



February 2021

In the Earth

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Recommended Citation

Ramji, Rubina (2021) "In the Earth," *Journal of Religion & Film*: Vol. 25 : Iss. 1 , Article 18.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.unomaha.edu/jrf/vol25/iss1/18>

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In the Earth

Abstract

This is a review of *In the Earth* (2021), directed by Ben Wheatley.

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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.



In the Earth (2021), dir. Ben Wheatley

British horror film *In the Earth* is about a world living through a deadly pandemic, and it was filmed during the real COVID-19 pandemic. A scientist, Martin, travels to a remote place in the country to study the soil during the time of the plague and the mycorrhizal network that connects and controls all the tree roots, like a brain. He is hoping to find a better understanding of the modern plague his world is experiencing.

While hiking two days in the forest with Alma the park ranger to get to his mentor's camp, he hears about a local folktale that is used to keep children from wandering away from home in the dark. Parnag Fegg is a "spirit" of the woods – an embodiment of the living forest. Although Alma insists that Parnag Fegg is just a legend, the duo encounter trouble. First, they find an abandoned tent and then they themselves are attacked later that night in their own tent. Whatever had attacked them has stolen their shoes, causing Martin to get wounded. A strange man, who lives in the woods, finds them and offers to help them. They become wary of the stranger, when he claims to be able to communicate with the trees and the earth. In a way, he's a reflection of what

can happen to those who have been isolated from society for too long – something we must be watchful for in our pandemic. We soon learn that Zack the stranger has taken Olivia, Martin’s mentor, because her scientific approach to the trees and the woods overlooks the true spiritual nature of the trees and the earth: and the spirit of the trees demands sacrifice.

As the characters in the movie try to set their world aright in their own way, we experience what it is like to live in the middle of a deadly pandemic, and what isolation can do to the human soul. *In the Earth* draws on religion, folklore, nature and science to tell the story of the interconnectedness of the earth to humanity and all living creatures. If we as humans treat the earth beneath our feet for our own material gains, then we forget that nature is mightier than the creatures that inhabit it, and it will fight back to save itself.