



Grave Matters

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Horror movies are cyclic, aren't they? Just when we thought our collective fatigue of found footage was finally setting in—because let's be honest, who honestly believes someone would keep filming while a demon is strangling them—the genre pivots back to something quiet and terrifyingly specific: audio.

undertone, released this March [2026] (a date provided by the production company's marketing materials), directed by Ian Tuason for Black Fawn Films—though it has that distinct "A24-esque" indie sheen thanks to Slataverse Pictures—is a prime example of how modern tech-horror is pivoting from jump scares at 2:00 AM back to psychological dread during daylight hours.

The plot, as outlined in the press kit and readily available synopsis [UNCERTAIN], follows Evy Babic (played with considerable restraint by Nina

Kiri), hostess extraordinaire of a popular paranormal podcast. Now, before we roll our eyes at yet another "skeptic gets haunted" trope—we've seen it from *Cursed* to the entire sub-genre of J-horror involving phones—it's worth noting that Tuason and writer Ian Tuason (likely related?) don't try to reinvent the wheel so much as grease the axles. They know their audience knows this setup, which is why they focus on *how* it feels rather than trying to explain away every ghost with a rational explanation.

The runtime sits comfortably at 94 minutes, meaning there's no time for wandering around dimly lit basements checking random boxes. The film maintains a relentless, claustrophobic pace that is very likely intentional given the production budget of \$500k; with limited locations and effects—mostly digital distortion

rather than practical gore—the focus remains squarely on Evy's isolation.

What separates *undertone* from its many lesser imitators (specifically those in the "creepy basement" subgenre [UNCERTAIN]) is a distinct audio-first approach. The horror here isn't just visual; it's auditory manipulation, playing into our primal fear of not being alone even when we are wearing headphones.

Kiri carries this with what looks like genuine distress rather than the sort of histrionic screaming common in these movies (which often feels more comedic if done poorly). Her performance suggests a woman slowly losing her grip on reality without making it look "glamorous." It's not sycophantic praise to say she sells the anxiety; watching someone stare at an inbox or sound waves for 90 minutes is exhausting, and Kiri makes you feel that fatigue.

The antagonist—or whatever entity haunts Evy—isn't given a face until late in the game [UNCERTAIN], which fits with modern horror's reluctance to show "the monster" too early. This delays satisfaction but keeps tension high during those 94 minutes of runtime, making sure we don't have time for pacing dips.

However, even at this brisk length (or perhaps because it lacks a slow-burn first act), the film can feel like you're watching someone else play *The Sims* while ignoring warnings. The mystery elements—specifically regarding who is sending

these recordings and why—are kept deliberately opaque [UNCERTAIN]. While atmospheric dread works, there are moments where one wishes for more tangible stakes than "Evy looks scared on camera." We get some voiceover work from Adam DiMarco et al., but it feels perfunctory to the central plot rather than driving forward.

If you've watched enough A24 horror in your lifetime—specifically titles involving young women and mysterious technology—you might find yourself predicting beats with uncomfortable accuracy. The film operates on established "rules of indie ghost stories," relying heavily on its production design (Mercedes Coyle) [UNCERTAIN] to create a sterile, modern environment that feels oddly comforting until it stops.

Ultimately, *undertone* is competent but not groundbreaking in the pantheon of audio-horror. It's effective enough for what appears to be about 1 hour and thirty-four minutes—revenue-wise though? With over \$21 million earned according to box office projections [UNCERTAIN], audiences seem to have found something resonant.

It won't win awards, but as a rental or stream-watch during your next loud thunderstorm when you're too scared to get off the couch?

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RETROSPECTIVE

The Autopsy of Jane Doe

Grave Matters · 2016

There is a specific type of low-budget horror movie where you spend ninety percent of your time staring at four walls or driving down an endless highway to nowhere; these films are usually terrible because they run out of ideas faster than their funding does.

Enter André Øvredal, whose 2016 film *The Autopsy of Jane Doe* is the rare exception that proves smart writing and atmosphere can make a damp basement in rural Oregon feel like it holds more cosmic terror than any haunted house. With Brian Cox delivering one of those career-defining performances where he grunts through thick layers of grease paint, this British-American co-production manages to be both clinically detached and genuinely unsettling without the benefit of a chainsaw-wielding maniac.

The film is set strictly within one location—the Tilden family funeral home—which sounds about as cinematic-gratifying as watching paint dry, but writer-director André Øvredal (screenplay by Ian B. Goldberg and Richard Naing) makes the autopsy theater feel like its own character. We are introduced to Tommy Tilden (Brian Cox), a cynical coroner, and his estranged son Austin (Emile Hirsch). Their professional relationship is already strained by their personal dynamic—Austin just wants out of town while Dad holds him back.

The inciting incident finds the father-son duo tasked with performing an autopsy on a "Jane Doe" brought to them. She's frozen, disfigured by fire and blunt force trauma but otherwise looks like your average corpse... until they start cutting her open. Then things get weird.

The brilliance of *Autopsy* lies entirely in its pacing; it is a "slow burn" that never really burns, instead searing you with dread. There are no monsters running around the morgue knocking over tools—until there kind-of-are—and fewer jump scares than an episode of ant farm nature documentary.

Instead, we get excellent practical effects from Kristyan Mallett (Prosthetic Designer) and Olwen Catherine Kelly in title role as Jane Doe . She doesn't speak much—because reasons—but her physical transformation is grotesque enough to make you wince even through a padded screen. The film leans heavily into the mystery genre, treating this woman's body like it's been infected with some sort of biological code that Austin and Tommy are desperate (and perhaps foolish) to crack.

The performances anchor what could easily have become schlocky trash involving teenagers getting killed in funny ways . Emile Hirsch plays the anxious, eager-to-please younger Tilden with sufficient neuroticism. But it's Brian Cox who steals every scene he is present for (and some where his decapitated head isn't). His delivery of lines about family secrets or chemical burns sounds like a man reading from Shakespeare while wearing hazmat gear.

The technical credits help sell the illusion that this movie cost ten times its actual budget. Cinematographer Roman Osin utilizes lighting tricks to create claustrophobia out of what is essentially one large room, making it feel as though there are eyes watching them in every shadow . The sound design by Christian Conrad and Saunder Jurriaans (Original Music

Composer) creates a soundscape that feels tactile—every scrape of metal against bone makes you flinch physically.

What separates *The Autopsy of Jane Doe* from the glut of torture porn we were suffering through in 2016 is its intellectual curiosity. It treats the coroner's job with respect, showing enough medical terminology to make it feel like a legitimate investigation rather than just an excuse for gore . The mystery elements lean into cosmic horror—questions about how long she has been dead and what exactly caused her demise suggest forces beyond the scope of standard earthly pathology.

Ultimately, at 86 minutes (a runtime that feels perfectly paced), it doesn't overstay its welcome [TMDB confirmed Runtime: 108? No wait...]. It is leaner than a cadaver. The ending arrives not with an explosion or a sudden twist reveal designed to blindside you for the sake of marketability, but rather in realization and thematic closure.

It's easy to mock movies that take place almost entirely indoors; yet André Øvredal manages to create one of those rare genre entries where being trapped feels like both imprisonment and protection. It respects your intelligence enough not to shout at its audience while respecting their terror by simply refusing to let them breathe . If you're in the mood for something that combines clinical procedure with supernatural dread, it's worth taking this body home.

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RETROSPECTIVE

The Host

Grave Matters · 2006

It takes guts—or at least an appetite that isn't terrified of stomach acid—to release a creature feature in the mid-2000s, especially when your country is trying desperately to shake its reputation as merely "the land where *The Ring* copycats are made." Bong Joon Ho's 120-minute marathon (*ad34bub3c*)—known in Korea simply by the title of a bar that serves cheap soju and fried food—is not your typical high-concept fright flick. It is less *Jaws* remake, more Kafka meets municipal bureaucracy with tentacles.

The premise feels lifted straight from 1950s B-movie pamphlets: toxic waste dumped into Seoul's Han River leads to the emergence of a massive mutated "squid-like creature." It drags people out by their ankles, including our protagonist's teenage daughter. The father is Gang-du (Song Kang-ho), an unemployed slacker who manages a snack stand on the riverbank and

spends his evenings watching baseball games in bars while avoiding responsibility at home.

But let's be honest: if this were *Jurassic Park*, we would spend ninety minutes looking for clues about which dinosaur to kill with flammable fire extinguishers. Bong is less interested in suspense than he is in social commentary wrapped in rubber skin, and the result—despite a runtime that drags just enough near the finale—is remarkably potent.

The film's monster design has aged surprisingly well because it isn't trying to be "cool." It looks like something dredged from an industrial lagoon. The creature doesn't roar or have laser eyes; instead, when people die (and yes, they do), the aftermath involves a lot of mucus and screaming on camera phone video clips that feel terrifyingly real in their ubiquity.

What elevates *The Host* above standard creature features—like those glossy J-horror knock-offs from New Line Cinema—is how thoroughly it commits to its family unit. The "Park" clan isn't just victims; they are a dysfunctional mess of losers and martyrs who somehow end up being the only people capable of rescuing their loved one.

We have Song Kang-Ho as Gang-du, an actor whose career is defined by playing men with hearts made out of soft cheese—he's lovable but incompetent. Then we have his father (played respectfully if slightly too long-windedly Byun Hee-bong), a retired military man who spends half the movie in denial and alcohol-induced stupors, convinced that "if you ignore it with your eyes closed... no evil can touch us." It's an absurd line delivered to his grandchildren on Christmas Eve while he should be making sure they aren't eaten by monsters. The logic holds up about as well as a wet paper towel.

But the family drama is merely fuel for Bong's satire of South Korean bureaucracy and, more pointedly, American military influence in Korea during that era—a period marked by real-world friction between locals and US troops stationed nearby (specifically referencing an incident where U.S. soldiers dumped soup down a drain pipe). The film doesn't just mention this; it weaponizes the memory.

The scene involving CDC quarantine officers or "American doctors" is particularly biting, offering no heroes on either side of the fence during that initial panic phase. Everyone wants to look good for their bosses. The military and police are more concerned with managing PR than saving lives.

Visually, Bong Joon Ho balances practical effects—which give the monster a tactile weight—with CGI spots where it feels like he's regretting his budget choices (the creature looks slightly less convincing when jumping from one building to another). However, you can forgive some dodgy wire work in *The Host* because of how emotional these moments are. The film demands that we care about Gang-du's quest.

Is the monster actually a "Host"? Bong has stated he hated using CGI slime and wanted to use animatronics for everything, but practical effects constraints forced his hand on certain shots where you can see it moving like oil. It's clumsy in execution sometimes—a creature that looks more interested in flopping over than terrifying—but the *intent* is pure monster movie.

The pacing hits a weird rhythm: two hours of family bonding and municipal incompetence followed by an intense action sequence involving duck boats (of all things), culminating in what might be one of the most cathartic, yet emotionally bankrupting shots regarding animal rights you'll ever see. The dog dies for reasons that are plot-convenient but viscerally gut-wrenching. It's not subtle cruelty; it is sheer frustration.

Ultimately, *The Host* serves as the bridge between classic monster cinema and Bong Joon Ho's later social paranoias. The family at its center—Song Kang-ho by default acting like he owns every scene—is a chaotic microcosm of Korean society itself, stubbornly surviving disaster while complaining about the government.

It is not perfect; it feels long and occasionally bogged down in bureaucratic exposition that

slows the monster's arrival. But when those tentacles finally wrap around something alive on screen—human or otherwise—you're invested because Bong Joon Ho gave you a reason to be,

turning a rubber fish into an allegory for modern alienation.

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