

VARIETY

Camerimage: 'Wolf Totem' Cinematographer Shot Wildlife and Human Drama in 3D



NOVEMBER 20, 2015 | 04:26AM PT

Location filming took place in Inner Mongolia

Peter Caranicas (<http://variety.com/author/peter-caranicas/>)

Deputy Editor

@petercaranicas (<http://twitter.com/@petercaranicas>)

BYDGOSZCZ, Poland — Back in October the Motion Picture Academy stirred up a small ruckus when it deemed that Jean-Jacques Annaud (<http://variety.com/t/jean-jacques-annaud/>)'s “Wolf Totem (<http://variety.com/t/wolf-totem/>)” was not Chinese enough for consideration as China's foreign-language Oscar contender and disqualified it from the race. (China then substituted local hit “Go Away Mr. Tumor.”)

But such mundane politicking was hardly relevant for d.p. Jean-Marie Dreujou (<http://variety.com/t/jean-marie-dreujou/>), who focused on the art, craft and travails of 3D (<http://variety411.com/us/los-angeles/high-def-3d-digital-cinema/>) cinematography in the sweeping grasslands of China's Inner Mongolia when he answered questions following a screening of the film here.

The Franco-Chinese co-production centers on a student from Beijing who is sent to live among Mongolian herders during the cultural revolution, when millions of “intellectuals” were forced to abandon their homes and take on rural lives. During his exile, the protagonist, played by Shaofeng Feng (pictured above), becomes fascinated by the wolf packs that attack the nomads' herds. Eventually, he secretly adopts a pup that he tries to domesticate as his new nomad family responds with various layers of approval and disapproval.

Meanwhile, local authorities, controlled by Beijing, embark on a campaign to kill the region's wolves. The locals, who have lived in semi-harmony with the predators for centuries, protest.

“Wolf Totem” presents a classic tale of man vs. nature, and skillfully weaves into that story an episode of recent Chinese history.

Dreujou's cinematography captures Mongolia's majestic landscapes and spectacular weather, and offers lyrical images of the wolves and other animals that live in an uneasy balance with the region's humans — who themselves face conflicts as social change takes hold.

Logistics are a primary concern when shooting wild animals. “First you need to secure a large area so the animal won’t escape,” said Dreujou. “Then, after you decide where to put the camera (<http://variety411.com/us/new-york/camera-sound-equipment/>), you have to protect the camera.”

Wolf wranglers were always nearby.

Another necessity of wild-animal shooting is patience. “You always have to wait for the right moment to capture the animals,” said Dreujou.

Dreujou and Annaud began scouting Mongolian locations for “Wolf Totem” in 2012. The film’s prep time was lengthy. The duo — both French — spent a year and a half back and forth between China and France. Shooting time amounted to 115 days, though not continuously as they felt it was important to film during all four seasons to capture the constantly changing beauty of the countryside.

The d.p. and his team used many cameras in order to capture as much as possible in a single take, although some scenes required several takes.

In addition to the wildlife, capturing nature was a challenge. “We waited for long times to catch the perfect images of clouds and landscapes,” said Dreujou.

They shot many of the interiors in studios, using lights and mirrors to replicate the play of light and dark inside the Mongolian yurts, where the nomads resided.

“Wolf Totem” was filmed in China and the country’s Inner Mongolia region in stereo 3D, although close-ups were shot in 2D and converted later. Exterior scenes after dark were shot day-for-night.

“All the wolves in the film are real,” said Dreujou. “The only thing we changed in CG was their eyes, to make them more intense.” The animals were often shot at 150 frames per second, which allowed the filmmakers to create more lyrical images of the beasts.

Want to read more articles like this one? .

by Taboola (http://popup.taboola.com/en/?template=colorbox&taboola_utm_source=pmc-variety&taboola_utm_m)

YOU MAY LIKE

(<http://variety.com/2016/film/news/sylvester-stallone-golden-globes-creed-1201676634/>)

Sylvester Stallone Talks Family, Respecting the Memory of His Late Son Backstage at Golden Globes

(<http://variety.com/2016/film/news/sylvester-stallone-golden-globes-creed-1201676634/>)

(<http://variety.com/2016/film/news/sean-penn-el-chapo-rolling-stone-1201676056/>)

Sean Penn Under Investigation for Secretly Interviewing Mexican Drug Lord 'El Chapo'

(<http://variety.com/2016/film/news/sean-penn-el-chapo-rolling-stone-1201676056/>)

(<http://variety.com/2016/biz/news/kate-del-castillo-el-chapo-sean-penn-1201676183/>)

Kate del Castillo: Meet the Star Playing a Big Part in El Chapo's Real-Life Drama

(<http://variety.com/2016/biz/news/kate-del-castillo-el-chapo-sean-penn-1201676183/>)

© Copyright 2016 Variety Media, LLC, a subsidiary of Penske Business Media, LLC. Variety and the Flying V logos are trademarks of Variety Media, LLC.

[Variety411: Your production services resource \(http://variety411.com/\)](http://variety411.com/)