

Relic (2020 film)

Relic is a 2020 Australian psychological horror film directed by Natalie Erika James from a screenplay by James and Christian White. The film stars Emily Mortimer, Robyn Nevin, and Bella Heathcote.

Relic had its world premiere at the Sundance Film Festival on 25 January 2020, and was released on 3 July in the United States by IFC Midnight, and 10 July in Australia on Stan.^[4]

Plot

When Edna, an elderly widow who is suffering from Dementia, goes missing, her daughter Kay and granddaughter Sam travel to their remote family home to find her. They discover the house locked from the inside, and a strange black mold-like substance on an upstairs wall. Much of the furniture has been adorned with Post-it notes of reminders for Edna.

That night, Sam is visited by their young neighbour Jamie, who states that he had not been to visit Edna for a while after his father had told him not to go back to the house. Sam and Kay grow increasingly disturbed by a loud creaking from inside the walls and the appearance of more black mold throughout the house. Kay experiences nightmares of a withered rotting corpse in an old shack in the woodlands.

The next morning, Kay finds Edna has returned, barefoot and muddled, and unaware of her own disappearance. Following a visit from a doctor, Edna is found to be mostly of sound mind and without injury with the exception of a large black bruise on her chest (resembling the mold). Kay tells Sam that she plans to move Edna into a retirement home, given her self-neglect. That night, Kay awakes to find Edna sleepwalking toward the front door, whispering, "It's nothing." After being brought back to bed, Edna is convinced there is something hiding in the room and urges Kay to check under the bed; Kay sees something breathing but is distracted before she can investigate further.

The next day, Sam and her grandmother share a tender moment until Edna suddenly grows cold and accuses Sam of stealing from her. She snatches the ring off Sam's finger, not remembering that she had gifted Sam this ring. Following another violent event involving Edna, Sam visits Jamie's father Alex to ask why he

Relic



Official promotional poster

Directed by	Natalie Erika James
Written by	Natalie Erika James Christian White
Produced by	<u>Jake Gyllenhaal</u> Riva Marker Anna McLeish Sarah Shaw
Starring	<u>Emily Mortimer</u> <u>Robyn Nevin</u> <u>Bella Heathcote</u>
Cinematography	Charlie Sarroff
Edited by	Denise Haratzis Sean Lahiff
Music by	<u>Brian Reitzell</u>
Production companies	<u>Screen Australia</u> <u>Film Victoria</u>

stopped letting Jamie visit. Alex reveals that the last time Jamie visited, the pair played hide-and-seek, however, Edna mistakenly locked Jamie in his hiding space and left him there for hours, forgetting she had even seen him that day. Back at the house, Kay follows Edna into the garden, where she finds her tearing pages from the family photo album and frantically eating them. When Kay tries to intervene, Edna bites her and storms off, attempting to bury the album in the soil, claiming it will "be safer there". Fearing that something may come to get her, Edna softens and agrees to let Kay take care of her.

Sam discovers a hidden passageway to another part of the house. She enters but becomes lost as the corridor begins to loop. Disorientated and afraid, she resorts to screaming and banging on the walls. Edna's condition seems to have worsened again; she now glares at Kay mistrustfully, refusing to eat and wetting herself. Kay notices that her mother's urine is stained black. As Edna bathes, she scratches what was once her bruise but is now rotting black flesh. The bathwater overflows and shorts out an electric heater, causing the house's power to go out. Sam travels deeper into the corridors. The ceilings slope lower, forcing her to crawl. She eventually escapes by knocking holes through the mold-covered walls.

Kay finds Edna, much to her horror, picking at her rotting face with a knife. Kay and Sam flee into the passageway when they hear Edna approach. Edna, now disfigured and physically contorted, crawls towards them. Sam and Kay break through the wall and fall into the lounge room, followed by Edna. She attempts to pin down Sam before being beaten down by Kay. Wheezing, the decaying Edna gestures toward a post-it note on the floor, labelled "I AM LOVED?", and smiles. As they escape the house, Kay realises that the walls are no longer rotting and returns to her corpse-like mother to carry her to bed. She helps Edna peel away the last remnants of her hair and flesh to reveal her final form, a withered rotting corpse (like the one in her nightmare). Kay and Sam then lie on the bed with Edna until she peacefully falls asleep.

The film ends with Sam noticing a very small black bruise on the nape of Kay's neck, resembling Edna's initial bruise, suggesting that in time Kay will suffer a similar fate to her mother.

Cast

- Emily Mortimer as Kay
- Robyn Nevin as Edna
- Bella Heathcote as Sam
- Chris Bunton as Jamie
- Jeremy Stanford as Alex

	<div><div><div><div><div></div><div>Nine Stories Productions</div></div><div><div></div><div>Gozie AGBO</div></div><div><div></div><div>Carver Films</div></div></div></div></div>
Distributed by	<div><div><div></div><div>Stan (Australia)</div></div><div><div></div><div>IFC Midnight (United States)</div></div></div>
Release dates	<div><div><div></div><div>25 January 2020 (Sundance)</div></div><div><div></div><div>3 July 2020 (United States)</div></div><div><div></div><div>7 October 2020 (Australia)</div></div></div>
Running time	89 minutes ^[1]
Country	<div><div><div></div><div>Australia^[2]</div></div><div><div></div><div>United States</div></div></div>
Language	English
Box office	\$3.2 million ^{[2][3]}

- Steve Rodgers as Constable Mike Adler

Production

In October 2018, [Emily Mortimer](#), [Robyn Nevin](#) and [Bella Heathcote](#) joined the cast of the film with [Natalie Erika James](#) directing from a screenplay she co-wrote alongside [Christian White](#). [Jake Gyllenhaal](#) and [Riva Marker](#) served as producers on the film, while [Anthony Russo](#) and [Joe Russo](#) served as executive producers under their [Nine Stories Productions](#) and [AGBO](#) banners, respectively.^[5]

[Principal photography](#) began on 8 October^[6] and wrapped on 16 November,^[7] resulting in a 30-day shoot. [Post-production](#) began on 26 November.^[8]

Release

Relic had its world premiere at the [Sundance Film Festival](#) on 25 January 2020.^[9] The film was originally scheduled to screen at [SXSW](#) in March as part of the [Midnighters](#) section,^[10] but the festival was cancelled due to the [COVID-19 pandemic](#). On 10 March, it was announced that [IFC Midnight](#) had acquired the North American distribution rights to the film.^[11] In the United States, it was released on 3 July in [drive-in theatres](#) and received a [wide release](#) in theatres and [video on demand](#) on 10 July.^{[12][13]}

Reception

Box office

Relic grossed \$192,352 from 69 theaters in its opening weekend, finishing first among reported films.^[14] It then made \$195,674 from 128 theaters in its second weekend.^[15]

Critical response

On review aggregator website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), the film holds an approval rating of 92% based on 231 reviews, with an average score of 7.6/10. The site's critics consensus reads, "*Relic* ratchets up its slowly building tension in an expertly crafted atmosphere of dread, adding up to an outstanding feature debut for director/co-writer Natalie Erika James."^[16] On [Metacritic](#), the film has a weighted average score of 77 out of 100, based on 37 critics, indicating "generally favorable reviews".^[17]

Justin Chang, speaking on *Fresh Air*, said: "There are no shocking twists or contrivances in store in *Relic*, and not a lot of gore, either. James excels at mining dread and tension from ordinary conversation, and she uses thriller conventions to get at something simple but shattering: the horror of watching a parent slowly deteriorate."^[18]

Accolades

Award	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Australian Writers' Guild</u>	22 August 2019	Feature Film – Original	Christian White and Natalie Erika James	Nominated	^[19] ^[20]
<u>AACTA Awards</u>	30 November 2020	<u>Best Film</u>	Anna McLeish and Sarah Shaw	Nominated	^[21] ^[22] ^[23]
		<u>Best Direction</u>	Natalie Erika James	Nominated	
		<u>Best Screenplay</u>	Christian White and Natalie Erika James	Nominated	
		<u>Best Supporting Actress</u>	<u>Bella Heathcote</u>	Nominated	
		<u>Best Sound</u>	Robert Mackenzie, John Wilkinson, Steve Burgess, and Glenn Newnham	Nominated	
		<u>Best Hair and Makeup</u>	Angela Conte, Larry Van Duynhoven, and Bec Taylor	Nominated	
<u>IndieWire Critics Poll</u>	14 December 2020	Best First Feature	<i>Relic</i>	5th place	^[24]
<u>Florida Film Critics Circle</u>	21 December 2020	Best First Film		Nominated	^[25]
<u>Critics' Choice Super Awards</u>	10 January 2021	Best Horror Movie		Nominated	^[26]
<u>Gotham Awards</u>	11 January 2021	<u>Best Feature</u>		Nominated	^[27]
		Audience Award		Nominated	

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