthington has the good looks and easy self-assurance of an Aussie sporting hero and his riveting screen presence and sonorous voice recall the young Russell Crowe and the sadly-missed Heath Ledger. Just watch this young man's career take off.

I gave *Avatar* my highest rating of five stars.

Whether the Hollywood Academy sees it the same way is a story that will be told in just a few days time. I expect it will do very well and collect a swag of Oscars – but you never know. I'll deliver my report on the Awards in my next review.

So, good bye for now – and I'll see you in the back stalls.