

# DESIGN, EXOBIOLOGY AND ARCHAEOLOGY



Tim Brown has commented on the design of the exobiology in James Cameron's much-touted movie "Avatar" – [\[Link\]](#)

I took Molly and Ben to see it again this weekend.

There is certainly something captivating about the creatures and environment of planet Pandora. Tim talks about the plausibility of the design work that makes it easier to grasp the idea of designers creating new *life forms*, as well as technology and gadgets. Spot on. I would take that further and say "lifeworlds". Design operates with processes and systems, not on discrete artifacts. And things can take on life themselves. I am particularly reminded of Stephen Jay Gould's celebration of the creativity of natural selection in his book about the extraordinary prehistoric creatures of the Burgess Shale – "Wonderful Life" – palaeobiology as strange as this exobiology.



Karen Carr's reconstruction of the Burgess Shale Cambrian fossil world for the The Field Museum



### More exobiology

Here again we see that intimate connection between science fiction and archaeology. Both often model lifeworlds and work to bring them alive, here and then, there and in the future. [Link – Tolkein and archaeology][another link]

The plot of Avatar is basically an otherworldly “Dances with Wolves” – when army Lieutenant Kevin Costner joined a native American community in the face of an expanding modern state. The theme is the recognition of the value of ways of life that are threatened or incompatible with an aggressively consuming modernity. A couple of the comments on Tim’s blog make this point.

There’s another *archaeological* point to be made here. Pandora is a fabulous *Utopia*. As an archaeologist, I am all too aware that actually very few human societies have lived anything like the Navi – “in harmony with nature”. When we have enough information to judge, it is clear that every human society has had a damaging effect on the environment. The challenge to live sustainably is going to require deep questioning of this feature of human behavior. [Link – Charles Redman on Human Impacts]