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Special thanks to Mary Beth and Rod for playing with the Horror-Web on several levels, and offering us this chance to bring you all a special **exclusive** taste of the upcoming May/June 2003 issue #33 of Rue Morgue!!

On the Origin of the Ring Virus

By Jen Vuckovic
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*Japanese horror first successfully breached the North American market in 1998 with Ringu. Now we're facing a full-scale Asian horror invasion designated as "J-horror" that is indebted not to a videotape, but to a book. Author **Koji Suzuki** discusses his literary milestone on the brink of its North American debut.*



A haunted well, a cursed videotape, a dooming telephone call. All symptoms of a supernatural disease set to bring about the end of the world through viral epidemic. Cause of death: acute heart failure or, literally, being scared to death. By now you are all likely familiar with Ringu, the Hideo Nakata-directed Japanese box-office-hit thriller that propelled Asian psychological horror to international status as the cream of the narrative crop in the genre.

But what lurks just beneath the surface of those films is something even more

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fascinating. Ringu was based on a novel of the same name, and an author's chance idea that set in motion a chain of events that would change the course of film history forever. That book was **Ring**, **Koji Suzuki's** first horror novel which is the genesis for the J-horror coup that has the world spellbound - a book which will finally see English language publication on April 15th from Vertical Inc. This is where it all began.

"There was a video tape in my room," reveals **Suzuki** of the inspiration for his story. "It just hit me that it might be scary if you died seven days after you watched a videotape. People watch videotapes in everyday situations. What if it's a tape that's cursed? That was the idea. I believe scary things lie beneath everyday things."

While the motion pictures captured the frightening essence of **Ring** in their own ways, **Suzuki's** novel poses more profound concepts. **Ring** is a genuinely scary tale that proposes that the young girl Sadako is in fact a plague unleashed upon humankind; the result of an unlikely marriage of a woman's destruction by ridicule and her child's telekinetic rage against her unfortunate congenital abnormality and her untimely death.

Not surprisingly, **Suzuki's** story is much more complex and focuses heavily on the virology of the **Ring** virus, something that was diluted considerably in the films. The protagonist here, unlike in the movies, is male and later discovers the cabin was built above an old sanatorium that once housed small-pox victims - a much more fitting locale for the narrative to unfold.

Originally published in 1991, Ringu (**Ring**) didn't exactly fly off the shelves at first, but like the infamous videotape in the story, it caught on by word of mouth and spread like a virus through Japan, selling almost 3 million copies - enough to capture the attention of a battery of producers in the television and film industry. It didn't take long for the book to proliferate and generate a multi-media outbreak including a radio drama, a Manga comic, two television dramas, a prequel, two sequels and, of course, the feature films: The **Ring** Virus (Korea), Ringu (Japan) and the Gore Verbinski-directed American remake The **Ring**.

Ringu gained so much momentum in Japan and at the international festivals that, before long, many other Asian countries followed suit with their own brand of atmospheric spectral tales. North American horror audiences have since welcomed the onslaught of genuinely creepy and original J-horror films like Kiyoshi Kurosawa's Kairo (2001) and the Pang Brothers' The Eye (2002). Although original in their own right, they are clearly influenced by **Suzuki's** stylish ideas and sense of atmosphere.

"Each one has its own taste," the author notes of the many films inspired by his story. "I do not like the splatter thing. What I like is something that works on your imagination, like the movie The Others - you see no blood, but fear comes into your mind. Both Ringu and The **Ring** have great atmosphere. However, I enjoyed seeing some effects that only movies can make. For example, the twisted faces on the photos, that's something you can't write."

It's hard to believe the movie that ignited an explosion of psychological horror films in Japan can be traced back to, of all things, children. But **Suzuki** reveals that, ironically, his inspiration to pen Ringu came to him while tutoring young kids.

"I wanted to write something very interesting," he says. "I was kind of a tutor at that time, and I often told scary stories to children. I knew they loved it so I thought to myself: people might actually seek something scary." ...

Read the full story in Rue Morgue's May/June issue (#33), along with reviews of The **Ring** DVD and Dark Water, another Nakata/**Suzuki** collaboration.

Check out the rest of the issue, including: Cabin Fever, Takashi Miike, Tim Burton's twisted toys and more!! On stands May 1st, 2003!!



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