

## “AMER” (Film Review)

Written by Michael Gingold  
Friday, 29 October 2010 10:18

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If you've ever wanted to know what it was like to see a classic Italian *giallo* or *poliziotteschi* film during its original theatrical run, I can't think of a modern cinema experience that could capture that feeling like seeing AMER. As the split-screen credits unfold to the beat of vintage Bruno Nicolai music, you truly get the sense of what it must have been like to catch a Dario Argento, Sergio Martino or Fernando Di Leo flick at its Rome premiere.

It's been said many times before but can't be emphasized more than for this movie: It has to be seen in a theater for the full effect. Obviously that's going to be difficult for a lot of people reading this, as AMER is only scheduled for limited theatrical play this season (beginning with its opening today at New York City's [Cinema Village](#))—but if it happens into a city near you, don't miss it. And if you have to wait for the disc release, watch it on the largest TV with the best sound system possible.

For AMER is a senses-filling experience that teases, seduces, shocks and assaults you for an hour and a half. Its color-drenched, eye-popping imagery is complemented by a remarkably active soundtrack in which every hushed gasp, every creak of a floorboard, every drip of water contributes to the overall atmosphere. Belgian writer/directors H el ene Cattet and Bruno Forzani have perfectly captured how classic *gialli* look and sound, and more importantly (and far more difficult), they've captured how they *feel*. Emotion is elicited through pure filmmaking, not through narrative manipulation—because, like some of those Italian movies, this one doesn't really have a narrative.



Instead, AMER is made up of three segments in the life of its heroine Ana, depicting her

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experiences with sensuality and terror in such a way that we feel her reactions right along with her. We first meet Ana as a little girl (played by Cassandra Foret) creeping around the spooky mansion where her family lives. The inquisitive child peeks in on her parents in the midst of the carnal act, enters a forbidden room where her deceased grandfather lies in state and witnesses strange and terrible sights—but are they really there, or the product of a child’s hyperactive imagination? Without telling us one way or the other, Cattet and Forzani skip ahead to Ana as a pouty teenager (Charlotte Eugène-Guibbaud), on an outing with her mother that brings her into the view of a gang of young bikers—whose lascivious attention and sexual possibilities confuse, terrify and excite her all at once.

The final segment is the most squarely located in *giallo* territory, as the adult Ana (Marie Bos) returns to that big old house, now empty of people except for her, lounges in the bathtub—and attracts the voyeuristic attention of a mysterious someone. But who’s stalking whom? Narrative revelations like this, actually, are beside the point; the filmmakers are much more concerned with the visual and aural sensations, playing with audience identification—and making them squirm with a lengthy sequence involving that Italian murderers’ favorite weapon, the straight razor.

There is a decent amount of bloodshed and nudity—wouldn’t be a *giallo* homage without ‘em—but AMER is not simply about sex and violence...it’s *about*

sex and violence, if you get what I mean. It’s about how the mind reacts to the visceral and can be entranced or repulsed by it—or sometimes both at the same time. It’s also a striking achievement of pure filmmaking, establishing Cattet and Forzani as rising talents to be reckoned with. It’ll be fascinating to see where they go from here, and one can only hope they bring the same creative team with them, as cinematographer Manu Dacosse’s lush/gritty images and Bernard Beets’ taut editing are intrinsic and invaluable to AMER—not to mention the suitcase full of vintage Italian scores (by Nicolai as well as Ennio Morricone, Stelvio Cipriani and others) that the writer/directors deploy so well here. It’s one thing to say you’re paying tribute to a certain style or period of cinema and simply litter the screen with borrowed tropes, and quite another to truly recapture what made those movies worth homaging in the first place—and the latter is what AMER does, in spades.



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*You can track back through Fango's exclusive on-camera interviews with Cattet and Forzani about AMER starting [here](#) .*

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