Exam practice 3

The science behind the fiction

A Time travel is a concept that has interested science fiction writers for a long time. Perhaps the most well-known story – and the one which made the public more interested in the idea of time travel – is *The Time Machine* by H.G. Wells, which was first published in 1895. But the idea of time travel without the help of a machine appears in stories from a range of cultures, and dates back as far as 700 BC. For many authors, time travel provides an opportunity to criticize the present by making the story seem to be about a distant past or future.

B It is not just in literature that time travel is a popular idea. Many films and television programmes have used it as a way of attracting audiences. Some of these are extremely well-established on television. For example, the British programme *Dr Who* has been running for over 50 years. It is the most successful science-fiction series of all time and frequently uses time travel in its storylines. Films about time travel also tend to attract large audiences, in whichever decade they are released. Since 1980, films with a time travel theme have earned studios almost $3 billion.

C The popularity of films about time travel seems to be growing, with more and more projects being developed. While many of the films based on Wells' writings are made on relatively small budgets, there are examples of blockbusters that use his ideas as well. Interestingly, a number of recent films have been influenced by the work of scientists, too. Christopher Nolan, who directed *Inception* and the *Dark Knight* trilogy, studied the works of physicist Kip Thorne for his latest project, *Interstellar*.

D Thorne first became known to Hollywood when the astronomer and writer Carl Sagan asked him to examine the time travel section in a book he was working on called *Contact*. In the story, which was later made into a successful film, Thorne suggested that characters could use 'wormholes' – paths that let people travel more quickly through time and space – to meet aliens from another planet. The plot of *Interstellar* contains similar ideas, with explorers using wormholes to travel through time and space and meeting aliens.

E As a scientific concept, time travel was often seen as slightly ridiculous. However, Thorne is a highly regarded academic who teaches at the California Institute of Technology. He believes that many of the big mysteries about the birth of the universe and what happens inside black holes will be explained by physics eventually. In fact, he recently told reporters that a full understanding of time travel could be less than 30 years away.

Reading

1 **Read the text and mark the sentences *true* or *false*. Provide evidence from the text to justify your answers.**

1 Time travel fiction usually focuses on future problems.
....

2 Science fiction isn't a commercially successful genre.
....

3 Kip Thorne worked in Hollywood before *Interstellar*.
....

2 **Choose the correct answers.**

1 Many very old time travel stories feature …
  A time machines.
  B a range of cultures.
  C ways of time travelling without machines.

2 Kip Thorne's role on *Contact* was to …
  A write scripts.
  B advise on scientific issues in the book.
  C design special effects.

3 Kip Thorne believes that, in the future, physics will explain …
  A what creates black holes.
  B how the universe will end.
  C the origins of the universe.

Use of English

3 **Explain the meanings of these expressions from the text.**

1 address the issues (*paragraph A*)
....

2 has been running (*paragraph B*)
....

3 a highly regarded academic (*paragraph E*)
....

4 **Join the sentences using the relative pronouns in bold.**

1 *The Time Machine* is a novel. It was written by H.G. Wells. (**that**)
....

2 *Interstellar* is about a group of explorers. They meet some aliens. (**who**)
....

3 The California Institute of Technology is a research institute. People study physics there. (**where**)
....

Writing

5 **Choose *one* of the tasks. Write 100–150 words.**

1 Write a biography of a popular person from your country.

2 Write a biography of someone you know well.