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60 SECOND INTERVIEW



■ Koji Suzuki was an obscure Japanese writer until his novel *The Ring* was made into a smash-hit horror movie. It was later remade in Hollywood with even greater success. The plot revolves around a videotape that brings death unless you pass it on within a week. In Japan, the film has inspired two sequels and created a whole psycho-horror genre of films.

Koji Suzuki

■ How did you get the idea for *The Ring*?

I don't do a plot summary when I start a new novel. I follow my inspiration. *The Ring* was born when I felt I could create an epoch-making story, something extremely interesting. I am not keen on horror movies or stories. In fact, my speciality is French literature. So I was driven by nothing but inspiration when I wrote *The Ring*. I did not at all intend to write horror.

■ What was the source?

I thought: "What if four girls and boys died of unnatural causes but in different locations? What if they had a mutually frightening experience?" And my imagination took off from there. I looked at a videotape that just happened to be there and thought: "OK, let's say they've all seen a haunted video. But how was it recorded in the first place? How about by a psychic with extraordinary powers? Then I started looking into psychics."

■ The *Ring* is the first part of a trilogy. Can you expand on the second part [*The Spiral*], where people's deaths seem to have a medical explanation?

All human diseases and illnesses are more or less influenced by state of mind. For example, stomach ulcers come from stress. Stress is psychological, it doesn't have a physical source. So even if you are physically healthy, your mind can affect your health. In short, by watching the video, a sort of consciousness is activated. It sends signals to release virus-like substances from the body that trigger human cells to cause heart attacks.

■ How does the story develop to the third part, *The Loop*?

You cannot call it a horror. It's a story about a self-replicating life that lives in a computer environment. It's like an extraordinarily advanced simulation. A hero appears and tries to deal with it. At the beginning you wouldn't know how it's connected to *The Ring*. The cast is different. Then halfway through the story you realise there's a connection and you see an unexpected development at the end. *The Loop* is an impressive story based on modern science. I really don't like horror stories.

■ But people look up to you as one of the best horror writers. [Laughs] *The Loop* totally denies the

paranormal horrors enjoyed in the first two instalments. It gives people hope. I didn't want to end it by giving readers the creeps.

■ Do you believe in an after-life?

I'm generally not interested in the paranormal. But I do wonder what happens when people die. At present, science cannot explain everything that happens. Some things defy explanation. Nonetheless, I think most paranormal stuff is rubbish. But who cares? As long as it's fun.

■ Why do we enjoy being scared so much?

You need to use your imagination in order to enjoy terror. For instance, at night in the bathroom you feel someone is right behind you but it's all in your mind. The thought "there might be someone behind me" develops into a ghost and gives people fear. I managed to write a good

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horror story because I don't actually like horror. If I liked it and was always reading it, I would've written typical horror. Instead, the story was original and fun. For example, if a boy who always listened to classical music grew up to become a rock star, he might create something extraordinarily unique.

■ Were you pleased with the American version of *The Ring*?

Yes, I like the original Japanese version, but the Americans have spent a lot of money and upgraded it.

■ Are we going to see sequels from Hollywood soon?

It's not conclusive but I've had offers.

■ What was the weirdest letter you've had from a fan?

My other novels have drawn on most of the fan letters. One fan wrote and insisted *The Ring* was his idea and that I stole it. It's typical, isn't it? I never got involved with people like that.

■ What's next for Koji? Find out online at www.metro.co.uk. *The Ring* is published in English this week (PanoramaCollins, £10).