

Avatar:

Imagine crossing over

by Pastor Ken Miller Rieman

Until this last week, I'd only known an 'avatar' to be an image used to represent a person interacting with others in an on-line game or chat room. Needless to say, this word is finding a new place in our culture.

Those more culturally literate than I would have associated 'avatar' with the human incarnations of Hindu deities, often portrayed as half-human, half-animal. 'Avatar' comes from the Hindu verb 'to cross over.' Those who have already seen the Oscar-nominated, highest-grossing film of all time will make the connection.

Avatar, the movie, is set several hundred years in the future. Industry, for those on planet Earth, has grown increasingly dependent upon resources that can only be found off-planet. Jake Sully, a paraplegic war veteran, is hired by a mining company operating on the distant world of Pandora to help them with a special project.

The plot starts to look like *Dances with Wolves*. Pandora is inhabited by giant humanoids called the Na'vi who dress like Native Americans, and generally commune with nature. Of course, the mining company wants to extract an insanely precious mineral right out from underneath the Na'vi home.

Jake Sully is chosen to become the 'driver'

of an 'avatar,' a creature grown in a bio-tank from human and Na'vi DNA. The technology allows Sully's brain to meld with the avatar's brain and 'drive' the avatar out to make friends with the Na'vi. Though his mission is to spy on and subdue the Na'vi, Sully falls in love with the Na'vi culture, and the tribal chief's daughter. Talk about a foot in two worlds! Sully gets in over his head.

The turning point in the movie comes when Sully is forced to choose between the world of his birth and the world into which he has crossed over. I don't want to spoil the ending, but suffice it to say the audience finds itself rooting with the Na'vi against the mining company. The final battle brings a degree of resolution, but one is left with the feeling that the war has only begun. Indeed, director James Cameron has already promised a sequel.

But Pandora is not the only place caught up in a culture war. Seattle's own Mark Driscoll, pastor of one of the nation's fastest growing neo-fundamentalist churches (*Mars Hill Church*), has called *Avatar* the most 'demonic, satanic' movie he's ever seen. Apparently, his objection is with the depiction of a culture that seeks not to worship God, but "to connect, literally, with



Guatemalan and North American consider the damage caused by a wind storm outside Unión Victoria, Guatemala.

trees and animals and beasts and birds." Funny, I thought that was one of the most beautiful parts of the movie. Would a Mark Driscoll sequel solve the conflict with Mars Hill Bible smugglers? If the Na'vi learned about Jesus would they stop caring about their land and just let the mining company have it? It's telling that Driscoll is more concerned with the



Sitting in Unión Victoria's Mayan ritual circle between the Catholic and Evangelical churches, Brethren pastors learn how the different Guatemalan groups honor their faith and their differences.

'satanic' worship practices of people on Pandora than he is with the murderous thieves trying to wipe them out.

A very different critique, coming from our

own denomination's monthly magazine—*Messenger*, takes issue with *Avatar* as yet another Hollywood movie that looks imaginative but remains entrenched in the popular myth of redemptive violence and just-war theory. Contributor, Jeanne Davies asks, "Why can't we imagine an alternative to violent solutions? If we cannot imagine it in our story-telling, we will not be able to create peaceful solutions to conflicts in our world." Davies' piece goes on to list some of the last century's most dramatic stories of non-violent resistance to evil.

As valid as I think Davies' critique is, I feel like it misses an opportunity. For sure, it would be nice if a director like James Cameron would make an award-winning film about the life of Dunker preacher John Kline, martyred during the Civil War for ministering to parishioners on both sides of the battle lines, but I'm not going to hold my breath. On the other hand we could decide to not see a movie like *Avatar* because it doesn't fully reflect our values. That's a legitimate path, but one that I left some years ago.

I think we have yet another choice. We could allow *Avatar* to spark a conversation with folks who may not know what non-violent resistance is, but recognize that *Avatar* still has a lot to say about our world.

Avatar, as a commercial venture, is an unparalleled success. As a work of art, its value can be judged on its own terms.

Does *Avatar* help its viewers cross over from their world, into another? Does the world which viewers enter expand their capacity for moral understanding, or for moral behavior in their own?

Do we live in a world where corporations or nations threaten the lives or cultures of those who happen to live on top of natural resources with commercial value? You bet. Does *Avatar* provoke the viewer to empathize with the threatened culture? Again, there is no question. But is that enough?

When my folks were working with refugees displaced by Sudan's civil war, I discovered a curious thing. Seeing the great imbalance of power between the government in the North, and the civilians in the South whom they bombed, and forced off of their land, I found my pacifism was challenged. Who was I to tell the South Sudanese they should not take up arms to defend themselves? I could not.

Non-violent resistance to high-altitude aerial bombardment is difficult. (For that matter, so is violent resistance) The strength of pacifism lies in its ability to humanize the victims of violence and appeal to the humanity of the perpetrator. The farther removed the perpetrator is, the harder that task becomes. And that just may be where *Avatar's* value might lie. Millions of its viewers will learn to empathize with a culture victimized by corporate power. If this helps them see how their consumer behavior impacts others in our own world, *Avatar* will have done a great thing. If it encourages them to purchase goods certified 'Fair Trade,' that are mined humanely or grown and harvested sustainably, it will be a moral success. If it inspires them to see the interdependence of life forms on our planet, it will change us all for the better.

If the sequel to *Avatar* shows the Na'vi adopting the kind of militaristic and self-serving behaviors of those who threaten them, it may accurately depict much of our world, but I doubt it will help our own identity to cross-over into a new way of being. Ultimately, the value of *Avatar* as a work of art will depend on whether and how we are changed by it. *Avatar* has posed some very important questions. Whether it starts a conversation that brings new people to the table is up to us.



Fine Tune your Job Search with FREE classes at OV!

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This FREE six week course will cover:

- 1) Choosing a job that suits your needs and employers' wants - (2 sessions)
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- 3) Get noticed (resumés, cover letters, pitch letters to employers, attracting recruiters) - (1 session)
- 4) Squeaky wheeling in a competitive market - how to do follow up, and energize a stalled job search - (1 session)

5- 7 pm each Tuesday, March 23 - April 27th in the OV Social Hall

Taught by:
Alice Hanson



Haiti Earthquake

The earthquake in Haiti has worsened the cycle of hardship and poverty the Haitian people endure. The Church is called to open its ears to the cries of the poor and open its hearts with compassion to alleviate their suffering.



You Can Help:

☑ **Donate.** Financial gifts are the best way to help the effort in Haiti. Contribute online through www.brethren.org/HaitiDonations. **OR**, donate through Olympic View, designating your check 'Haiti Relief'

☑ **Pray.** Visit this special webpage, www.brethren.org/HaitiPrayers to post your 'Prayers for Haiti.' Prayers will be shared with the Brethren in Haiti.

☑ **Assemble Gift of the Heart Kits:** Hygiene Kits & Baby Care Kits are needed. Instructions: www.churchworldservice.org/kits

☑ **Special Quake Kits:** Family Household Kit & 10x10 tarps are being collected until April 16, 2010. Instructions found at www.brethren.org/HaitiEarthquake

www.Brethren.org/HaitiEarthquake

1-800-451-4407

Participants in the 2010 Presidents' Day Weekend — Oregon/Washington Men's Retreat at Camp Myrtlewood.





Test Your Knowledge of Women's History

1. Who founded Bethune-Cookman College, established the National Council of Negro Women, and served as an advisor on minority affairs to President Franklin D. Roosevelt?
2. What woman was the first African-American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature. ?
3. What Black woman refused to give up her seat to a White man, in Montgomery, Alabama, in 1955, thus sparking the civil rights movement of the following decade?
4. Who was the first woman to run for President of the United States (1872)?
5. Who opened up social work as a profession for women, and also won the 1931 Nobel Peace Prize for her anti-war organizing work?
6. Which Mexican-American woman has repeatedly been the leading money winner in the Ladies Professional Golf Association?
7. Who was the first woman Poet Laureate of the United States?
8. Who was the first "First Lady" to have developed her own political and media identity?
9. Who wrote the first version of the Equal Rights Amendment, in 1923?
10. Who was the first Black woman elected to Congress?
11. What leading suffragist was arrested and convicted of attempting to vote in the 1872 election?
12. Who was the first Chinese-American woman ever elected to hold a statewide office in the United States?
13. What journalist traveled around the world in 72 days in 1890?
14. What woman was turned down by 29 medical schools before being accepted as a student, graduated at the head of her class, and became the first licensed woman doctor in the U.S.?
15. What former slave was a powerful speaker for the rights of women and Black people?
16. When was the Equal Rights Amendment first introduced into Congress?
17. Who was the last queen of the Hawaiian Islands, deposed because American business interests wanted to annex Hawaii to the U.S.?
18. Which woman was banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony for holding religious discussion meetings in her home?



19. Who spoke out for the advancement of American Indians' rights from speaker's platforms nationwide and before Congressional committees in the 1880s?
20. Who drove a stagecoach across the roughest part of the West without anyone knowing until she died that she was a woman?
21. Who was the first Hispanic woman to serve as U.S. Treasurer?
22. Who was the Shoshone Indian woman who served as guide and interpreter on the Lewis and Clark expedition?
23. Who was Chair of the Board and publisher of The Washington Post and Newsweek magazine, and also oversaw six broadcasting stations?
24. About 20,000 women shirtwaist workers staged a strike for better working conditions. Their action was called the "Uprising of the 20,000." When and where did his strike occur?
25. When did officials of Little League Baseball announce that they would "defer to the changing social climate" and let girls play on their teams?
26. As vice president of the United Farm Workers, what woman has been vital in speaking for civil and economic rights for farm workers throughout the U.S.?
27. When did Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 go into effect, prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sex in federally funded school programs and activities?
28. What woman was invited to teach nuclear physics at Princeton University, even though no female students were allowed to study there?
29. What woman served as a "conductor" on the Underground Railroad, freeing hundreds of southern slaves and leading them to safety in the North? A \$40,000 reward was offered for her capture.
30. What woman is credited with helping free more than 2,000 Chinese women and children smuggled into San Francisco to be sold as slaves?
31. Who was the first African-American woman poet to have her works published?

Women's History Answers

1. Mary McLeod Bethune (1875–1955)
2. Toni Morrison (b. 1931)
3. Rosa Parks (b. 1920)
4. Victoria Woodhull (1838-1927)
5. Jane Addams (1860-1935)
6. Nancy Lopez (b. 1957)
7. Rita Dove (b. 1952)
8. Eleanor Roosevelt (1884-1962)
9. Alice Paul (1885-1977)
10. Shirley Chisholm (b. 1924)
11. Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906)
12. March Fong Eu (b. 1929)
13. Nellie Bly (1867-1922), real name Elizabeth Cochrane Seaman
14. Elizabeth Blackwell (1821-1910)
15. Sojourner Truth (c. 1797-1883)
16. 1923
17. Queen Liliuokalani (1838-1917)
18. Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643)
19. Sarah Winnemucca (1844-1891)
20. Charlie Parkhurst
21. Romana Bañuelos (b. 1925)
22. Sacajawea (c. 1786-1812)
23. Katherine Graham (b. 1917-2001)
24. 1909, New York City
25. 1974
26. Dolores Huerta (b. 1930)
27. 1976
28. Chien-Shiung Wu (1912-1997)
29. Harriet Tubman (c. 1820-1913)
30. Donaldina Cameron (1869-1968)
31. Phillis Wheatley (1753-1784)

March Outreach:

In March, our congregation is lifting up the work of **Bethany Theological Seminary**. Since 1905, Bethany has been the graduate school and academy of our denomination, empowering Christian leaders for the work of the church.

Since many congregations are small and can only support a part time or bi-vocational pastor, Bethany offers certificate programs and correspondence study, in addition to the more traditional Master of Theology and Master of Divinity degrees. To keep money from standing in the way of seeking education, Bethany provides full-tuition scholarships. This is not easy to do, but the generous and steadfast giving of congregations like ours have made it possible. We hope it can continue.

We invite your gifts to this outreach ministry this month, in addition to your regular giving to Olympic View.



"May Away"

May 21-23 Pacific Beach, WA

Olympic View members and friends gather each May for a weekend of fellowship, relaxation, and worship. This year's 'May Away' will be on the Pacific coast. If you'd like to come, contact Jim or Goldie Barnes.

Treasurer's Report

By Rob Miller

I'd like to update you on how the church ended 2009 and where we are now a couple months into 2010.

We ended 2009 receiving 92% of budget, a total of \$155,884 in giving for a \$169,147 budget. That shortfall is benefited by the church only spending 95% of its budget, \$160,244. In all, an additional \$4,340 would have been needed to meet 2009 expenses. At the end of the year, the church retained \$30,154 in cash assets, however the various non-budgetary funds (memorial, various maintenance projects, etc) that comprise those assets are \$1,163 more than those available. In other words, we were borrowing that much from our non-budgeted funds to meet expenses.

In January we received \$13,008 in giving and had \$14,003 in expenses. Cash assets were \$24,385 and we are borrowing from the non-budgetary funds \$2,155. Your additional gifts to meet this seemingly small goal will help us get on a solid footing for the rest of 2010!

In other news, the church just began moving its assets to Verity Credit Union. Don't be surprised to see a new check when you receive a reimbursement!



8th Annual OVCCB Game Day and Green Potluck

The 8th Annual Friends Game Day and Green Potluck for all adults will be held in the Fellowship Hall on Saturday, March 13.

Games begin at 3 pm and the Potluck Dinner will begin at 5 pm.

Please bring your favorite board (or other) game and a main dish, salad, or dessert to share. Corned beef with cabbage and carrots, drinks, and bread will be provided.

This event is always a lot of fun and all adults in the church are invited. You can teach your favorite game or learn a new one. There's always lots of laughter, not to mention great food. Join us for a few hours of fun and fellowship.



Roger Edmark, Bob Landis, and Bill Shoemaker plot their airlines' progress through a maze of international routes at last year's Game Day.

Local Peace & Justice Items

THINK PEACE:

Peacemaking in a Troubled World

A new cable program series

Airing **Tue. March 16,**

(and subsequent 3rd Tuesdays),

6 - 6:30 pm,

on SCAN, (Seattle Community Access Network TV),

Cable channels: 77 (Comcast), or

29 (Millennium)

Streaming video at <http://www.SCANTV.org>

FELLOWSHIP OF RECONCILIATION

Seattle Chapter monthly meeting.

SUN. MARCH 21, Program:

A Force More Powerful: the Nashville Lunch Counter Story

with facilitated discussion led by

Mike Yarrow

at Woodland Park Presbyterian Church,
225 N 70th, Seattle

5 pm potluck, 6:30 - 8 pm program,
Free, collection will be taken. All welcome.
Info: 206-789-5565 or wwfor@wwfor.org

UNICEF TAP PROJECT

Volunteer Opportunity until March 31

An initiative to save children's lives by providing safe drinking water and sanitation globally.

Info: <http://www.taproject.org/volunteer/>
or Sheela Bowler 206- 790-1742

Sharing Together in Prayer

In Our Community:

- ⇒ For **Eileen Birky**, grieving the loss of her mother, Lois, on Sat., Feb. 6, from liver cancer.
- ⇒ For **Peggy Cochran**, grieving the loss of her brother in February.
- ⇒ For **Goldie Barnes**, facing surgery March 16th to remove a cancerous tumor from her breast.
- ⇒ For **Jerry Rodeffer**, recovering from surgery to remove Kidney stones.
- ⇒ For **Harumi Flesher**, travelling to Japan to audition to perform with a local Symphony .

Ongoing Prayer Requests:

Lowell Geiver, Goldie Barnes

Peggy Cochran, Adam Ford

Maurice Carlson, Geraldine Campbell

Bill Case & daughter Carol Kamada

Lew Fortin's nephew, Michael Rogers

Gene & Donna Harnden

Nancy Louise Wilkinson, Ed Enzi

Eunice Jarboe, Vera Gastfield Wolfe

Elsie Clayton, Gloria Sherwood

Sharon Haley's siblings:

Mark, Ruth and Paul Andrews