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Under the Shadow

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Abstract
This is a film review of Under the Shadow (2016) directed by Babak Anvari.

Author Notes
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Under the Shadow
(2016)
Written and Directed by Babak Anvari

Under the Shadow is a delightful horror story. I haven't heard so much screaming by an
audience in twenty years. The woman next to me hit me with her elbow when she went to cover
her eyes. I thought I was going to need medical attention. The screaming was always followed
by nervous laughter – and I mean nervous. The entire audience was on edge.

Set in Tehran during the height of Iran/Iraq war in 1988, a mother, father, and daughter try
to survive. But the father is called to duty and must leave the family. As the war comes closer to
home, the neighbors begin moving to safer locations and in the end the mother, Shideh, and
daughter, Dorsa, are left alone to fend for themselves. Well, not alone exactly. It seems that an
evil spirit, what Muslims call a Djinn, has entered their home along with one of the unexploded
bombs being dropped on them, and Dorsa can see it. The Djinn has supernatural qualities much
like Satan and it has the ability to possess people.
Although mother and daughter should have left the city along with their neighbors, Shideh is strong, and works hard to protect her daughter: she is an aspiring doctor and a political activist – a modern woman in a sexist society. Also, Dorsa has a doll that wards off evil spirits, but someone has taken her doll. While Shideh looks for the doll, in hopes of getting them farther away from the war zone, the presence of the Djinn becomes more pronounced. Both mother and daughter now experience the malevolent Djinn. Although a great horror story, Under the Shadow also focuses on the sexism women felt and the oppressive laws women lived under in 1980s Tehran; for instance, at one point when Shideh leaves the home, she is arrested for not wearing her chador.

As with all good horror films, something at the end of the movie tells you that while the movie is over, the horror is not.