



Locals get a look behind the scenes at the making of a sci-fi Hollywood hit

Acclaimed science fiction writer Steven Gould was the special guest speaker at the Octavia Fellin Public Library Jan. 4, during “Sci-Fi Fest,” a weeklong schedule of events in observation of National Science Fiction Day Jan. 2.

Gould, who resides in Albuquerque, is the author of 10 novels, most notably his 1992 release *Jumper*, which was adapted into film in 2008.

He spoke to the eager crowd about his experience in Hollywood, from the film adaptation of *Jumper* to working with James Cameron and other writers on the sequels for the 2009 blockbuster *Avatar*.

One of Gould's most exciting opportunities in the film world came about in 2013, when his agent received a call from Jon Landau, the Academy Award winning producer for *Titanic* and *Avatar*.

Landau asked if Gould was willing to come to Hollywood for a meeting with Cameron.

"I would work for a period of time out there as they created the story arcs for the next movies," he told Gallup sci-fi fans.

The work involved refining the more than 1,000 pages of notes Cameron had for the four novels based on the movies, including the first one.

Gould was flown out to Hollywood and stayed at a hotel that was next door to Lightstorm, Cameron's production company in Manhattan Beach, Calif. Cameron wanted to meet at his house in Malibu and sent a production assistant to pick up Gould.

"We arrived at two big houses with a parking lot in between. I was taken to the Lower House, which used to belong to George C. Scott," he said. "He wanted to meet at the Upper House."

While waiting in the living room of one of the icons of the film world, Gould noticed place settings for two people in the dining room.

"And then, like five minutes later, James Cameron walked in and that was something," Gould said.

Cameron was scheduled for two hours for the interview.

“About 20 minutes into it, I turned to him and said, ‘I’m a huge fan of your movies, but 12 people have walked on the moon and only three have been to the bottom of the Marianas Trench. I’d really like to talk to you about that,’ ” Gould said.

The interview went over schedule by 45 minutes, and covered various topics ranging from engineering to the *Avatar* sequels.

“Around two weeks later, they said yes, we want to work with you,” he said.

For six months, from June to December 2013, Gould joined Cameron and four screenwriters – Josh Friedman, Shane Salerno, Amanda Silver and Rick Jaffa – to begin working on the sequels. Gould began working on the four novels adapted from the films.

The storyline remains top secret.

“I can’t talk about the plot, just general stuff,” he told the curious crowd Jan. 4.

After completing the first *Avatar* novel, Gould had to wait 14 months to get notes back on the book, but his patience was well worth it.

A visit from Hollywood stars cast in the lead roles was a big perk, and Gould name-dropped a few sci-fi heroes he met from the silver screen.

“The writers met Zoe Saldana, who hugged everyone in the room after seeing the character sketches and storyboards,” he said. “Then Sigourney Weaver walked into the room. I mean, that’s Ripley.”

“It’s a little sad now, but Bill Paxton came by one day to take Jim out to lunch for his birthday,”

he added.

The first sequel will be released in two movies, followed by the two remaining sequels after that. Cameron has an agreement with Fox to deliver three films.

“They did finally start actually filming, though. They’re in production. They’re doing what they call the ‘performance capture.’ They’re in the suit to capture their physical motions,” Gould said.

The first *Avatar* sequel is slated for release in 2020.

HOLLYWOOD BREAKTHROUGH

Beyond *Avatar*, Gould spoke about the breakthrough adaptation of his novel *Jumper*, and the subsequent adaptations of his first work that are soon to take the internet by storm.

“*Jumper* [the film] was based on the first book and a little bit of the second book, *Reflux*,” Gould said, referring to his novel and its sequel. “The director, Doug Liman, is the same guy who did the *Bou rne Identity* .”

YouTube Red, an online subscription service, has also purchased the rights to “Impulse,” the third book in the *Jumper* series. The pilot for the TV series was completed outside Toronto between December 2017 and January 2018.

“They’re actually filming right now, for the whole series. They’re planning on doing nine more episodes. They’ll release four of the episodes on YouTube to hook people on subscribing to YouTube Red,” he said.

Gould never imagined having competing adaptations for the *Jumper* series when he wrote the novel in the early 1990s and has likened this Hollywood success to winning the lottery. But his luck involved a lot of hard work.

“To get in the lottery, you have to actually have published something,” he said.

Optioning the film rights is every author’s dream and Gould knows he has been fortunate with his success in Hollywood.

“I’ve had 17 options with my books over the course of my career. The fact that I had two things make it into production is good,” he said.

In 2008, 16 years after the novel *Jumper* was released, the book was on the New York Times Bestsellers list because of the movie adaptation.

A WORD OF ADVICE

During the question and answer segment, Gould spoke about his writing process, the time needed to complete a novel, turnaround time with his editors, and his work as an officer and president of the Science Fiction Writers of America.

He said writers must concern themselves with the things they can control, like improving their craft through reading, interacting with peers at writing workshops, and encouraged multiple submissions with various publishers.

“Write about what you want to read. Don’t write something because you think it’s the hot thing happening right now,” he said.

Before concluding, he shared insight on electronic books and royalties from paperback and hardback releases. For the audience in attendance, many left the library with stars in their eyes.

For more information, visit www.digitalnoir.com/s/jumper.html .

By Rick Abasta
For the Sun