Creature Designer Neville Page on Creating Avatar's Banshees

by Alex Billington

We're down to the last few weeks before **James Cameron's** *Avatar* arrives in theaters everywhere. I'm seeing it later this week and I'm sure early reviews will start hitting around then as well. But before we get into that, I wanted to feature this great interview that **Hero Complex** did with creature designer **Neville Page**. You may not recognize him yet, but Page is a engineer / artist / designer who has worked previously on *Cloverfield*, *Watchmen*, J.J. Abrams' *Star Trek*, James Cameron's *Avatar*, and *Tron Legacy*. He's the guy responsible for designing the creatures, worlds, and vehicles in pretty much all of those films. Read on!

Before getting to ***Avatar***, Page explained that he's been inspired the most in his life by *Star Wars* as well as other films like *Blade Runner*, Ridley Scott's *Legend*, and James Cameron's *Aliens*. And speaking of *Aliens*, Page actually says it was Cameron himself who designed the queen. "At his house he pulled out the original design ... I think to remind us he was *quite* capable... I had no idea he was that much of an artist." Never knew that, but it's definitely cool to know. As for *Avatar*, Page was primarily responsible for designing the **banshees**, the flying creatures on Pandora that you've probably seen before.

He explains the process:

"The **banshee** is what I spent the most time on. We knew it was a flying creature. What made it so incredibly challenging, with a bird you have to design it flying, perching, everything has to work. You can't just draw it one view at a time... The hardest thing of all was having a Na'vi on top of it and flying it. You had to backwards engineer it. It was like designing and engineering an aircraft. And that's without the **beauty** and **aesthetics** of it."

That wasn't all that Page did, though. He was part of the original design team in **2005** that was brought in to work with Cameron. "We worked on the Na'vi, the plants, the environment... Jim, like few others, is so tuned into the plausibility of organisms. He wanted them to look as **real** as possible, and work **organically** as well." He didn't even realize what it would look like in the end until he saw the footage at Avatar Day ("I thought to myself, 'Wow, Jim pulled this off'"). Page was also asked about the comparison that many people are making between the tall blue Na'vi aliens in *Avatar* and the characters in the animated movie *Delgo*.

"I thought the choice of the **color blue**, you only have a few colors to go with. Alien colors are greens and blues or pale whites. Jim had a palette he wanted. Do I think there is much of a comparison? **Clearly there is.** I think [the video and side-by-side comparisons] was too literalized. I think it's easiest to do with many films. You can take a bunch of stuff and spin it to whatever you want. It's like any love story. There can be **parallels** drawn to any love story. It's who can tell it better, with more compelling imagery. That's definitely what Jim has done here. People are going to get it."

Page is dead on with that explanation. It happens all the time. Almost every week we hear about another lawsuit from someone claiming that they wrote a story similar to some movie and that the screenwriter stole the idea from them. I think it was just mere coincidence that these designs seem so similar. They obviously designed the Na'vi way before *Delgo* had even been released. I'm glad that Page could even agree that they look the same, but that's not the point, that doesn't really mean anything. I doubt this will change the mind of anyone who is already opposed to *Avatar*, but I'm glad *someone* is addressing this pointless "concern."