Part 7

You are going to read an extract from a magazine article about Macquarie Island. Six paragraphs have been removed from the extract. Choose from the paragraphs **A – G** the one which fits each gap (**41 – 46**). There is one extra paragraph which you do not need to use.

Mark your answers **on the separate answer sheet**.

Macquarie Island

Journalist Matthew Denholm joins a group of scientists, attempting to save Macquarie Island, which lies halfway between Australia and Antarctica.

I am stumbling, blinded by tiny missiles of ice and snow driven horizontally into my face by a howling gale. One minute I'm blown backwards. The next I'm leaping skyward in undignified panic as a foot narrowly misses an outraged elephant seal. Squinting painfully through torchlight, I've little hope of seeing the beasts.

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Later, inside a cosy hut, sporting a patch over the sorer of my eyes, I have to admit that it probably is. This is, after all, the sub-Antarctic. Or to be precise, Macquarie Island: a sliver of land conjured abruptly from the vast wilderness of the Southern Ocean. The darkest, coldest months are generally the quietest time of year for human activity here, but this year is different. I'm with a team of scientists who are undertaking a seemingly impossible task: to rid the entire island of every rabbit, rat and mouse.

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Next morning, I abruptly change my mind, however, when I awake to a view that justifies the three-day voyage to this remote outpost of Australia. After overnight snowfalls the island is painted white, from highland plateaus, with frozen lakes, to rocky black sand and pebble shore. All glistens in rare sub-Antarctic sunshine. Besides, the previous afternoon's discomforts were entirely our own fault.

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The delay while we doubled back made it impossible to reach the hut before dusk. I had also blundered, deciding snow goggles were unnecessary. We had been taught a valuable lesson. While officially part of Australia, this island is a different world. Different rules apply. Every move must be planned and precautions taken because of the dangers posed by climate and terrain.

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This extreme isolation means no activity is easy on the island. Our first challenge was getting ashore as there is no safe anchorage. But when we eventually reached the beach, I could instantly see that the island's reputation as 'the Galápagos of the south' is justified. Over the next few days, seals, penguins and a host of seabirds are a constant presence. As in the Galápagos Islands, some species are abundant – there are an estimated 100,000 seals and four million penguins. Though hunted in the past, these days the main threat to the island's fauna comes not from man but from our legacy.

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Unaccustomed to the herbivores' teeth, the island flora has been overgrazed and reduced to stubble. The hills and plateaus are pock-marked with holes and soft surfaces are undermined by their burrows. On this treeless island, the overgrazing has also left the homes of native birds exposed. Petrel and albatross chicks are thus more vulnerable to predation and the harsh elements. The devastation reached such a point that in 2007 the World Heritage Convention discussed whether the island should lose its World Heritage status.

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However, the status was also conferred because of its 'outstanding natural beauty and aesthetic importance'. Given that the wild hillsides that should be lushly covered are bare, and are animated not by the movement of wind in tussock but by rabbits running amok, it is not surprising that the world was beginning to ask whether the description still applied.

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A This is mainly in the form of rabbits. Introduced in 1877 as a food source, they took to the island with gusto. Recent estimates of the rabbit population, before the eradication program began, ranged from 100,000 to 150,000.

B It's a realisation that makes all the more impressive the endeavours of the first explorers to come here. Here at Brothers Point, perched on a headland off the island's east coast, we could be the last humans on Earth. In a geographical sense, we very nearly are.

C The walk – just under 10km from the research station to the cabin – wasn't meant to be in darkness. Some time after setting out, however, my photographer realised he had left a piece of camera equipment behind.

D It's one of the most ambitious programs of its type ever attempted. A worthy project indeed, but as the intense winds rage outside, I can empathise with Captain Douglass, an early visitor to the island. Arriving in 1822, Douglass called Macquarie 'the most wretched place'.

E The resultant landslips have devastating consequences. They have harmed hundreds of penguins as well as destroying nesting sites leaving local wildlife at risk. I begin to realise just how damaged this wilderness is.

F At night, they are indistinguishable from the rocks that cover the ground; only their gurgling barks tell me when to jump. As I lose feeling in my fingers, numbed by glacial temperatures, I ask myself: Is this what I sailed to the bottom of the world for?

G Macquarie achieved the listing 10 years earlier, partly in recognition of the fact that it is a geological freak. The island is ocean floor forced to the surface by the convergence of two tectonic plates – an ongoing process.

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