

Precious Avatar

Aliens walk among us

If we could project ourselves into an Avatar of Precious, what unobtainium could we extract from under the Home Tree of culture? I make this conceit, riffing in part because of the reviews of those movies sharing the same page in this newspaper Dec. 24.

Avatar is science fiction fantasy, Precious is a representation of actual reality. An avatar, for those of you not old enough to remember, originally was an incarnation of god in a particular form: as Rama and Krishna are Avatars of Vishnu. An avatar is someone who embodies or manifests an idea or concept. In cyber context an avatar is simply a three-dimensional image used to represent an Internet user in cyberspace. What element would we need to project ourselves into Precious' reality to create the real vision and empathy prevent her dysfunctional creation, and provoke her functional freedom?

Precious is the movie representation of Sapphire's book *Push*, but the movie is considerably less heavy than the book, commodified as it is for majority white audiences who may miss, as I feel the Weekly's reviewer missed, the central points of the movie. Precious is an obese teen parent, living in Harlem with her incredibly abusive mother, (the movie spares us the mother's molestation of Precious in the book) who collects welfare checks while foisting the Down Syndrome oldest child on her own mother.

Precious' children were fathered by her HIV-positive father, and while illiterate and experiencing spirit-crushing verbal, emotional, and physical abuse amidst poverty, she fantasizes about a different life. We see this in disassociative flashbacks while she is being raped. We see this as she is grooming herself for school, when she sees not her actual image, but a Kim Basinger look-a-like.

That millions like Precious are produced intentionally and deliberately, that welfare is an extension of slavery, trapping generations in systemic bondage, unless they can free themselves from those bonds of ignorance among other things, is not really revealed directly by the film unless you know what to look for.

Clearly the keys to her freedom are not being proffered to her by the public school system or the welfare system which failed her and her family. Just as obviously there is an element of unobtainium emitting empathy, insight, and hope present within her charter school teacher and hospital nurse that isn't being offered by the system.

In *Avatar* unobtainium is a crystal with magnetic superconducting properties which make it nifty for space travel. It also creates a field which connects the lifeforms of Pandora, in a seamless web of interspecies communication. In *Avatar* it's the usual colonial corporate American script, where a young white Marine is projected into a colored alien body, to strategically learn the ways of the "blue monkey" native savages so they can be moved, assimilated, exterminated, in the name of corporate profit, uh ... progress. Humans can have a Pandoric empathy for the lifeforms and aliens among us like Precious, without 3-D glasses.

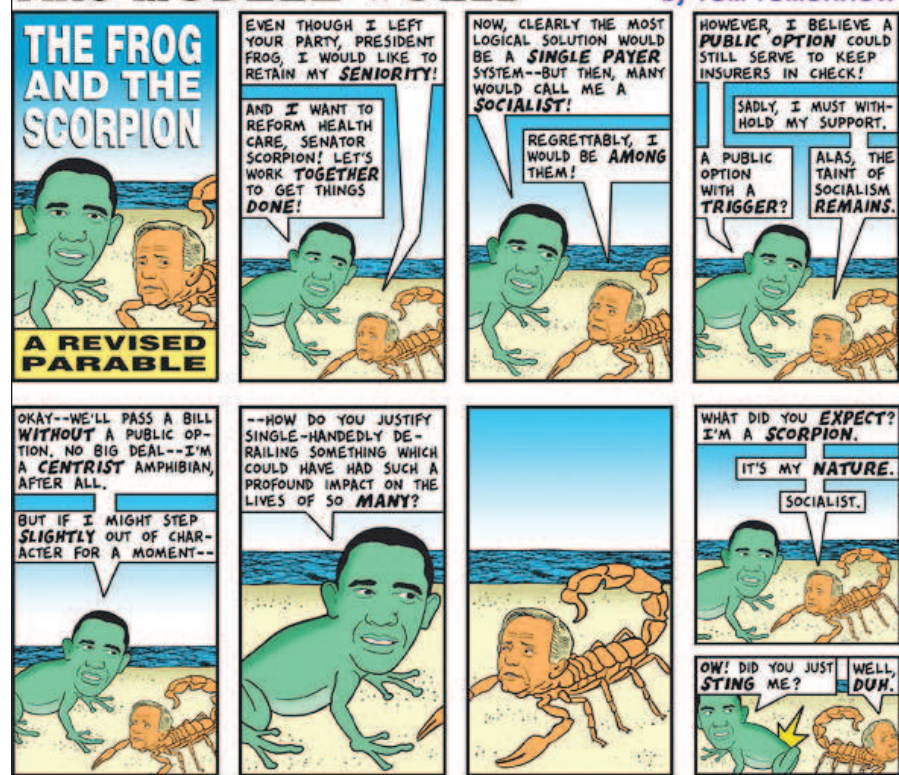
Each one, teach one.

Mark Harris is an instructor and substance abuse prevention coordinator at LCC.



THIS MODERN WORLD

by TOM TOMORROW



LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

HELP FOR HAITI

New York-based MADRE (www.madre.org) is one of the organizations I trust to make the best use of scarce resources for emergency and development assistance. In response to the earthquake in Haiti, MADRE has activated an emergency response through its partner organization, Zamni Lasante Clinic. Doctors, nurses and community health workers there are working to get bring medical assistance and supplies to areas that have been hardest hit.

The most urgent needs right now are bandages, broad-spectrum antibiotics and other medical supplies, as well as water tablets to prevent cholera outbreaks. The need for food, shelter and other types of relief are growing by the hour.

MADRE has worked in Haiti for many years, supporting community-based organizations in times of disaster. The situation is catastrophic and immediate action is key to saving lives. You can donate online by going to www.madre.org and at the home page, scroll down to emergency in Haiti; or, send a check to Madre, 121 West 27th Street, #301, New York, N.Y. 10001, or call (212) 627-0444.

Robert Roth
Eugene

HEAL THE FRACTURES

Whether or not the UO is granted an extension to construct a building and a parking lot for more than 250 cars next to the Willamette River, the smart thing to do is to acknowledge that things have changed tremendously since the Riverfront Research Park (RFRP) plan was approved 20 years ago. The economy has changed, neighboring land uses have changed, our concern for protecting the environment has changed and our community has changed. Even if the RFRP's master plan is still legally valid, these changes mean it is functionally obsolete and won't serve the university or the community.

The university has a history of getting whatever it wants, but at a high cost to our community and the university. Rather than finding solutions that work for everyone,

the UO gets locked into drawn-out battles with its neighbors leading to resentment, mistrust and outcomes that don't serve the wider community.

It's time for the UO to heal the fractures with its neighbors. A good place to begin is to give all stakeholders a fresh opportunity to envision the future of the RFRP before any asphalt is laid.

Charles Biggs
Eugene

PAYING A FAIR SHARE

Phil Knight now has another campus memorial with a glass bauble for his sport stars! I only wish he would support fair taxation and be willing to spend the same portion of his income on schools, human services, and making our community safe as any middle class Oregonian spends.

He is one of the large donors for a "no" on Measures 66 and 67 campaign that would have the very rich pitch in just a little more to stop more huge cuts in our state budget. Former laws have eliminated taxing the rich. I understand he also keeps his business from paying taxes to the city of Beaverton by not allowing it within the boundary by one block but enjoys all the city benefits. Funny how he enjoys the support of Oregonians but continually refuses to pay a fair share of taxes.

Ruth Duemler
Eugene

PUBLIC SECTOR GROWTH

Leslie Weinstein (letters, 12/31) urges passage of Measures 66 & 67 and laments the "cuts" that have allegedly been made to the state budget.

The state budget for the 2009-2011 biennium was not cut! It was increased 9 percent. In addition, the state created around 1,600 new government jobs, including one paying about \$100,000 a year to a former Democratic senator.

In the past two years, Oregon has lost nearly 115,000 private sector jobs but gained almost 10,000 public sector jobs. The Oregon Legislature continues to

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