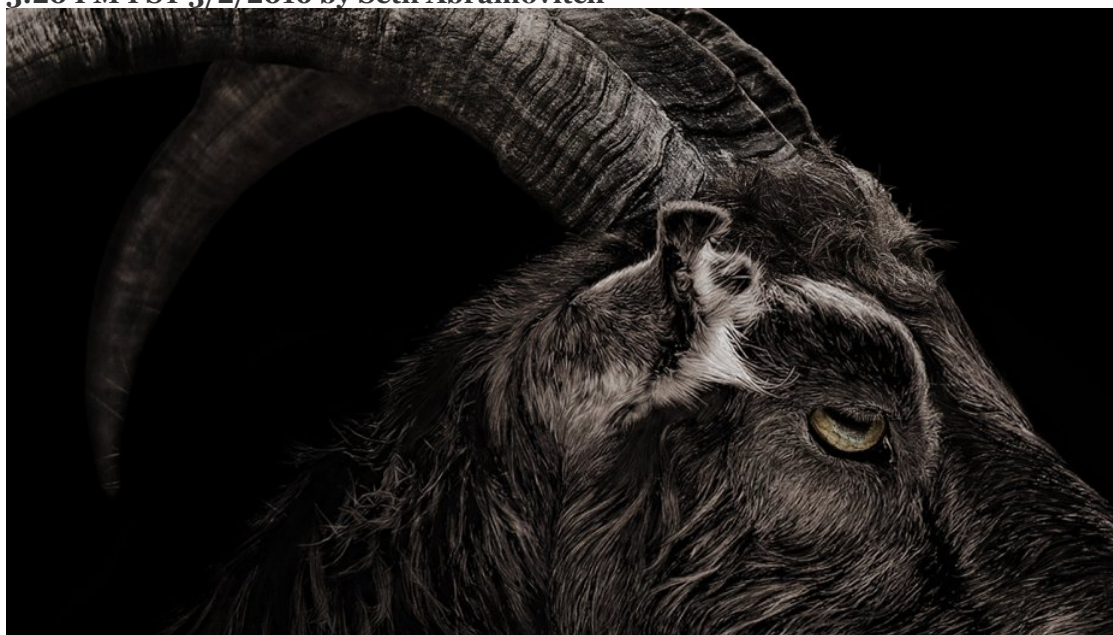


Black Phillip: The Real Story Behind the Breakout Goat From 'The Witch'

3:20 PM PST 3/2/2016 by Seth Abramovitch



Photofest

Forget CG: The horned star of the horror release is an extremely real, 210-pound billy named Charlie who put his co-star in the hospital and still gives his director nightmares.

It wasn't supposed to be all about the goat.

When production designer-turned-director Robert Eggers set about making his first feature, *The Witch*, he instructed editor Louise Ford to keep the movie's hircine star — a 210-pound billy goat called Black Phillip — in the margins.

"We were deliberately trying to play Black Phillip down in order to make his importance more surprising," says Eggers, 32, of the character, a farm animal belonging to a Puritan family having a rough go of it in 1630 New England.

It's in the final act — spoiler alert — that Black Phillip reveals himself to be much more than just excitable livestock. In Eggers' meticulous film, the Devil isn't just in the details: It's in the goat itself.

As early as *Witch's* 2015 Sundance premiere, where Eggers won the best director award, the signs were there: Fans would stop castmembers on the snowy streets of Park City to rave about the horned creature and quote his seductive catchphrase: "Wouldst thou like to live deliciously?"

Now, two weeks into a nationwide debut — the first wide-release from hipster-cool film company A24, which paid \$1.5 million for rights — Black Phillip is a minor cultural sensation, subject to countless fan-art tributes, the requisite parody Twitter accounts and his very own advertising campaign.

One 30-second spot announces "a new horror icon is born" amid shots of Black Phillip rearing, galloping sideways and breathing heavily in a dark manger.

Indeed, there's an argument to be made that Black Phillip's popularity has eclipsed that of the movie itself, which has so far grossed \$17 million — what A24 touts as a success due to a modest marketing spend.

As horror icons go, however, Bela Lugosi this is not. Black Phillip's actual name is Charlie, and he's since retired to a farm not far from where *The Witch* was shot in Northern Ontario. There he lives bucolically, wholly unaware of his cult-celebrity status

Like so many movie stars, Charlie lucked into his breakthrough role largely because of his looks. "A trainer showed us some pictures and we chose the goat who looked the Black Phillip-iest," recalls Eggers, who tends to emit a faint sigh of exasperation whenever the subject of Charlie comes up.

(That trainer, Anna Kilch, marvels at what an impressive physical specimen he was: "He had the biggest horns," she says. "Goats just don't grow bigger horns than that.")

[Read More 'The Witch': Sundance Review](#)

But unlike some of the other beastly performers on set — who were called upon to play things like a possessed hare and a bloodthirsty raven and did so with professional efficiency — it became quickly apparent that Charlie would prove to be a handful.

Eggers, who has piercing blue eyes and a thick beard worthy of an artisanal chocolate mogul, can still remember his heart sinking after reviewing some early test footage of Charlie interacting with the film's cast.

"If we wanted him to be doing something violent, he wanted to go to sleep. If he was supposed to be standing still, he was running around like a madman," Eggers recalls. He credits Ford, the film's editor, with piecing together whatever usable footage they had into the acclaimed performance.

No one in the cast had a rougher time with Charlie than Ralph Ineson. A veteran British actor with a bassy voice and large, aristocratic features, Ineson, 46, had to drop 30 pounds to play the family patriarch, a starving farmer. That left him at a distinct disadvantage when he was called upon to wrestle Black Phillip, as dictated by several scenes in the script.

"I didn't have a lot of gas in the tank, really," Ineson says of sparring with the beast, who weighed about 50 pounds more than him. "He was horrible. Really, really horrible. From the moment we set eyes on each other it was just kind of hate at first sight. He had two modes: chilling out and doing nothing, or attacking me."

On the fourth day of filming, Charlie rammed his serrated horns into Ineson's ribs, dislodging a tendon. "Everything hurt," Ineson recalls. "I spent the rest of the five-week shoot on painkillers."

With one particularly violent scene involving William and Black Phillip still left to shoot, Eggers — who was determined not to go the CG route — commissioned a puppet version of the goat.

"There was one puppet half the size of Charlie," Eggers says of a first failed attempt. Another was commissioned: "Someone had flown from L.A. on a plane sitting next to a giant goat puppet. That one was the size of a cow. Both didn't look very good and were laying in the dirt by the makeup trailer," Eggers says.

In the end, several elaborate Black Phillip sequences had to be abandoned, but one key scene in which Black Phillip rears onto its hind legs — distressingly close to two young actors who play creepy twins — was non-negotiable. (The goat was on a leash during the dangerous sequence and the leash was later digitally erased.)

Despite having gotten the shot, Eggers says he would not work with Charlie again. But Anna Kilch, Charlie's wrangler, insists Charlie did the job and did it well: "It was a difficult shot, but he did it perfectly quite a few times so we were really happy with him."

Kilch was surprised to hear that Eggers and Ineson had such a negative experience with Charlie. "He was kind of the star of the show so we ended up using him a lot. Maybe that's why [they found him difficult]. But no, he was fantastic," Kilch says.

Ineson begs to differ. "It's wonderful that his fantastic performance is bringing notoriety to the film," he says, "but there's a little part of me that's like, '*Seriously? That f—er?*'"

"There's an incredible restaurant in London called The Smoking Goat," Ineson continues. "When Robert was in town, we went there for my wife's birthday and shared this incredible goat dish. We remembered Charlie. Not so fondly."

Link to original article: <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/news/black-phillip-real-story-behind-871974>