

# 'Wolf' Is a Beauty of a Beast

**MOVIE REVIEW**  
**\*\*\* BROTHERHOOD OF THE WOLF (Le Pacte des Loups)** (R). In provincial 18th-century France, a vicious beast is culling humans out of the herd and creating outrageous pre-Revolutionary metaphors. Visceral, hysterical and near-poetical in its violence. With Samuel Le Bihan, Monica Bellucci, Emilie Dequenne, Vincent Cassel, Jérémie Renier. Written by Stéphane Cabel and Christophe Gans. Directed by Christophe Gans. 2:22 (sexuality, nudity, violence, gore). In French with English subtitles. At select Manhattan theaters.

By John Anderson  
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**T**HEY'RE BOTH French imports, but that would seem to begin and end the points of comparison between ultraviolent "Brotherhood of the Wolf" and sweet-faced "Amélie." So why was I watching one and thinking about the other?

Partly, I suppose, because there are times you wish "Brotherhood's" species of slaving beast had made old Amélie disappear. But, mostly, because both are strictly post-production movies. The near-hallucinogenic speed of their visuals, the editing-within-an-inch-of-its-life aesthetic upon which the films are put together and the philosophy that the faster things move the less likely we'll leave, all contribute to a movie experience that borders on the overwhelming. And that's our consumer report for today: If you like movies that presume you have no attention span, you'll like both of these films.



Universal Studios Photo  
 Vincent Cassel in "Brotherhood of the Wolf"

"Brotherhood of the Wolf," a political costume drama/martial-arts horror film and the more logical beneficiary of director Christophe Gans' style of breakneck filmmaking, is based on a centuries-old French legend, a kind of Jack the Ripper bedtime story for little French farm kids. In 1765, during the reign of Louis XV, more than 100 of the rural poor of southern France either went missing or turned up ravaged by what seemed to be a mythically hideous beast. Integrating the naturally awful aspects of such a story with the kind of political intrigue that prefigures the Revolution, Gans has turned out a film that works on a lot of levels, but mostly as an aesthete's monster movie.

Louis XV, fearful of what a beast-based reign of terror will do to his hold on power, dispatches a scientist, the Chevalier de Fronsac (Samuel Le Bihan), and his Iroquois blood-brother Mani (Mark Dacascos) to the Gevaudan province to investigate the killings. There, they encounter the village priest, Sardis (Jean-François Stévenin), and the maimed hunter Jean Francois (Vincent Cassel), and a population that represents everything backward and biased about unenlightened France.

That Fronsac represents scientific inquiry and Mani the unknown terrors of both a New World and a new race are indicative of Gans' pro-republican agenda and less-than-subtle politics. He's also more than willing to toss in every genre-bridging device and overt symbol — Mani being one example; Jean-Francois' elegant sister with the Frencher-than-French name of Marianne (Emilie Dequenne of "Rosetta") being another. But "Brotherhood of the Wolf" isn't a manifesto about intolerance and collective politicization. It's an action thriller.

And a good one. The effects and fight scenes are first-rate — Jim Henson's Creature Shop provided the animatronics — but the film's biggest technical asset may be editor David Wu, a veteran of the better films of Hong Kong action master John Woo. Whether the denouement of "Brotherhood of the Wolf" is thoroughly satisfying may be a question, but getting there is certainly a trip. ■