



SAM WORTHINGTON (center) plays paraplegic marine Jake Sully.

Avatar soars in 3-D

James Cameron once declared himself king of the world. Now he has his eye on bigger things – he wants to rule the universe, the future and your brain

• By JONATHAN AMERIKANER

AVATAR (US)
Fantasy (162 min.) Rated PG-13
for intense epic battle sequences
and language.

Parents who view the latest state-of-the-art 3D sonogram of their unborn infant are often amazed and even unnerved by the detail, beauty and the stark reality of what is to come. For a film critic, viewing *Avatar* is also an overwhelming look into the future—the future of filmmaking and film watching. The film has already been compared to groundbreaking features such as *The Jazz Singer*, the film that brought sound into the mainstream, and *Star Wars*, which changed the scope and scale of science fiction. After 14 years of development, three years of production and a rumored budget of half a billion dollars, director

James Cameron and his team have created a film that truly places us inside the world they imagined for us. *Avatar* is a film you don't just see. It's an experience.

Avatar takes place in the year 2154, and Earth is dying or dead. The human race is now forced to excavate fossil fuels from alien worlds. An unnamed company has discovered a powerful source of energy in a mineral called (no fooling) "unobtainium" on the distant planet of Pandora. The

film review

planet's indigenous tribal clan, the "Naavi," tries to stop the company's excavations. A race of 12-foot tall blue humanoids, the Naavi share many attributes of a feline. The story follows paraplegic marine Jake Sully (Sam Worthington) who is part of a team of earth "pilots" able to

remotely control their genetically grown Naavi bodies – their "avatars." The pilots' mission is to find a diplomatic solution with the Naavi, who will not move from their ancient home which happens to be situated on top of the largest deposit of "unobtainium" on Pandora.

How can a fantasy seem so real? Cameron pulls it off. He creates the world of Pandora with awe-inspiring detail and yes, "realism." Mountains float in the sky. Trees reach a thousand feet into the air. There are rhino-type creatures the size of elephants with heads like hammer-head sharks and fluorescent spores like jellyfish that float gently through the air. James Cameron's last three films were pseudo-documentaries exploring the deep sea and clearly Cameron was affected by the luminous world of the deep. Some of the most beautiful sequences take place at night when all of Pandora becomes alive with a phosphorescent glow.

If you can see *Avatar* in 3D, do. It was envisioned as a 3D film, and after spending the last several years deep in the ocean filming 3D films such as *Aliens of the Deep* (2005), Cameron has perfected his technique. Early last spring I had the unique opportunity to see a short clip of *Avatar* on a 3D television (yes, they exist). I was skeptical because I feared the 3D would remain a gimmick. But *Avatar* refrains from resorting to corny objects hurtling at the audience. Instead Cameron masterfully and subtly uses 3D to provide depth and a sense that we are actually there. In one thrilling sequence, Jake, in a Naavi rite of passage, must capture a dragon-like creature and tame it mid-flight. In fact, much of *Avatar* takes place in the skies, which looks glorious in 3D.

There was (and still is) much hype surrounding *Avatar*. Some reviewers believe it may revolutionize the way movies are made and seen. Time will tell. Some will compare it to Cameron's last mainstream film, the billion-dollar grossing *Titanic* (1997). *Titanic* was carried by young women who returned to see the film multiple times. *Avatar* is a science-fiction action adventure, whose core audience will probably not be young women. Nevertheless, this is an epic film that demands to be seen on the big screen.