



‘WOLF TOTEM’ (‘LANG TU TENG’/‘LE DERNIER LOUP’)

French director Jean-Jacques Annaud adapts the Chinese bestseller about a Beijing youngster who adopts a wolf cub in Inner Mongolia during the Cultural Revolution

Chen’s fascination with the steppes wolves starts early on, after flouting Bilig’s advice and being cornered by a pack while traveling alone. This short early standoff already offers a solid showcase of not only **James Horner’s** strings and, later, brass-dominated score, which expertly ratchets up the tension, but also Annaud and cinematographer **Jean-Marie Dreujou’s** suggestive use of low camera angles and closeups that generate suspense and virtually anthropomorphize the menacing lupine creature.

There’s no denying that Annaud can put together a terrific action sequence. A chase sequence about an hour in, involving horses and wolves in a nighttime snowstorm, is spectacularly staged, with stunning overhead shots and great use of minimal light, including the sickly yellow-green beams of the herdsmen’s flashlights that give the audience just enough of a sense of what’s going on while also illustrating the protagonists’ overwhelming sense of confusion and panic. Also noteworthy are two sequences, shot in broad daylight on the day after a wolf attack, that feature countless frozen animal carcasses in a lake that turn the results of nature’s cruelty into a thing of eerie beauty.

Two packs of wolves were specifically trained for this film from practically the day they were born, back in 2010, by animal trainer **Andrew Simpson**, who directed the spectacular Siberia-set documentary *Wolves Unleashed*.

The results of Simpson and Annaud’s work is often stunning.