

# Movie Review – The Goddess of Pandora

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Neytiri of the Na'vi

I recently watched the DVD “Collector’s Special Extended Edition” of the movie *Avatar*, by James Cameron. He is one of my favorite directors, having made *Terminator I* (which I consider to be one of the best action/adventure movies ever made), *Titanic*, and *Aliens*.

*Avatar* is a science fiction/fantasy/adventure flick set on the planet of Pandora, a moon in the Alpha Centauri star system. In many ways this movie surpassed all of Cameron’s others in a brilliant combination of human acting, CGI effects, military battles, and a convincing love story between a human man and an alien woman. But what interested me most were the theological aspects of the movie.

The goddess of Pandora is named “Eywa,” perhaps taken from “Ewha Womans University” in South Korea. As the inevitable lawsuits have piled up against *Avatar*, one Korean satirist wrote that even the school was trying to sue for a cut of the proceeds.

Eywa is a new age goddess, essentially a female version of the Druidical gods of the Celts; a nicer and more caring earth/nature goddess that benignly (for the most part) presides over a planet where virtually all of the life forms are somehow interconnected in a huge web of life. The people of Pandora, called the “Na’vi”, have long ponytails, and can connect with animals or plants by inserting the shaggy end into receptors on the animal or plant. This is a similar concept to the “shape-shifting” of the Druid adepts in which they were said to have the capability to mystically leave their body and become one with an object of nature – to soar with an eagle, run with a horse, meditate with a tree, or become mute with a rock.

Cameron also included elements of eastern mysticism into his goddess. The word “avatar” is a Hindu term for an appearance or manifestation of a deity, such as the Hindu god Ganesha pictured as an elephant, or Vishnu shown in the form of a blue man (the Na’vi of Pandora were also blue). Eywa also included elements of Buddhism, which teaches pantheism (“god is in everything, and everything is god”). Eywa is thus the “spirit of nature” who is distant and uninvolved with mortals. When a person dies their individuality is supposedly reabsorbed into Eywa, similar to the Buddhist concept of Nirvana.

The network/interconnectedness aspect of Pandora also had romantic and sexual connotations – the idea of a mental connection between man and woman, where the man not only penetrates the woman, but in a strange and unknown way enters her mind, and she likewise can enter his. Together Na’vi couples supposedly create a unity and a lifelong bond, similar to what Murrone says to William Wallace in the movie *Braveheart*, “And I will love you, you and no other, forever.” In our day of disposable marriages, that is a powerful and compelling statement, especially for women.



Eywa

Eywa was represented in the movie as a “willow” tree with long neon-pink branches and floating white “spirits,” located in a sacred grove. But regardless of how cool the goddess and the world of

Pandora was, Eywa has the same problem as the Druidical gods of the Celts and the pantheist gods of eastern mysticism – she is too small.

Consider a few of the statements made about Jehovah and how much greater he is than Eywa or any earth god:

In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. *Genesis 1:1*

Lift up your eyes on high and see who has created these stars – the one who leads forth their host by number. He calls them all by name, and because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, not one of them is missing. *Isaiah 40:26*

And the Word became flesh, and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth. *John 1:14*

Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed, and were created. *Revelation 4:2*

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. *Revelation 20:11*

The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. And He shall reign forever and ever. *Revelation 11:15*

Ireland was almost entirely Druidical until St Patrick arrived on the scene around AD 450. He told the Irish of a God that was above the trees, higher than the mountains, greater than seas, and even above the stars, because that God had made them all. Furthermore, this God loved people and had himself become a man in order to identify with the human condition. Despite violent opposition from the Druidical priests who resented any imposition on their authority and influence, Patrick persevered. Within his lifetime, the extreme violence of the Irish society and their slave trading activities were reduced, and many Irish turned away from Druidism to seek after Jehovah, the God of the Bible.

It is a well-acknowledged fact that people have unquenchable desires for something above and beyond themselves. Life must be more than mere existence, and we have strong passions for purpose, meaning, achievement, romance, and individuality. All of these are ultimately incompatible with eastern mysticism which teaches that reality is essentially an illusion. Enlightenment in this context consists of understanding that life is Samsara, the wheel of suffering. You live, die, and are reborn in a long cycle which is your karma – your unalterable fate – and you get off the wheel only by surrendering yourself to the cosmic all, which is Nirvana, the Buddhist/Hindu version of heaven, in which your individuality is absorbed.

But if eastern mysticism is true, why would we be created with all of these passions for meaning and purpose, only to have to eliminate them in order to enter heaven? Why is life on earth ultimately meaningless? Humanistic Darwinism is even worse; there is no possible meaning or purpose because in that worldview we are simply a cosmic accident – a collection of stray molecules that somehow got together to form life. But the Bible says that we were created in the image of God and therefore we are like him in many ways. Jehovah as our creator therefore makes much more sense than any other

paradigm because he is a purposeful, passionate being who loves and cares, and who is concerned about morality and justice. As C.S. Lewis said in *The Problem of Pain*: “Experiencing hunger does not necessarily mean that you will find something to eat, but it does indicate that you live in a world where edible substances exist.”

There are only six major worldviews/theologies in the entire history of humanity: 1) Judaism/Christianity; 2) Islam; 3) Eastern mysticism (Pantheism, Buddhism, Hinduism, etc.); 4) Ancestor worship/Animism/Wicca; 5) Secular Humanism; and 6) Atheism. Everything else is a variation of one or more of the above. Furthermore, everyone has internalized a worldview that informs their thinking and that forms the basis upon which life is lived. We cannot prove the nature of God and cannot even prove his existence or non-existence. Therefore, whatever we believe and whatever worldview we choose (or is chosen for us) has to be accepted on faith. Many people have simply absorbed the worldview of their parents, friends, or the society around them, and have not critically examined what they believe.

In addition to being non-provable, all worldviews/theologies have problems and conundrums – issues which are hard to explain in the context of that worldview. But Christian theology, philosophy, and ethics is the most powerful, cogent, comprehensive, and realistic worldview in existence, because Jehovah is the most powerful, cogent, comprehensive, and realistic God. The founders of all other religions, such as Muhammad and Gotama Buddha, are dead and buried, but Jesus rose from the dead, and his grave is empty.

According to the Bible, Jehovah designed and brought all things into being, and at the end of the world He will ultimately create a new order of existence that we cannot yet fully understand: “He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there will no longer be any death, or mourning, or crying, or pain, because the former things have passed away. He who sits on the throne says, ‘Behold, I make all things new.’” (Revelation 21:4-5).

If Jehovah is so great and cool, why aren’t Hollywood studios and directors like James Cameron creating stories and making movies about him, and trying to imagine what heaven could be like? If Christianity has the best and most comprehensive answers for the issues of humanity, why has it been rejected by much of western intelligentsia? Here are some of the possible reasons:

1. The influence of other beings. There is also a powerful group of spiritual beings who have been engaged in a centuries-old propaganda program to keep people away from Jehovah, or if that fails, to discredit him and cast him as being cruel, capricious, uncaring, and uninvolved. These are the demons, led by Satan, and they have existed throughout human history. They continually pander to our pride and selfishness, encourage us to do wrong, and teach us to question and ignore God. Furthermore, they have continually adapted their tempting and pandering programs to the current culture and spirit of the age. In the past they encouraged evil and corrupt church leaders, whereas now the ploy is typically self-centeredness. From their perspective, the point is to keep people absorbed with self and away from God in any possible way that they can. “Be of sober spirit, and be on the alert, for your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.” 1 Peter 5:8. See the article, [The True Conspiracy](#) for more information.
2. The justice of Jehovah. Jehovah is a God of justice and morality and he demands that his people rise to his standards. We cannot, of course, even live up to our own standards, let alone his. That is the reason why Christ was born and died – so that his sacrifice could pay for our failures. All of us

want justice, but typically we want everyone else to be judged rather than ourselves. Therefore, many are uncomfortable with a God who will judge them. They want to deny the existence of guilt, do their own thing, and be the captain of their own fate. Eywa is remote and uninvolved, and this remoteness means that the goddess won't interfere with whatever you want to do. In contrast, we can come to Jehovah just as we are, with all of our baggage from the past, and he will accept us because all of us are his children. But moving on with him involves "coming into the light"; a divine change in our thinking patterns and behavior to eliminate self-destructive and wrong patterns and replace them with what is right and true. Furthermore, Jehovah sends his spirit to live within those who belong to him to improve their character – a concept that is much more intimate and connected than any Pandoran web of nature.

The Biblical term for doing and thinking wrong is "sin." But many are uncomfortable with the notion that they are sinners and in need of God's help. It is much more comfortable to have a philosophy like: "I'm OK – you're OK" even though that is spiritual equivalent of putting a Band-Aid on cancer.

Our era is therefore one of designer spirituality, and it is common for people to choose attributes and make up their own god/goddess like Cameron did. Another cinematic new age version was that of George Lucas in *Star Wars* – "may the force be with you." But what evidence is there that the real God is like whatever we imagine? What happens after we die, when the real God shows up and calls us to account?

There is little fear of God in America, but there should be. As Jesus said in Luke 12:5 "But I will warn you whom to fear: fear the One who, after He has killed, has authority to cast into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear Him!" If you were to jump off the top of a building without a rope, it doesn't really matter what you believe about gravity. Jehovah is a divine parent who loves us, but who also disciplines us so that we can learn to be righteous, and to enter his holy and awesome presence. "God is a righteous judge, who has indignation every day. If a man does not repent, He will sharpen His sword..." Psalms 7:11-12.

3. The authority of Jehovah. The Bible gives us the Ten Commandments and many other principles for living, but as with the issue of judgment, many resent Jehovah's authority. Our society has taught us to question authority and to despise obedience. This is especially true of contemporary movements such as feminism, which calls for open marriage (or the elimination of marriage), abortion rights, and the elimination of male authority. There are others philosophies and groups which also despise the Bible and seek to discredit it, but as this essay is related to *Avatar* and Pandora, the focus here will be issues raised in the film; the women's movement was central to the movie and formed its philosophical backdrop.

Feminism has achieved many new opportunities for women, but at the cost of creating and contributing to social pathologies that are afflicting the western world, such as divorce, abortion, marital unhappiness, sex role confusion, etc.

Unfortunately, Cameron is not only into new age religions, he also a militant pusher of feminism, at least in this film. *Avatar* is a feminist and environmentalist morality play where virtually all of the strong and/or positive roles are female, and the weak and/or negative roles are male. The "good guy" (actually girl) is Dr. Grace Augustine (Sigourney Weaver), who plays an arrogant research team

leader, and is the main environmentalist and pro-Pandora person (the conscience of the film). The bad guys are the nasty marine Colonel Miles Quaritch (Stephen Lang), and the soulless bureaucrat Parker Selfridge (Giovanni Ribisi) who respectively represent the heartless and cruel military, and the uncaring corporate trashers of Pandora's environment (they are seeking a mineral ironically called "unobtainium," and are stupidly willing to risk an all-out war with inhabitants of Pandora to "obtain unobtainium"). On the military side there is only one positive, strong individual, who, of course, is female. Trudy Chacon (Michelle Rodriguez) plays a kick-butt helicopter pilot who is the only person from the military willing to stand up to the evil Colonel Quaritch. On the environmentalist side, all of Dr. Augustine's associates are weak males.

Among the Na'vi, the situation is more complex. The society is male led, but the females are equally powerful. The male leader of the tribe dies, and his wife assumes control, helped by Eywa, who of course is also female. Jake Sully (Sam Worthington), the male lead in the movie, is a crippled former marine (i.e., a man who has lost certain elements of his masculinity). He eventually becomes the leader of Pandora, but his education in culture, physical conditioning, and combat all are accomplished by females; first by Dr. Augustine, and then by Neytiri (Zoe Saldana), his Na'vi girlfriend and eventual lover. In what would typically be training done by males, with males, and for males, Jake is always taught by Neytiri, his mentor with whom he falls in love. At the climax of the movie where Jake fights Colonel Quaritch, it is, of course, Neytiri who finishes the bad-guy marine off, ending the war.



Jake being trained by Neytiri

James Cameron has also done movies that take a more traditional approach to male/female relationships, such as *Titanic*, but in others he took the same tack as *Avatar*. For example, *Aliens* was a great action/adventure film, but was even more blatantly pro-feminist and antimale. The male roles were all either weak (Lieutenant Gorman, the witless marine leader), stupid (Private Hudson, who often lost it), evil (Carter Burke, the corporate bureaucrat and the *Aliens* equivalent of Parker Selfridge) or ineffective (with the exception of Corporal Dwayne Hicks, all of the men involved are killed off, and Hicks is sedated for the entire climax of the movie). The women in *Aliens* are the only ones with true bravery and strength (Private Vasques – the macho female marine who despises Gorman, her boss, and then is forced to die with him), and intelligence/goodness (Ellen Ripley, who

takes command of the mission, and Rebecca Newt Jordan, the little girl who is the only individual of an entire colony who had managed to survive the aliens). Sigourney Weaver played the character of Ripley in *Aliens*, and therefore was the ideal choice for the bitchy and confrontational Grace Augustine in *Avatar*. The climax of *Aliens* is a battle between two females – Ripley and the alien queen, who fight over the little girl. Ripley’s only helper in the battle is an individual who looks like a man, but who is actually an android (a robot).



Ripley and Newt encounter the alien queen

Long gone are the days of shows like “Father Knows Best” that affirmed and supported the role of men and fathers. Cameron is following the lead of Hollywood movies and TV shows which often depicts males (especially white males) as dumb, boorish, self-centered, irresponsible losers. There are still some male heroes, but many depictions of influential men place them in negative roles where they are power-hungry abusers. Females in contrast are usually depicted as smart, sexy, positive, responsible, in-control, and having the answers.

Movies and television shows are just one visible symptom of an extensive conflict in the western world that has been documented in books such as *The War Against Boys*, by Christina Hoff Sommers. As indicated above, feminism has had a negative impact on society, which is getting worse because of the lack of role models for responsible and loving husbands, as well as nurturant and giving wives. But there is still a healthy disconnect between Hollywood and Main Street. Society at large is, for the most part, still led by men who in many cases are good leaders and fathers, who take care of their families, and who are loved by their wives.

The feminist prescription for American society, often pushed by Hollywood, is a fantasy of strong, powerful women, and compliant, androgynous men. Christianity, with its support of traditional sex

roles, and the Bible's instruction for wives to submit to their husbands, is therefore an enemy to be attacked rather than something positive to be explored.

Serving God rather than self has never been popular, but nevertheless, the words of Galatians 5:7-8 should be heeded: "Do not be deceived, God is not mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. The one who sows to his own flesh will from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit will from the Spirit reap eternal life." Consider also the words of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21: "Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in or steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." Seeking Jehovah rather than the lesser gods is the most important and significant thing we can do.

The kingdom of heaven is like a treasure hidden in the field, which a man found, and from joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking fine pearls, and upon finding one pearl of great value, he went and sold all that he had and bought it.

*Matthew 13:44-45*

For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance. But whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him.

*Matthew 13:12*