

WOLF TOTEM

From the Novel by Jiang Rong

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5 **INT. ULAN BATOR BUS STATION. NIGHT.**

5

Lugging their bags and a heavy case between them, Chen Zhen and Yang Ke try to find the bus which will carry them onwards.

The air is thick with shouting and exhaust fumes.

A huge poster of Mao dominates one end of the bus station.

TICKET AGENT

"Settlement 49"? There are dozens of 49's. You have to know which district!

There are police and soldiers everywhere, marshalling the populace with shrill whistles.

6 **EXT. MONGOLIAN STEPPE, GRASSLANDS. DAY.**

6

Chen Zhen wakes in daylight, wondering where he is now.

He's crammed onto the back of a bullock cart with his bags and three or four fellow travellers, plus their animals and their purchases from the market.

A voice shouts from somewhere.

BAO SHUNGI

You guys. Students!!

Chen Zhen extricates himself painfully from the tangle of limbs. Yang Ke emerges from under a blanket, blinking in the light.

He sees a local official with a self-important air coming alongside on a pony.

This is BAO SHUNGI. He's been hurrying to catch up with them and does not appear very much at ease on his saddle.

Ignoring the peasants he addresses Chen Zhen.

BAO SHUNGI

You're the two guys from the Capital?

CHEN ZHEN

Yes, we were at Beijing University. Arts and History.

BAO SHUNGI

... I was at Beijing too. Teaching Genetics and Biology until I was promoted here. I am the new Head of the Pasture.

(CONTINUED)

6 CONTINUED:

6

Chen Zhen and Yang Ke understand what the word "promoted" means when a Beijing teacher is transferred to this remote land. Nevertheless, they nod respectfully.

There's a collection of yurts up ahead.

Bao rides out in front, to give the impression of being in charge, calling to the children herding sheep.

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

Hey, little kid! Which is the yurt of the Brigade Leader?

CHILD

The one with the flag.

Bao makes an irritated sound. They all have flags; but one flag, bearing a wolf emblem, is larger than the others. He leads off towards that one.

7 **EXT. YURT.**

7

As they approach, children cling to their parents coat-tails, stare or run back inside.

At the main tent, a flap opens and a striking-looking woman of 30 emerges, sees the newcomers, and walks towards the stables. Her name is GASMA.

The patriarch, BILIG, comes out a moment later. BAO dismounts and addresses him.

BAO

You're the Brigade leader? I bring you comrade Chen Zhen and his companion Yang Ke.

The cart pulls up and the students climb out with their gear.

BOA

They will live with you for two years. You will feed them and give them employment. In return they will read to your children.

Bilig scratches himself and says nothing.

Bao gets back on his horse and rides off, leaving Chen Zhen and his new family to regard each other awkwardly.

Behind them, the driver off-loads their trunk.

BILIG

What's in the trunk?

CHEN ZHEN

Books.

(CONTINUED)

7 CONTINUED:

7

Bilig knocks out his pipe, disappointed. He was hoping for something useful.

8 **EXT. YURT ENCAMPMENT. DAY**

8

Children regard Chen Zhen in silent wonder as Bilig shows him the camp. There's not much to see.

BILIG

Your job will be shepherding. You can borrow that horse and saddle. You'll need this for protection.

A stout heavy club, four feet long.

CHEN ZHEN

Protection against what?

BILIG

The wolves of course.

(Then)

You city boys. Don't they teach you anything?

9 **EXT. MONGOLIA / GRASSLAND VASTNESS. LATE AFTERNOON.**

9

A thin layer of snow covers the vast grassland. The winter afternoon sun casts long shadows.

Chen Zhen sits reading against a saddle, a large flock grazing around him.

Nearby, a horse is chewing grass.

Suddenly the lead sheep looks up on alert. So do the horse and the dogs.

The sheep stop eating and look around fearfully.

Chen Zhen drops his book, stands up.

From the end of grassland, a herd of wild Mongolian gazelles rush over from the north like a yellow wave.

The grassland is trembling.

The herd of gazelles passes by at lightning speed.

Sheep and goats huddle together, watching with a mixture of alarm and envy as their wild cousins race past, free as the wind.

Chen Zhen too watches in awe.

Far away in the distance, he spots a small dot, a horseman trotting in his direction.

(CONTINUED)

9 CONTINUED:

9

Chen Zhen wraps his bags, saddles up his horse, checks his watch. Finally the rider arrives - it's Yang Ke arriving for the evening shift.

YANG KE

Sorry to be late. Did you see the gazelles? I wonder what was chasing them?

Chen Zhen wonders the same thing. He doesn't have his club with him.

The sun is already low in the sky and he has to head back in the direction the gazelles came from.

Chen Zhen spurs his horse.

He soon becomes a speck in the vastness.

10 **EXT. FOOT OF HILL/ TOP. END OF AFTERNOON**

10

Chen follows a trail that meanders at the foot of steep hills.

He sun is about to disappear behind the crest.

He steers his horse off the trail then spurs it up the slope.

11 **EXT. HILL TOP. END OF AFTERNOON**

11

He halts at the top of the hill, looking at the horizon.

In the last rays of sunshine, he can just make out the far distant village of yurts.

After a moment's hesitation, he decides to take a shortcut through a deep winding gully.

He pulls on the reins.

The horse snorts, refuses, tries nipping his master's leg.

Chen Zhen kicks his mount, forcing him down towards the gully.

The horse finally complies, breaking into a gallop.

12 **EXT. DARK VALLEY. SUNSET**

12

The horse slows. Shivers.

Nostrils wide he sniffs at the wind. His twitching ears monitor the silence.

(CONTINUED)

The sweat on his coat turns into a thin layer of frost.

Chen Zhen starts sweating as well.

The animal track gets narrower and narrower, finally disappearing entirely: a dead end.

Chen Zhen's heart skips a beat.

A pack of wolves block his way on the slope in front of him. Their fur catching the last red rays of the sunset.

At the center of the pack stands a larger male, his powerful chest distinctively white.

He barks and several wolves silently leave the pack and run along the rim of the gorge

The horse rears and whinnies.

Wolves are gathering behind them, blocking their escape.

Chen is petrified, undecided. The horse takes the initiative, walking cautiously towards the pack.

The alpha wolf narrows its eyes, focussed on the oncoming horse and rider.

The other wolves glance at the alpha wolf and wait for its signal.

Chen Zhen folds forwards at the waist, his hands sliding down the horse's flanks.

Suddenly, grabbing the stirrups, he straightens, banging them together and shouting:

CHEN ZHEN

Hurdal! Hurdal!

The clang of metal on metal reverberates in the silent air of the ravine.

The pack of wolves spring up.

Chen carries on banging the stirrups like a mad man, reining the horse to make it rear up.

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

Hurdal! Hurdal!

The alpha wolf calmly at him, impassive, then turns its back.

Following the alpha wolf, the pack retreats over the hilltop, disappearing into the darkness.

Chen raises his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

12 CONTINUED: (2)

12

The dying rays of the sun make strange patterns to the clouds.

Chen is shaking, his teeth chattering from the cold and the release of tension.

Sunset paints the low clouds pink, as though the sky is smiling on him.

CUT TO:

13 **EXT. VILLAGE OF YURTS (WINTER CAMP). NIGHT**

13

The small cluster of yurts sits under the starry sky.

Dogs bark as Chen Zhen approaches.

From the larger yurt at the center of the village, a figure walks out holding a flashlight.

GASMA

Chen Zhen, is that you?

CHEN ZHEN

Who's that?

She plays the torch on herself so he can see her.

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

Gasma.

He dismounts, leaning lightly against her as his legs turn to rubber.

GAZMA

You alright?

CHEN

I took a shortcut off the trail and got lost.

GASMA

Ha! Don't tell Papa Bilig.

She leads the horse away and hobbles it, shaking her head at his stupidity.

GASMA (CONT'D)

He warned you. There might have been wolves.

Then she follows him into the yurt.

The yurt feels comfortable and warm. Colorful tapestries adorn the felt walls, embroidered with mystical clouds, idealized mountains, intense blue sky, and wolves.

Bilig listens, eyes half-closed, as Chen Zhen reads aloud:

CHEN ZHEN (READING)
*... riding this vast, deserted land.
 He couldn't stand walls, barriers
 or borders. He'd rather die than
 be taken prisoner.*

Gasma, cleaning the dishes, interjects with a translation in Mongolian (The old man's Mandarin is patchy.)

GASMA
 (in Mongolian)
*He had never surrendered to
 anyone...*

Chen is reading from an old leather-bound book entitled "The Secret History of the Mongols"

CHEN ZHEN (READING)
*... his dream was to be free as the
 wind, free as the thunder, free as
 the wild wolves.*

Bayar, Gasma's six-year-old son is falling asleep by the stove.

When she bends to arrange a pillow for him, Chen Zhen glimpses the brown skin of her breast - then quickly goes back to his reading.

Gasma smiles to herself, flattered that this young educated man, ten years her junior, should be interested in her, a peasant woman.

CHEN ZHEN (READING) (CONT'D)
*The laws of nature were his only
 constraints, Great Tengger his one
 and only Master, now and forever...*

Chen Zhen stops reading.

BILIG
 And whom do you answer to, Chen
 Zhen ? To Bao Shungi? To Chairman
 Mao?

CHEN ZHEN
 I'm loyal to my parents, and all
 my superiors.

BILIG

I hope that includes me.

Chen Zhen looks from Gasma to Bilig and back.

Zhen wonders: " did she tell the old man something. Did he guess?

After a brief hesitation he says:

CHEN ZHEN

To be honest, there was one instruction I did disobey. I left the path on the way home. The horse and I were surrounded by a pack of wolves - as you warned might happen. I remembered that you told me wolves were scared of the sound of steel traps.

BILIG

(Grudging)

Well, you're not entirely stupid.

CHEN ZHEN

Have you ever thought of capturing one ... to study it I mean.

BILIG

Capturing a wolf?!

CHEN ZHEN

I just thought - they're such fascinating animals...

BILIG

And so you'd like to keep one?

CHEN ZHEN

Just a cub.... You don't think it's possible?

BILIG

(Explodes)

It's ridiculous! Worse - it's sacrilege

GASMA

(Trying to calm him)

Father....

BILIG

No! If he's going to live with us it's important he knows this!

(Forcefully, to Chen Zheng)

A wolf is a Totem. Understand? A guide, a God! You can't put a god in a cage!

15

EXT. SNOWY SLOPE/ GAZELLES' HILL. DAY

15

Hidden from the slope, Bilig and Chen lie on the snowfield.

In front of them are brown grasslands covered with a thin layer of early snow. Thousands of gazelles are browsing.

BILIG

(Whispers)

You want to study wolves?
What do you make of this?

The old man hands his "telescope" to Chen Zhen - a pair of binoculars sawed down the middle.

Through the half binocular, Chen Zhen can see, hiding behind tussocks of dry grass, dozens of wolves stalking the gazelles. Pressed to the ground, the wolves are immobile, almost invisible.

CHEN ZHEN

Why aren't they doing anything?

The Gazelles are not aware of any danger - scratching on the snowfield with their hoofs and quietly chewing the tender shoots they uncover.

BILIG

They are. They're waiting for the gazelles to be full..

Chen Zhen looks across at him, sceptical.

BILIG (CONT'D)

You know how Genghis Khan defeated the great armies of the south? He studied the wolves here. Wolves are smart and disciplined. They work together and obey their leader. Most important, they have enormous patience.

BCU on the wolves, salivating at the sight of their prey.

BILIG (CONT'D)

Life is about choosing the moment. Wolves and Mongols understand that.

CUT TO:

The end of day, sunset

Still the wolves stay motionless.

Chen Zhen and Bilig are equally immobile - their sheepskin jackets frozen stiff as cardboard, their eyelashes white with frost.

(CONTINUED)

Chen Zhen sees the sun setting over the horizon, the clouds changing hue in the sky above.

CHEN ZHEN

There was something else that I didn't tell you about yesterday.

BILIG

Oh?

CHEN ZHEN

After I escaped from the wolf pack - I saw something in the sky - like a smiling face.

BILIG

Of course. That's Tengger. Do you imagine you'd still be alive without Him?

CHEN ZHEN

Chairman Mao teaches that all religion is superstition and we must eject it.

BILIG

Then who will Chairman Mao turn to - when the wolves attack HIM?

Having eaten, the gazelles become drowsy.

One by one, they lie down on the grassland and start chewing the cud.

The old man looks through his telescope.

BILIG (CONT'D)

See that? Too fat to run now. That's what they were waiting for.

Through his telescope, Chen Zhen sees the alpha wolf with the white chest slowly standing up on all fours.

The other wolves of the pack do the same.

The Alpha wolf darts forward, leading two large wolves down the western flank, concealed by rising ground.

The rest of the pack charges the gazelles from the east, west, and north - flowing out of the tall grass like guided missiles.

Stuffed from their overeating, the gazelles lurch to their feet in panic.

Many merely stand still, quaking; others crumple to the ground in submission.

(CONTINUED)

The leading gazelle leads a breakaway group uphill, only to be met by another group of wolves lying in wait.

The gazelle veers West and the rest of the panicked herd follow as fast as their full bellies allow.

AERIEL SHOT, TRAVELLING: the wolf pack in full pursuit from the back, right, and left.

Running to the top of a hill, the lead gazelle is confronted by a vast snowfield covered with a shining crust of ice.

The lead gazelle pauses, but the herd's momentum carries it onwards - charging full-tilt towards the virgin expanse of snow.

Through his telescope, Chen Zhen sees the pack disappearing behind the crest of the hill.

BILIG (CONT'D)

Get your horse. Let's go.

He gets his own horse and turns it homewards

CHEN ZHEN

(of the Gazelles)

Aren't we following them?

BILIG

Too far. Too dangerous. Anyway, it will all be over when we get there.

Mystified, Chen Zhen reins in his horse, turns and follows Bilig back towards the yurts.

BILIG.

I'll show you tomorrow.

The immense stretches around them, merging with the darkening sky.

Chen Zhen and Bilig are tiny figures in the great immensity of nature.

BILIG

The worst tragedy for us Mongols is we never wrote our history. You speak Mandarin. Maybe one day you'll write about us.

CHEN ZHEN

I'm a reader, not a writer. There's a difference. I can't write a book.

(CONTINUED)

16 CONTINUED:

16

BILIG

How do you know? Have you ever
tried?

As the two horsemen blend into the darkness, the falling
night resounds of the howling of distant wolves.

17 **EXT. WINDING TRAIL TOWARDS SNOWY HILLS. DAY**

17

A convoy is winding through the grassland.

Men and women, old and young people from the "production
team" sit in several carts loaded with felt, ropes,
wooden spades and poles with hooks.

Surrounded by riders and hunting dogs, they are singing
Mongolian songs and sharing a flask of liquor.

Gasma is among them, sitting on the edge of a large cart.
Her husband BATU sits beside her, one arm draped casually
around her shoulder, the other holding little Bayar on
his lap.

BATU

See. Easy. You do it...

Batu handles the rein to the boy. Bayar proudly drives
the family cart.

CHEN ZHEN, riding alongside, sees Gasma with her partner.
It pains him slightly that they're so happy together

At the top of the mountain, scouts, riding ahead, shout
and beckon to the others.

18 **EXT. TOP OF GAZELLES' HILL ABOVE SNOWDRIFT. DAY.**

18

Chen Zhen, Yang Ke and Bilig meet at the top of the hill.
This is where we last saw the gazelles.

Bilig reins in his horse and takes out his telescope to
scan the vast snowfield below.

BILIG

They say the Khan's great general,
Mugali fought a battle here.

The center of the great snowdrift is relatively smooth,
but elsewhere it is full of dark holes. A dozen or so
gazelle carcasses dot the area, some still moving.

BILIG (CONT'D)

He drove the cavalry of the great
Jin Dynasty into this snowdrift.
They're probably still buried
there.

(CONTINUED)

18 CONTINUED:

18

Chen Zhen contemplates this. They spur their horses downhill.

19 **EXT. SNOWDRIFT "LAKE". DAY**

19

The horses' hooves break through a crust of snow as they move closer to the snow "lake".

The men, dismounting, break through the crust and sink into deep snow.

A half-eaten gazelle lies at an angle in the crushed snow beside Chen Zhen's foot.

BILIG

Clever eh? The wolves store their kills here to keep from starving the following year.

Eight or nine little gazelles stand trembling on the lake a hundred yards from Chen Zhen, surrounded by holes in the snow. They are too frightened to move, but the tiny spot of hard snow on which they stand may crumble at any moment.

BILIG (CONT'D)

There are places like this all over the prairie. Great spring food for the newborns.

CHEN ZHEN

Not so great for the gazelles

There are other young gazelles whose thin legs are buried in the snow, still alive but unable to move. A few have only their heads poking out, their bodies completely submerged.

BILIG

They're very stupid. They almost deserve it.

He calls to Zhen and Yang Ke who unload from their cart two large pieces of felt and carry the two rectangles to the edge of the snowy lake.

With Bilig supervising in dialect, Chen Zhen and Yang Ke spread one of the rolls of felt over the crusty snow.

It is like a gigantic snow-shoe. The three men embark. They drag up the second roll of felt and lay it out in front of the one they are standing on.

They do it over and over, as if piloting a pair of felt rafts, moving steadily towards a living gazelle.

(CONTINUED)

Not far away, Batu and Gasma carry their own large rolls of felt. Little Bayar walks behind his parents carrying a long pole with a hook on its end.

LATER

Out on the ice, Bayar takes the pole with the metal hook and reaches into one of the black ice holes.

His father helps him to pull out the frozen body of a gazelle.

People cheer. Bayar has "fished" his first frozen gazelle.

All around him now, lying on their stomachs on felt pieces and pushing with their hands and feet, men and women slide on the ice towards the dark holes.

PASSAGE OF TIME

Gazelles are fished out by the dozen, delivered to the edge and then piled in the carts.

Felt boats are chasing one another across the snowy lake raising clouds of powdery snow and sprays of ice. Dogs bark, people shout.

In the sky, Tengger smiles.

Chen Zhen and Yang Ke have ventured out on the ice together. From time to time, as the felt boat picks up speed, the crusty snow beneath them cracks and crunches.

Chen feels as if he were riding on a magic carpet, gliding across the snowy whiteness, floating like an immortal.

Their felt sledge is getting closer to one of the surviving gazelles.

There's a look of terror in her eyes.

She is standing on a hard patch no bigger than a small table, which could give way at any moment.

YANG KE (TO CHEN ZHEN)

This one's pregnant.

CHEN ZHEN

You think?

Lying on his belly, he moves the felt until it is up next to the gazelle's feet.

The crust is holding.

The animal leaps onto the felt. She falls to her knees, quaking all over.

(CONTINUED)

Chen steers to where the snow is harder.

When he reaches the edge of the snowfield, Bilig is waiting.

BILIG

Let her go. If she gets stuck again, it will be the will of Tengger.

Chen strokes the helpless, feeble creature.

CHEN ZHEN

I could keep her.

BILIG

You'd tie her up how? And how would you protect her from the dogs in camp?

Chen Zhen considers this.

CHEN ZHEN

It's a cruel world.

BILIG

(Re: the gazelle)
She's the cruel one. She eats grass. I'm serious. Imagine what it's like to be grass: shallow roots, nowhere to run. She has it at her mercy.

He turns and surveys the prairie, with his strange mix of philosophical wistfulness, resignation and affection:

BILIG (CONT'D)

Grass is "the big life". The rest of us are "little life".

CHEN ZHEN

You're trying to make me feel better about releasing her.

BILIG

No. I'm explaining the way things are. That's what you're here for isn't it? To be re-educated?

Chen Zheng opens his mouth to disagree...then abruptly closes it again.

He'd assumed he was posted here to educate the Mongols. Then again, maybe he was tricked and it's the other way around.

He helps the gazelle to her feet and nudges her out onto the snow.

(CONTINUED)

BILIG.

Besides, if the wolves don't eat her, they'll eat our sheep.

The gazelle takes a few wobbly steps, spots the tracks of other gazelles, and runs off toward the ridge without looking back. She quickly vanishes in the mountains.

Other snow-boats draw near to the shore, many are carrying live gazelles, but the cart is piled high with frozen carcasses.

BILIG

Let them all go. We have more than enough to feed ourselves.

One by one they stumble off over the mountain ridge and disappear.

BILIG (CONT'D)

These ones won't be so dumb now. The wolves won't be able to trick them next time. Everything we do affects everything.

Campfires blaze by the glittering shores of the "snow lake" The "production team" are butchering and barbecuing a gazelle, all of them in high spirits, swigging from flagons and singing.

Chen Zhen takes the flagon, eyes smarting from the wood-smoke, head reeling from the powerful alcohol.

He drinks deep and passes the flagon to Yang Ke.

BILIG

In a year your parents won't recognize you. I'll have turned you both into Mongol savages.

Chen Zhen snatches the flask back. Raising it high, he toasts Bilig:

CHEN ZHEN

(In Mongol dialect)

To the "Venerable Tribal Leader".

The old man takes three drinks from his flask and responds with the traditional greeting

BILIG

Minihu, minihu, minisaihu (My child, my child, my good child).

BATU

Wait til you marry a Mongol girl...
and father a Mongol brat, then
you'll be a true Mongol.

Chen Zhen's eyes drift to Gasma, laughing.

BILIG

Look out, though. Mongol women
make you work under the
bedclothes.

Riotous laughter. Shartseren chimes in

SHARTSEREN

Especially Gasma. I hear her
howling all hours of the night.
Isn't that right Batu: She's the
wolf and you're the poor sheep
with her teeth on your throat!

Everyone roars with laughter, including Batu. Chen Zhen is embarrassed on Gasma's behalf but Gasma just gets up and kicks Shartseren over on his fat drunken ass.

He falls on top of Chen Zhen, laughing.

SHARTSEREN (CONT'D)

If you fuck a Mongol girl, don't
choose one like Gasma. She's too
strong..

Gasma swoops down on Shartseren. He rolls away and she falls astride Chen Zhen.

SHARTSEREN (CONT'D)

Oh shit. She's got him. It's all
over for the kid now.

Chen Zhen blushes. But Gasma just brushes her wild dark hair out of her eyes and stands up, laughing in the firelight.

Yang Ke looks away. His eye catches an attractive Mongol girl sitting close to the campfire.

She removes her heavy coat, revealing the shiny skin of her shoulder.

Gasma takes Chen Zhen's wrist and ties a red thread around it.

GASMA

Here: for your protection.

A blizzard is coming.

(CONTINUED)

Tired but happy, the group are ready to go - the carts already loaded.

Shartseren stands on the shore of the snow lake, swaying slightly.

BATU

(Shouts)

Shartseren, Let's go!

SHARTSEREN

Let's you and me stay. We can take more gazelles tomorrow.

Billig walks over, annoyed by the younger man's stubbornness

BILIG.

Tengger is telling us to leave. What's left here belongs to the wolves.

Shartseren sticks a pole with a flag into the snow.

SHARTSEREN

This is our place.

Billig removes it.

BILIG.

It's no-one's.

They get in the carts and leave.

HIGH SHOT: On the immense grassland we see a lonely small town of newly-built brick houses and muddy roads.

Three carts overloaded with frozen gazelle meat stand in front of the state-owned shop.

Chen and Yang Ke are helping Batu and Shartseren to unload.

A couple of settlers lend a hand. One of them, with a long bony face tries to strike up a conversation.

SETTLER

You'd never see this much meat in the South.... Have you heard of the famine there?

Batu shakes his head, avoiding eye contact.

SETTLER (CONT'D)

So where's this "big snow lake" of yours.

22 CONTINUED:

22

BATU

There's no such place

23 **INT. STATE-OWNED SHOP. NIGHT.**

23

The store is a cornucopia of batteries, soap, pots, ropes and other daily necessities.

MANAGER

...26 coupons for a torch, 84 coupons for french perfume....

Shartseren's eye falls on a Red Lantern transistor radio on a high shelf.

SHARTSEREN

How much for the radio?

MANAGER

Forty gazelles. You only delivered 28.

SHARTSEREN

28 skins. You haven't weighed the meat yet

MANAGER

The meat will earn you 134 coupons. You can afford a radio next year.

Shartseren returns to the table at the corner and empties his glass of wine.

His blurry eyes stare covetously at the transistor radio on the shelf.

The Bony Settler sits beside him and fills his glass.

SETTLER

To the Grassland!

He leans in to Shartseren and whispers something. One eye on the radio.

Shasteren, gets up angrily

SHARSTEREN

We told you. It is forbidden to say..

`SETTLER

The other guy said there was no such place.

Feeling tricked. Shasteren leaves the store, angry with himself.

27 CONTINUED: 27

Shasteren casts a guilty look over his shoulder, and rides on.

28 **EXT. SNOWDRIFT. MOONLIGHT.** 28

Figures are moving on the snow-covered lake

With shovels, iron bars and pickaxes, Townspeople clear the snow and break the ice below.

Men fish out the frozen gazelle carcasses - every last one.

They stack them up on handcarts, wheelbarrows, stretchers and tractors.

At the top of the hill, phosphorescent eyes are glowing in the darkness - Wolves watching their food being looted.

Enraged, the alpha wolf howls at the sky.

The whole pack echoes his call, resonating through the dark valley and the grassland.

29 **EXT. GRASSLAND VASTNESS. EARLY MORNING SUN.** 29

A troop of over one hundred horses trot forwards under the early morning sun.

Impeccably groomed, the magnificent animals are flanked by a few mounted soldiers.

In front of the column two riders lead the way.

One is a CAVALRY OFFICER. The other is local supervisor BAO SHUNGI

30 **EXT. VILLAGE OF YURTS (WINTER CAMP). MORNING** 30

Chen Zhen and Yang Ke are massing their sheep and goats in front of their yurt, about to leave for the grazing land.

They see the troop of horses coming at them.

Boa Shungi casts an eye over the two former students - shaggy, dirty and bearded now, like locals in their Mongolian outfits.

There's note of derision in his greeting.

BAO SHUNGI

You two look like you've settled right in.

(CONTINUED)

CHEN ZHEN

We love it here.

BAO SHUNGHI

Don't get too comfortable.

The brigade gather in front of Bilig's yurt.

The Mongols look in awe at the magnificent horses.

The cavalry officer makes a speech in Mandarin which Bao Shungi translates into Mongol:

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

The Captain says it's an immense honor to look after those horses. It shows how much the upper cadres put their trust in you.

Bilig is thinking it looks like an awful lot of work.

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

Those animals are the cream of the P.L.A stables - a treasure for the nation. They protect our frontiers with their lives. Guard them with your own.

(To Bilig)

You! - Brigade Leader - who will you recommend to take care of these horses?

BILIG

Batu is the best herder in our team.

Gasma looks proud for her husband.

Shartseren looks a bit downcast.

Bilig, aware of this, adds quickly:

BILIG (CONT'D)

...and Shartseren as second-in-command.

The visitors clink their glasses to seal the deal.

Bao Shungghi produces a piece of paper from inside his tunic.

BAO SHUNGHI

Oh, and I've received this directive to cleanse the wolf caves of their puppies.... as usual

(CONTINUED)

31 CONTINUED:

31

BILIG is reluctant to take it. Bao Shungi places it on the table.

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

You do it every spring don't you?

BILIG

The wolves' meat-storage has been looted by strangers. They're already hungry.

BAO SHUNGHI

Why is that my problem?

BILIG

Killing the pups will make them vengeful.

Bao stands up, shaking his head at this nonsense.

BAO SHUNGHI

Killing the pups will reduce their numbers. That's simple arithmetic.

Pushing the official paper back across the table

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

....and this an order.

32 **EXT. ROCKY SLOPES. DAY**

32

There is a lot of activity on the hills.

On every slope the Members of the Brigade are busy with picks and spades.

They dig open wolves' lairs.

A clamor rises on one of the rocky slopes: Gasma and her team just managed to find a litter of two new born baby wolves.

Happily, she tosses the two little creatures as high up in the air, wishing them a good journey to eternal life.

GASMA

May your souls fly To Tengger!

33 **EXT. ROCKY HILLTOPS. DAY**

33

From the hilltops, the wolves observe what the men are doing.

34

EXT. TUMULUS (GREAT WALL RUINS). DAY

34

Like an ancient tumulus several feet high, a buried rampart runs across the grassland all the way to the horizon.

CHEN ZHEN

I love coming here....Thousands of years of history right under our feet. It's incredible, isn't it?

YANG KE

I suppose... if you're interested in that kind of thing.

Around them, the greedy sheep of their flock are chewing the new green shoots.

New-born lambs are avidly sucking under their mother's bellies.

Yill the sheep-dog rests at the foot of the mound - heavily pregnant.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

It beats me why we needed the Great Wall in the first place: Millions of Han Chinese against a handful of Mongols?

CHEN ZHEN

Hardly a handful. They defeated the round-eyes all the way to Europe, while we stayed home and did the gardening. We ate rice. They ate meat. Carnivores against herbivores

Yill stands up and starts barking. They turn and see a fleeing dark shape - a female wolf holding a lamb in its mouth!

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

Hey!

The young men run to their horses

35

EXT. UNDULATING HILLS / BLACK ROCK HILL. DAY

35

Holding a lamb in its mouth, the Female Wolf with black legs scrambles up a slope. She sees Chen and Yang Ke on their horses galloping behind her.

They're gaining.

The Female Wolf drops the lamb and runs off down another valley, overlooked by the hill with the Black Rock.

(CONTINUED)

Zhen dismounts and picks up the shivering lamp, then he and Yang Ke resume the chase.

With her big belly, Yill lags far behind.

Ahead of the horses the female wolf disappears down a hole in the middle of a meadow.

The young men dismount. Yill enters the mouth of the hole. The wolf turns, snarling and shows her fangs.

CHEN ZHEN

She's protecting her cubs.

With a pole he tries to drive the wolf back into her lair.

YANG KE

Be careful.

He runs to his horse, comes back with his lasso-pole with which to catch the wolf's neck.

The wolf disappears deep inside the tunnel.

THE SAME, LATER:

Recovering on the grass, Yill watches the two students gather dry twigs and grass, which they pile at the entrance of the lair.

Yang Ke lights up the twigs and pushes the bonfire deep into the tunnel. They block the opening with their coats and wait.

Nothing happens.

Then, twenty meters away a plume of smoke rises above a bush.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

There's another exit!

The two guys rush over to the second entrance.

They're bending over to look inside - Chen Zhen in front, Yan Ke to one side - when, Like a missile, the female wolf shoots out the hole.

Chen Zhen yells in fear and falls over as the wolf bolts between the terrified student's legs and disappears into the shrub.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

(Laughing)

Why didn't you catch it?

She ran right between your legs!

Chen Zhen picks himself up, a bit shaken.

(CONTINUED)

YANG KE (CONT'D)

You should've seen the look on
your face - you looked like you
were going to shit yourself.

Chen aims a good-natured kick at him as they return to
the horses.

CHEN ZHEN

Next time YOU stand in front of
the damned hole!!

GASMA

Good job, Yill. They are very
beautiful!

Gasma strokes Yill's head. Lying near the stove, Yill is
delivering her puppies.

The students' yurt is littered with clothes, books and
boots.

Another puppy comes forth. Yang Ke picks up the hairy
ball and kisses it.

YANG KE (PROUDLY)

A third one...

He checks her belly

YANG KE (CONT'D)

...and my first baby girl!

He puts the little blind puppy into a box padded with
sheep fleece.

Lonely Chen watches Yang Ke cuddling his cute new born
baby dogs.

Gasma notices Chen's nostalgic expression.

GASMA

You're friend's jealous.

CHEN ZHEN

I'm thinking: that wolf we missed
must have had pups she was
protecting.

GASMA

Not in the meadow. That lair's
been abandoned a long time. She'll
have them hidden somewhere else.

37 **EXT. UNDER BLACK ROCK HILLTOP. DAWN**

37

The starry sky gradually dims.

Hiding behind scrub, Chen Zhen aims his telescope at the Black Rock under which we previously saw the Female Wolf with black legs getting into her lair.

Yang Ke lies beside him, nervously holding his breath.

All of a sudden, through his telescope, Chen sees the Female Wolf emerging. She looks around on alert, then sprints into the depths of the valley.

CHEN ZHEN

Lets go!

38 **EXT. CAVE MOUTH UNDER BLACK ROCK HILLTOP. EARLY MORNING** 38

In front of the lair, Chen Zhen stoops, closely observing the ground where some fresh paw prints, can be seen, plus bone shards and faeces.

CHEN ZHEN

See. Food scraps. This is where the cubs will be! I'm going in.

He takes off the thick leather robe he wears, removes a long Mongolian-style leather belt wrapped around his waist.

YANG KE

What! Are you out of your mind?! Her mate is probably still home

Chen Zhen ties one end of the leather belt to his ankles, handing the other end to Yang Ke.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

At least let's come back with the dogs.

CHEN ZHEN

No. Do it now. While she's hunting. Let's go!

39 **INT. INSIDE CAVE TUNNEL. DAY**

39

Propped up on his forearms, with a flashlight held in one hand and an iron bar in the other, Chen Zhen crawls forward.

His flashlight illuminates a tunnel dug by claws, no wider than a man, getting narrower as it twists towards the depths of the wolf's lair..

44 CONTINUED:

44

Standing in the stirrups, he spots Yang Ke at the mouth of the cave.

45 **EXT. CAVE MOUTH UNDER BLACK ROCK HILL. DAY**

45

CHEN ZHEN
(Muffled, indistinct)
OK, pull now! Pull!!

Yang Ke puts his own head into the cave and grabs the belt.

Pulling hard he finally drags Chen out of the cave.

Chen stands up, now covered in soil, his clothes in tatters, with an excited expression on his dirty face.

He's hugging his hat to his chest as he emerges.

ZHEN KE
You're a madman.

CHEN ZHEN
Look

INSIDE THE HAT we see six wiggling furry balls.

LAMJAV
Great job!

The two young men turn abruptly.

LAMJAV (CONT'D)
You city guys are not as useless
as people say! I only caught two
in the last three days.
(A beat)
You want to sell them to me?

CHEN ZHEN
I promised them to Bilig. He'll
need them for our quotas.

LAMJAV
I'll pay you twice what you'd get
in the state-run shops.
(A beat)
Do you know how to kill them?

CHEN ZHEN
Yes we're fine.

YANG KE
No. How?

Before Chen Zhen can stop him, Lamjav takes two baby wolves from the hat.

Holding them by their little tail, he spins them like a sling and throw the pair skyward.

(CONTINUED)

LAMJAV (CONT'D)

May your soul fly to Tengger!

The two innocent creatures plummet earthwards and smash on the rocks nearby.

As Chen Zhen and Yang Ke look, shocked, at the lifeless cubs, Lamjav, take two more from the hat

CHEN ZHEN

No!

LAMJAV

It's better. Tengger will accept them for eternal life.

Two more cubs sail high in the air and fall on the rocks near the tunnel entrance.

Chen Zhen gives the hat to Yang Ke and runs to the victims. They're stone dead.

Looking back he's shocked to see Yang Ke giving the last two wriggling furballs to Lamjav.

CHEN ZHEN

No!

LAMJAV

(Simultaneously)

Watch your head!

He sends them high up to their fate.

LAMJAV (CONT'D)

Careful how you skin them. They'll make a nice scarf if you don't tear the pelts. You're sure you don't want to take my offer?

Chen Zhen shakes his head and, picks up the dead cubs. Wiping away tears he crams them into his satchel.

Straightening he sees Lamjav riding away, disappearing behind the crest of a hill.

CHEN ZHEN

Why didn't you stop him?

YANG KE

Then we'd have had to kill them ourselves.

He moves to the horses. Chen Zhen looks at his wrist.

CHEN ZHEN

I have to go back, I lost something in the cave...

(CONTINUED)

45 CONTINUED: (2)

45

Yang Ke stares at him.

YANG KE

What ?

CHEN ZHEN

I have to go back in.

He takes off his belt.

YANG KE

Zhen, no. I'm not doing this again. You can see the roof's unstable. The mother will be back any minute and...

CHEN ZHEN

(Cuts in,
impatiently)

I don't need you. I'll do it myself.

YANG KE

Zhen!

Ignoring him, Chen Zhen goes back into the cave again

46 **INT. CAVE TUNNEL / WOLF DEN. DAY**

46

Chen Zhen is back inside the tunnel.

He gets to the threshold of the larger chamber where he picked the babies.

With his flashlight he spots what he came back for. It is the little piece of red wool that Gasma gave him as a token after their friendly fight in the snow.

Extending his arm to retrieve it, his arm brushes against fur.

47 **EXT. CAVE MOUTH UNDER BLACK ROCK HILL. DAY**

47

Yang Ke is with the horses when Chen Zhen emerges from the cave.

CHEN ZHEN

Look at what I found!

Inside his palm is a little brown furry ball: another adorable little wolf, trembling with fear.

48 **INT. CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. NIGHT**

48

Inside their yurt, Yang Ke strokes the head of his beloved dog. .

(CONTINUED)

YANG KE

Brave Yill... Good Yill...

Yill licks his hand. Underneath the dog, the recently born puppies are sucking on her nipples.

Avoiding the female dog's eyes, Chen Zhen fishes out something in his pocket: the little wolf.

CHEN ZHEN

Go on. Keep stroking her...

YANG KE

This isn't going to work

Yang Ke lays his hand over the dog's eyes to block her sight.

Chen Zhen swiftly moves one of the puppies aside. He squeezes the newly vacated nipple. He rubs the baby wolf's nose with the milk that squirts out.

Yill senses that something is amiss, and begins to squirm.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

(Soothing)

Good girl... Good girl...

Chen Zhen places the cub in front of the vacant nipple.

Blindly following the spray of milk, the wolf cub instantly swallows the nipple, starting to suck it hungrily.

Sensing other nipples nearby, it pushes aside the other puppies, biting them to drive them away.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

Look at this little bandit -
breaking into a peaceful house!

CHEN ZHEN

He's a pure spirit.

YANG KE

He's a menace!

The dog puppies, pushed aside, start to whimper. Yill struggles to rise.

CHEN ZHEN

Keep her head down! If she finds
out what's going on she'll bite
the wolf puppy to death!

YANG KE

There. Good dog. Good dog.

(CONTINUED)

Finally, amazingly, she settles.

The two students watch the wolf cub greedily hanging on the nipple, grunting satisfactorily.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

You really think we're doing the right thing here - nurturing a wolf in the middle of a shepherd's village?

CHEN ZHEN

(Dead pan)

Maybe you should have thought of that before we brought it here.

YANG KE

(Outraged)

Me? Oh, sure! As though this whole mess was all MY idea!

CHEN ZHEN

I'm only saying, if you hadn't been so squeamish about killing it.

YANG KE

You're the one who was in tears.

Chen Zhen shrugs and smiles.

CHEN ZHEN

OK, I'm sentimental. It's not such a crime.

YANG KE

That depends where you're living.

He takes the wolf puppy by its neck and tries to pull it off the nipple.

The little wolf refuses to let go. The female dog struggles, her nipple now stretched like a limp rubber band.

Chen Zhen gently inserts his two fingers beneath the cheeks of the greedy little wolf and eases him off the nipple.

He lifts the little bandit close to his face, inhaling the smell of milk, of life.

CHEN ZHEN

(To the wolf cub)

Little wolfie. What are we going to do with you?

ZHEN KE

Kill it and be done.

49 **EXT. CAVE MOUTH UNDER BLACK ROCK. NIGHT** 49

At the foot of the hill topped with the Black Rock, the Female Wolf is sitting in front of the opening of her empty cave.

She raises her head towards the cloudy sky and wails in despair.

Her sad long howls echo through the dark valley.

50 **EXT. BEHIND CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. DUSK** 50

A few feet away behind his yurt, Chen Zhen is digging a hole in the ground.

For a moment we think he's digging a grave ...then he pads the bottom with sheepskin scraps.

He takes the baby wolf out of his pocket, strokes him and gently lays him down in the hole.

CHEN ZHEN
Good night, "public enemy"!

He closes the hole with a thick wood board.

About to put a heavy stone on top, he has second thoughts and goes back inside the yurt.

He returns with something in his hand: the little female puppy.

He lays her down against the Baby Wolf, then watches the two milk-stained animals snuggle up against each other.

Chen is moved by the sight. He closes the hole with the plank and the stone, then stands there awhile gazing at the dark surrounding hills.

He hears the distant, plaintive howl of the she-wolf.

MALE VOICE
(Indistinct/ crackly)
...strong cold winds from Siberia...
cloudy... possible heavy snowfalls
in the border area...

Carried over from...

51 **INT/EXT. ARMY HORSE MEADOW/HERDSMEN'S TENT. DAY** 51

Shartseren's newly acquired "Red Lantern" radio set.

As he fiddles with the dial, trying to get a better signal, a shout comes from outside.

(CONTINUED)

51 CONTINUED:

51

BILIG.

Shartseren. Stop playing with that stupid thing! We need you!!

52 **EXT. SPRING CAMP/PAPA BILIG'S FAMILY YURT. DAY.**

52

Outside, strong gusts of wind nearly blow away the flimsy portable yurts.

BILIG

(Shouts)

The white-haired blizzard is coming!

(To Batu)

Get your arse over to the Army-Horse meadow! Make sure nothing happens to them!

53 **INT. FAMILY YURT. DAY.**

53

Batu puts on his leather robe, searches through a drawer for his flashlight, grabs his rod.

Gasma gives him two leather robes for the ostlers on duty at the meadow.

GASMA

Be careful.

Batu hugs her, kisses his son...

54 **EXT. FAMILY YURT (WINTER CAMP). DAY.**

54

... slings his rifles over his shoulder, then jumps onto his horse.

From the door of the yurt, Gasma watches as he gallops off in the northern direction where the horses are located.

55 **EXT. GRASSLAND/YURTS/CATTLE PENS. DAY/DUSK**

55

Terrific gusts of wind sweep over the grasslands which sway to and fro in the gale like waves upon the sea.

Dark clouds race across sky as Batu rides full pelt into the storm.

Ahead of Batu: a gigantic white wall is fast approaching, howling like a wild thing.

In an instant, the light dims, with snow flying wildly.

Batu disappears into the blizzard

(CONTINUED)

55 CONTINUED:

55

Behind him Yang Ke's flock of sheep is soon dispersed and scattered.

A cattle pen falls apart in the gale. The cattle break free.

A yurt is blown over, spinning around upside down then breaking apart.

The felt top of a wagon is tossed high into the sky.

People are shouting, horses neighing, dogs barking, sheep bleating, but all this din is soon drowned out by one overwhelming single sound: the howl of the "white-haired monster".

56 **EXT. PASS BETWEEN HILLS. SNOW FALL. DAY/DUSK**

56

Batu rides on through the blizzard, blinded by driving snow.

The hard icy flakes leave countless white traces in their wake, looking as if the whole sky is filled with flying white hair, on occasions so dense that one cannot tell the head of a horse from its tail.

57 **EXT. CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. DAY/DUSK**

57

With pegs and ropes, Chen reinforces his yurt against the wind.

In the dim light, he opens the lid of the little wolf's hole.

Head down against the gale he picks up the little animal and brings him inside.

58 **EXT. MOUNTAIN TOP OVER GRASSLANDS. WHITE-HAIRED BLIZZARD. DUSK**

58

Amid the ominous howling of the "white-haired monster", the alpha wolf leads his pack, the Female Wolf with the black legs is at his side.

They wolves move like wind.

The pack reaches a mountain top overlooking a vast meadow.

Batu has dismounted and is leading his horse now, trudging forward into the blizzard.

59 **EXT. ROCKY SLOPE OVER ARMY HORSE MEADOW. SNOWING. DUSK.** 59

Sneaking among the boulders in the lee of the blizzard, the alpha wolf and his pack arrive at a spot overlooking the Army-Horse Meadow.

Two wolves leave the pack and head uphill over the crest.

The alpha wolf leads the rest of his pack downhill.

60 **INT. CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. NIGHT.** 60

Chen Zhen puts more dung in the stove.

The young wolf, a bit larger than when he was captured, looks up at him blowing on the ambers.

The gale roars outside and shakes the felt walls.

Chen Zhen lies next to the little wolf. It climbs on his shoulder, bites his ear lobes, rummages his hair, licks his face.

Chen's laughter is cut short by a sound outside. He pushes the wolf away and listens - a distant call for help. It sounds like a woman.

Chen springs to his feet, pulls on his sheepskin coat and his boots

He puts his baby wolf inside a wooden chest, closes the lid, padlocks it and runs outside.

61 **EXT. PASTURELAND IN THE HILLS. SNOWFALL. NIGHT.** 61

Snowflakes swirl in the night sky.

Yang Ke is sleeping among the compact flock of sheep for warmth.

The panicked cries wafting from the campsite wake him up.

He stands up and sees flashlights flickering amongst the yurts down below.

YANG KE

(Urgently)

Yill! Here Girl!

He turns on his flashlight, mounts his horse, and starts to round up the flock.

62 **EXT. OUTSIDE PAPA BILIG'S YURT / GASMA'S SHEEP PEN.** 62
SNOWSTORM. NIGHT.

Chen Zhen gallops full tilt through the flying snowflakes.

He sees Gasma, cursing furiously at something in her sheep pen.

Yelling like mad, she is fighting a wolf - trying to drag it BY ITS TAIL away from the flock of frightened sheep!

The enraged beast tries to turn around to bite her. The close-packed sheep stop the wolf from turning. The young woman refuses to let go.

Behind her, the two shepherd dogs, barking madly are also stuck in the flock.

Chen Zhen tries to climb over the sheep to get close to her

GASMA

(Yells)

Stay back! The wolf will bite you!
 Let the dogs through!!

Chen Zhen starts trying to manhandle sheep out of the dogs' path, as....

63 **EXT. SLOPE / ARMY HORSE MEADOW. "WHITE-HAIR" BLIZZARD.** 63
NIGHT.

Batu and Shartseren charge down the slope on horseback, into the very teeth of the blizzard.

Blinded by the driving snow, they can barely see a foot in front of them.

Even the horses are spooked by the punishing winds. Seeming to have smelled something, they shake their heads wildly to and fro.

Batu reins in his horse.

BATU

Shartseren. SHARTSEREN!!

No reply. He wipes the sweat off his forehead, moves the lasso-pole to the other hand, takes out the big flashlight, and clicks it on.

Countless flying "white hairs" fill the beam of light. Then a ghostly snow-covered figure appears on horseback.

BATU (CONT'D)

Shartseren?!

(CONTINUED)

Shartseren directs his flashlight beam towards Batu. The two men draw a circle in mid-air with their flashlights, locating a common spot. Then, struggling to control their panicked horses they come alongside each other.

Batu seizes Shartseren, lifts the earflaps of his hat, and yells into his ears:

BATU (CONT'D)

Stay here, and intercept the horses! Drive them Eastward, away from the lake below Jiazi Mountain!!

Shartseren yells back, fighting to control his horse.

SHARTSEREN

My horse is spooked. There must be wolves around. Where are the others?

They then hold their flashlights high and shine them in the northern direction, shaking the light beams to and fro, signaling their presence to the two missing herders.

BATU

The day-shift don't have flashlights. They probably don't even have their coats with them.

SHARTSEREN

They'll die in this!

Suddenly, a grey mare emerges into the two light beams.

It stops right beside Batu, panicked, panting hard.

Batu grabs the halter. Underneath its neck a bite wound oozes blood, some of it frozen on the horses flanks.

Frightened by the blood, Shartseren's horse rears up in panic. Then he jerks its neck and gallops off like mad.

BATU

Shartseren!!

Fighting his own mount, Batu has no choice but to abandon the grey mare and chase after Shartseren.

Her clothes torn, her strength almost gone, Gasma clings to the wolf's tail.

Chen keeps fighting towards her through the sheep.

65 **WITH THE ARMY HORSES, BLIZZARD. NIGHT**

65

Just as Batu finally gets hold of the reins of Shartseren's horse, the full herd of the Army Horses emerges from the curtain of snow, their terrified eyes reflected in the leaping torch-beams.

They churn and flee in panic, hooves throwing up billows of snow, trying to escape something down at ground level.

Batu aims his torch beneath the horses. There's something down there.

Hugging the neck of his horse Shartseren leans forward, nearly falling into the snapping jaws of an enraged wolf!!

66 **EXT. GASMA'S SHEEP PEN. SNOWSTORM. NIGHT.**

66

Jumping out of the darkness, another wolf springs at Gasma.

Chen Zhen jumps up and runs over the backs of the sheep, onto the attacking wolf.

He grabs the wolf hind legs and throws it to the ground. The wolf twists back on him jaws snapping inches from his arm, tearing his coat.

GASMA

(Yells)

Stay on your feet. Keep behind it!! Behind it!!

The wolf keeps jerking and twisting. Chen Zhen loses his footing and goes down - falling among the terrified sheep's hooves

Gasma snaps the wolf's tail. It yelps in agony. Gasma yells to her dogs:

GASMA (CONT'D)

Kashima! Barr! Yamil!

The flock of sheep disperses. The dogs charge over to her

Chen Zhen is on the ground, the wolf bearing down at him, trying to reach his throat with its slavering jaws

Chen Zhen flails with his hands, closes his eyes, strength failing...

Blood drenches his face.

He opens his eyes, and sees the dog Yamil with his fangs sunk deep into the attacking wolf's throat.

67

EXT. SOMEWHERE IN THE HILLS. NIGHT. SNOWING.

67

Dozens of wolves - a hundred maybe - are in among the horses chasing and biting.

Covered in frost the wolves are ghostly white, but their eyes burn with blood-lust.

Batu rides over, blocks Shartseren's horse with his own.

BATU

(Shouts)

We stay and fight. Don't run. I'll shoot you if you dare to run away!

SHARTSEREN

Don't tell me! Tell it to my damned horse!

BATU

We need to bunch up the herd!

Shasteren whips his horse with the reins, and finally succeeds in controlling it.

Then he turns on his flashlight, twirls his lasso-pole around his wrist and charges toward the herd of panicked horses.

The two men use the light of their flashlights to guide and direct the herd, whipping those that stray too far.

The horses gradually come to their senses, falling into close formation shoulder-to-shoulder behind the lead stallion.

Hundreds of hooves start to stamp and kick, driving the wolves from under them.

Several wolves don't move fast enough, and are killed and crippled by the pummelling hooves

68

EXT. GASMA'S SHEEP PEN. SNOWFALL. NIGHT.

68

In the sheep pen, the crisis is over. Gasma removes her scarf and wipes the blood from Chen Zhen's face with it.

GASMA

I told you to leave it to the dogs. Look at you!

The wolf has left many scratches on his cheeks and neck.

GASMA (CONT'D)

Wolf teeth are poisonous. You're lucky these are not too deep!

(CONTINUED)

68 CONTINUED:

68

She checks his arms - spits into the deeper wounds and rubs in the saliva.

Bilig suddenly emerges from the night.

BILIG

The army-horses stampeded. We've lost Batu and Shartseren. The wolves are everywhere!

69 **EXT. VILLAGE OF YURTS (WINTER CAMP). SNOWSTORM. NIGHT.**

69

Bilig is assigning tasks, turning the village into a fortress.

BILIG

Check if they took off over the hill. You two follow the western path. Stay together! Quickly!

The Production Team head in all directions, carrying torches, clubs and rifles.

Yang Ke returns from the pasture land along with his flock of sheep.

BILIG(CONT'D)

Someone get those sheep in the pen.
Yang Ke, watch over the yurts!
Chen Zhen, saddle up the horses!

70 **EXT. STEPPE. BLIZZARD. NIGHT.**

70

Somewhere out on the Steppe, the massed horses continue to charge through the blizzard, with the wolves following and flanking.

Batu races to the front of the herd, and whips the alpha horse hard, forcing it to move eastward.

BATU

(Shouts to Shasteren)
The lake is that way, they're trying to drive the horses there!

The herd tries to wheel southeast, exposing its flank to the pack of wolves with the howling wind at their backs.

The alpha wolf throws himself in the air and leaps onto the back of an army horse.

The wolf bites hard. The horse lets out an agonized whinny.

The female wolf with the black legs springs up toward another army horse, biting into its belly.

(CONTINUED)

70 CONTINUED:

70

The rest of the pack hurl themselves into the fray

The alpha wolf tears a chunk of meat from the back of another horse. Falling, he drops the meat, rolls and springs again.

Maddened by the smell of blood, the other wolves join the killing spree.

The horses veer back on their original course

Batu bellows to Shartseren:

BATU (CONT'D)

They keep heading back to the lake! We need to head them off we'll lose the lot!!

71 **EXT. VALLEY. "WHITE HAIR BLIZZARD". NIGHT.**

71

Amid the blinding snowflakes Bilig and Chen Zhen grope their way forward.

Near a rocky bend they spot something lying motionless. Bilig dismounts to investigate.

BILIG

(Shouts)

It's a wolf! Trampled by horses!

He remounts his horse.

BILIG (CONT'D)

They're after the army horses. The attack on the sheep pen was a diversion.

CHEN ZHEN

Wolves aren't as smart as that
(Off Bilig's
reaction)
.... are they?

Bilig's grim expression says it all - of course they are.

Suddenly, they hear horses neighing in the distance, and gallop towards the sound.

72 **EXT. SLOPE ABOVE THE LAKE. DECLINING SNOWSTORM. NIGHT.**

72

The grasslands are a massive slaughterhouse of dead and dying horses. Their blood stains even the flying snowflakes.

Batu and his wounded, bleeding horse are encircled by a pack of wolves.

(CONTINUED)

Its nostrils flaring with fear, Batu's valiant horse kicks and bites at its attackers.

Wolves lunge and bite.

The rest of the herd has been dispersed by the wolf pack - frantically fleeing and galloping downwind toward the lake.

BATU

No! NO! Not the marshes!!

Yelling, encircled, Batu is powerless to stop them.

He pulls out his rifle and fires at the sky.

Shartseren's horse bolts, disappearing with his rider into the night.

Batu's own horse rears up, throwing him from the saddle.

His head hits a rock and he lies immobile. The horse bolts. The wolves descend on Batu en masse.

The rest of the herd rush on into the treacherous waters of the swamp.

With their own momentum, plus the downhill slope and the wind at their backs, they push deep into the muddy swamp.

The thin layer of ice breaks under their hooves and they sink up to their bellies. More and more horses keep piling in behind.

Bilig and Chen follow the gruesome trail, littered with wounded wolves and dead horses.

Chen spots a human shape lying in a pool of reddened snow.

CHEN ZHEN

Over here!!

He dismounts and rushes to the body, brushing the snow and ice from its face.

It's Batu.

Bilig tumbles from his horse. Cradling his dead son in his arms, he raises his head to the rushing sky and howls a grief-stricken lament.

75

EXT. FROZEN LAKE. DAY.

75

In the morning light we behold a gruesome tableau: a hundred petrified horses welded to the frozen surface of the lake, their black eyes bulging, necks twisted, mouths open at the horror of their last moment.

BAO SHUNGHI

This is an outrage.

The brigade gathered behind him take in the scene, numb with shock and loss.

Bao turns to Bilig.

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

Your Production Team is to blame.
I charge you with gross negligence
and disrespect for the Motherland.

Bilig blinks, uncomprehending.

At his side, Gasma keens softly over the body of her dead husband.

Chen gives her his cloak. Bao continues to rage

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

Each of you will take
responsibility for failing to
protect State property... you
especially!!

He's addressing Shartseren, who sways on his feet as if concussed, his head wrapped in bloodied bandages.

BAO SHUNGHI

You will be charged for having
deserted your post. Do you have
anything to say for your defense?

SHARTSEREN

I don't remember what happened. I
think the horse bolted.

BAO

You think? ...YOU THINK!!
Cowards and incompetents - the lot
of you!

Gasma raises her tear-streaked eyes and glares at him, like a she-wolf coiled to spring.

Chen Zhen steps in front of her.

CHEN ZHEN

Comrade Bao, I must beg to differ.
(Of Batu)
This man died a hero.

(CONTINUED)

BAO SHUNGUI

A hero is someone who succeeds,
not someone who failed !

CHEN ZHEN

(Softly)

We all fail sometimes, Comrade.

He holds the other man's gaze, remembering the story of Bao Shungui's "promotion".

A muscle twitches near Bao's eye.

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

The true culprits are those who
stole the frozen gazelles and
caused the wolves to starve.

GASMA

(Gets up angrily)

And those who ordered their lairs
be destroyed, even when.....

BAO SHUNGUI

(Backs off, furious)

That's enough! The authorities
will decide who's to blame. I hope
for your sakes they declare it an
accident and not sabotage.

He turns and heads off to his horse. Gasma looks set to follow him and strike him but Bilig grabs her sleeve, restraining her.

BILIG

Look after the boy. We'll load
Batu's body on the wagon.

The funeral procession winds along a narrow mountain trail.

Batu's older male relatives are walking behind the horse-wagon which is driven by Bilig.

Batu's body is bumping on the back of the wagon.

They round a corner and, Bilig whips the horse to a trot.

The wagon starts to accelerate, racing ahead along the stony trail.

It jolts, tossing the dead body off onto the ground.

Bilig stops the wagon, dismounts. Chen Zhen hurries forward to help him lift it.

(CONTINUED)

CHEN ZHEN

I'll help you.

BILIG.

Leave him. He chose to get off here.

He kneels down, unwraps the felt carpet shrouding Batu, and lays the body on its back.

The silent funeral procession walks down the slope towards them.

CHEN ZHEN

It's too rocky to bury him here. Why not lower down.

BILIG

We owe him to the wolves - repayment for any lives we have taken. The wolves will carry his soul to Tengger.

INT. CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. DAY

Chen Zhen is removing meat from a lamb rib, cutting the meat into thin slices and then placing them into a small pan.

Someone knocks on the door.

It's Gasma. She hands Chen Zhen's scarf over to him.

GASMA

Most of the blood washed out - not all of it.

She sits.

GASMA (CONT'D)

You were brave standing up to Bao yesterday. Batu says "Thank-you."
(Of Zhen's reaction)
I saw him yesterday in my dream.

CHEN ZHEN

It is me who should thank YOU. Your dogs saved my life. You're braver than I'll ever be

He pours a cup of milk tea for her.

Gasma looks at the small pan with the meat in it.

GASMA

Who's that for?

CHEN ZHEN

(Improvising)

"Jealous" like you said.
I adopted one of Yill's puppies.

GASMA

You have to put millet in it.

CHEN ZHEN

Oh. Alright.

GASMA

The wolf-mothers feed their brood
chewed meat and crunched bones. We
give our own pups a sort of
porridge with meat and milk in it.

CHEN ZHEN

Thanks for the recipe.

She knows there's something he's not telling her.

EXT. MOUTH OF CAVE UNDER BLACK ROCK. DAY.

Two tiny distant horsemen, ride up the slope leading to
the Black Rock hill.

On their approach, Rats and marmots scamper into their
burrows. A fox runs off and hides among boulders.

The riders are Chen Zhen and Yang Ke.

YANG KE

It's the only reasonable thing to
do, Zhen..

Chen Zhen nods, unconvinced.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

If the Brigade find it, they'll
never trust us again.

The two men dismount.

Chen extracts his little wolf from his satchel.

He strokes him, kisses him on the head.

Yang Ke arrives at the mouth of the cave.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

Oh...It's been abandoned.

He's right. The paw prints have been erased by the wind.
The tunnel entrance is filled with dried grass and sand.

A harsh cry above their heads draws their attention to...

(CONTINUED)

78 CONTINUED:

78

Two eagles circling in the sky, searching for prey.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

Not a great place for an orphan.

79 **EXT. PASTURELAND AND VALLEY, SUNSET**

79

The sun has already disappeared beyond the mountains.
Twilight has painted the clouds a rosy hue.

Hundreds of sheep graze idly. Yang Ke keeps lookout.

Distant headlights catch Yang Ke's attention: a jeep is approaching the campsite.

80 **EXT. YURT CAMPSITE, DUSK**

80

Bao Shunghi, his face lit by the car headlights,
addresses the Production Team.

BAO SHUNGUI

The official committee has
completed its investigation on the
army horses disaster:

He pauses for effect, pulling out an official declaration
and paraphrasing by the light of the headlights.

BAO SHUNGUI (CONT'D)

"All charges are dropped against
the horse herders....

Clearly he disagrees with this.

BAO SHUNGUI (CONT'D)

"The authorities regret the great
damages suffered by your
production team. Batu's work
points will be transferred to his
wife...

A long and haunting solo chant rises into the night. It
is an howl of a wolf on the hills.

Bao Shunghi pauses for a second, carries on.

BAO SHUNGUI (CONT'D)

"His assistant, Shartseren, will
be released from prison and re-
instated in his post.

Gasma closes offers a silent prayer of thanks.

From North to South, wolves are now answering the first
plaintive howl in a deep impressive choir.

Around the yurts, dogs start barking in response.

(CONTINUED)

BAO SHUNGUI (CONT'D)

"As team supervisor, Bilig will
assume the dead man's duties.

He hands the declaration to Bilig, but can't resist
adding his own caveat:

BAO SHUNGHI

(Sotto)

Be warned, old man: one more
mistake, and I will take over the
whole ranch.

81 **EXT. CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. NIGHT**

81

In front of the youths' yurt, Yill barks angrily, then
falls silent.

Behind the yurt, a moonbeam illuminates the plank of wood
and the heavy stone that covers it.

82 **EXT. VILLAGE OF YURTS (WINTER CAMP). NIGHT**

82

The wild wolf howls again.

The chorus resumes, even more powerful, from west, east
and south.

The herdsmen are getting nervous. There is turmoil in the
campsite.

WOMEN

Oh~hol, oh~yeh hol~ oh~hol~

Women crying, dogs barking and the howling wolves combine
in a frightful symphony.

Gasma listens, moved, to the protracted, wailing calls
from over the mountains.

GASMA

The wolf mothers are calling for
their little ones.

CHEN

What do they say ?

GASMA

They miss them, like I miss Batu.

She leans into Chen Zhen and he hugs her.

CHEN ZHEN

Did you see him in your dream
again?

(CONTINUED)

GASMA

He visits me every night

CHEN ZHEN

What does he say?

GASMA

There's something he wants me to do. I keep refusing him. It makes him ill-tempered.

83 **EXT. CRESTS OF SURROUNDING HILLS/ HIGH ROCKS. NIGHT** 83

On the crests of the surrounding hills, the wolves, in silhouette, continue to howl their despair to the cosmos.

84 **EXT. NEAR CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT/ WOLF PUPPY'S HOLE. NIGHT**

Chen Zhen squats near the wolf-cub's hiding place. He's about to lift the lid when a voice from the darkness startles him:

YANG KE

Chen, this is the chance to let it go. Let it run to its mother. She'll find it and accept it.

Chen hesitates.

CHEN ZHEN

What if she doesn't? He carries the smell of man now. The pack will kill him..

A humble howl interrupts their conversation - tentative, and insecure.

On the other side of the yurt - the production team all hear it - clearly not the bark of a dog

Bao Shunghi heads in their direction. His flashlight picks out the plank over the hole.

From under the plank: howls, scratches and grunts are audible.

Everybody gathers around the hole.

Chen Zhen knows the game is up. He lifts the stone and raises the lid. Torchlight falls on the little wolf.

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

Alright. I confess. He is mine.

Bao Shunghi, Bilig, Gasma, all the herdsmen stare at Chen in shock.

(CONTINUED)

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

(Improvising madly)

Director Bao Shunghi, this an experiment. Chairman Mao says: "study your enemy". I thought we should observe a wolf more closely.

BILIG.

I said "No!"

YANG KE

"Until you bite it, how can you know the taste of a pear."....
That's Chairman Mao also.

Chen Zhen gestures him to shut up and let him handle this.

CHEN ZHEN

(to Bao Shunghi)

My plan was to protect our herds by mating this wolf with one of our female shepherd dogs.

The Production team holds its breath, looking from Bilig to Bao Shunghi and back again.

BILIG.

This is an outrage.

BAO SHUNGUI

(To Chen Zhen)

Genetics was among the topics I taught at University. I like your way of thinking.

He kneels to study the wolf cub with his torch, switching back to Mongol dialect:

BAO SHUNGUI (CONT'D)

You really think that we can breed a wolfhound to match the Russian army dogs?

CHEN ZHEN

That would be the goal ...

This is too much for Bilig. The old Mongol turns back, pushes through people and disappears into the night.

Bao watches the old man go, gratified to have proven his superior intelligence. He straightens.

BAO SHUNGHI

Good idea Chen Zhen. You have my approval.

(CONTINUED)

84 CONTINUED: (2)

84

From the hills around the camp the howls of the wolves resume their chant even louder.

The little wolf answers as loud as his young voice allows.

LAMJAV

(Darkly)

Now that they have heard it the wolves will come and take it back.

BAO SHUNGUI

Then, let them come.

We'll kill them all.

(To Chen Zhen)

Your wolf cub might lure them here.

Little Bayan overhears this and takes note.

85 **EXT. SURROUNDING HILLTOPS/ HIGH ROCK. NIGHT**

85

Like a Mongol warlord among his troops, preparing to attack, the Alpha wolf stares at the campsite below, watching the strange moving lights, assessing the battlefield.

86 **EXT. VILLAGE OF YURTS. NIGHT**

86

The village occupants watch the mountain top, the night still filled with howling.

CHEN ZHEN

What's happening?

No-one answers. The production brigade are scared also and they clearly think Chen Zhen is part of the problem.

87 **EXT. SURROUNDING HILLTOP/ HIGH ROCK. NIGHT.**

87

On the peak of the highest hill, the Alpha wolf howls, signalling the retreat.

He turns and walks away, followed with his warriors, females and young ones.

The female with black legs is last to turn away.

Finally, the hills behind and around the campsite fall silent.

88 **EXT. BEHIND CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT/ WOLF PUPPY'S HOLE. 88**
NIGHT

Gasma and Chen Zhen watch the little captive at the bottom of its hole.

As the distant wolves stop calling, he falls quiet also, flattening himself on the floor, as if overwhelmed with loss.

The others are dispersing. Gasma offers Chen Zhen no consolation.

GASMA

You must be mad.

Then she walks away too.

89 **EXT. GREEN PASTURELAND/ IMMENSITY. DAY 89**

On the endless, undulating hills, in daylight we see two black dots, then a third dot, following.

Bilig is riding with a spare horse. Hearing hoofbeats far behind, he turns.

When he sees Chen, he turns away and continues.

Chen catches up.

CHEN

Uncle Bilig, please forgive me. I know I betrayed your confidence. I captured the wolf a while ago. I was just waiting for the right moment to talk with you about it.

Bilig does not even look at Chen.

CHEN (CONT'D)

If I hadn't spoken up, Director Bao Shunghi would have killed the cub. But I promise you the experiment will succeed.

Still nothing from Bilig.

CHEN (CONT'D)

Director Bao Shunghi studied crossbreeding, he knows that it works...

BILIG

You told me your goal was to learn from us, not Bao Shungi.

(CONTINUED)

CHEN

I am learning, uncle.

BILIG

You've clearly learnt nothing! A wolf in a cage isn't a wolf anymore. It's a dog. All what you will achieve is to prevent your wolf to become what he is meant to be.

Wolves are warriors. That's the fate Tengger gave them. What is a warrior if you take his pride, if you stop him killing, if you teach him to fear death?

I'm not interested in your "experiment". You want to study a God and your very first action makes him into a slave.

EXT. HILL BESIDE SWAN LAKE, EVENING

Bilig bends down and climbs slowly, silently, to the hill top.

He lies on his stomach in the grass.

Behind him, Chen ties the horse on a rock.

He comes to Bilig and lies down beside him.

The pristine scenery stretches in front of them - a contoured basin extending for tens of kilometers.

Soft grass and wild flowers grows on the gentle slopes. A small river curves in a horseshoe, flowing into a crystal-clear lake.

Bilig takes out his binoculars and splits them in two. Chen accepts his half as a peace offering.

BILIG

Over there, that's the border.

Chen surveys the scenery with the half-telescope.

Masses of swans, geese and ducks populate the central lake, its mirror-like surface turning golden in the sunset.

BILIG (CONT'D)

This is the last piece of Chinese grassland that has not been exploited.

Not far away, gazelles are eating grass. One of them is stuck in the mud. Lurking wolves watch and wait.

(CONTINUED)

BILIG (CONT'D)

As soon as our lambs can walk the distance, we will set our summer camp here.

A few swans fly up, followed by other birds, wheeling off over their heads en masse.

The Lake becomes calm again.

EXT. SHORE OF SWAN LAKE. SUNSET

The peaceful lake turns red in the setting sun, shimmering in a haze of wood smoke.

Bilig is barbecuing some shanks of gazelle. Chen Zhen adds a few sticks to the fire.

CHEN ZHEN

I have that book with me, the one you like.

He walks to the bag and takes out the "Secret History of the Mongolia".

As he settles to read aloud he says:

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

The funny thing is: You say I treat the wolf as a slave, In fact it is I who am his servant. I wait on it like I would a Mongol Prince. I milk a cow to feed it, I mix porridge for it, I give it my ration of meat. I worry about it being cold, or sick, or bitten by dogs. Yang Ke calls me the wolf's slave.

Bilig sighs, smiles at him.

BILIG

It won't happen. But it's my own fault. I have been a bad influence on you...

CHEN ZHEN

You know that I worship the wolves - as you do. Most Chinese merely fear them. Just think of the thousands who will be coming here. Someone needs to teach them.

(A beat)

This is a good place for the wolf cub to live. Give me a few weeks to grow him stronger. When we come here, I will set it free.

(CONTINUED)

91 CONTINUED:

91

BILIG

Hmph. The old ones say: "It's easier to climb on the tiger's back than to get off it."

92 **EXT/INT. MARMOT GRASSLAND/MARMOTS BURROWS. DAY**

92

Like an orchestra tuning up, we hear teeth cutting roots, masticating, swallowing...

The sound builds and builds - a discordant symphony.

Marmots are everywhere, mowing, snipping, pruning, chopping, eating ceaselessly

93 **EXT/INT. MARMOTS' BURROWS. DAY**

93

Under the humid ground, warmed by the summer sun, insects hatch, filling the marmot burrows with their myriad tiger-striped black-and-yellow bodies.

Buzzing impatiently, they swarm out over the Steppe.

94 **EXT. LATE SPRING CAMP, CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. DAY**

94

The whole brigade is busy with the summer transfer to the new grassland, mustering flocks with the help of kids and dogs.

Yurts are being disassembled. Felt walls are rolled up, and loaded onto carts with carpets, stools, boxes, pots and foods.

Yang Ke removes the last supporting poles while Chen puts kitchenware on the wagon.

He empties a willow basket filled with dried cattle dung.

YANG KE

Hey. If you throw the cattle dung away, how can we cook?

CHEN

I'll gather some more on the way.

Chen unchains the wolf cub and leads it toward the willow basket.

YANG KE

Why not just tie it to the carriage?

The little wolf has doubled in size. He's clearly unwilling to move.

(CONTINUED)

CHEN

See how he hates being led? The little tyke would rather hang himself!

Chen slips the chain through the willow twigs and tries to make the wolf enter the basket.

The wolf growls and pulls back, ploughing twin furrows with its paws in the sand.

Chen opens a tin of chopped lamb, fills the wolf's bowl, and puts it in front of the basket.

The wolf gulps the raw meat. Chen attempts to push the bowl closer to the basket.

The wolf snarls and locks onto the rim of his bowl, looking at Chen with murderous eyes.

Suddenly he lunges, snapping at Chen, who springs back.

GASMA

(In passing)

You should kill that thing before he kills you...

She carries on without a backward glance, leading the cart horse by a guide rope. Her son, Bayar, holds the reins, proudly "driving" the family wagon.

CHEN ZHEN

Yang Ke, give me a hand!

Yang Ke approaches the wolf cub, which shows its teeth and lunges at him too. The chain pulls it back. It flips over and rolls on the ground.

Chen throws a military raincoat over the wolf, and rushes to the carriage as though holding a bomb.

He shoves it into the basket.

Yang Ke closes the flap.

The convoy winds through miles of emerald pasture.

Bumped up and down, the wolf cub lowers its head, curls its body, puts its tail between its legs.

Through the bars of its temporary cage, it watches Chen following on horseback, then closes its eyes.

Chen spurs his horse forward to where Yang Ke, sitting up front, drives the oxen.

(CONTINUED)

95 CONTINUED:

95

ANGLE ON: Yill and her grown-up puppies. The dog follows the wagon, keeping a wary eye on the wolf.

96 **EXT. GRASSLAND, TWILIGHT.**

96

Two campfires glow like embers on the dark land.

The Team members are gathered round the campfires, cooking food, boiling water and passing flagons.

Songs swirl in the dark night. We hear scattered applause and the thin high refrain of the horsehair fiddles.

Chen Zhen is pounding meat-paste for the wolf cub.

YANG KE

How long since you ate meat yourself?

CHEN

I'm fully grown. I don't need meat.

Chen pushes the bowl through willow twigs and puts it in front of the wolf.

CHEN (CONT'D)

Eat little wolf! Eat it!

The wolf looks at the bowl, then back at Chen, then closes his eyes again.

CHEN (CONT'D)

So damned stubborn! He'll only eat when he's out of the cage.

YANG KE

Then he'll have to wait til tomorrow!

97 **EXT. UNDULATING HILLS, DAY**

97

In the sun of another new day, the wagon team is on its way again.

Wagon wheels dyed green by the grass, score parallel trails in their wake.

In the willow cage, the wolf stares at Chen riding behind.

Chen, returns to the front of the wagon.

This time, Yill and her puppies follow him.

Chen Zhen recognizes their surroundings.

(CONTINUED)

CHEN

This is the place. The Lake of the Swans is just behind that hill!

The young wolf cub stands up in the cage. There is no one behind, no dog, no other wagon.

It rushes up to the willow wall and starts chewing on it.

The wagons climb the last slope, excited drivers whipping their oxen to pull harder.

A magnificent flock of swans take to the air as the newcomers approach.

CHEN (CONT'D)

Yang Ke! The swans!

From the far side of the hill, a gunshot is heard. And then another.

98 **EXT. SWAN LAKE, DAY**

98

Two birds plummet like stones. The rest of the flock scatters.

99 **EXT. HILLS, PASTURELAND, SWAN LAKE. DAY**

99

Chen Zhen gallops up the hillside, towards Bilig who heads the convoy.

The old Mongol stares down to the Swan Lake, unable to believe his eyes.

Dozens of tents have been set up at the center of the pastureland.

Settlers - men and women - unload their gear, dig turf, build walls and plough the land with hoes and shovels.

Further away, a quarry scars the slope, providing gravel for the new road.

The lakeshore has become a muddy bog full of hoofprints and wheel-ruts.

Bao Shunghi is among the settlers, still wearing his trademark beret.

He waves at the stunned members of the brigade silhouetted at the top of the hill. Then he jumps on a tractor and roars up the slope at full speed, trailing a comet-tail of curious children.

BAO SHUNGHI

Welcome! Didn't know you were joining us here!

(CONTINUED)

He shows the workers below.

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

These are your new neighbors -
Mongols like me from the South..

Bilig is in a state of shock

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

This land will soon be much more
productive. They have all the
experience we need in farming and
agriculture...

BILIG

They came because they've ruined
their own land. The steppe is not
suited for agriculture. The soil
is too thin.

BAO SHUNGHI

You forget that biology is my
subject. And there's a famine down
south in case you hadn't heard. We
have no choice but to farm the
land here.

Over there we'll build houses and
animal pens. We'll build a school
and a clinic, grow more fodder to
breed more animals. Dairy cattle.
Pigs. Meat for everyone! A happy
and settled life.

Bilig walks off in disgust. Bao Shungi turns to Chen Zhen

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

Chen Zhen - putting on a bit of
muscle. We'll all have to lock up
our daughters!

No-one is amused by his attempt at humour. They're all
still in a state of shock.

The ox cart pulls up next to them. The willow basket on
the back is empty - split with a big hole.

The chain stretches out the back through the basket.

At the other end of the chain, the frantic young wolf
struggles, having been dragged the last few yards.

He's covered in mud and grass but he's still on his
feet, fighting the hated chain.

BAO SHUNGHI (CONT'D)

A true son of Genghis Khan!

(CONTINUED)

Chen Zhen starts towards the bloodied wolf cub as two more gunshots echo round the valley and Yang Ke jumps from his seat.

YANG KE

Director Bao, please, tell them to stop killing swans. These birds are sacred here!

Bao Shungi turns to the others, mocking Yang Ke.

BAO SHUNGUI

He's thinking of the ballerinas at the Peking Opera. The bourgeois all loved "Swan Lake".

(To Yang Ke)

I know the music of Tchaikovsky quite well my boy, I can play it on the piano. Those settlers are starving. Their crops aren't established yet. What's wrong with killing some swans for food?

(A beat)

As for the wolves: I've declared open season to reduce their numbers - traps, poison, guns and ammunition will be allocated. Shooting will be permitted throughout the year.

Bilig strongly disapproves of this but he keeps quiet - he'll deal with it in his own way

EXT. MOSQUITOES SWAMP. DAY

The summer sun heats the shallow water of the swamp.

The mud and shit on the shore, trampled by too many hooves is stewing like a brown ragout.

Thousands of mosquitoes are breeding.

Clouds of them fly from the reeds to the cattle.

EXT. GRASSLAND . DAY.

The alpha wolf's family - the female with the black legs and a few young adults - are hiding behind tall grass, silent and motionless.

They watch a few rabbits coming closer, grazing, unaware of the danger.

Mosquitoes land around the wolves' eyes and lips.

The alpha wolf shakes his head.

(CONTINUED)

- 101 CONTINUED: 101
- The rabbits bolt away.
- 102 **EXT. SANDY LAND. AFTERNOON.** 102
- Rats are eating every sprig of grass, pulling the tussocks off the thin layer of fertile earth, devouring the grass.
- A mangy wolf is spying on them from behind a dry bush, its fur covered with stinging mosquitoes.
- It shakes itself.
- The rats disappear in their hole.
- 103 **INT. CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. NIGHT.** 103
- Chen is peeling off a lamb's leg from a full carcass, cutting the raw flesh into small cubes.
- YANG KE
Don't tell me - this one was
killed by crows also.
- Chen ignores him, keep working
- YANG KE (CONT'D)
The whole country is short of
meat. You steal a lamb to feed a
wolf that will attack our flocks.
Explain the logic to me.
- Chen Zhen opens the door and disappears in the windy night, his bowl of meat in hand.
- 104 **EXT/INT. WOLF ENCLOSURE. NIGHT** 104
- Behind the yurt Chen Zhen has built an enclosure of felt, poles, wagon-wheels, lattice screens and boxes.
- Chen Zhen feeds his wolf.
- CHEN ZHEN
Grow up little wolf - grow up
quickly...
- 105 **EXT. NEW MIGRANT SETTLEMENT. MORNING.** 105
- In the mid-day heat, new settlers are building a high brick wall around a sheep compound.
- THE SUPERVISOR trowel in hand, sees Chen's figure running up hill with his wolf, silhouetted against the blue sky.
- The man with the trowel returns to his work.

106

EXT. HILL SLOPE ABOVE SETTLEMENT. LATE AFTERNOON

106

More rats and marmots scamper away, vanishing underground at the approach of....

Chen Zhen, running with his wolf on a chain.

They come to an old campsite on the pastureland.

Chen Zhen sees a patch of old cooking-ashes scattered by the wind.

He holds his wolf tight.

CHEN ZHEN

When I free you, you'll have to be very careful.

Zhen walks closer to the camp-fire.

Two sheep's hooves lie in the center of the ashes, from under which a few rusted steel teeth are poking out.

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

Watch this.

Chen Zhen picks up an old sheep-shank with some decayed meat still sticking on it.

Holding it at careful distance from his nostrils he allows the little wolf to sniff it:

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

Remember that smell... it's a warning!

Chen Zhen throws the bone into the circle of ashes.

The heavy bone lands on the bait and the hidden wolf-trap snaps shut with a frightening metallic sound.

The young wolf jumps back, frightened.

107

EXT. STEEP SLOPES ABOVE VALLEY. SUNSET

107

Chen continues up a steep and narrow mountain path, breathing hard.

They climb an even steeper path, the young wolf now in the lead, Chen Zhen breathing harder.

CHEN ZHEN

You have to be strong enough, stronger than dogs...

On the mountain top, Chen finally catches his breath.

The little wolf lies at his feet.

(CONTINUED)

107 CONTINUED:

107

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)
 ...Stronger than foxes and eagles,
 stronger than wild wolves...

Trucks are bumping on the road down the valley.

The loud muffled sound of a explosion rumbles between the hills.

A cloud of dust rises above the distant quarry.

The little wolf stiffens. Chen Zhen strokes the soft fur on his head.

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)
 It's okay... Little wolf, don't
 worry, it's okay...

108 **EXT. QUARRY NEAR THE NEW SETTLEMENT. SUNSET**

108

The last few blocks of stone and rubble tumble down from the top of the quarry.

DISSOLVE TO:

109 **EXT. MEADOW IN RIVER LOOP. DAY**

109

The sun is high in the sky.

In a meadow in a loop of a winding river, flies are humming over the carcass of a dead sheep.

Ravens pick at its decaying head.

110 **EXT. SMALL WINDING RIVER. DAY.**

110

Chen Zhen, knee-deep in the stream, pulls the young wolf's chain, encouraging him to swim

CHEN ZHEN
 Come on ... it's just water!

111 **EXT. MEADOW IN RIVER LOOP. DAY**

111

Alarmed, ravens fly off the dead sheep.

Behind the bushes the alpha male wolf and his pack are approaching the carcass.

Looking all around, the alpha male emerges with his mate.

Checking where she places her paws, the female cautiously sniffs the sheep.

(CONTINUED)

111 CONTINUED: 111

Reassured, she digs her fangs into the sheep skin and pulls the carcass.

A device hidden under it triggers a stick of dynamite.

The explosion blasts the female out of shot with appalling violence.

112 **EXT. SMALL WINDING RIVER. DAY.** 112

The echo of the explosion reaches Chen Zhen and the young wolf.

They turn and head towards it.

113 **EXT. BANK OF RIVER LOOP / MEADOW. DAY** 113

Unafraid of water now. The wolf jumps in and swims, Chen Zhen follows.

CHEN ZHEN

Brave boy!

He reaches the bank, climbs up onto the meadow.

There's blood on the grass.

A few feet from him, he discovers the lifeless, broken body of the female wolf.... the wolf with black legs.

Chen recognizes her with a start, and tries to drag the little wolf back into the river.

The little wolf is already sniffing the grass. Clearly, he wants to follow the scent, to be with his wolf-brothers.

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

No little wolf! This way! Come!

The little wolf resists, digging his claws in the ground.

Chen looks at him, heartbroken.

CHEN

Little wolf, it's impossible!
You're not ready.

The little wolf snarls angrily.

Chen extends his hand for a stroke, holding the chain, pulling slightly.

The little wolf uncoils like a spring and leaps on Chen.

Chen is thrown onto the ground.

(CONTINUED)

113 CONTINUED:

113

He finds himself holding the wolf by the throat as it wrestles and snaps, trying to bite him.

CHEN ZHEN

No. Down Boy! Stay!

But the wolf is not a dog. It clamps its teeth onto his right arm and bites down hard.

Chen Zen hits it on the head until it releases him.

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

Bad wolf.

His sleeve is ripped. Blood is flowing freely over his wrist and dripping off his fingers.

114 **DELETED (WOLF ATTACK MOVED TO 118)**

114

115 **EXT. THE LAKE OF SWANS. DAY (REPLACES DREAM SEQ).**

115

Chen Zhen is at the edge of the water, bathing his injured arm. The wound continues to bleed profusely. He ties a strip of cloth around it, holding one end with his teeth

Gasma passes with a basket of laundry

GASMA

What happened?

CHEN ZHEN

Nothing.

She puts down her basket.

GASMA

Your wolf again. You're crazy.
Here

She tries to help but he waves her away.

CHEN ZHEN

I'm managing. I can manage

GASMA

(Insists)
I told you before they have poison
in their teeth.

CHEN ZHEN

No they don't. That's just
superstition.

GASMA

(Angrily)
What do you know?!

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

GASMA (CONT'D)

How do you think Kushi lost his arm, or Odval his leg. It's like a snake bite. First it festers then you lose the limb. A child would die of this without penicillin.

CHEN ZHEN

Where do I get penicillin?

GASMA

You can't. All those new settlers are using everything up. You'll need to come back to the yurt

In the warm, intimate space, sunlight lancing between the door flaps, she puts down her basket and boils a handful of moss and fungus

GASMA

Take off your shirt.

He does as he's told. She takes the moss and fungus off the boil, then opens the wound.

GASMA (CONT'D)

This is going to hurt.

She presses the hot poultice into the open wound. Chen Zhen stifles a yell of pain.

Gasma starts bandaging his arm. Chen Zhen watches her as she works, mesmerized by her beauty.

CHEN ZHEN

Is Batu still talking to you in your dreams?

GASMA

Sometimes.

CHEN ZHEN

Is he more content now?

GASMA

No.

CHEN ZHEN

What does he want?

GASMA

None of your business.

CHEN ZHEN

I know what anyway.
(She looks up)
He wants you to remarry.

GASMA

(Looks down again.)

What's so strange about that? His son needs a father.

CHEN ZHEN

His woman needs a mate.

Gasma ties the bandage.

GASMA

Not this woman - she's too busy.

CHEN ZHEN

He wants you to choose me.

She steps away from him.

GASMA

A Chinese student? Why would he want that?

Chen Zhen grabs her arm

CHEN ZHEN

He knows I love you. You know it too.

Maybe you feel the same way. Do you? Gasma? You do!

GASMA

(Pushes him away)

You're young. Let go. You won't stay.

CHEN ZHEN

Who says I won't?

GASMA

It's obvious. You're a city boy. Everyone knows how these stories end.

CHEN ZHEN

(Holding her)

They don't know ME. This is my true home. My other life means nothing now. Tell me what I have to do to prove it.

GASMA

There's no point. My new husband has already been chosen.

CHEN ZHEN

By who. By WHO??!!

GASMA

He's Bao Shungi's brother.

(CONTINUED)

CHEN ZHEN

(Baffled)

Have I met this guy? Have you?

GASMA

He says it will help unite the nation.

CHEN ZHEN

(Angry now)

Fuck that. This is ridiculous. Does Bilig know? I'll speak to Bilig.

GASMA

Bilig agreed to it. "We all have to move with the times."

117 (C-Z /BAREFOOT DOC SCENES) DELETED

117

118 EXT. YELLOWING PRAIRIE. DAWN

118

The scenery has changed.

Only a few patches of green can be seen along creeks at valley bottoms and on the shady side of the hills.

On the yellowing prairie, Bilig is approaching on horseback following his hunting dog.

Bilig dismounts. He ties his horse to a rock, some distance from the remains of two dead goats.

Humming a lullaby from his childhood, holding his lasso pole, he crawls on the dry grass.

BILIG

When larks sing, spring will come...

When marmots squeak, orchids will blossom...

When herons horn, rain will drop...

When wolves howl, the moon will rise...

Over the dry, yellow wilderness, a few larks spring up from the grass and hover in mid-air chirping.

Bilig ropes the lasso around the neck of the first dead goat.

He gets as flat as he can on his belly, protects his head ... and pulls.

119 EXT. CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT AND WOLF COMPOUND. DAWN

119

Chen Zhen is preparing Little Wolf's breakfast.

(CONTINUED)

119 CONTINUED:

119

From off-screen he hears a distant explosion.

He goes to his saddle-bag and takes out his half-binoculars.

Through his telescope Chen sees the Old Mongol pouring kerosene from his oil lamp on the remains of the exploded carcass.

120 **EXT. INSIDE WOLF ENCLOSURE. DAWN**

120

A stake is fixed in the center of the makeshift enclosure.

Little Wolf - now a young juvenile - is chained to it, trying to jerk free, or break the metal links with his teeth

Powerless, he finally gives up.

Chen opens the door with the wolf's tin bowl in his hand.

He puts it on the ground and calls:

CHEN ZHEN

Little wolf. Breakfast!

The animal approaches cautiously, snatches the bowl and retreats, wolfing down the red meat with his baleful gaze fixed on Chen.

Chen stares back for a long time, pensive.

Turning, he sees an eye watching through a hole in the enclosure - young Bayar.

121 **EXT. THE WOLF ENCLOSURE. MORNING**

121

Chen Zhen digs in his pocket, gives the boy a candy:

CHEN ZHEN

I'm off to my shift. Make sure those other kids don't bother him.

BAYAR

I will!

Chen Zhen gets on the saddle, waves Bayar good bye and gallops away, fast becoming a speck in the immensity of the Steppe.

122 **EXT. SETTLEMENT. DAY**

122

A group of chattering settlers' children run towards Bayar's place.

123 **EXT/INT WOLF COMPOUND. DAY.**

123

At the entrance to the wolf compound, Bayar lays down the rules.

BAYAR

One candy for looking at it, two
for going inside - agreed?

Most kids give him two candies. Bayar lets them in one by one.

BAYAR (CONT'D)

Don't get too close. And no
touching!

One of the big kids approaches the cub, trying to provoke a reaction.

BAYAR (CONT'D)

No touching! No touching!

124 **EXT. BROWN BUSHY LAND. DAY**

124

Flat on their bellies, Bilig and his dog crawl on brown grass.

Bilig extends his pole and pulls.

The carcass of a gazelle moves, rotates ninety degrees.

Nothing happens.

Bilig stands up, ordering his dog back.

BILIG

Get back. There's no bomb. It must
be poisoned!

Rigged under the half risen carcass a small device is wired up to a dynamite stick.

It goes "click".

The dynamite blows up.

125 **EXT. AUTUMN GRAZING MEADOW. DAY.**

125

Chen dismounts. He sees Yang Ke's horse grazing near the campfire.

He sees Yang Ke's bitch and her puppies running to give him a warm welcome.

The flock of sheep are peacefully grazing, but Yang Ke is nowhere to be seen.

(CONTINUED)

CHEN ZHEN

(calls)
Yang Ke!!

Yang Ke, making love to a local girl on the ground in the middle of the flock, hears his friend's call

YANG KE

Shit.

Lying low, he pulls on his trousers.

Chen Zhen's POV: The compact flock is a sea of white. A head pops up out of it.

YANG KE (CONT'D)

Here I come !
(Sotto, To the girl)
Stay hidden. I'll get rid of him

The young woman, struggling to put on her robe, flattens herself to keep out of sight.

Yang Ke walks through the flock, stretching as though he just woke up.

He smiles at Chen Zhen, then focuses beyond him and his expression changes.

The figure on horseback is approaching fast, yelling.

Yang Ke's first panicked reaction is that this is the girl's father. Then he realizes its Gasma.

She yells at Yang Ke, completely ignoring Chen Zhen

GASMA

You better come right away. Bayar got bitten.

YANG KE

By who?

GASMA

Your friend's damn wolf!

Mushrooming construction sites have transformed the small town.

Beside the state-owned shop, a brand new school is under construction.

Chen Zhen and Gasma, holding Bayar on her saddle, are looking for the clinic, anxious and lost.

127

INT. WAITING ROOM OF DISTRICT HOSPITAL, DAY

127

The clinic of earlier days is now a small district hospital.

Chen Zhen and Gasma sit in the bare, tiled waiting-room, not talking.

The door opens and the barefoot doctor comes out.

DOCTOR

We won't sew up the wounds. Better to leave them open. Without penicillin, it's going to be touch and go. You can wait here or find a hotel

He goes away. Another long silence.

CHEN ZHEN

If you want to go out for a bit I'll stay here.

GASMA

You go. GO!

Chen Zhen rises, miserable and guilty.

CHEN ZHEN

They must have Penicillin somewhere.

GASMA

There's nowhere, except the big city and we'd never get him there in time.

CHEN ZHEN

Is there anything else I can bring for him. Bread? Milk? I'll see what they've got at the shop.

No reply. He gets up.

Gasma can still hardly bring herself to talk to him, but now she turns to him and says, fiercely

GASMA

If Bayar dies, I will kill your wolf.
And then I'll kill myself.

128

EXT. WOLF COMPOUND. NIGHT

128

Darkness has fallen over the camp. The little wolf is alone in his compound

(CONTINUED)

128 CONTINUED:

128

There is a small opening in the fence with a view of the distant, moonlit mountains.

The young wolf sits in front of it, raises his muzzle towards the sky and sends a long plaintive howl to Tengger.

129 **EXT. DIRT ROAD ON GRASSLAND. EVENING**

129

Chen Zhen is galloping on the grassland. He bends his head down to whip the horse.

130 **EXT. DIRT ROAD. NIGHT**

130

There's no moon. The horse has slowed to a trot. In pitch darkness follows the vague pale outline of the dirt road

Almost asleep in the saddle, he forces his eyes to stay open.

131 **EXT. SETTLERS VILLAGE. NIGHT (WAS 100)**

131

A pair of murderous yellow eyes glow in the night.

Under the moonlight, the alpha wolf leads his pack through the grassland to the settlers new agricultural village.

He stops, observes the newly-built sheep pen, circles around the high brick wall, listening to the bleating of sheep inside.

132 **IN THE PEN**

132

Dozens of sheep are crowded in the pen. They can smell their attackers. They get up and start moving in the confined space. Bleating lambs are separated from their mothers.

133 **EXT. WALLED SHEEP PEN**

133

One wolf stands up, leans his forelegs as high as he can against the brick wall.

A second wolf climbs of the back of the first wolf, plants his hind legs on the shoulders of the first wolf and puts his forelegs against the wall.

Climbing over this wolf-ladder, the whole pack swarm up over the wall and jump inside the enclosure.

DOCTOR

Do you have money?

CHEN ZHEN

(In Mandarin)

It's for a child with a wolf bite.
The barefoot doctor says he might
die of infection. I rode for
twenty four hours to get here.

The "peasant's" intelligence surprises the doctor

DOCTOR

....Come in.

His secretary is still outside, tying the horse to an
electricity pole.

The Doctor ushers Chen Zhen in the consulting room.

137

INT. CONSULTING ROOM. DAY

137

All round the walls there are shelves and boxes and jars
with various medicines - some modern, some traditional

DOCTOR

See these?

He picks jars at random, shows Chen Zhen their contents.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)

Wolf hair. Wolf teeth. Wolf claws,
wolf penis. Can you get me this?.
I'll pay you good money.

Chen Zhen looks at this, at the sheer amount of animal
"remedies" in this one room: "Swan's Blood", "Tiger
Heart"

CHEN ZHEN

Just give me the penicillin.

DOCTOR

We have a deal then?

Chen Zhen turns his bloodshot eyes on the doctor.
Exhaustion and emotion gives his face a fearsome, savage
appearance.

From some deep primitive well of anger and frustration he
bares his teeth and roars like an animal.

CHEN ZHEN

Give me the penicillin!

The doctor backs away, nervous for his own safety.

(CONTINUED)

137 CONTINUED:

137

He grabs some vials of penicillin from a bowl and shoves them in Chen Zhen's hand.

DOCTOR

Here then. No payment. Bring me what you can.

Chen Zhen stuffs the vials in his pocket and leaves without a word, leaving the doctor baffled and shaken.

138 **(WAS 104) EXT. NEW SETTLEMENT / WALLED SHEEP PEN. DAWN** 138

In the cold light of dawn the sheep pen looks like a battlefield. Those sheep who are not already dead lie where they fell, too terrified or too badly injured to move.

The settlers are clearly dismayed. Shartseren is at a loss to explain what happened here.

SHARTSEREN

The old folk believed that wolves could fly. I've never seen such a thing. I don't know how this could happen...

A Child pipes up. It's the big kid who Bayar forbade to goad the little wolf.

CHILD

The little wolf called them. One of the students has a pet wolf. He calls to the wild wolves when we're sleeping!

139 **EXT. CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. RISING SUN**

139

In the early morning light, there is great commotion as angry new settlers and Production team herdsman surround the students' yurt.

SHARTSEREN

(shouts)

Chen Zhen. Come out we need to speak to you!

There's movement inside the yurt then Yang Ke emerges blearily.

SHARTSEREN (CONT'D)

Where is he. Where's your wolf-loving friend?

YANG KE

He's not here. He went into town

(CONTINUED)

SHARTSEREN

That was three days ago. Why's he not back?

Yang Ke scratches his head, still half awake

YANG KE

There was an emergency...

SHARTSEREN

(Cuts in)

Well there's been another one. A massacre in fact. Where's the damn wolf cub?

YANG KE

He's on his chain. He's not done anything. He can't have.

SHARTSEREN

We'll be the judge of that.

He leads the others off round the back of the hut. Yang Ke hurries after them.

140 **EXT. REAR OF THE YURT. CONTINUOUS.**

140

Chen Zhen is leading his horse back into the village of yurts.

He sees the mob come around the side of his own yurt and start pulling apart the wolf enclosure.

CHEN ZHEN

No! What are you doing?! Stop!
Stop!!

Gasma is on the horse, holding Bayan in her arms. The boy is pale and sweaty, heavily bandaged round his arm, upper body and neck.

Chen Zhen gives Gasma the reins to the horse and runs towards the mob.

141 **EXT. WOLF ENCLOSURE. DAY**

141

As the enclosure is demolished, the little wolf snarls and retreats quickly under the tangled heap of objects turned over by the frantic gang.

Shartseren picks up a club, sifting through the mess and throwing things aside. A shape is moving under some felt.

MOB

Kill it! Kill it!

(CONTINUED)

Shartseren snatches aside the felt, stamps down on the wolf-cub's chain to stop it getting away, raises his club for the killer blow and

Chen Zhen comes out of nowhere and tackles him sideways.

The two of them crash to the ground among the broken stick and wagon wheels

Shasteren drops his club in the melee. Now its a free-for-all as the mob pitch in trying to get to Chen.

A HUGE SETTLER - built like a wrestler manages to retrieve the club.

He looks for Chen, ready to strike.

GIANT

Bastard. Let me at him.

Then the sound car engines and horns makes everyone stop and turn.

THEIR POV: Two jeeps come over the rise and skid to a halt

Bao Shunghi is in one of them. Para-military types with high-powered rifles are in the other.

Bao Shunghi strides towards them, slamming the car door behind him.

BAO SHUNGI

What's going on here?

Chen Zhen extricates himself, clutching his terrified wolf.

SHASTEREN

This maniac and his wolf-cub - everyone's had enough of him.

BAO SHUNGI

Idiots. It's the wild wolves that are your problem, and I happen to have brought you the solution.

He introduces the men with rifles.

BAO SHUNGUI

These men are the best sharpshooters in the District. Bartel, Gertai and their team.

(Beat)

Where's Bilig?

141 CONTINUED: (2)

141

SHASTEREN

He was injured in an explosion,

BAO SHUNGUI

(To Chen Zhen)

Too bad. That makes you the resident wolf expert. You'd better come along with us.

(Of the wrecked enclosure)

Someone clear up this mess.

The production team, chastened, start clearing up the wreckage of the enclosure.

Bao Shungi strides off in the direction of Bilig's hut.

142 **DELETED (SHOWING WOLF TO HUNTERS)**

142

143 **INT. BILIG'S YURT (WAS 133)**

143

The old man lies on his couch, badly burnt from the explosion.

Gasma is already at his side, fanning away flies. Her bandaged child lies nearby on cushions. She has the air of a woman who's whole life has suddenly unravelled

BAO SHUNGHI

What happened ?

Bilig speaks hoarsely The burns on his throat and the tightening scars on his chest make it hard to breathe, but his sense of humour has not abandoned him.

BILIG

It's important to keep one's appointments. Tengger is calling me.

Bao Shunghi pats his shoulder. It's painful and Bilig winces

BAO SHUNGHI

Don't be stupid. You'll be back on your feet in no time. We're going to get those get those bloody wolves for you. Revenge!

The old Mongol regards him with his one good eye, almost amused by the other man's lack of insight.

144 **EXT. OUTSIDE CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT. EARLY MORNING.**

144

Bao Shungi comes out of the yurt, full of his usual self-confidence.

(CONTINUED)

144 CONTINUED:

144

The jeep-drivers start their engines.

BAO SHUNBGI

Let's get going.
Where's our "expert"?

145 **EXT. INSIDE WOLF COMPOUND. EARLY MORNING.**

145

The wolf is slowly recovering its composure. Chen Zhen holds him tight against his chest.

The young wolf snuggles close, as he did when he was a cub. He licks Chen Zhen's face.

Out of shot: The jeep honks impatiently.

CHEN ZHEN

Don't worry little wolf, you'll be fine...

The jeep honks again and he leaves.

146 **EXT. OUTSIDE CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT, EARLY MORNING.**

146

The sharpshooters and their team occupy the back of the jeeps.

Shartseren has joined Bartel and his team in the second car.

Bao Shungi is Gertai is with his men in the first vehicle. He squeezes up against the driver and shouts to Chen Zhen

BAO SHUNGUI

Come here. Sit next to me. You can point out where the wolves are.

147 **EXT. ON THE GRASSLAND, DAY**

147

The wind is so strong that Chen can hardly keep his cap on.

The two jeeps speed to the west, creating two yellow dust-dragons behind them.

148 **IN. THE JEEP. EVENING**

148

The grasslands here are devoid of animals. Bao Shungi shouts to Chen Zhen over the noise of the engines:

BAO SHUNGUI

This is hopeless. You know where they are don't you?

(CONTINUED)

CHEN ZHEN

Further from habitation, on the slopes and in the reed swamps!

BAO SHUNGUI

Reed swamps are full of mosquitoes. We're not in a mood to mess around here.

CHEN ZHEN

....then we need to go further on.

They drive on.

149 **INT. YURT. NIGHT**

149

Wind blows the outside of the yurt, making the oil lamps flicker and the wolf-tapestries appear to move.

Old Bilig is sleeping, his breathing noisy but regular.

Gently, Gasma begins unwrapping the bandages on her young son's injuries, terrified of what she will find there, imagining the worst.

Slowly the bandages come off to reveal Bayan's injuries - huge lacerations running from his jawbone over his shoulder and around the back of his chest. She traces the red lines with her fingers.

Miraculously they have healed. The penicillin has done its work. There's no infection and the wounds are almost closed. Bayan twists to try and see

BAYAN

Is it all right.

GASMA

It's alright. It's good.

BAYAN

Then why are you crying?

She holds him close, weeping tears of gratitude to Tengger.

150 **EXT. SCRUB-LAND. WIDE SHOT. DAY.**

150

The closer the jeeps are to the sandy grassland, the more wild animals appear: sand martins, sand grouse, foxes and gerbils, flocks of red/brown grouse.

The two jeeps look like speed boats, cutting their way through a golden ocean. The yellow grass blades are two feet tall.

(CONTINUED)

CHEN ZHEN

The grass is too tall here.

BAO SHUNGHI

(Frustrated)

Well why did you bring us?!

(To the driver)

Go north - that way!

(To Chen Zhen)

These marksmen don't come cheap you know. I'm beginning to think you don't want to tell us where the wolves are.

CHEN ZHEN

Most of them have already been killed, Director. Our jeeps make too much noise anyway. Maybe we should...

GERTAI

(Interrupts)

On the hillside to the left!

Two wolves, over there!

Bartel takes his binoculars, sees something

GERTAI (CONT'D)

(To the driver)

Try to keep pace with them!!

He signals to the car behind.

Squinting into the distance Chen Zhen sees two large wolves about a mile away slowly trotting westward.

GERTAI (CONT'D)

(To the Driver)

Stay parallel. We can get a head shot from the side.

As they slowly close the distance the wolves become nervous and pick up speed - still out of range of the guns

In the jeeps, Gertai and Bartel adjust their telescopic sights.

Chen Zhen's heart is pounding. The range is down to four hundred meters.

The two wolves have seen the guns. They speed up and run in single file to the nearby ridge.

At the same time two shots ring out

The two large wolves fall simultaneously.

(CONTINUED)

150 CONTINUED: (2)

150

BAO SHUNGI

Good shooting.

151 **EXT. BELOW THE RIDGE. DAY.**

151

The jeep drives to the wolves' bodies and stops. One of the animals is shivering in its death throes. Bartel shoots it in the head and it lies still.

Chen Zhen closes his eyes in pain.

GERTAI

Put the dogs in the other car!

The dogs are transferred to the other jeep. The dead wolves are tossed into the back of Bao Shunghi's car.

BARTEL

Two down. It's a start.

152 **EXT. COMMANDING HEIGHT/DOWNHILL PASTURES. DAY.**

152

The two jeeps climb to the nearest hilltop.

GERTAI

There!

Chen Zhen sees two small wolf-packs in the distance. One has four or five wolves, the other about a dozen, led by a large alpha male.

GERTAI (CONT'D)

(To the driver)

Take the larger pack!

Using military hand-signals, he gestures to the second jeep to follow the smaller pack.

The two jeeps diverge.

DRIVER

(To his passengers)

Hold on tight!

He careers downhill, bouncing over sand and tussocky grass.

153 **EXT. MOUNTAIN SLOPE, DAY**

153

The second jeep, speeding uphill, is brought to an abrupt halt by a cliff edge.

The small pack they are chasing splits in two: three young wolves flee down a narrow canyon.

Bartel and his team take aim and fire.

(CONTINUED)

The three wolves fall.

The men free their dogs and go after the two remaining wolves mangy animals with faded fur, running desperately uphill now.

SHARTSEREN

These two are old. They can't run far.

The men climb the slope after the dogs.

The old male wolf turns back to look at his pursuers. He rushes toward a rocky promontory and turns back again.

The dogs are gaining. The old male wolf hesitates, then jumps into the void.

The female takes refuge into a small cave. The dogs surround it, barking at the entrance.

The old female starts digging frantically, dogs snapping at her heels.

As the dogs try to get in and drag her out, the cave collapses.

The dogs pull back, yelping. The she-wolf is buried alive under the rubble.

154 **EXT. WETLAND AND REEDS. AFTERNOON.**

154

Meanwhile the first jeep hurtles down towards the valley getting closer and closer to the large pack of wolves.

Led by the large alpha male, the wolves head for the marshland at the bottom of the hill, racing through the shallow water of the marsh into the dry reed-beds.

BAO SHUNGI

Typical. Just where we don't want them.

The second jeep, descending from the rocky hills, reaches the other side of the wetland.

The men jump out with their rifles.

Bao Shunbgi grabs a jerry-can of fuel out of the rear of the first jeep.

CHEN ZHEN

Director Bao Shunghi, fire is forbidden in the steppe.

BAO

So are wolves.

(CONTINUED)

He starts dousing the margin of the reed-beds with fuel

CHEN

The nomads will not like you for this.

BAO

They hate me anyway. Being a leader of men is not about being liked.

He takes out his lighter and starts the fire.

WIDE SHOTS:

The wind pushes the flames through the dry reed-beds.

The men take their shooting position at the four corners of the marsh.

They cock their rifles, ready to shoot.

155 **THE SAME. LATER**

155

A cloud of smoke billows high in the sky.

Chen Zhen looks at the sun disappearing behind a dark veil of smoke.

ULTRA WIDE SHOT:

A dark smudge of smoke and shadow moves over the grassland.

As the distant echoes of gunfire resonate around the lake, the steppe of Mongolia turns from gold, to black.

156 **EXT. WETLAND AND REEDS. AFTERNOON.**

156

A few wolves already lie dead on the margin of the wetlands.

Two wolves dart out of the burning inferno, their fur singed, leaving behind them a trail of smoke.

Bartel aims at the first one.

He fires, hits.

Gertai aims at the second one, misses.

Shartseren makes as if to follow

GERTAI

Leave it. His fur is worthless and he'll die anyway...

(CONTINUED)

156 CONTINUED:

156

Bao Shungi watches the doomed, injured wolf hobble off over the scorched pasture.

The scene looks like a war-zone. Bao Shungi is beginning to realize what he's committed here - a crime against nature.

Chen Zhen meets his eye, wipes away tears from the smoke, smudging ash on his face.

157 **EXT. WETLAND. SMOKE AND WATER. DAY**

157

The rest of the pack is taking advantage of the diversion.

Still led by the Alpha Male they swim undercover, concealed by the dense smoke.

As the wolves reach the shore, the wind turns, revealing their presence.

Chen sees them and silently wills them to escape.

Bao Shungi sees them and, for once, says nothing.

...But Shartseren has seen them too.

SHARTSEREN

Over There!

158 **EXT. PASTURELAND / SLOPE. DAY.**

158

The relentless chase continues.

GERTAI

Step on it! Faster!

The driver already has his foot flat on the floor.

The jeep races onwards at top speed, frequently airborne.

Chen, thrown around like a rag doll, hanging on for dear life, feels like he's living a nightmare.

GERTAI (CONT'D)

Faster! Try and cut him off!

Three hundred meters ahead, and off to one side, the wolves put on a final desperate burst of speed.

The jeeps race to outflank them

The pack veers uphill.

Cresting the rise they are immediately tagged by the second car.

(CONTINUED)

The two jeeps converge in a pincer movement.

The alpha wolf surges ahead. The pack behind him is obliged to fragment. One by one they peel off in separate directions.

GERTAI (CONT'D)

Stay with the leader! I want that head as a trophy! See if we can exhaust him!

The alpha wolf continues to run, mouth open, panting.

Both jeeps stay behind the alpha wolf, just keeping pace, deliberately exhausting him.

When the wolf speeds up the jeeps go faster; when the wolf slows, so do the jeeps.

The alpha wolf is nearing the limit of his endurance.

Chen Zhen closes his eyes, unable to look.

Finally, the wolf runs himself to a standstill.

There's no cover here, nowhere to hide.

The drivers hoot their horns and the gunmen fire in the air. Trying to keep the wolf moving

The wolf picks himself up and manges to run another hundred yards, then stops and turns, head drooping, completely spent, finally at bay.

BAO SHUNGUI

Now what?

Without quite knowing what he is doing, Chen Zhen gets out of the car.

BAO SHUNGI

Chen Zhen!! Come back. That wolf is a killer!! Have you totally lost your mind?!

Chen Zhen ignores him and keeps walking. His eyes fixed on the wolf, the sound of the men shouting behind him fading into background noise.

The wolf fills his field of vision: its heaving chest with the white mark, its burning eyes, its slavering jaws.

BAO SHUNGUI

Chen Zhen!!

The hunters are trying to get the wolf in their sights
Chen Zhen's body keeps blocking their aim.

CLOSE ON CHEZ ZHEN:

He's twenty meters from the wolf... ten meters.

His own breathing is all he can hear now.

His own heartbeat, and the wolf's.

With five meters between them the wolf settles back on
its haunches, as though to spring.

Chen Zhen stops.

CHEN ZHEN

You spared my life two years ago.
Walk away. Go.

The wolf growls in its throat. Anger burns in its
exhausted eyes - an ember of hate, almost extinguished

CHEN ZHEN (CONT'D)

(Shouts)

Go!

Unable to run, the wolf summons the last of its strength
and lunges at him.

As it does so a shot rings out.

The bullet whistles past Chen Zhen's shoulder, tearing
the cloth of his coat.

It hits the wolf in the chest and blasts out through its
skull. The wolf falls dead at Chen Zhen's feet, blood
seeping over the dusty ground.

Gertai puts down his gun and runs up to him furious.

GERTAI

You're a damn fool. What were you
playing at? The pelt's completely
ruined! Look at it!

Chen Zhen ignores him and walks past him, heading back to
the jeep, his eyes on Bao Shungi.

Hold on Chen Zhen as everyone gets back in the jeep.

They drive away, leaving the great wolf on the steppe - a
gift to Tengger.

The jeeps stop in the middle of the campsite, in front of
Bilig's yurt.

(CONTINUED)

160 CONTINUED:

160

Herders gather around as Shartseren and the hunters unload their haul of a two dozen dead wolves.

Chen Zhen jumps out of the car as Yang Ke approaches.

CHEN ZHEN

Where's Gasma? How is Bayar?

YANG KE

The boy is fine. The old man not so good.

Chen Zhen continues into Bilig's yurt.

161 **INT. PAPA BILIG'S YURT. EVENING**

161

In the gloom he takes in the colourful tapestries, the child sleeping peacefully, the venerable mongol on his couch.

There's a bowl of soup at Bilig's side, but the old man hasn't touched it.

CHEN ZHEN

You should eat, Papa.

Bilig opens his good eye. His breathing is very shallow, his voice a croaky whisper.

BILIG

I'll sleep now. Come back and read to me. I have been listening to Tengger a lot recently.

He means the sound of the wind flapping the felt walls, and humming in the guy ropes.

Chen Zhen takes his hand.

CHEN ZHEN

The wolves are dead. I'm sorry.

BILIG

Not all of them.... Not yours.

162 **EXT. PAPA BILIG'S YURT. EVENING.**

162

When Chen Zhen emerges from Papa Bilig's yurt the hunters, having photographed with their kills, are loading the dead wolves back on their jeep

BAO SHUNGI

You did well. I will make sure that all the members of the Production Brigade get rewarded for today's success.

(CONTINUED)

- 162 CONTINUED: 162
- Chen Zhen crosses to his own yurt.
- 163 **INT. CHEN ZHEN'S YURT. EVENING** 163
- Kneeling on the floor, he cuts some meat for the little wolf.
- 164 **EXT. INSIDE WOLF'S ENCLOSURE. EVENING** 164
- Chen Zhen opens the door of the rebuilt wolf enclosure and goes inside with a bowl of meat.
- Night is falling. In the darkness, Chen Zhen can just make out the stake in the center and the chain winding on the ground.
- CHEN ZHEN
Sorry I am late, little wolf..
(A beat)
Little wolf?
- Chen Zhen picks up the chain, follows it.
- The chain leads him to a heap of freshly dug earth. It disappears inside a deep tunnel - a lair the wolf has dug for its own protection.
- Chen pulls the chain.
- Its end is not attached to anything.
- Chen crouches, points his light inside the tunnel.
- The wolf's lair is empty.
- 165 **EXT. WOLF ENCLOSURE. NIGHT** 165
- Emerging from the wolf enclosure he sees Gasma crossing to the stables.
- Chen Zhen hurries after her.
- 166 **DELETED (MOVED OR COMBINED)** 166
- 167 **INT. STABLES. NIGHT.** 167
- As he enters the stables, Gasma is giving the horses their feed.

CHEN ZHEN
Where's little wolf.

(CONTINUED)

GASMA

I returned him - to the grassland

CHEN ZHEN

(Shocked)

You killed it?!

GASMA

I should have.

(Beat)

But I couldn't. I freed him.

CHEN ZHEN

You had no right, Gasma! He was my
wolf ! Where did you leave him?

GASMA

He was the wolf of Tengger. I owed
him a life. Two actually.

Chen Zhen's anger subsides. He remembers her threat of
suicide

CHEN ZHEN

Bayan is past the worst then?

GASMA

Almost healed. It's a miracle.

CHEN ZHEN

It's the power of modern medicine.
It's the future.

She smiles at his blind faith in progress.

GASMA

(laughing)

You Chinese....

She kisses him on the forehead

Chen takes her in his arms. For once she doesn't resist

Chen Zhen inhales her fragrance: of hay, of milk, of
grass from the prairie. He has waited so long for this
moment

They kiss hungrily.

CHEN ZHEN

Why are you doing this?

GASMA

(between kisses)

Because you're leaving soon.

CHEN ZHEN

Never. Never...

(CONTINUED)

167 CONTINUED: (2)

167

168 **THE SAME. LATER.**

168

The flashlight is lying on the haystack, its beam casting its light on the intertwined bodies of Gasma and Chen Zhen making love.

169 **EXT. CHEN AND YANG KE'S YURT / WOLF COMPOUND AND STABLES. DAWN.**

169

Chen and Yang Ke's yurt is silhouetted against the pale pink hues of early dawn.

170 **INT. STABLES. DAWN**

170

The flashlight batteries are almost gone. The feeble yellow glow from the bulb is fading.

Chen Zhen and Gasma lie stroking each other.

CHEN ZHEN

I'll stay forever.

She shakes her head tenderly

GASMA

No. You'll be what Tengger intended. You'll write our story. You will teach those Chinese about the big life and the little life.

CHEN ZHEN

And you?

GASMA

At least I'll sleep better now. Perhaps my dead husband will stop nagging me to have another child.

171 **EXT. WINDING MOUNTAIN TRAIL. DAY (WAS 136)**

171

The funeral procession winds along a trail carved out of the mountainside.

Older men are walking behind the horse-wagon.

It jolts, tossing the dead body off onto the ground.

Shartseren jumps out from the driver's seat.

He kneels down, unwraps the felt carpet shrouding Bilig.

He lays the Old Mongol's body on its back.

(CONTINUED)

171 CONTINUED:

171

At the foot of the slope, Chen Zhen and Yang Ke stand with their hands pressed together in prayer

Next to them stands Bao Shunghi.

Respectfully, he takes off his French beret.

Snowflakes are dancing in the air.

172 **EXT. HILLSIDE (WAS 137). DAY.**

172

The mourners are returning slowly to the village of yurts

There are snowflakes dancing in the wind. Winter is not far away.

Chen Zhen hears a distant howl.

He leaves the path and runs up the hillside.

173 **EXT. HILLTOP. DAY.**

173

He arrives at the hilltop, breathless.

Behind and below him the other mourners are mere specks now.

He sees a little shape on the opposite crest: a young wolf, sitting.

CHEN ZHEN

Little Wolf!!

The two look at each other for a long time.

Chen Zhen lowers his head. When he lifts it again, the little wolf is gone.

Chen Zhen stands alone, motionless, willing it to return.

It is gone, galloping out of sight towards the northern mountains

REVERSE on Chen Zhen alone on the hilltop, still waiting and hoping:

His POV: Beyond the hilltop opposite, a ray of sunshine lights up the drifting clouds, forming strange patterns....

.....as if the sky were smiling.

THE END