

Feng's soul floated away on meeting co-stars of

Wolf Totem

Shanghai-born actor Feng Shaofeng never expected his co-actors to welcome him this way: 20 baby wolves smelt his neck from behind.

Feng has the leading role in *Wolf Totem*, a film based on the Chinese best-selling novel of the same name about two young men's grassland life, especially their experiences with wolves.

To be released on Feb 19, the Chinese New Year, the film features 35 wolves, which were trained in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region during the past four years.

Canadian animal trainer Andrew Simpson told Feng he had to win the trust of the wolves the first time he met them, otherwise they would not cooperate in the filming.

The first thing Feng did after he went into the compound where the wolves were living was to sit down. If he remained standing he would be too tall for the wolves to approach. After sitting down, the wolves came up to him from behind and began to smell him.



Wolf trainer Andrew Simpson and actor Feng Shaofeng promoting *Wolf Totem* in Shanghai

"I felt like my soul floated away at that moment," said Feng.

And so a strong bond started, especially with a wolf called C-Saw whom Feng tried to adopt but it turned out to be impractical.

After filming, Simpson took all the wolves to Canada, where they now live on his ranch, enjoying their retirement from film stardom. Feng plays a young student, Chen Zhen, who was sent to the Inner Mongolian grasslands during the "cultural revolution" (1966-76). Wolves became part of his life, fighting him and inspiring him.

The novel was an immediate hit when it was published in 2004, prompting an English version, published by Penguin four years later.



Wolf Totem will compete for an audience with a number of films due to be released in the New Year season, including Jackie Chan's *Dragon Blade* and the Chen Kun-led fantasy blockbuster *Zhong Kui: Snow Girl and Dark Crystal*.

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