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FIRST LANGUAGE ENGLISH (US) **0524/13**

Paper 1 Reading **May/June 2020**

INSERT **2 hours**

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INFORMATION

- This insert contains the reading texts.
- You may annotate this insert and use the blank spaces for planning. **Do not write your answers** on the insert.

This document has **8** pages. Blank pages are indicated.

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Read **Text A**, and then answer **Questions 1(a)–(e)** on the question paper.

Text A: My week on powdered food

The writer explains their experience of a new powdered food product called Erfoo (Earth Food).

I've always found lunch annoying. It interrupts work. At the office, I resent the endless canteen queues; working from home, I object to the daily decision-making. Lunch fatigue troubled me so much that last month I decided I'd had enough. Erfoo (Earth Food) would be the solution to my problem. According to the advertisements, this self-proclaimed 'future of food for our planet' delivers 'everything your body needs'.

Coming in a minimalistic white pouch, the meal-replacement powder blends things like rice, peas and flaxseed. Add water, shake it up, and there's your lunch, dinner or breakfast, or all three. I ordered a week's supply, telling friends about my exciting discovery. Comments ranged from outraged to encouraging ('this makes a lot of sense'). My mum suggested I just ate a banana.

Apparently, Erfoo is favored by developers – people who make websites and apps. It leaves them with more time to write code. I began fantasizing about my new streamlined lifestyle: the extra work I would do, money I could save; maybe I'd lose weight. At the very least, I would feel a bit like an astronaut.

Sadly, my first gulp of Erfoo tastes revolting. There are lumps in the mixture – I've accidentally made it with room-temperature water. Chugging down the concoction, it strikes me that Erfoo doesn't just sound like the act of vomiting. I haven't enjoyed my liquid meal. Afterwards, I feel full, but not as if I've eaten.

When lunchtime next rolls around, I'm not hungry – the thought of Erfoo doesn't appeal. But if you're committed to the future of food, you know lunchtime is Erfoo o'clock.

This time I use chilled water, and a hand blender to eliminate lumps. I also add mocha flavoring. It occurs to me that I'm now, in fact, 'cooking'. This defeats the object of attempting to streamline the rigmarole of lunch, but at least my second Erfoo tastes more palatable.

As the week progresses, Erfoo becomes a habit, but by day seven a new joylessness has engulfed lunchtimes. I don't feel like a spaceman. I feel like an idiot. The Erfoo goes to the back of a kitchen cupboard and I eat a banana instead.

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Read **Text B**, and then answer **Question 1(f)** on the question paper.

Text B: A complete diet in a time-saving way?

The writer discusses some of the meal-replacement products such as protein shakes, gels and powders that are currently available.

You can divide the world into two groups of people: those who drink protein shakes for breakfast and those who don't. I am firmly in the latter. It's fair to say that I'm not the target market for the lucrative line of trendy meal-replacement products all tapping into the idea that food is old-fashioned, inconvenient and boring. Apparently, there's now a more hi-tech, whizz-bang way of delivering the same nutrients more efficiently in the form of gels and powders. Yum.

I'm almost tempted to try the 'bespoke vitamin and mineral blend' described as 'an all-natural, vegan formula' – until I talk to Joanna Blythman, an investigative food writer. She scoffs at the idea. 'These products contain technologically altered hi-tech ingredients. You're talking about industrial food chemistry where basic ingredients are being mucked around with and transformed. There are these very intense chemical sweeteners in there. There's sucralose; that's something like 200 times sweeter than sugar. There's maltodextrin – that's another sweetener. And xylitol – that's another one. It's all just rubbish. Then there's 'pea protein', which sounds good, doesn't it, but what is it? Peas treated with a number of complex, chemical reactions to extract some sort of beige powder.'

It does raise the question of why you'd want to eat that.

On Twitter, I find a Swiss software developer who tells me he's been eating nothing else for weeks. 'I've just moved to the city and it's an effort to find time to cook each evening. I have a very healthy lifestyle and like eating healthily. I read about it and thought I'd give it a go.'

My running partner, Catherine, is exactly the type of person who drinks protein shakes for breakfast. At the end of our run she pulls out her 'lunch' from her rucksack. 'It's OK,' she says.

I'm not sure. We may want to maximize the health benefits of food, but the research simply isn't there yet, and what about the emotional, cultural and social well-being aspects of food? We're not robots: food is more than just fuel.

Appetite is such a fundamental drive. Food is part of what we do every day to make our lives a bit nicer. If you've had a bad day, it's just that little nice thing you can do for yourself. And these products just don't get that at all.

Read **Text C**, and then answer **Questions 2(a)–(d)** and **Question 3** on the question paper.

Text C: The Clement Street Soup and Sourdough Restaurant

Lois has moved away from the place where she grew up to work for a company called General Dexterity (GD) founded by a young businessman called Andrei. The company designs industry-leading robot arms for factories and needs talented computer-programmers to find ways to improve what their robots can do.

Day one, Andrei gave a guided tour of the company's underground base – a cavernous construction, formerly a parking lot. Towering rows of robot arms sweeping, grasping and lifting lined the cement floor. Their plastic cladding was colored sky-blue, their contours friendly and capable with just the faintest suggestion of biceps – gentle swells sporting GD's logo, a lightning bolt.

These were repetitive gestures, Andrei explained, currently executed by human muscles and minds. Repetition stifled human creativity, he said. Repetition belonged to robots.

I learned about the software I'd be working on and saw the founder's original prototype robot arm, a three-jointed limb taller than me. You could call, 'Arm, change task. Say hello!' and it would wave a wide, eager greeting – unlike my new workmates.

Orientation week ended on Friday night. Then my job began. Not the following Monday. The next morning. Saturday. I had the feeling of being sucked – floop – into a pneumatic tube.

Programmers at GD were almost exclusively young, distant, cold-eyed wraiths, in identical denim. They started early morning, working past midnight, in a hurry to be done, and rich. Each week the section manager, Peter, reminded us: We're on a mission to replace human labor – work harder.

Programmers often slept at the office. Some nights I'd lie there, staring blankly at the ceiling and the braids of fiber ferrying data around the office. My parents were far away, locked in the frame of a video-chat window. I had no friends nearby. There was a knot in my stomach that wouldn't loosen. I existed in a state of stupor, brain flaccid, cells gasping. I couldn't get my turbine spinning.

It was Peter who'd recommended switching to the meal-replacement, Slurry. 'It's what we all eat,' he said.

At meal times, I sat in a corner of the empty cafeteria and slurped the gray gel.

It would have been Slurry for 'dinner' as always, if I hadn't discovered, stuck to my apartment's door, a handwritten menu advertising a local delivery service. I'd just arrived home from work. My face felt brittle from stress – this wasn't unusual. I was already flagging after a single summer at my new job. I was supposed to be one of the bright new additions, the fresh-faced ones. My face wasn't fresh. My hair had gone flat and thin. My stomach hurt.

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I wouldn't normally have been interested, but this menu, written in a dark confident script, intrigued me. At the top, in exuberant letters, was the restaurant's name and telephone number. The menu was compact: Spicy Soup, a Spicy Sandwich or a Combo (double spicy), all of which, the menu explained in its curling connectors, were vegetarian. The menu charmed me – as a result, my night, and my life, bent off on a different track.

I called the number. A friendly voice answered, 'Hello! What can I make for you?'

I ordered the Combo.

Sometime later, my order arrived, delivered by a cheery young man with a heavy, hard-to-place accent: 'Good evening, my friend!'

I dug in my pocket for cash, then thought to ask, 'What kind of food is this?'

His face beamed. 'Real food, traditionally made. If you like it, I'll give you the recipe.'

Sitting on my kitchen countertop – utterly bare in those days, free from any sign of food preparation – I consumed the first Combo (double spicy) of my life. The healing powers, physical and psychic, of the spicy soup made traditional noodle soup seem like dishwater. It was an elixir. The sandwich was spicier still, thin-sliced vegetables slathered with a fluorescent red sauce, the burn buffered by thick slabs of bread artfully toasted. First my stomach unclenched, then my brain. I let loose a long sigh that transformed into a rippling burp. I laughed out loud.

That night, instead of fitfully reviewing the day's errors, I fell asleep soothed by spicy broth and dreams of baking that fragrant, fluffy sourdough bread.

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