

ANYA TAYLOR-JOY

It's a freezing Saturday afternoon in February and I've gone to interview Anya Taylor-Joy in the abandoned hotel where she's on the shoot for this very cover. After lurking in the corner for a while - and at one point bumping into her in the toilet - we grab a drink in the not-quite-so-abandoned hotel next door. "Make it a double! It is Saturday after all, happy weekend!" She and I cheers, whiskey in hand and David Bowie's "China Girl" playing on the radio.

Born in Miami, Taylor-Joy lived in Argentina until she moved to London when she was eight. "I love London! I don't actually live anywhere now, I'm just [doing] back to back movies." Does she consider London to be her home? "Home for me is truly where the people that I love are and so it depends."

Scouted at 16 by renowned model agent Sarah Doukas (of Storm Models and Kate Moss fame) when she was practicing wearing heels down the street - "I had my first party the next day!" - Taylor-Joy was overheard by *Downton Abbey's* Allen Leech reading some poetry at one of her first model assignments. He asked her to recite some lines, took her details and the next thing she knew she was signed to Leech's agent and the rest, as they say, is history.

"I think I'm a very forthright person, I go with my gut." The 21-year-old actress tells me. "I always trust that instinct and the only time I feel confused is when I don't have an instinct on something, which usually means I shouldn't do it." It's clear that Taylor-Joy's gut must be very well tuned then. Since rising to fame in the last few

years, she has been nominated for, and won a slew of awards as well as scoring upcoming roles in esteemed director M Night Shyamalan's new film *Glass* and the much-hyped new addition to the *X-Men* film series, *The New Mutants*.

Her next release, *Thoroughbreds*, is a uniquely dark yet comical adventure into the depths of what it means to be human, directed and written by Cory Finley. If you blend *American Psycho* and *Heathers* with a smattering of *Equus*, you begin to get an idea of what to expect. Taylor-Joy takes on the starring role of Lily, a seemingly privileged Connecticut schoolgirl who embarks in an intense friendship with the emotionless Amanda. "It was a film I wanted to make for a long time. As a kid I was obsessed with *Heathers*, *Cruel Intentions*, just any film like

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that. It's all dark and I think I gravitate towards darker projects as they are more honest in a way as they speak to the underbelly of humanity".

Gravitating towards darker projects could be seen as a bit of an understatement: her breakout role was playing Thomasin in 2015's *The Witch*, followed by similarly dark roles in *Split* and *Morgan*. But is taking on such an abundance of complicated, dark characters hard to shake off? "Nothing will be as hard as Thomasin. I got incredibly depressed for a month but I hadn't learnt yet that characters were real people to me." She was just 18 when she filmed this role. "I think the nice thing is that I never come out of any movie the same, I learn and I grow alongside these people. Thomasin was the hardest, and Lily. I usually keep a piece of jewellery from my characters or something but for Lily I couldn't keep a single thing." This understanding of the darkness in each of her characters is something that strongly comes through in all of her scene-stealing performances.

In *Thoroughbreds*, Taylor-Joy's character begins as the perfect image of "togetherness" but the wheels quickly come off throughout the film. "Lily for me was quite exhausting as she is always so straight and stacked up and I'm not like that, I'm all over the place." She explains, sipping her whiskey. "What I think is dangerous about the society we live in now and that cultured image of perfection is the fact that no one is actually like that, every single person is a human being and trying to live up to this ideal".

The evolution of Lily and Amanda's friendship (the latter played by her co-star, and fellow scream queen,

Olivia Cooke) along with the notion of toxic friendships, especially in your teens which are such a hard time to navigate, is intense. "I've totally experienced them and one of the biggest elements in a toxic friendship, well at least it was for me, was obsession with the other person." Taylor-Joy says. It's this idea of putting a mirror up to our own darkness, which is something that makes the viewing all the more addictive. "Obsession is a really fun thing to play out on screen as it's quite filthy. Maybe that's not the right word but it's dark."

It's impossible to imagine two different actors in these roles. Their personal and extreme tête-à-têtes create a neo-noir world all of its own. "I didn't know Olivia before but I was so excited to work with her as that was what first drew me to the script, it's not just one nuanced female character, it's two of them consistently one-upping each other through dialogue".

Thoroughbreds also marks the late Anton Yelchin's final film project, before his tragic death in 2016. Describing how she watched *Thoroughbreds* at Sundance with his mother, Taylor-Joy becomes emotional. "Both of us just sat there and said that he was electric, you can feel everything and he was so much fun and such a student of film." Composing herself, she continues. "He's just phenomenal, and I'm so glad that this performance reflects how truly talented he is."

With exciting roles also coming up in *The New Mutants* and *Glass*, the final entry of Shyamalan's trilogy which includes both *Split* and the 2000 film *Unbreakable*, we will be seeing a lot more of Taylor-Joy in the upcoming months. "I think *Glass* is something that is going to be

mind-blowing. When you are on a set with all of these incredibly talented people, most of which I consider my family because they made *Split* with me, we were all sort of wandering around thinking this is so cool, this is going to be momentous what we are doing right now."

"I can finally talk about *X-Men* which is great!" She exclaims. I imagine the torture of being constantly interviewed and attending press junkets whilst being asked about something you can't talk about. "I'm so excited to see myself have powers, I was pretending the whole time so I'm really excited to actually see the CGI." Playing the character of Illyana Rasputin - better known by her moniker Magik - Taylor-Joy takes on the role of a Russian mutant with sorcery powers. "I loved playing her! She is sassy, tough, Russian as hell. I switched my drink to vodka after shooting. She is really fun."

Has she taken this momentous rise to fame in her stride? "I feel so lucky that for someone as ridiculous as me, there is a job I can do that I can hopefully be good at, I'm just going with it. I really do feel that I'm going to turn 80 and be like 'oh my god, what happened to my life?'"

It's easy to forget that she is still only 21 years old. In person she is enigmatic and has that star quality you would expect from a film star much further down the line in their career. "I've been through a baptism of fire. Everything has gone so fast!" Perhaps it is this unique path into acting that shows that Taylor-Joy will be here to stay. "I'm so grateful acting exists; I'd be a very unstable person if it didn't. I just feel incredibly lucky."

Thoroughbreds is out now.

Dress by GUCCI, boots by BULGARI, ring by BULGARI and earrings by OPULINE

Dress TEMPERLEY HAIR CARLOS FERRAZ at CAROL HAYES Management using BALMAIN. Makeup NATHALIE ELENI using DOLCE AND GABBANA Makeup and MZ Skin care. Set designer LEE FLUDE at CAROL HAYES Management. Photography assistant CHRIS CHUDLEIGH. Fashion assistants JORDAN KELSEY and KEELEY DAWSON. Producer ROSIE DONOGHUE at KO Productions. Production assistant ANNIE HOLDEN at KO Productions

