



The Winter Guest

★ ★ ★

Genre: Drama

Rated:

Runtime: 110 minutes

Director: Alan Rickman

Principal Cast: Emma Thompson, Phyllida Law, Gary
Hollywood, Arlene Cockburn

A Winter's Tale

From Ang Lee's chilling imagery in *The Ice Storm* to the million-dollar icebergs of *Titanic*, ice is the cinematic symbol du jour. Now comes British actor



Alan Rickman's directorial debut, *The Winter Guest*, in which the film's star isn't so much Emma Thompson or her real-life mother, Phyllida Law, but rather the breathtakingly filmed frozen seascape of a Scottish coastal town. There, plunging temperatures and eerily silent ice-covered streets serve as a fitting backdrop for the film's themes of isolation, death and loneliness.

For many, Rickman's name is synonymous with the 1991 sob-fest *Truly, Madly, Deeply*, in which he played a ghost that haunts his still-grieving partner. The film, which featured perhaps the most gratuitous display of tissues, weeping and snot in history, was a gloomy smash. So it's hardly surprising that Rickman's debut behind the camera features a grieving, lethargic widow (Thompson) doing a lot of sniffing and sobbing while her dead husband's presence--there are portraits of him all over the house--continues to haunt her.

Although the sensitive character studies in *The Winter Guest* are convincing--the cast is brimming with classically trained graduates of the British stage--and the tone understated, the pacing is, at times, as tedious as the characters' meandering clifftop walks. Luckily, the mother-daughter brooding is kept in check by some gently humorous diversions, like the scene in which young bantering boys bunk off school,