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## **THE WITCH (2015)**

**WC: ~263**

Traditional elements of horror are present in *The Witch* from the moment the camera touches down on a small New England courthouse. Thomasin and her family are banished, solidifying the film's primary theme of isolation as they leave for desolate land outside of their Puritan colony. A minimalist score punctuated by stretches of silence pulls tension taut between the characters as they suffer tragedies, accuse one another of treachery, and uncoil in their solitude. Expert camera work brings audiences up close and personal with each character and inserts viewers into the action. We become Thomasin discovering the disappearance of her baby brother. We watch the family pray over a possessed Caleb. We follow the titular witch through the forest, where she is always a shadow backlit by fires and just out of reach.

This is the genius of *The Witch*. It's not what people think of when they talk about horror. There are no real buckets of blood spilled. There is no Michael Myers waiting around each corner. Nothing really jumps out from behind the trees, but looming threat that something might try keeps you on the edge of your seat. The film is deeply psychological; it forces viewers to sit in this family's solitude, to feel their pain and bear witness to their unraveling.

*The Witch* isn't your run-of-the-mill gorefest. It is quieter. It is at once claustrophobic and atmospheric. It is uncomfortable and disturbing (let us all remember the crow scene; yeah, *that* crow scene), and it is rife with devils and demons and unrelenting tension that is never quite released.

## **CRIMSON PEAK (2015)**

**WC: ~244**

Murder. Omens. Ghosts. Dark, creepy houses holding even darker secrets. These are all things you would expect from a horror film, and they are all front and center in Guillermo del Toro's *Crimson Peak*.

The film is a visual masterpiece that can give you nightmares for weeks. The ghosts blend traditional understandings of full-bodied spirits with the skeletal reality of the decayed human form. The titular house looks like a Halloween attraction, and even has bleeding floors to

boot. Sure, the red seeping up between broken floorboards is just a richly-colored clay, but the imagery doesn't stray far from the blood shed on them later.

*Crimson Peak* combines elements of multiple genres to achieve a passionate story about love, trust, and family. It's a murder mystery, a psychological thriller, a gothic romance, and a paranormal horror story all in one. In writing the script, del Toro was inspired by ghost stories such as *The Shining* (1980) and *The Haunting* (1963), and these inspirations show. The atmosphere of the house feels akin to the Overlook Hotel. Audiences never quite feel completely safe, and any moments of relief are brief. Perhaps this horror isn't quite as intense as other films, but that doesn't make it any less worthy of the genre. *Crimson Peak* is a beautiful roller coaster of emotions. You'll jump. You'll scream. You'll probably shed a tear or two. This film is the definition of "horror with a heart". Emphasis, of course, on "horror".