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## Under the Shadow

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# Under the Shadow

## **Abstract**

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

## **Author Notes**

William Blizek is the Founding Editor of the Journal of Religion and Film, and is Professor of Philosophy and Religion at the University of Nebraska at Omaha. He is also the editor of the Continuum Companion to Religion and Film (2009).



***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.