

The New York Post

Trained wolves steal the show in 'Wolf Totem' film adaptation

Wolves who were raised from cubs and trained to give remarkable performances on camera are the big attraction in French director Jean-Jacques Annaud's sweeping Chinese ecological epic, which is getting a much-deserved run on IMAX screens. This adaptation of the best-selling novel is worth seeing just for a spectacular sequence depicting the wolves chasing a herd of prize horses toward a frozen lake during a blinding snowstorm — which appears to have been shot with minimal computer-generated fakery.



The Washington Post

While the movie uses a variety of tricks, the wolves are genuine. These are not the CGI critters of the "Twilight" series. Wolves, horses and sheep are the principal players in the movie's set pieces, which are powerfully staged and tightly edited, if sometimes oversold by James Horner's bombastic score. Annaud and his crew, including wolf trainer Andrew Simpson, nicely illustrate the animals' cunning and coordination. One sequence shows why some herders were once convinced that wolves can fly.

Philadelphia Enquirer

Wolf Totem has some of the most exciting, mind-blowing scenes of nature I've ever seen. In one typical sequence, a pack of wolves hunts down an entire herd of horses in a wild storm. The camera switches from dizzying long shots taken from helicopters to eye level views of wolves ripping into horse's necks.

Screen International

Shot on location under daunting conditions over a year-and-a-half period on the rugged steppes of Inner Mongolia using real wolves and a bare minimum of new-fangled digital effects. (Annaud says there are only 5 full-CGI shots out of over 2800, with some animatronics thrown in.)

Minneapolis Star Tribune

A remarkable shot of a wolf rubbing against a fallen one in a gesture of mourning, seem shot from real life. What about the scene where a hungry pack climbs a vertical barrier to feed on the sheep housed inside? I have no guess. The film features astounding performances by its running, fighting, emotionally moving tribe of wolves who, along with their trainers, deserve a round of applause.

Hollywood Reporter

The animal footage looks fantastic. 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.

Variety

The production reportedly took three years so that the wolves could be trained from the cub stage, and they exert a mysterious, hypnotic collective presence.

Toronto Sun

The pack of specially trained wolves used in the film are sometimes better at emoting than the human actors.



LA Times

“Annaud insisted on using real wolves and not CGI creatures because “you don’t get into the soul of the wolf, you get into the soul of the computer artist,” he said.

Now Toronto

Among the outstanding set pieces, the most spectacular is a battle between the wolf pack and mounted herders trying to control a horse stampede in the middle of a blizzard.

Slant Magazine

The chase scenes involving wolves, horses, and gazelles are breathtaking in their realism and utterly convincing in their violence.

Boston Globe

An adorable cub called ‘Little Wolf’ is the one who steals your heart.

The Guardian

Wolf Totem has undeniable elemental, even spiritual, power at its disposal. The wolves get as many adulatory close-ups as any Hollywood A-lister, and Annaud relishes filming the pack on clifftops in pouting choreographed ranks, like some canine boyband, or a shaggy, panting Mount Rushmore. The central sequence – a desperate attempt by the herders to head off a horse stampede in a blizzard – is fantastically exciting, and mostly done in-camera, not through CGI: pounding hooves, yellow flashlights picking out horror-movie fangs, blind desperation.

LA Times.com

It’s easy to see why director Jean-Jacques Annaud showcases those animals in such majestic fashion. Raised for the film by trainer Andrew Simpson, the wolves are worthy of every close-up they get.

Reeling Reviews

No CGI was used to recreate the animals. Wolf trainer Andrew Simpson raised the animals used in the film.

The New York Times

The landscape and painstakingly trained wolves are the true stars. The work with actual animals offers an increasingly rare pleasure.

Honeycutts Hollywood

The film’s stars are its wolves, magnificent in their teamwork and hunting tenacity, deadly in their attacks and fiercely independent of man even though man benefits from their animal population control. The brightness of their eyes, the ferocity of their teeth and jaws where saliva drips as they patiently stalk prey, the thickness of fur coats to protect them from harsh weather make these magnificent creatures among the most fascinating animals in all the animal kingdom.

The Boston Herald

‘Wolf Totem’ leads pack with poetic beauty.