

Unit 1. Hunger Games: Catching Fire

7 **President Snow:** “Miss Everdeen, you fought very hard in the arena, but they were games. Would you like to be in a real war?”

Disc 1

Poulou: Academy Award-winner Jennifer Lawrence returns fiercer than ever as Katniss Everdeen in *The Hunger Games: Catching Fire*. The girl on fire becomes the symbol of liberation from the tyranny of Panem’s capital and its venomous President Snow, played by the legendary Donald Sutherland.

President Snow: “She has become a beacon of hope for them. So she has to be eliminated.”

Poulou: Snow hatches the plot to pit Katniss against previous Hunger Games victors inside a deadlier-than-ever arena.

President Snow: “This is the 75th year of the Hunger Games. The tributes are to be reaped from the existing pool of victors.”

Prim: “Katniss!”

Katniss: “I get to say good bye.”

Jennifer Lawrence: It’s really an incredible story, about, you know, a girl that doesn’t want to be a hero but finds herself in a position where she kind of is forced to be.

Gale: “People are looking to you, Katniss.”

Katniss: “I don’t want anyone looking to me. I can’t help them.”

8 **Poulou:** The heroes of *Catching Fire* unravel in a somber and deadly environment, both inside the arena and out, in the poverty-stricken districts of Panem.

President Snow: “Imagine thousands of your people dead, your loved ones gone.”

Katniss: “What do I need to do?”

Poulou: Snow wants Katniss to calm the crowds, but it’s too late. The film, intended mainly for young audiences, highlights the racial and class divisions of dystopian Panem with rich cinematography and a vast array of costumes.

Man: There she is, Katniss Everdeen, the girl on fire!

Poulou: Though stark and bloody at times, *Catching Fire* does not glorify violence. It exposes its ugly face and the bitter consequences of a struggle, no matter how necessary.

Katniss: “Go ahead.”

9 Poulou: The movie franchise also promotes a new generation of movie heroine. Strong and cunning, passionate and compassionate, neither a temptress nor a tomboy, Katniss can be fearful and fearless.

Prim: “Since the last games, something is different. We can see it.”

Katniss: “What can you see?”

Prim: “Hope.”

Poulou: Willow Shields is one of the luckiest 13-year-olds, having been selected for the role of Primrose, Katniss’ sister. She tells VOA that Jennifer Lawrence’s unaffected screen persona reveals a genuine human being.

Shields: She’s down-to-earth, funny, and she’s just, you know, she doesn’t have to try to be, you know, not like... She doesn’t like to conform to the celeb image. So, it’s great to finally see someone who’s just themselves and not so much involved in Hollywood.

Poulou: Like Jennifer Lawrence, Katniss has become, for younger audiences, a symbol of truth and hope in a world as ailing as the one on-screen.

Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 2. Blue Jasmine

17 **Ginger:** “Jasmine. Oh, my God.”

Jasmine: “Look at you. Your place is homey. Oh, the flight was bumpy. The food was awful. I mean, you’d think, first-class...”

Ginger: “I thought you were tapped out.”

Jasmine: “I’m dead broke, really. I mean, the government took everything.”

Hal: “Are you nuts? You think if I was having an affair...”

Poulou: With her husband, Hal, incarcerated for investment fraud, Jasmine, a New York socialite, turns to her sister, Ginger, a grocery-store cashier in San Francisco. Penniless and jobless, Jasmine finds comfort in memories, booze, and delusions of grandeur.

Jasmine: “*Blue Moon* was a song that was playing. You know the song *Blue Moon*. Yeah, but I... I always wanted to do something with my life.”

Poulou: Jasmine is loosely based on Ruth Maddoff, the wife of wealthy stockbroker Bernie Madoff, sentenced to 150 years in prison for defrauding his investors of billions of dollars.

Hal: “I fell in love with the name Jasmine. Is there anything you want that you don’t have?”

Jasmine: “Sweetheart, it’s beautiful!”

18 **Poulou:** Like previous Woody Allen films, *Blue Jasmine* is a character study, but less forgiving than his earlier movies, of a depressed woman in a dysfunctional family.

Jasmine: “You choose losers because that’s what you think you deserve, and that’s why you’ll never have a better life.”

Chili: “She doesn’t care about you. She’s a phoney!”

Poulou: Woody Allen also draws parallels with Blanche DuBois from

Tennessee Williams' play *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Stanley: “Just remember what Huey Long said - that every man's a king - and I'm the king around here. And don't you forget it.”

Poulou: In the movie version, Blanche DuBois, who is delusional, clashes with her brutish brother-in-law in the same way Jasmine provokes the ire of her sister's working-class boyfriend.

Chili: “What the hell's going on here?”

Danny: “It's Al.”

Ginger: “Here, give me that.”

Chili: “That's the guy - Al!”

Ginger: “Hi? Yeah, yeah, but you're calling at a ...”

Chili: “Give me that.”

19 Poulou: Woody Allen's film also exposes the hollowness of people whose lives are built around wealth and power.

Jasmine: “I can't just do some mindless job. Ugh. I was forced to take a job selling shoes on Madison Avenue. Ugh.”

Poulou: Cate Blanchett interprets Jasmine, a tour-de-force performance, as a woman who becomes a shell when she's stripped of her only asset... money.

Jasmine: “One minute you're hosting women, and the next, you're measuring their shoe size and fitting them. Erica Bishop came into the store. She saw me and was so embarrassed for me, she slipped out, thinking I didn't see her. I saw you, Erica!”

Poulou: The ensemble cast builds a masterful drama about the human condition during Wall Street's meltdown. And despite the satisfaction the audience might feel at her plight, Jasmine's collapse is almost too much to bear.

Jasmine: “With wealth comes responsibilities. I wasn't just some mindless

consumer like so many of my so-called friends...though I won't say I disliked buying pretty clothes. Tip big, boys. Tip big because you get good service..."

Poulou: Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 3. Oz The Great and Powerful

27 Oz: “Aah! I don’t want to die! “

Poulou: Like the original, *Oz the Great and Powerful*, a new release by filmmaker Sam Raimi, opens in black and white.

Oz: “I don’t want to be a good man. I want to be a great one.”

Poulou: Circus magician Oscar Diggs, played by James Franco is taken to the Emerald City, where he’s destined to claim the throne.

Evanora: “It belongs to you, but only after you defeat the Wicked Witch.”

Oz: “Just how wicked is she?”

Poulou: He meets three witches. They deny they’re wicked.

Witch 1: “You don’t know much about witches, do you?”

Poulou: It will take time for him to figure out who the bad one is.

Oz: “Just how wicked is she?”

Glinda: “Towns were destroyed. Children were orphaned. Great wizard from Kansas, I’ve waited for you.”

28 Poulou: James Franco says the original story inspired him.

James Franco: I have been a fan of the world of Oz since I was probably eleven, maybe younger. So, I thought it was a really great opportunity to jump into the world of my childhood imagination.

Poulou: Sam Raimi’s 3-D film offers rich visuals, good acting, and great special effects. But it can’t match the 1939 *Wizard of Oz*, where Dorothy, played by Judy Garland, in her ruby slippers, made history. She travels to the Emerald City to meet the Wizard who will show her the way back home, only to find that Oz is a fake. The journey is an allegory of self-discovery. The Library of Congress named *The Wizard of Oz* the most watched motion picture in history, says Patrick Loughney,

executive director of the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center at the Library.

Patrick Loughney: It's a magical film because it captures that concentration of energy, genius, and creativity that was apparent in Hollywood in the movie industry at that time.

29 Poulou: Loughney says the 1939 film carried a post-Depression message of endurance.

Patrick Loughney: To me it's the message of hope in that movie that ultimately connects worldwide with everybody at that time and even today.

Poulou: Other incarnations of *The Wizard of Oz* have reflected changes in popular culture. In 1974, *The Wiz* featured Dorothy, played by Diana Ross, with an all-black cast.

Patrick Loughney: I think it reflects a social change that had already occurred in America since the 1950s and '60s. And so you have major movie studios beginning to accommodate creative artists coming out of the African American community.

Poulou: Now Sam Raimi's technical marvel, *Oz the Great and Powerful*, may give new life to the Wizard until the next incarnation of Frank Baum's beloved story. Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 4. Trance

37 Official: “Get down! Get down! Everybody out now!”

Poulou: Simon, an art auctioneer played by James McAvoy, risks his life to hide a Goya painting from a gang.

Frank: “Stop right there.”

Poulou: Frank, the gang leader, hits Simon on the head and Simon loses his memory from the blow. But Frank does not believe Simon suffers from amnesia and tortures him to make him talk. Gradually, he realises that Simon is telling the truth and takes him to a hypnotist to help him remember.

Lamb: “So I’d like you to close your eyes and imagine you’re in an elevator.”

Poulou: The hypnotist is the seductive Elizabeth Lamb, played by Rosario Dawson.

Lamb: “You’re going down...”

38 Poulou: In the beginning, the characters and their connection to each other appear straightforward. Simon is the victim, Elizabeth his advocate, and Frank the villain. But Danny Boyle says there is nothing formulaic about *Trance*.

Danny Boyle: From every character’s costumes, the sound, the music, the locations, the style of the filmmaking... Everything is there to seduce you, as though you are sitting in the chair, about to be hypnotized. There might be more than one story you should listen to here, and the delight of the film is who to trust.

Lamb: “The sum of everything we’ve ever done”

Frank: “She put that memory there. It’s not real!”

Poulou: *Trance* resembles *Inception*, which came out in 2010. But in

Christopher Nolan's blockbuster, the main characters build subconscious worlds for corporate espionage. The characters in *Trance* have fractured memories and broken personalities. They are not who they appear to be.

Simon: "Was I hypnotized?"

Danny Boyle: It's a lovely, multi-layered ... sweet box, really, which is all designed to lure you in, and then you have to contribute to the puzzle of the film.

39 Poulou: Danny Boyle likens *Trance* to a film noir, where the central character is a mysterious, alluring woman and there is no clear villain or hero.

Frank: "So where's she gone, huh? Don't let her get away, Simon, not after all this."

Poulou: Although Danny Boyle's *Trance* is not as gripping as his Oscar-winning *Slumdog Millionaire* it reflects its creator's lively, over-the-top personality. It mesmerizes. And entertains.

Frank: "She has been using you from the start, Simon."

Poulou: Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 5. Elysium

47 Poulou: It's the year 2154, and the world is starkly divided between the haves and the have-nots. The downtrodden inhabit an overpopulated, polluted Earth, while the rich have migrated to Elysium, an outpost in space where there is no poverty or sickness.

Police Robot: "What's in the bag?"

Max: "Hair products...mostly. I'm just...Hey, hey, hey, hey. I'm just going to work."

Poulou: The story is centered on Max. Having broken the law many times, he's trying to sort out his life on Earth. He gets a job at a factory, where he's exposed to radiation.

Medical Robot: "In five days' time, you will die."

Poulou: Unless he can make it to Elysium, the place of his dreams. Neil Blomkamp directed the film.

Neil: All of the things that make life worth living, everything that's been extracted from Earth, all of the medical help and the technology and the wealth and the standard of living and the longevity and everything else ... is all there.

48 Poulou: But Elysium is inaccessible to foreigners ... that is, everyone living on Earth, including Max.

Man: "Attention incoming vessels. You are in violation of Elysium airspace."

Poulou: Jodie Foster interprets the unyielding Madame Delacourt, a government official in Elysium who will stop at nothing to enforce anti-immigration laws to protect her environment.

Madame Delacourt: "Shoot them down."

Jodie Foster: Her point is, is that... the Earth that she came from, that

she remembers - and don't forget she's 108 years old, was falling apart and was horrible, and it was a terrible place to be. And they've created this new habitat, *Elysium*, to get rid of some of the bad things that happened then- you know, the terrible pollution, toxicity of the planet, overpopulation - all those things that we all know right now are a problem.

49 Poulou: Blomkamp's movie is an allegory about many of today's problems - poverty and immigration, homeland security, lack of universal healthcare, and the destruction of our planet.

Julio: "Whoever has this has the power to override their whole system. You can save everyone."

Max: "What did you do to me?"

Julio: "Gave you a way out."

Poulou: After he agrees to go on a dangerous mission to *Elysium* and hack into its security system, Max turns into a human transformer with equipment that makes him incredibly strong and turns his brain into a hard drive filled with security data. From that point on, *Elysium* is action-packed and delivers social justice, Hollywood-style. Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 6. After Earth

56 Poulou: General Cypher and his son, Kitai, are the only two survivors. Cypher is in the ship's hull, stranded and in critical condition. Kitai has to retrieve a beacon 100 kilometers away to call for help.

Cypher: "We need that beacon. Do you understand? You are going to retrieve that beacon, or we are going to die."

Poulou: Kitai races against time on Earth, where the environment has become hostile to humans. Extreme temperatures, poisonous plants, wild animals.

Cypher: "There's a river, 250 meters straight ahead. Go."

Poulou: Jaden Smith, Will Smith's 13-year-old son, plays Kitai. He tells VOA that, although this is a riveting story, it could be a real-life scenario if we keep polluting our planet.

Jaden: If we don't get rid of all the horrible plastic and the oil and the fossil fuels, we're on an escalating path. It just keeps going up, keeps going up. So, I definitely think it could get to the point where Earth will evict us.

57 Poulou: Garrett Reisman is an engineer for SpaceX and a former NASA astronaut. He says the film is based on real science of space travel, but he cautions not to rely on it yet.

Garrett: Even if we went on a crash program over the next ten years, we wouldn't come close. And we're trying to make new rockets that can get more people up into space. But we've still got such a long way to go that my message is, "We better take care of this planet, because if we mess it up too fast, before we have an opportunity to leave, we're going to be in big trouble."

Poulou: Will Smith, who plays General Cypher, tells VOA, for now, don't

fret. Just enjoy the film.

Will: There's really a strong family core at the middle of this movie. It's rare that you can make a movie like this that your grandmother and your aunt and your little niece can all go to. There's something for everybody in the movie.

58 Poulou: *After Earth* is also about a father-son relationship not unlike the one Jaden has with his dad, Will Smith. Jaden says, like Kitai, he wants to forge his own path.

Jaden: I definitely feel like Kitai felt a lot of pressure. I just want to make movies, and I just want to go - I don't want it to be labeled as I'm following in his footsteps or anything. I just want to make movies and put out art to the world.

Poulou: But Will Smith says he's there to teach his son the trade and how to survive in the jungle that's Hollywood - not a very different jungle from the poisonous one on Earth a thousand years into the future.

Cypher: "Together, we will survive. And do not misunderstand me. Danger ... is very real. But fear is a choice."

Poulou: Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 7. Gravity

66 Kowalski: “Beautiful, don’t you think?”

Stone: “What?”

Kowalski: “The sunrise. Terrific.”

Poulou: The astronauts’ reverie is abruptly interrupted by Mission Control warning of debris from a destroyed Russian satellite.

Man: “Mission abort.”

Kowalski: “Explore, this is Kowalski. Confirming visual contact with debris. Debris is from a BSE sat.”

Poulou: Senior astronaut Matt Kowalski warns Dr. Ryan Stone.

Kowalski: “We have to go, go, go.”

Captain: “We’ve lost Houston. We’ve lost Houston.”

Kowalski: “Look, we need to get the hell out of here.”

Poulou: But Ryan, played by Sandra Bullock, is on her first mission and does not see the danger until it is too late.

Kowalski: “Astronaut is off structure. Dr. Stone is off structure.”

Poulou: Kowalski, played by George Clooney, tries to retrieve her.

Kowalski: “Grab ahold of anything you can.”

Poulou: Director Alfonso Cuarón creates a visceral 3-D experience of a space-mission disaster, where the romantic, quiet void turns terrifying and astronauts literally spin out of control. Cuarón told VOA he wanted to make these intricately technical images as accurate as possible.

Alfonso: With Emmanuel Lubezki, “Chivo,” the cinematographer, the intent was to do something that looked like an IMAX documentary. Also, we wanted to do something that honors the laws of physics in space, in terms of the microgravity and the no resistance.

67 Poulou: The actors also had to deal with the laws of physics, especially Sandra Bullock, who almost single-handedly carries the movie as mission specialist Ryan Stone.

Kowalski: “Give me five.”

Stone: “I’ve got you.”

Bullock: Everything you see, we physically shot, even if it was in tiny pieces to string it together. But everything physically that you saw, we either did in the cube, locked into the system. We did on a 12-wire rig so I could fly and I could do the bodywork.

Poulou: Bullock tells VOA that evoking the feelings of a lost woman inside a space suit was even more difficult.

Bullock: You have to have that inner emotional life going at all times. If it is not alive and it’s not there, you’re gonna see it on the eyes.

Stone: “Houston, do you copy?”

Poulou: The film feels claustrophobic, and Ryan’s fight for survival futile. Having lost her young daughter, Ryan feels she has nothing to live for. Fighting with her inner demons in the middle of nowhere makes this film an existential drama.

Bullock: It’s someone who has lost their connection to living and life. And with, you know, the debris you get the representation of adversity, and that’s gonna happen in everyone’s life. We’re all going to be knocked down. We’re supposed to get back up, but why?

68 Poulou: NASA astronauts Catherine Coleman and Mike Massimino have logged many hours of spacewalks. They say the film accurately depicts technical and emotional challenges in space, especially the debris orbiting the Earth that could endanger missions.

Catherine: Every piece of debris bigger than about this is tracked. And, in fact, you know, tomorrow, we will, you know, be evaluating, “Something’s

heading close to the space station. Do we move the space station or not?” So, it’s a harder and harder problem with more and more pieces of debris.

Poulou: *Gravity* is already receiving Oscar buzz, especially for its visual effects and visceral music. Alfonso Cuarón could not be happier. As for his next project...

Alfonso: Whichever film in which characters walk.

Poulou: Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 8. The Imitation Game

76 Denniston: “Gentlemen, meet Mr. Turing.”

Turing: We’re to work together, then? I’m afraid these men would only slow me down.

Director: “Popular at school, were you?”

Poulou: In *The Imitation Game*, Alan Turing is a socially awkward but deeply sensitive man who finds refuge in code description.

Turing: “I... I like solving problems, Commander. And Enigma is the most difficult problem in the world.”

Commander: “No, Enigma isn’t difficult. It’s impossible. The Americans, the Russians, the French, the Germans, everyone thinks Enigma is unbreakable.”

Turing: “Good. Let me try and we’ll know for sure, won’t we?”

Poulou: Working with a small team at an undercover location, Turing breaks Nazi Germany’s code with a computer prototype he created.

Turing: “I’m designing a machine that will allow us to break every message, every day, instantly.”

Poulou: He hand-picks a female code breaker for his team when women were not considered for such positions.

Turing: “5 minutes and 34 seconds.”

Joan: “You said to do it in under 6”.

77 Poulou: Filmmaker Morten Tyldum builds an intelligent World War II thriller around two mavericks running against the clock to solve Enigma. He says his film promotes the uniqueness in each and every one of us.

Morten: I think it’s sort of like the new kind of superheroes in a way, you know? These are the brainy, unique, brilliant, smart but also awkward

and interesting individuals.

Poulou: Scriptwriter Graham Moore made it his mission to introduce Turing to the public. He also wanted to write a script about the triumph of intellect over homophobia and gender bias.

Moore: It's a story of these two outsiders sort of finding each other. And, you know, it's an asexual love story. You know, he's a gay man. She's a woman. But there is something very tender between them.

Alan: "It got him to like you."

Joan: "Yes."

Alan: "Why?"

Joan: "Because I'm a woman in a man's job, and I don't have the luxury of being an ass."

78 Poulou: Turing's story would not have captured popular attention without lead actors Kiera Knightley and Benedict Cumberbatch.

Moore: I could write the angriest line, a scene of Alan Turing being sort of angry and mean to someone around him, and Benedict would deliver it at this whisper, at this very gentle, quiet whisper. And then I write a line that I feel like is so quiet and so gentle and he'll deliver it in a roar.

Benedict: When I read it, I was, first of all, amused, inspired by a brilliant bit of script-writing. They choose a character who's difficult, interesting, quirky, funny, intelligent, but utterly unapologetic, utterly lacking in any vanity. It wasn't as if he was being set up to be liked, and that's the huge appeal to me. I think that's what we all, at our best, are. We're just true to ourselves.

Director: "You've got more secrets than the best of them."

Poulou: Turing was arrested for being a homosexual in 1952 and committed suicide a few years later. *The Imitation Game* finally celebrates the unsung hero. Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 9. White House Down

7 **Poulou:** It's not the first time Roland Emmerich is destroying the White House. In 1996, he blew it to smithereens in his film *Independence Day*. The enemy back then was aliens. Now it's an inside job. A terrorist group is planning to take the President hostage and access America's weapons of mass destruction.

Disc 2

Man: "Showtime!"

Poulou: But all is not lost. John Cale, a soldier fresh out of Afghanistan, is visiting the White House for a job interview.

Carol Finnerty: "John Cale, why do you want to be in the Secret Service?"

Cale: "I can't think of a more important job than protecting the President."

Emily: "Did you get the job?"

Cale: "Yeah, I think I got a shot."

Poulou: His estranged daughter, Emily, is visiting with him. What happens next is predictable. In the chaos, John and Emily are separated.

Man: "Roger that. We're holding the President in the library."

Cale: "That's the library. Don't go there. Just... Oh, this is so stupid."

8 **Poulou:** Cale races to save his daughter and, of course, the President. Channing Tatum as John Cale is in super shape as he goes through leaps and bounds to protect the Commander in Chief. He spoke about the stunts he performed.

Channing Tatum: There is a 25-foot drop that I didn't do. I did do most of them, though, yeah.

Poulou: Tatum, who was named the Sexiest Man Alive by *People* Magazine, approaches stardom with humor and humility.

Channing Tatum: "I don't sit there and ponder that question, really, I just

sort of try to just keep working.

Poulou: Jamie Foxx is James Sawyer, President of the United States. He says his character is not a take on President Obama.

Jamie Foxx: It was cool, but we didn't want... Like I said, we didn't want to do...

Channing Tatum: An impersonation. ... an impersonation, no. 'Cause we don't want people to think that's how Obama would react in this situation, 'cause we don't know.

President Sawyer: "I said freeze!"

Cale: "Shoot him! No, don't shoot him. Shoot him!"

9 Poulou: Maggie Gyllenhaal plays Special Agent Carol Finnerty. She said visiting Washington helped her connect with her role.

Maggie: To come here and to walk around... And I didn't think I cared about any of these places. And to see the Capital Building, I was like, "I want to go up as close as I can get." Or to see, like, the First Amendment written in stone in the News Museum, you know, and walk by and read it and think, like, "I absolutely believe in that." That's just something I believe in, you know? And I think Carol Finnerty is like that.

Poulou: Filmmaker Roland Emmerich says, despite the grand sets and special effects, his film is, at its core, about a father trying to reconnect with his daughter.

Carol Finnerty: "Help is not coming. You just need to get out of there."

Cale: "My little girl is counting on me right now, and I'm not gonna disappear on her."

Poulou: He says his film is a throwback to '80s and '90s action flicks.

Roland Emmerich: It's not as fun anymore than it was, you know, with movies like *Indiana Jones*. I mean, *Raiders of Lost Ark* was one of the most fun movies I've ever seen in my life. And these kind of movies

are like a little missing.

Poulou: *White House Down* is a wild ride in the heart of the nation's capital.

It toys with the hypothesis of what would happen to the world if the White House were compromised.

Man: "Move! Move! Move!"

Poulou: Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

John: "Tell me how much time I have."

Unit 10. Big Hero 6

17 Lee: This action-adventure movie about a boy genius, his robot, and his friends started out as an obscure comic book. The directors kept the title and the characters' names, but transformed "Big Hero 6" into something uniquely Disney.

Don Hall: We don't have any superpower people in this movie. It's all super technology.

Fred: "He's glorious!"

Music: "On top of the world."

Chris Williams: You're always walking a line. We want to push it so it feels fun and fantastic. At the same time, you want it to be based on actual science because people feel that... It just makes it feel more plausible.

Lee: One real-world example is Baymax, a huggable, inflatable, robotic nurse made of vinyl.

Don Hall: Our robot had to be something unique. I couldn't be something that we've seen before.

18 Lee: They found their robot in Chris Atkeson's robotics lab at Carnegie Mellon University. In this video provided by the university, Atkeson says...

Chris Atkeson: Most people think of robots either as tools for industry or military things. But when you say, "A robot is going to help you, be your servant, or take care of you", that's a stretch for most people.

Baymax: "I am Baymax."

Lee: In *Big Hero 6*, the robot Baymax works to heal the sick and injured. That's not too farfetched. Here at Carnegie Mellon University, scientists have built inflatable robotic arms. Their goal is to use that technology

to help older adults and people with disabilities. In addition to featuring cutting-edge technology in the film, groundbreaking computer technology also was used to create the movie.

Hendrickson: Here's some more shots. Here's a great fly-through. And you can see this is a full city. It's not just a few sets.

Lee: New software was used to build a city called San Fransokyo, where the movie is set. From the buildings to the characters and the geometry, this world is more complex than anything in the last three Disney films combined. With a more detailed world, the film needed a more complex lighting method. The studio created Hyperion, a computer program that simulates the technique of global illumination.

Hendrickson: Global illumination is basically what you see around you in the world. Light comes in through the window over here. It bounces around in the world. It lights my face. It comes off this wall. It lights my face.

19 Lee: Hyperion harnesses the physics of how light works in the real world and applies that to this virtual world. Here's the difference.

Hendrickson: So, we're letting the light just bounce once in this scene, but 10 bounces allows the light energy to really flow through the scene and illuminate everything... underneath the bed here.

Lee: Another piece of software created for this movie allows hundreds of thousands of people to be created in crowd scenes.

Hendrickson: No two people are the same in this film. It's not like before in computer-graphics films, where we had several different body types, several different head types, and you made 100 different people, and they repeated. There are no repeats in this film.

Lee: The directors say the new technologies developed for this movie removed technological limitations for filmmakers in *Big Hero 6* and

future animated features. Elizabeth Lee for VOA News, Burbank.

Hiro: “No! No, no, no! Back on! Back on! On! On!”

Unit 11. Third Person

27 Michael: “It’s supposed to be about a man who can only feel through the characters he creates.”

Poulou: Paul Haggis’ drama *Third Person* is about a Pulitzer Prize-winning writer who can only live through the lives of others. Somewhere in Paris, he weaves a story about couples in different parts of the world facing issues of trust, betrayal, and loss.

Scott: “Come with me.”

Monika: “Where?”

Scott: “Anywhere.”

Poulou: Scott and Theresa meet at a café in Italy. He’s an American businessman estranged from his wife, dealing with guilt because he let his daughter drown while he was not paying attention.

Girl: “Hi, Daddy. I miss you.”

Scott: “My daughter. You have kids?”

Monika: “A girl. I don’t see her two years.”

Poulou: Theresa, a Roma, is trying to get back her kidnapped daughter.

Monika: “Will you help me? No questions.”

Scott: “Tell me.”

28 Poulou: Meanwhile, somewhere in New York City, a young woman files for custody of her son after endangering his life.

Lawyer: “Did you get a job?”

Julia: “I’ve had half a dozen jobs.”

Lawyer: “One that you keep for more than a week.”

Poulou: Her ex-husband is determined to never let her see the boy again.

Julia: No, you said...

Rick: Get out!

Julia: No! No!

Poulou: It appears that Michael, the author who is creating these characters, has a troubled love affair, an estranged wife, and an all-consuming guilt because, like Scott, due to inattentiveness, he let his child drown.

Girl: “Watch me.”

Poulou: Paul Haggis, who wrote and directed *Third Person*, says these tragic characters have been shaped by his personal life.

Paul: Everything came from my personal life, except... I mean, it's all completely true, except none of it happened. But I take those questions, those arguments I had, those fabulous parts I've had in my life, these incredibly romantic moments, and I put them into someone else's scene and someone else's setting, and I live them again in that.

29 Poulou: Haggis also presents the filmmaker's dilemma... living vicariously through others.

Elaine: “You really don't feel a thing, do you?”

Paul: Often, the joy of writing is allowing the characters to go to places that surprise you, to places that you perhaps don't want to look at.

Poulou: *Third Person* is an introspective film that, as the filmmaker says, should be subject to the viewers' interpretation.

Paul: They want to be reassured, and I don't think the purpose of movies is to reassure you. It's to challenge you, to let you come up with your own answers because your own answers, “A,” are probably right and, “B,” are maybe even better than what I intended.

Poulou: And though the film does not offer a clear-cut direction to its audience, it packs an emotional punch and lingers.

Elaine: “You love love. It's people you don't have time for.”

Poulou: Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 12. 12 Years a Slave

37 Redneck: “That servant that don’t obey his lord shall be beaten with many stripes. That’s Scripture.”

Poulou: Like many slavery films before it, *12 Years a Slave* unfolds in the sweltering heat of Southern plantations. But unlike its predecessors, Steve McQueen’s film focuses on a free man from the North who is kidnapped and sold into slavery.

Solomon: “My name’s not Platt. My name ...”

Slave Trader: “Your name is Platt.”

Poulou: His name was Solomon Northup, and it’s a true account.

Steve McQueen: The reason why I took this angle is I wanted that person to be everyone in the audience, someone who can take you, the audience, through this unfortunate conveyor belt of slavery.”

Solomon: “Days ago, I was with my family... in my home. Now you tell me all is lost?”

38 Poulou: Chiwetel Ejiofor offers a tour-de-force performance as Northup.

Solomon: “I will not fall into despair!”

Chiwetel Ejiofor: This is a story about one of the harshest structures that’s ever been created in the history of the world, and it is somebody trying to survive that with their mind intact. And they do.

Poulou: Film historian Dexter Gabriel says the movie breaks new ground.

Dexter Gabriel: The movie does a very good job in exposing slavery, almost in a sense exposing the old films on slavery, the old plantation epics, exposing them for frauds.

Poulou: He says movies like *Gone with the Wind* in 1939 did a disservice, because they painted a portrait of slaves living in harmony with their

owners. Nostalgic tributes faded after the Civil Rights Movement. In 1977, the TV miniseries *Roots* became the first attempt to reveal the brutality of slavery. But Gabriel says slavery was a small part of the story that looked at the African-American experience as a whole.

Dexter Gabriel: In its attempt to simply create this immigrant story, it attempts to mask slavery under this heading in order to make African-Americans more like everyone else.

39 Poulou: Steven Spielberg's *Amistad* in 1997 was about a slave mutiny aboard the slave ship *Amistad*. Gabriel calls the film a missed opportunity.

Dexter Gabriel: Rather than privilege the slave mutiny, Spielberg makes it about this courtroom drama starring founding fathers and interesting abolitionist lawyers.

Poulou: 15 years later, Quentin Tarantino's *Django Unchained* empowered the black slave in a tongue-in-cheek vigilante story. But Gabriel calls it an unrealistic tale of one black man against plantation masters.

Dexter Gabriel: It is, in the end, a wonderful absurdist fairy tale of slavery.

Solomon: "My back is thick with scars."

Poulou: In *12 Years a Slave*, the mood darkens. Many say its portrayal of slavery is too harsh.

Dexter Gabriel: Slavery was a part of this country and this world longer than it hasn't been. I think everyone, in some way, has to come to terms with it.

Poulou: After almost a century of slavery movies, *12 Years a Slave* offers an opportunity for reflection. Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 13. The Butler

47 **Fallows:** “Are you political, Mr. Gaines?”

Cecil: “No sir.”

Fallows: “Good. We have no tolerance for politics at the White House.”

Cecil: “I’m Cecil Gaines. I’m the new butler.”

Poulou: In “Lee Daniels *The Butler*, Cecil Gaines is the unassuming servant who epitomizes race relations in 1950s America. Forest Whitaker offers a layered interpretation of Cecil.

Forest Whitaker: At that time, to have a position where you’re working in the White House was a really big deal, economically speaking, socially speaking. But then there’s also those who look at people in the service industry as “Uncle Toms” or people who, you know, are servants. You know, as he says, you can serve without being servile. And I think there’s a very big difference between the two things.

Poulou: Cecil doesn’t fight for social change, but he unwittingly effects it by serving eight presidents.

Kennedy: “I am thrilled to be working with all of you over the next four years.”

Cecil: “Mr. President.”

Kennedy: “I know your son is a Freedom Rider.”

Freedom Rider: “Turn the bus! Everybody out!”

Kennedy: “I never understood what you all really went through. You changed my heart.”

48 **Poulou:** But Cecil is not as sure-footed at home as he is at the White House. His wife, Gloria, resents his long hours and turns to alcohol and other temptations. His eldest son, Louis, a civil-rights activist, looks down at his father.

Cecil: “Look at you... all puffed up... hat on your head... coming in here, saying whatever you want. You need to go.”

Louis: “What?”

Cecil: “Get the hell out of my house! Get on out!”

Gloria: “Now, everybody just sit down.”

Louis: “I’m sorry, Mr. Butler. I didn’t mean to make fun of your hero.”

Gloria: “Everything you are and everything you have is... ‘cause of that butler.”

Poulou: Oprah Winfrey offers an Oscar-worthy performance as Gloria.

Oprah: I think of all of the men and women who served either as butlers or chefs, cooks, maids, janitors. And I think that the “Aha!” is the grace and nobility that it took to do that, to hold your head up every day, to build a family and build a life that supported you and your community. I just have a greater sense of pride for that man, those men, and that time.

Martin Luther King: “Young brother, the black domestic play an important role in our history.”

49 Poulou: Martin Luther King, played by Nelsan Ellis, tells Louis that a butler or a maid, over-perceived as subservient, is in many ways subversive without knowing it. Cecil Gaines was certainly that. His character is based on Eugene Allen, the real White House butler who witnessed major events while serving as the White House butler for 34 years. But the film is ultimately about America, says filmmaker Lee Daniels.

Lee Daniels: It’s a Civil Rights story, but it’s really a father-and-son story, and the father-and-son story is... it transcends race.”

Nancy Reagan: “I’d like to invite you to the state dinner next week.”

Cecil: “I’m gonna be there, Mrs. Reagan.”

Nancy: “No, not as a ... not as a butler, Cecil. I’m inviting you as a guest.”

Poulou: The film has a healing effect. And while it serves as a reminder of racial struggle and injustice... it also celebrates Americans’ ability to

overcome. Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 14. Foxcatcher

57 Du Pont: “Athletes need role models. Like anyone, they need people to look up to.”

Poulou: Despite his physical awkwardness, John du Pont, heir to the du Pont chemical fortune, felt a particular affinity towards the world of wrestling. He styled himself a wrestling coach and bankrolled a team he named Foxcatcher that trained on his estate. His star was wrestler Mark Schultz.

Du Pont: “What do you hope to achieve, Mark?”

Mark: “I want to go to the...’88 Olympics in Seoul.”

Poulou: Actor Channing Tatum plays robust but insecure Mark Schultz, who finds a father figure in the delusional du Pont.

Du Pont: “I want Mark Schultz to come visit me.”

58 Poulou: Steve Carell layers du Pont’s unraveling character slowly and deliberately. His performance has already created Oscar buzz. Critics applaud Miller’s decision to cast the comedian in a role that is ultimately chilling. But Miller says he threw caution in the wind when he met his lead actor.

Miller: I saw that there was an aspect of him that was able to understand who this very dark character was. And it was important to put an actor in that role who you do not expect to do what he does.

Poulou: Miller says Carell’s intricate makeup transformed the actor into a birdlike John du Pont.

Miller: Steve would show up about two hours earlier than anybody else and would sit in the chair. But because he had to show up before anybody else, we never really saw him out of his makeup pretty much for the

duration of the shoot. We never saw Steve out of his makeup.

Du Pont: “Mark, you have been living in your brother’s shadow your entire life. It’s time. It’s your time now.

Mark: “I know what you mean.”

59 Poulou: The movie follows the interdependent relationship between the wrestler and the millionaire. It is offset by Mark’s brother, David Schultz, another Olympic wrestler who also stays at du Pont’s estate to help his brother train. David is more independent than Mark, but he, too, becomes dependent on du Pont’s finances, even as du Pont becomes more and more volatile.

Du Pont: “Why is there nobody in the gym?”

Mark: “Yeah, no, I gave...”

Du Pont: “You ungrateful ape.”

Poulou: Watching *Foxcatcher*, the moviegoer is taken in as Steve Carell creates a chilling but almost comic persona. So, when the seemingly innocuous John du Pont murders in cold blood, we experience the shock people close to him felt almost 20 years ago.

All: John! John! John! John!

Poulou: Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Unit 15. Interstellar

67 Cooper: “We used to look up in the sky and wonder at our place in the stars. Now we just look down and worry about our place in the dirt.”

Poulou: Disillusioned Cooper, a pilot turned farmer, sees humanity’s dying spirits in a dying planet. Sometime in the near future, climate change has caused an agricultural crisis, leading to widespread famine.

Cooper: “Now you need to tell me about your plan.”

Poulou: Professor Brand, Cooper’s old mentor, recruits him for a secret space-exploration program to find habitable planets beyond our galaxy.

Cooper: “I’ve got kids, Professor.”

Brand: “Get out there and save them.”

Poulou: Cooper is torn. He loves his children too much to leave, but also too much to stay and let them die.

Cooper: “I’m coming back.”

Murphy: “When?”

Cooper: “I love you forever.”

Poulou: Filmmaker Christopher Nolan launches the astronauts into the cold unknown. They look so negligible against the backdrop of the awesome vastness of space, but their drive to save humanity scales unfathomable distances. They are life, the trailblazers of a new era. Nolan says his greatest inspiration was another trailblazer.

HAL: “The 9000 series is the most reliable computer ever made.”

68 Poulou: Stanley Kubrick’s sci-fi philosophical drama *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Nolan: I got to see it when I was seven years old. My dad took me to see it on the big screen, on re-release. And that experience has just stuck with me my whole career, of the potential of what movies can be, how that

big screen can take you across the universe. And *Interstellar* is definitely my attempt to try and, you know, give kids of today some sense of that.

Poulou: *Interstellar* takes audiences through wormholes and black holes at dizzying speed. But as big as his space film is, it rests on an intimate story of love between a father and his daughter. Matthew McConaughey offers a layered interpretation of conflicted Cooper, who knows he may never see his kids again.

Matthew: It's about the dare of the exploration, discovery, and courage. And it's about... it reminds us that our capacities are sometimes greater... are a lot of times greater than we even give ourselves credit for. Oh, we have incredible capacity as a species. And this film challenges us. At the same time, it has incredible faith in us.

69 Poulou: Anne Hathaway plays Professor Brand's daughter, Amelia, one of the astronauts on this journey of no return. She says her role was a very demanding one, emotionally as well as physically.

Anne: And I am a tomboy, so I don't usually like to admit when I'm challenged by something, but this one was really hard. The suit was heavy. I was the only girl for miles. And so the boys... you know, for them, they were like, "Ooh, this suit's kind of heavy," and I'm just...

Poulou: Jessica Chastain interprets Cooper's daughter, Murph, all grown up. She, a scientist, is working against time to save mankind.

Jessica: For women, this is very odd to get to play a character like this, that gets to be intelligent, capable, actively participating in her own world, in the world around her, and emotional. Sometimes women can be intelligent and capable, but then you're not allowed to be emotional.

Brand: "Do not go gentle into that good night."

Poulou: Christopher Nolan, the director who gave us *Memento* and *Inception*, does not take shortcuts. As his skeleton crew tears through the mysterious

fabric of the universe, we join them on a gripping, emotional, and by no means predictable journey. *Interstellar* is a movie of titanic proportions.

Penelope Poulou, VOA News, Washington.

Cooper: “We’ll find a way. We always have.”