Part 6

You are going to read an article about an animal trainer. Seven paragraphs have been removed from the article. Choose from the paragraphs **A – H** the one which fits each gap (**37 – 43**). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use. Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

Andrew Simpson: the wolf whisperer

One of the world's foremost animal trainers prepares a pack of wolves to star in an epic Chinese film

Ten pairs of dark eyes stare out from behind a 4m-high fence on the northern outskirts of Beijing. The pack looks relaxed, until they hear the sounds of the car. At once, their ears prick up, their noses tilted towards the noise. 'They never really sleep while the sun is up,' says Andrew Simpson, a 45-year-old Scot who has spent his life training wolves. Simpson is in China for his greatest challenge yet. He has 18 months to get a pack of wolves to sit, snarl and fight on cue in order to take part in the film of one of China's most famous novels, the multimillion bestseller *Wolf Totem.*

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Plans for a film of *Wolf Totem* have been afoot since 2004, at first using all-digital wolves. But when director Jean-Jacques Annaud was brought on board, he insisted that the animals in the movie should be a genuine pack. China's dwindling wolf population are not allowed to leave the country; their trainer, then, would have to come to them. 'When we first started talking about *Wolf Totem* I didn't realise I might have to commit two or three years of my life to it,' says Simpson, who has moved here from his ranch in rural Canada.

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There is not much sign of danger. He immediately presents his tummy for a rub. 'Tickle him,' urges Simpson, 'It's part of the process.' The fur is bristly, and his body is tight and strong. It turns out he is on a reconnaissance mission. After covering himself in our scent, he gets up and saunters back to the rest of the pack. One by one, they have a sniff, deciding whether to accept us into the fold or not.

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It's a different story in captivity though. At one point, Simpson breaks off several branches from a nearby tree and begins to wave one under the nose of one of the wolves, until the wolf clamps its jaws tightly around it. A tug of war follows until the wolf manages to grab the branch and retreats victoriously. The rest of the pack is now running wildly, hoping to join the game.

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Today, though, he is having trouble just getting his wolves to stand still. Each day, the pack is put through its training for at least an hour. It takes about a month to persuade a wolf to get 'on your mark' – in the position required – a command that is accompanied with a wave of the hand and, if successful, a reward.

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Getting a wolf to snarl on cue is also time-consuming. A large bone is first gently, then more aggressively, taken away from a hungry wolf until he bares his fangs. And, although Simpson and his six-man team, brought in from Calgary, have been working with the pack from when they were just a few weeks old, only three of the wolves, Cloudy, Silver and Parker, will allow such close human contact.

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Simpson admits the unique bond with those wolves, with whom he has spent many years, stems from a near-parental commitment to their wellbeing. 'You must give yourself completely to raising wolves and building a bond with them. Most people try to raise wolves by spending a few hours a week with them. This approach never works. You need to understand how their pack structure works and then slot yourself into their lives.'

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And with that, he leads the pack in a howl. As he throws his head back, the wolves around him begin to yelp, and then one or two muster a more full-throated cry. It is not yet the blood-curdling call of the wild that runs through *Wolf Totem*, but they'll get there.

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A Achieving such complete integration may mean sleepless nights feeding baby wolves or sitting outside in a thunderstorm comforting them because they are afraid, or travelling in an aircraft hold with them – all things he has done in his time. 'What I really hope is that the movie will change people's perceptions of wolves,' he says. 'They are really wonderful creatures. Challenging, but clever and capable.'

B Simpson slides the outer fence open, and we slip into the compound. He calls out to Cloudy, the alpha male of the pack. The wolf pads over, and I freeze. 'Let the wolves see you here with me for a moment. Stay close to me and they will not mind you,' he says.

C Before coming to China, Simpson was employed in Vancouver by a couple who trained animals for films. At the time, no one was focused solely on wolves. Working with these animals was a gamble, but it was what he wanted to do. Now, according to Annaud, Simpson is the 'finest wolf trainer in the world'.

D One of the first animals he worked with then was a wolf/dog crossbreed. He was told the dog had been a problem on the set, but after a few weeks he was walking with the dog off the leash. 'I guess back then I didn't know any better,' he says. 'I just did what I could and it worked.'

E Chinese wolves like these are more slender than their American or Indian cousins, with longer ears and narrower heads. They are built for speed. But despite their veneration in *Wolf Totem*, in the wild they are 'pretty terrible hunters', according to Simpson. 'Nine out of 10 times, a wolf will fail to catch his prey.'

F 'That is the real crux of the challenge,' says Simpson. 'I am used to working with wolves whose parents were born in captivity, but for *Wolf Totem*, this was not possible. I would have loved to ship my already-trained wolves from Canada, but they were not right for this project,' he adds.

G But, as its narrator warns: 'You can tame a bear, a lion or an elephant, but you cannot tame a wolf.' Simpson is inclined to agree. 'It is not possible to get a wolf to do something he or she does not want to do. If they do not enjoy it, they will not work.'

H Food undoubtedly works best for this purpose. Their normal diet is dried dog food, but here, they get fresh meat. 'If you overfeed a wolf, you have had it. They will wander off and not train for days. That can be a bit tricky with a movie's schedule.'

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