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# Ring

Koji Suzuki

Translated from the Japanese by Robert G. Rohmer  
and Glynne Walley

Vertical, Inc

US Hardcover First

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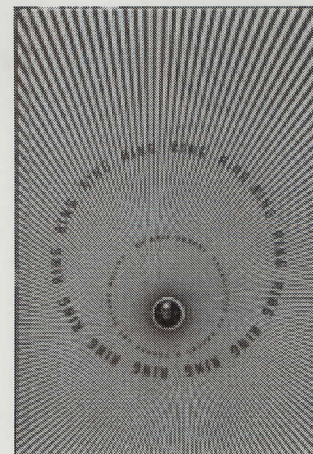
## REFERENCES

[Horror](#), [Science Fiction](#), [Mystery](#)

Most readers will have first encountered 'Ring' in one of its many adaptations. It's been a TV mini-series in Japan, a much-bootlegged Japanese feature recently released on a domestic DVD, and of course a popular US feature film. Even those who haven't seen the movie know the clever premise of the story. Now, long after all the filmic forms have become easily available in the US, the novel has been translated and published by Vertical-Inc. This is the exact reverse of the usual order, and common wisdom suggests that while reading a book does not ruin the enjoyability of a movie, watching a movie adaptation can definitely destroy the enjoyability of a book.

That's not the case with the story in 'Ring', which like the message in a game of "Telephone", has been so distorted in each successive incarnation that it's virtually unrecognizable. Yes, Suzuki's novel has plenty of surprises for those who have seen both versions of the movie. The characters, the premise and the conclusion have all been altered in the film adaptations. Or did you think horror novels all feature fashion-model beautiful newspaper reporters? Chip Kidd ([The Cheese Monkeys](#)) is the art director for Vertical-Inc and his eye-catching cover alone might make this worthy of purchase.

In Suzuki's novel 'Ring' - the first of a trilogy - the protagonist is a cranky, overworked young father. Asakawa



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is so distracted by his busy life, and a past failure that still haunts him, that even his niece's death barely registers. But a chain of chance leads him to discover that another teenager died a similar death at precisely the same time. Only when his reporterly instincts are energized does he begin to investigate.

So far, somewhat familiar. But the tone of Suzuki's novel is vastly different from either movie. He approaches the deadly incident not as a horror novelist, unearthing a supernatural curse, but as a mystery or science fiction novelist, connecting clues logically to eliminate the impossible. No matter how improbable, the deadly conclusions Asakawa's forced to come to are all that remains. The first and foremost suspicion is that some sort of virus killed the teenagers. That proves to be correct but it's not a virus like any other readers have encountered.

Once Asakawa realizes that he's under a tight and very real deadline, he employs the help of his old acquaintance Ryuji. Ryuji is not exactly a friend, but more a forced confidante, who long ago created an intimate relationship with Asakawa by confessing to Asakawa that he had raped a girl. The reality of that incident is disputable, but the effect of the confession is not. Now, Ryuji's employed as a philosophy professor, and his cynical, scorched-earth point of view is all that stands between Asakawa and an unpleasant death. Together they try to find the "charm" that will save Asakawa.

It's interesting that the solution to the riddle is called a "charm" here, because the novel itself has not a hint of any supernatural feeling. This is a cut-and-dried clue-clutching mystery with subtext to spare that's a joy to read even if you think you know what's going to happen. More often than not, you won't know, and even if you do Suzuki's clever plotting and unsympathetic characterizations will keep you glued to the pages. Readers who enjoy Stanislaw Lem's mysteries will find much to admire here. There's more than a hint of M. R. James' scholarly ghost stories, and even something of Chuck Palahniuk's relentless media-drone to be found in 'Ring' as well. The sum is definitely more than the whole of the parts. **It's a compelling, thought-provoking page-turning reading experience.**

This is not to say that 'Ring' is without problems. As one would expect, occasionally the prose can get on the clunky side as the wheels of translation catch on cultural idioms. But by and large, the translators, Robert G. Rohmer and Glynne Walley have done an excellent job. They create a unique sense of unease that's utterly unlike what you'll find in any horror written in English.

Suzuki himself tends towards the expository. Now that's not surprising, given that the novel operates a bit like a Conan Doyle mystery, with Ryuji playing the part of Holmes to Asakawa's Watson. But Suzuki is plowing a path that nobody else has traveled, as his 'Ring'-virus is born into an all-too vulnerable world. There are so many extremely clever riffs that never made it into either movie that readers aren't likely to notice how wide the road recently traveled is until they catch their breath and manage to look back. By the time that happens, it's far too late. **Readers will want to read the next book in this series with a palpable addictive twinge.** The good news is that translations of both sequels are in the works, and the following two are likely to make it here before any of the movies do. Readers can then enjoy the additional pleasure of knowing how much better the book is before they see the movie rather than after.