



THE WITCH



FROM NOW / RATED MA15+ / DIRECTOR Robert Eggers / CAST Anya Taylor-Joy, Ralph Ineson, Kate Dickie, Harvey Scrimshaw, Ellie Grainger



Something wickedly good this way comes...



UPON ITS RELEASE, *The Witch* was hailed by many as a modern horror masterpiece. The only people it didn't seem to impress, however, were self-described "horror fans": *The Witch* was too slow; not scary enough. While the film didn't jive with purists' definition of the genre — jump scares, gore, a hefty body count — it did manage to tap into a vein of horror that has been dormant: one that pushes psychological torment and a slow build of dread until it conjures a nightmarish bridge between our world and a much darker one that lays just underneath. Think more *The Shining*; less *Final Destination*.

Bearing much in common with Kubrick's aforementioned classic about an isolated family who spiral into madness at the hands of sinister supernatural forces, *The Witch* follows a 17th-century New England Puritan family who choose to exile themselves from their not-fanatically-Christian-enough village and relocate to a remote area near a foreboding forest. When the family's newborn goes missing while in teen daughter Thomasin's (Taylor-Joy) care (courtesy of the crone of the film's title), the clan begins to unravel; to know much more would threaten to break the dark spell *The Witch* goes on to confidently cast.

The performances are uniformly excellent, but the MVP is debut feature director Robert Eggers: his childhood obsession with witches informs the amazing attention to detail in the film (historically accurate costumes, sets and language with certain dialogue being lifted directly from 17th-century transcripts), and his mastery of tone and technique heralds him as a formidable new talent.

And while his *Witch* may not have you regularly leaping out of your seat in abject terror, it does promise to haunt your dreams long after the credits roll.

EXTRAS None.

JAMES JENNINGS



"Whatcha thinkin' 'bout, Satan?"
"Aw, y'know, evil stuff."

BLACK PHILLIP IS G.O.A.T.

The inside story of *The Witch's* unlikely breakout star

GOATS WILL EAT anything — movies included. If you'd laid a bet on the identity of the breakout star from Robert Eggers's chilling horror *The Witch*, you'd have been given short odds on its beguiling young star, Anya Taylor-Joy. Or maybe even Ralph Ineson, finally finding a role that should help him escape the long, shoe-throwing shadow of Finch from *The Office*. You would certainly have been given ridiculously long odds on Black Phillip, the headstrong family goat that turns out to be so much more than anyone expected.

But that's exactly what's happened. Black Phillip has become not just the poster-goat for Robert Eggers's Puritan chiller, but an unlikely horror icon with an ever-growing, mega-baffling variety of tributes. There's the Black Phillip faux-toy from *Kinder Trauma* ("He really talks!"). And petitions for an Apple emoticon (or egoaticon). "You know, there's an English pub serving a stout called Black Phillip?" offers Eggers. "It's all come as a bit of a shock. I mean, people are getting Black Phillip tattoos..."

Black Phillip is actually Charlie, a 90kg billy goat who got his big break through a photo-selection process that sounds like Grindr for goats (Bleatr?). "Charlie was perfect: huge, with an impressive pair of horns," says Eggers. "You could easily picture a witch riding him in a Hans Baldung engraving."

Black Phillip's presence was initially intended to be subtle and insidious. As it turned out, Charlie didn't do subtle. Joining the cast on the remote Ontario set, the goat's devil-may-care approach to acting soon proved divisive. "Anya nicknamed him 'stoner goat' and the twins liked him," says Eggers. "Ellie Grainger, who played Mercy, would pamper Charlie, plaiting his beard. But boy, did he not like Ralph. Not. At. All."

That appears to be the understatement of the year. "It was hate at first sight," shudders Ineson. He had two settings: sleeping or attacking me." One scene, which got cut, was 40 seconds of goat wrestling. "I did 27 knackerings takes — he was 10 kilos heavier than me." Charlie emerged victorious. Ineson ended up in ER. Charlie had ripped a tendon from his rib. Ineson's reward for surviving the ordeal was a cast of his horn, now displayed in his downstairs loo ("Not his actual horns, although the thought did cross my mind at the end of the shoot"), and when Eggers was last in the UK, the pair went for a slap-up meal at Soho's Smoking Goat. "We ate a big old goat and had our revenge," laughs Eggers. "You know, I feel a bit bad. Charlie shouldn't need to give a shit about my film, but he didn't make life easy." And how. As back-up, the production flew in two replica model Charlies but it all went a bit *Spinal Tap*. The first was half the size of Charlie. The second, the size of a cow. Neither were used, presumably because they looked utterly ridiculous, and Eggers found himself at the mercy of a diva goat. With kids on set, the infamous rearing scenes were achieved "with about 400 leashes from every direction of people holding onto Charlie". But Eggers has no regrets. "People connect with Black Phillip because he's a real goat, not CG. We just don't see good, honest animal performances anymore."

Charlie wasn't invited to the premiere. He'd probably eat the red carpet. In fact, with just one movie under his horns, he's now retired to Northern Ontario, close to Kiosk, where *The Witch* was shot. "I imagine right now Charlie is on his farm doing his three favourite things," says Eggers. "Chilling, eating grass and licking his genitals." Whatever Charlie's up to, let's hope he's living deliciously. **SIMON CROOK**