

Exam practice

Part A

Read Texts 1 and 2 and answer questions 1–18 on pages 145–148.

Text 1

Avatar: a sci-fi masterpiece

- 1 **1** Released in 2009, *Avatar* is a spectacular science fiction blockbuster. Director James Cameron once again reinvented the genre in dazzling style.
- 2** The setting is 22nd-century Pandora, a moon in the Alpha Centauri star system. Humans want to mine an important mineral, but the Na'vi, aliens that
5 live on Pandora, feel threatened. Jake Sully, a soldier, connects his mind to a Na'vi body to control it. This way, he can move around in Pandora's poisonous atmosphere. While Sully is supposed to fight the Na'vi, he falls in love with one and decides to support their cause.
- 3** What stays with you long after the credits have rolled is Pandora itself.
10 Cameron has truly created a new world, one with completely original plants, animals and landscapes. Floating islands of rock soar above misty jungles, while glowing carnivorous plants snap at bizarre insects. The Na'vi themselves are also captivating and beautiful. These tall, blue, long-tailed aliens move realistically, and the detailed expressions on their faces convey emotions
15 as well as any human's. Within minutes, you forget that they are computer generated.
- 4** However, the dialogue in *Avatar* is clichéd and humourless. The acting can seem exaggerated. The film's score is loud and intrusive. The themes—war and capitalism are bad, the environment and love are good—are hardly fresh.
20 Characters are either angelic or evil.
- 5** *Avatar* is one of the few films to actually change cinematic history. The film brought 3D technology into the mainstream for the first time and showed audiences that CGI films weren't just for children. Cameron's obsessive attention to detail shows in every frame.
- 25 **6** While more of a technical success than a classic story, *Avatar* is the most important sci-fi film since *Star Wars*. *Avatar* may not lead to many deep thoughts or feelings, but few films are so capable of transporting you to another time and place.

Comment 1: _____

30 Heidi Mak

1/2/2018 7:34 PM GMT +0800

It used to be that a good film had authentic characters, electrifying dialogue, and a creative, unpredictable plot. Now it appears that a film-maker can skip all of that and just provide some decent visual effects! Film critics these days
35 have very low standards.

Comment 2: _____

Reggie Lai

2/2/2018 9:34 AM GMT +0800

Sorry, but this review is riddled with errors and misinformation. For starters,
40 Jake Sully was supposed to collect intelligence on the Na'vi, not fight them. And the dialogue was not ' clichéd and humourless' at all! I suggest the reviewer sticks to kids' films in future!

Comment 3: _____

Edward Lum

45 2/2/2018 12:34 PM GMT +0800

This is an excellent and well-balanced review. As the reviewer says, *Avatar* is an influential film, but it's also inelegant and even stupid. More considered reviews like this one, please!

James Cameron

- 1** James Cameron stands out in Hollywood. A risk-taker and workaholic, Cameron has written and directed some of the most expensive and successful films in history, including *The Terminator*, *Titanic*, and *Avatar*.
- 2** Cameron was born in Canada in 1954, and moved to the USA in 1971. After seeing *Star Wars* in 1977, he decided to become a film-maker. He started off working in visual effects while writing screenplays in his spare time. Cameron was given the chance to direct his first film in 1981, but was fired after two weeks for reasons unknown.
- 3** His next film, *The Terminator* (1984), had a far better outcome. It became a commercial and critical hit, and made Cameron famous. A string of other successes followed: *Aliens* (1986), *The Abyss* (1989), and *Terminator Two: Judgement Day* (1991). These sci-fi films were all notable for their groundbreaking visual effects, an element of film-making that Cameron has moved forward significantly.
- 4** While his obsessive personality motivated Cameron to create ever more impressive cinematic spectacles, it earned him a fearsome reputation in Hollywood. *The Abyss*, much like the later *Titanic* (1997), was plagued with financial and practical problems. Cameron reacted to the setbacks by piling pressure onto the actors and crew, shouting until he got his way. The long hours and on-set stresses took a strain on Cameron's personal life, resulting in four divorces.
- 5** *Titanic's* difficulties were forgotten when it became the highest-grossing film ever and won 11 Academy Awards. Cameron received three of these. *Titanic* was inspired by Cameron's passion for the deep sea, which he has visited many times in submarines to make documentaries about sunken ships. He is also the first person to visit the Challenger Deep, the deepest point in the world's oceans, alone.
- 6** In 2009, Cameron released *Avatar* to positive reviews and massive financial success. The film's themes showed a different side to Cameron, a long-time vegan and environmentalist. With many film projects on the horizon, Cameron has no plans to reduce his heavy workload.

END OF READING PASSAGES