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AVATAR FILM: PERSPECTIVES FROM SPACE LAW

Abstract

Avatar is a 2009 American epic science fiction film set in 2154, when humans depleted Earth's natural resources, leading to a severe energy crisis. The mining company RDA (Resources Development Administration) exploits for a valuable mineral – unobtainium – on Pandora, a densely forested habitable moon of gas giant in the Alpha Centauri star system. Unobtainium is a room-temperature superconductor that can mitigate the Earth's energy crisis, but the expansion of the mining colony threatens the continued existence of a local tribe of Na'vi, a 10-foot tall (3.0 m), blue-skinned, sapient humanoids. To explore Pandora, whose atmosphere is poisonous to humans, scientists use Na'vi-human hybrids called “avatars”, operated by genetically matched humans. Using this strategy, RDA intends to get intelligence about the Na'vi and the clan's gathering place, a giant arboreal called Hometree, on grounds that it stands above the richest deposit of unobtainium in the area. RDA heavily militarized its base and its personnel and had no restrictions in using this arsenal against anyone who tried to prevent the unobtainium's exploitation. Based on this plot, it can be assured that Avatar film is a rich case of study to Space Law, because it provides several situations where the international legal framework should be applicable. Did RDA get authorization from its State Party to exploit Pandora, according to Article 6 of the 1967 Space Treaty? Could RDA have installed a base in Pandora? Could RDA have militarized Pandora, by taking and placing weapons there? This paper aims to answer these questions, as well as to give other examples where the Space Law is reflected on the movie. The law that regulates the Moon and other celestial bodies is either applicable to the Na'vi's homeland, so this paper also compares the Pandora's exploitation with the current discussions about the possibility of exploiting the Moon and asteroids.