



## TWO BROTHERS

Rating: Unknown

### A Conversation with Jean-Jacques Annaud

*In his new film *Two Brothers*, the Academy Award-winning director explores the untamed beauty of the animal world and promotes a stirring message of cultural and animal preservation.*

By Yvonne Milosevic

French filmmaker Jean-Jacques Annaud has spent the better part of the last decade globetrotting from one exotic locale to the next, creating signature cinematic canvases that fairly crackle with sumptuous texture and imagery. This time around, Annaud's artistic efforts take root in the lush jungles of Colonial French Cambodia, with a fable of twin tigers born amid the strangled ruins of the Lost Temples of Angkor. "This movie is a combination of three of my greatest passions: the animal world; a love of monasteries and temples; and my fascination with the European colonial period," explains Annaud. "It was a world that irritated and fascinated, but its buffoonery and quirky characters also amused me."

Feline protagonists Kumal and Sangha are plucked from their tropical sanctuary and must learn to bow to the capricious –and often cruel – whims of man. Billed as an epic adventure of discovery, survival and wonder, *Two Brothers* takes a pointed look at mankind's foibles, as well as what happens when we take these magnificent beasts out of the wild.

Although Animal Safety Reps from American Humane's Film & Television Unit did not directly monitor this international production, we have had the opportunity to converse with the director about some of the animal welfare-related issues raised by the film.

**You've said that even before making *The Bear* in the late 80s, you were interested in making a film featuring tigers. What was it about these creatures that captivated your interest, and why did it take so many years to come back to that idea?**

You know what happened was when I researched for *The Bear* I was going to a lot of places where I could see other animals. And each time I was fascinated with the tigers, to a point that I thought to do a movie called *The Tiger* instead of *The Bear*. In those days, I felt that the bear, because they're so often vertical, would give me a better identification, or would provide more instant identification from the viewers.

As a matter of fact, when I shot the movie and put it together, I realized that this vertical position had nothing to do with the quick identification. It had to do with the situation; it had to do with the emotions. When I finished *The Bear*, I never thought I would feel the need of doing another movie starring animals and on the perspective of animals. But as a matter of fact, you know, since I've done *The Bear*, I have done four films and I suddenly felt the need to go back to the heart of, should I say, one of the companions that are living on this planet.



I lived thoroughly my adventure with the bear. I identified with the bear for months on the set, as I do with all my actors. You know, when I direct a Chinese man, I feel as Chinese as I can; when I direct a woman I feel as feminine as I can; and



when I direct a tiger, I have to have in my heart what I believe are his emotions. So what happened is like when you finish a wonderful meal, you don't want to go to the restaurant again. I had the sort of feeling that I was fulfilled with the bear. And yet, especially after my last movie called *Enemy at the Gates*, which was set in the Second World War against the smoking ruins of Stalingrad in a world of fire, explosions and dust, I felt then the need of a peaceful jungle. I felt like making a heartwarming movie, like doing something about friendship and

brotherhood. I suddenly felt the need of diving into the green eyes of a tiger. It became a sort of personal need and I like to be in that state when I start a movie.

**Making films where the main protagonists are animals naturally requires much more time, logistical planning, and flexibility than films with human stars. What is it about working with animals or telling a story from the animal's point of view that makes it worth these major inconveniences?**

Well first, you know, I am amazed to see how many people ignore that animals have intelligence, memory, emotions. In a way it annoys me, and this is why people still kill animals or make animals suffer; they've been told through years of Christianity that we are so superior, that only we have feelings, they just cannot understand. And it annoys me, it upsets me, and therefore I feel excited when I can show or tell a story in an emotional way where people will share the point of view of what I would call "the Other". And that is why I wanted to do this film.

**It was fascinating to learn that researchers are taking a new look at the idea of long-term memory in animals—a concept that had previously been rejected, it seems. In fact, you even touched upon the idea of animal memory and dreams several years ago in *The Bear*.**

You know, it's almost terrifying to see that people believe that tigers are just killing machines. But how would they hunt if they don't memorize the techniques of their prey? How do they recognize their path? You know, they roam in immense territories, especially the Siberian tigers; it's sometimes thousands of square miles. And they always return to the same little cave, years after. How would they do that if they have no memory?

So it's fascinating to see how men, how mankind, has almost put a wall around themselves, not understanding that we are all of a common nature. If the tiger looks human, it's not because they've been humanized by some trick. It's because if you look at them carefully, you will see that they display anger, pleasure, sex appeal, desire—all the emotions we can display ourselves.

When I did *The Bear*, one review out of three would accuse me of being a naïve imbecile because I had animals dreaming. Those were people who have no cats and dogs at home. Unfortunately, they cannot imagine that our brain is functioning in the same pattern as those animals. Of course it's a little more sophisticated, but the basics are the same.

**How would you address critics who claim that this film anthropomorphizes the intelligence, recognition and memory in tigers?**

For them, I would remind them that the movie is a fable; therefore, if they do not believe that tigers have memory, well then they should just take it as a fable, as a parable. But you know, my big pleasure is to see that most people in audiences understand it and they don't question it, because their gut tells them that yes, this is what would happen. Tigers do recognize each other, you know they have a smell system that is very sophisticated, and also there is the stripes pattern that differentiates them greatly.

It sounds like you did a lot of research into animal behavior, especially on tigers, for this film.

Well, you know, I have to. This is part of my pleasure. I love being a student again every three years. When I start a project, first I start the sort of outline, and then I dive into books and I immerse myself into research. For this one, I was fortunate enough to have a large collection of books that I've bought over the years because of my interest for the colonial times. I had at home a large collection of almost unknown books written by hunters in that period. You know, big game hunting was very fashionable and all those guys were writing books that were very popular in those days. And I had those

at home.

And after that, I went of course to the specialized books on tigers, and one of the best specialists is Valmik Thapar, who became a friend of mine. I visited him in Ranthambore National Park near Jaipur in Rajasthan, and he took me at dawn and dusk for 15 days to see the tigers in the wild in every possible situation. I've seen them stalking, killing, having passionate love affairs, having territorial battles, taking care of the cubs. I mean, it was quite phenomenal. In the evening, I would have sort of private lectures with two Indian specialists who are researchers on tiger behavior who happened to be in that park at the same time. It was a fascinating period where I took thousands of notes.

And of course, another way to get my act together was to go to see Thierry Leportier's tigers. Leportier is one of the best trainers in the world today, one of the most respected. He's the man who did *Gladiator*, among many other films. He has wolves, pumas, lions, panthers and tigers. He has a rather large collection of those animals that he keeps in Poitou, in France, near [Le Grande Parc du] Puy du Fou (...) in the west of France. It's a very well-known place, and this is where I did my casting session.

**The film brings up the issue of divergent cultural attitudes toward exotic animals, as well as the message of leaving both the living and historical treasures in the jungle, where they belong. While filming *Two Brothers*, were you able to perceive in the Cambodian people any distinct cultural attitudes toward the animals?**

Well unfortunately, you know, Cambodians are still poaching extensively, and they're still letting their art go for a few dollars. This is something very unfortunate that their government is trying to sort it out, but you have to realize that a policeman or a gendarme in Cambodia is paid \$20 a month—if he's lucky to be paid – while the skin of a tiger can give him \$1,000 dollars. So that's the big problem, and same thing with statues, you know. I've heard with great despair that one of the most beautiful statues on the (...) river where I shot had been stolen since I shot there. Between the moment I scouted for locations and the moment I shot, a number of statues had disappeared. I have the picture before and the picture now – I'm talking about a number of months. It's a terrifying situation. But the drama of Cambodia: it's one of the poorest countries ... that has the most extraordinary temples in the world. So you have this contradiction and you immediately understand what it creates.

It's also a cultural thing. If the guy who's the warden for the national park of all the temples, if you pay him more, he would still like to sell a statue because he will then get [even] more [money]. I feel very sorry because it's a country that I really adore, and we had the most wonderful time in that country and I must say that of course, a number of people in Cambodia are very desperate to change the situation. But I have also to say the truth and see that it's still going on.

**Did you feel safe while traveling there; were the people hospitable?**

Very hospitable, and very safe. But, but, from day one, we were sort of very welcome officially by the king and the prime minister. Although belonging to different political parties and having different views on the future of Cambodia, they both were extraordinarily involved in the making of this movie. They felt it was good for their country. And also, the king being very Francophile, he knew all my movies, and that helped a lot!

**In *Two Brothers*, the characters Zerbino and Saladin portray a very negative side of circuses and some of their dubious training techniques. Granted, the story does take place many years ago and in a developing country, but I'm curious to know what your opinion is of circuses operating today.**

Well you know, I've got very mixed feelings because on the one hand, I know that man, children ... need to see other animals. I'm very sad to see that humankind is now so removed from animals. You know, before, we were all living in farms, therefore we knew –we had dogs, cows, donkeys – we understood that we were connected. Now people live in cities and they're entirely disconnected. And in one aspect, it is good for the training about life to share things with other animals. Now it's true that I've witnessed when I was a kid in France some appalling little circuses that were mistreating their animals, and of course, we cannot ignore this.

I think one has to be extremely cautious about tigers being used in [circuses]. I have witnessed, on the contrary, animals that were extremely well kept and that are very happy to be part of, to be the partners of a group that has sort of an exciting life. So you see you've got the two aspects.

I do not want to condemn the globality of it, because I see that a lot of the new generation of trainers are people who are in love with the species, you know, they identify with the species, and there is no treasure better than that animal they are working with and the animal knows that he is part of something very much like a dog and his master. Everyone knows that the dog feels happy when his master is happy, because it's a partnership. And therefore that is very touching and very positive.



So one has to condemn when the attitude is just exploitation, and one has to praise when the attitude, on the contrary, is positive on both sides.

I think the key to the matter is to ask yourself, "What does the animal feel?" Are we having here an animal that is proud and pleased, or do we have an animal who feels like a slave that has been abused?

#### **How were the fire scenes accomplished?**

You know tigers, like all animals, are frightened with fire, therefore, they're frightened with the flickering of fire, and also frightened in the big inferno that I depict at the end of the film. They would be frightened with the noise that those machines are doing because this is a controlled fire and it's a mixture of gas and oil, therefore, it does make noise, and that would be a very frightening thing for a tiger if he was not accustomed to it, accustomed to work close to that and knowing that it was not an unpleasant experience because it never happened in the training that he got close enough to even feel the heat of the flame.

What I've done for that big scene is in every scene where you see the tiger jumping through the fire either frontal or from the back, they were as a matter of fact only jumping against a blue screen. And then I replaced the blue screen with a curtain of flames and shot that separately and combined that later on in the lab.

Now, on the contrary, when they jump through the flame on the side, what I did is, when the camera is lateral, we had flames very close to the camera and very far away from the tiger, but the perspective doesn't tell you, and a curtain of flames further down, creating a large, should I say, panel or passage between the two curtains of flames, and of course we made sure that we were shooting on days when there was absolutely no wind so we had no problem.

Because the animals were so well trained, it was a very smooth and pleasant shoot; there were no rows, no anger on that shoot. It was very peaceful, and possibly because the tigers were so peaceful and we were all in the same mood. It was a very happy shoot, and that scene in particular went extremely well because it was very smooth, you know, the animals felt confident and it was magnificent to see how they were acting in those shots.

#### **How long did it take to train the tigers? I understand that training for The Bear took four years.**

Yes, The Bear was just a phenomenally long time. But you know tigers are rather quick to, they're very intelligent animals, and one year was enough.

#### **I need to teach my cat at home a few tricks then...**

Ah, no no no, they're very different. You know tigers are easier than [domestic] cats to train, for some reason. I cannot explain why. But I did have a cat, who unfortunately died of old age the very day the movie opened [in France]. He really was my best consultant ... And that cat, like every cat, was very independent and all that, while tigers, in a way, they appear more friendly. They're so confident, you know; they have very much the mentality of a dog, but with the appearance of a cat. I mean, that is my impression after spending a year with them.

#### **Considering the constant advancements occurring in the fields of animatronics and CG effects, do you predict a time in the near future when the use of exotic animals in filmed entertainment won't be necessary?**

No, no, no, because the same thing could apply with actors. Here, what I'm getting from those tigers are natural reactions. And a machine, it's not that a machine couldn't do it—it's the programmer that couldn't do it. Because who would know what's the expression of a tiger when he looks at a seductive female? How do I ask a programmer to do that? So it's probably feasible to have, let's say, maybe a fish or insect, maybe you don't need to take all the trouble. But when you have animals as complex as tigers, where there are so many facial expressions, and so many vocal expressions, it's very much like a human. How do you replace Julia Roberts by a robot?

#### **The vocal sounds being made by the cubs were all authentic?**

Yes, it's all authentic. You know, on The Bear, we had to invent a number of sounds or to improve a number of sounds with synthesizers, while on this one, not at all, because they do so many sounds, and they're so extraordinary and so evocative that it's absolutely 100% tiger – small ones and big ones.

#### **Some people have called it ironic that Two Brothers uses captive bred animals to tell a story promoting the return of wild animals to their natural environment. How would you respond to that?**

Well, you know, that's the same problem with any actor. You often have a very well paid star that is playing the "poor guy", and this is the paradox of actors. We couldn't even think—because it would be very wrong—to use wild animals because we would be disturbing their lives. Of course we had to use professionals, and once again, this is the paradox of the actor. This movie is fiction; it is played by actors. The difference is those actors happen to be tigers.

**Both *The Bear* and *Two Brothers* deal with issues of separation and rescue, big game hunting, and man's invasion of the animals' domain. Why have these themes resonated so strongly with you?**

Well because, listen, we are the only enemies of those species. I live in a farm south of Paris, and every fall, I have the impression that it's the War again, because it's like in Verdun. I hear people slaughtering deer and rabbits and foxes, and it makes me very sad, because I like being in a country place surrounded by wildlife. I hate people who massacre just for the pleasure of killing.

**It's interesting when people move out to the wild, so to speak, and then try to remove all wild elements from their new environment.**

Yes, I'm just the opposite, you know. I'm to the point now that in many of my barns I've got spiders, and all this, and I think "Well, this is their place!"

**When people walk out of the theatres after seeing *Two Brothers*, what message, if any, do you hope they take with them?**

I feel that the power of movies is to create emotion in the heart of people instead of a speech full of good intentions. I think it's much better to have them reflect and think about what they can do. And obviously as a lot of them are moved when they leave the theater, I do hope that not only for the parent, but for the younger generation, it can be a good way to respect what I call the "Others."

**I want to thank you for sharing all of these thoughts with me today.**

Well listen, it was very pleasant...and thank you—I must say, your questions were very exciting!

Starring:	Kumal, Sangha, Guy Pierce, Jean-Claude Dreyfus, Freddie Highmore	Director:	Jean-Jacques Annaud
Producer(s):	Jean-Jacques Annaud, Jake Eberts	Screenwriter:	Jean-Jacques Annaud, Alain Godard
Studio:	Universal Studios	Animal Coordinator:	Thierry Leportier (France), Randy Miller (U.S.A.)
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