



**WOMAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA PREVIEW
POWERED BY JAGUAR**

Amulet

+ Q&A with writer-director Romola Garai

Amulet, written and directed by Romola Garai, explores the story of Tomaz, an ex-soldier from an unnamed foreign conflict, living in strained circumstances in London. Haunted by his past, he is offered a place to stay in a decaying, claustrophobic house, inhabited by an enigmatic young woman and her dying mother. As he starts to fall for his new companion, Tomaz cannot ignore his suspicion that something insidious might also be living alongside them.

The House

An iconic marker of horror is the haunted house, which is the beating heart of *Amulet*. So finding a location in the middle of London that would exactly suit the eerie, decaying ambience of what Garai had in mind was always going to be a challenge. Producer Matt Wilkinson believes that 'the house is 100% the most important thing, above the script and cast, getting the house right, that's the environment, that's 70% of the film,' and remembers the difficulty of 'casting' the perfect house. 'We had an absolute nightmare with it. We had a different house lined up and then we got gazumped at a really crucial juncture, two weeks before the start of prep. We finally managed to source this house which had been owned by an 80 year old woman who'd died on the premises and the interior hadn't changed since the 60s.'

Thankfully the new owners were absolutely on board with a film crew taking over and using the house as a blank canvas, which meant that Garai's visions could be easily realised, thanks to a close working relationship with production designer, Francesca Massariol. In the script, Garai wrote extensive, specific descriptors about the design she had in mind for the house and in a moment of serendipity, had images on a mood board that were the exact same images that Massariol had also pulled up for her own board. 'I would turn up on set and think, wow, that really is the house, it's like she's lifted the ideas straight from my head and made them real,' says Garai. Wilkinson breaks down the different spaces that the characters encounter in *Amulet*. 'We wanted three very distinct worlds, the forest was very saturated and lush and that was to make you feel at home in that space, essentially another way of making the revelation of what's happened there even more shocking. The house was supposed to be more somber and womb-like and then the blues of the real world were in contrast to that, giving three very different flavors, lulling you into a false sense of security.'

Of course, from the actors' perspective, getting the setting right was crucial to their roles in the film. Staunton says, 'I was especially impressed with how the low budget stretched people's imagination and talents. Everyone wants to make this work, the art department went in with all guns blazing and it made all of us think outside the box. The house is so perfect, it seems to have landed in the middle of this street for this film!' Juri agrees, commenting, 'We have the whole house and it feels very real, as though they found it that way (although they probably didn't), and that all helps massively in terms of getting

into character. Even in the garden, there were poisonous plants, which we had to avoid, which somehow fits in with the mood of the film.'

Secareanu adds, 'It was so important to have a real house to film in because it had a vibe of its own. The house is such a big character in the story and it really helped us to bring authenticity to the story. Being in the house rather than on set felt much more organic.'

A Feminist Horror

For Juri, it was the content of the script which had a particular impact. 'Not only is Romola a great writer of dialogue but she has so many themes in the story. Initially it's a comment on victimisation, which is huge in itself, but also on religion and whom religion was created for. Usually a man, so then what is the woman's role? It's about how self-serving religion can be but there's also a great deal of pain and fear and anger and abuse. When you first meet Magda, she's scared and sad, she's almost stereotype of how a male dominated society views women. We were servants, the male was the patriarch so it's a comment on how ridiculous is it that Magda does all these things for Tomaz.'

Secareanu takes away something else from the film too, 'It's a feminist horror about forgiveness and we should all ask ourselves, whether forgiveness is ours to give or if we should take it from someone else. It's the moral issue that emerges from this film. That's what I love about it!'

Garai says, 'I wanted to write a horror film where the protagonists switch roles, so you understand that the man is coming into a place to rescue a young, innocent woman from an older woman, who is (as is always the case in these sorts of films) the source of the evil. I wanted to introduce all of those recognisable conventions and then switch them around, so Tomaz ends up becoming the source of the evil, Magda ends up becoming the rescuer and the older woman in the attic becomes a former victim. Also, if you look at a lot of horror films, there is the question of "are we deriving a voyeuristic pleasure from this because it's about women being hunted or attacked?" So I wanted a male protagonist because I enjoy seeing a man on film be very afraid a lot of the time – you don't see that very often. You see them having to fight things but just to see them just be scared is very entertaining!'

Wilkinson adds to this by saying, 'There are certain tropes around horror, certain expectations in terms of the victim and the saviour and Romola takes the audience's comfort and complicity with that and turns it on its head, messing with convention. I think horror is always a response to societal conflict so whatever the topic is, film and horror especially, finds a way to hold a mirror up to that. So part of the subtext of *Amulet* might be around the shift in gender roles that have come up in recent years as more women join the conversation about being marginalised or abused. Women rising up, women having a voice, women taking control, as per the themes in our film, obviously feels like a reflection of current changes in society.' Wilkinson also raises the point that the theme of women having a voice was not just reflected on screen but behind the camera too. 'Romola decided very early on that she wanted this to be female led from all aspects, not just creatively, so 70% of this crew was female and every HOD, apart from the editor, was also female – the production went out of its way to embrace as many new female talents in crucial roles as possible.'

Production notes

AMULET

Directed by: Romola Garai
A Stigma Films production
With: Summercourt Films
Presented by: Amp International, Northern Films
In association with: Head Gear Films, Metrol Technology, Kreo Films
Executive Producers: Damian Jones, Chris Reed, Phil Rymer, James Norrie, Bob Portal, Inderpal Singh, Phil Hunt, Compton Ross, Reinhard Besser, Pat Wintersgill, Walter Mair
Produced by: Matthew James Wilkinson, Maggie Montieth
Co-producer: Robyn Forsyth
Written by: Romola Garai
Director of Photography: Laura Bellingham
Editor: Alastair Reid
Production Designer: Francesca Massariol
Costume Designer: Holly Smart
Make-up & Hair Designer: Scarlett O'Connell
Composer: Sarah Angliss
Sound Design: Nick Baldock

Cast

Carla Juri (*Magda*)
Alec Secareanu (*Tomaz*)
Imelda Staunton (*Sister Claire*)
Anah Ruddin (*mother*)
Aggeliki Papoulia (*Miriam*)
Elowen Harris (*Dina*)
Joseph Akubeze (*labourer*)
Jaqueline Roberts (*doctor*)
Yonah Odoom (*Sudanese woman*)
Perry Jaques (*man shouting in a car*)
Charlotte Chiew (*woman in labour*)
William Lester (*voice of mother*)

UK 2020

99 mins

Courtesy of Republic Film Distribution



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IN PERSON & PREVIEWS

Woman with a Movie Camera Preview: Amulet + Q&A with writer-director Romola Garai

Fri 21 Jan 18:00

African Odysseys presents: UK Premiere: A Bruddah's Mind Cabeça de Nego + Q&A with director Déo Cardoso

Sat 22 Jan 14:00

Silent Cinema presents: South: Sir Ernest Shackleton's Glorious Epic of the Antarctic + live score

Thu 27 Jan 19:00

African Odysseys UK Premiere: African Redemption: The Life and Legacy of Marcus Garvey + panel discussion

Sat 5 Feb 14:00

Mark Kermode Live in 3D at the BFI

Mon 7 Feb 18:10

Preview: The Worst Person in the World (Verdens verste menneske) + Q&A with director Joachim Trier and actor Renate Reinsve

Sat 12 Feb 20:15

The Proposition + Q&A (special guests TBA)

Wed 16 Feb 18:00

Preview: La Mif (The Fam) + Q&A with director Fred Baillif

Sat 19 Feb 18:00

A Tribute to Roger Michell: Preview: The Duke + Q&A (guests TBA)

Thu 24 Feb 18:00

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Fri 25 Feb 19:00 and 20:30

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Mon 28 Feb 20:20

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