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The Hallow

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The Hallow

Abstract

This is a film review of *The Hallow* (2015) directed by Corin Hardy.

Author Notes

Rubina (Ruby) Ramji is an Associate Professor in the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Cape Breton University. After serving as a Chair of the Religion, Film and Visual Culture Group for the American Academy of Religion and then on the steering committee, Rubina continues to serve on the Executive Committee for the Canadian Society for the Study of Religion as President and is the Film Editor of the *Journal of Religion and Film*. Her research activities focus on the areas of religion, media and identity, religion in Canada, and religion and immigration.



The Hallow
(2015)
Directed by Corin Hardy

The Hallow is an atypical horror genre film that touches on folklore and science to give us a terrifying view of reality; what if the stories of folkloric devils and gremlins are actually based on scientific truths? Set in Ireland, *The Hallow* tells the story of a haunted forest and the creatures that once lived within it, creatures that continue to instill fear in the locals who live there.

A London conservationist moves with his family to survey an ancient forest, and finds “ophiocordyceps unilateralis,” a fungus that is often found in tropical forests. Also known as the “zombie fungus,” it infects ants and controls their behaviors, manipulating them to further spread the fungus, until they eventually die. Once the ant is dead, the fungus continues to grow and reproduce. In *The Hallow*, the tree specialist Adam (Joseph Mawle) finds this fungus growing

out of the head of a dead deer and takes it home to further analyze it. His wife Claire (Bojana Novakovic) stays at home and cares for their young baby son, Finn, but is plagued by a neighbour who continually warns her that their baby is unsafe as long as Adam continues entering the forest. The neighbour, Colm Donnelly, is the first link to the truth of what lies in the forest; he has lost his own daughter to the Hallow, because the forest belongs to the Hallow, creatures that had been driven out of their land by conquerors using iron and fire. Only with the mythical swords of old, forged from fire and iron, can one truly defeat the Hallow. But “if you trespass upon them, they will trespass upon you!”

It is the untouched forest that until now has remained hallowed (yet unholy) ground, but the Hallow, if disturbed, will take children from their parents. They are essentially the ophiocordyceps fungus that infects human beings, the fungus that manipulates their bodies and controls their behaviors, so that they can continue to reproduce and survive. But they hunt in the dark, like all evil creatures, and are afraid of the light; the rising sun keeps them at bay in the darkness of the forest.

The environmental aspect of the film is clear in its desire to stop deforestation, but for reasons that go against the preservation of an idyllic and perhaps sacred space; the forest is not a paradise, but a hidden realm of evil creatures which want to steal your children from your arms. They are the modern day zombies of the world, yet they have existed for centuries. And deforestation is how they will continue to reproduce; the fungus only needs to get into the cities to take over our minds, to take over our bodies and destroy humankind. Once the Hallow enter our bodies, we become “them”. The forests must remain truly sacrosanct and untouched, if we wish to continue our existence.