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CONVERSATION

Japan's horror king

BY CAROLINE HSU

Novelist **Koji Suzuki**, 47, hoped to become the *F. Scott Fitzgerald* of Japan but instead became something like the *Thomas Pynchon* of pulp. His books have sold over 10 million copies in Japan, and his eerie novel *Ring* was made into a film that launched the influential Japanese "psycho-horror" genre. Now his brand of seeping disquiet, more intent on raising neck hairs than racking up body counts, is moving to the

male. On a subconscious level, I draw a lot of influence from this perspective.

You've been called the Stephen King of Japan. Have you read King, and is he an influence?

I have read him but not a lot. I really like American literature—I think J. D. Salinger really influenced me, as well as Fitzgerald.

Is it true that you wrote *Ring* [a macabre novel in which a man believes his wife and baby will die from watching a cursed videotape] while your own daughter was sitting on your lap?

Yep. At the time, I was not a famous writer, and because my wife was a high school teacher I took care of the children. My daughter Misato . . . was about 2 or 3 years old when I was writing *Ring*.

What scares you the most?

Everyone has a different thing that really scares him. For me, it's not ghosts or the occult—I don't believe in ghosts or spirits. For me, losing someone that you love is the scariest thing.

What are you most famous for in Japan?

Many people know me as the author of *Ring*, but many also know me for my how-to books on raising children. But I'm not a househusband like John Lennon was; I'm a macho househusband. I develop my muscles by doing exercises. In America, it'd be

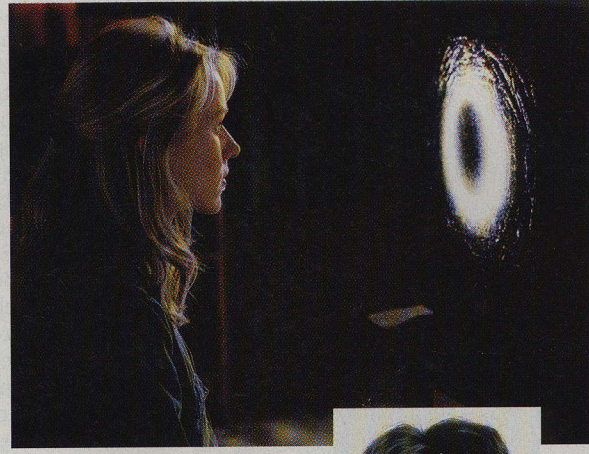
like Arnold Schwarzenegger teaching people how to raise kids.

Have you seen the American version of *Ring*?

Of course I have. I thought they did a great job, but I think my book is scarier.

Any plans to write more horror novels in the future?

I don't want to be committed to one genre. I'd like to write more novels set on the sea, on yachts—I call them yacht novels. I don't think I could do another horror novel. It kind of scares me. ●



PHOTOFEST

West. Following the success of the 2002 American remake, The Ring, Hollywood is knocking down Suzuki's door. Japanese director Hideo Nakata is filming an American sequel, tentatively titled The Ring 2 and featuring Naomi Watts and Sissy Spacek; Dark Water, an American film adaptation of another Suzuki book, starring Jennifer Connelly, will be out in the fall. With this month's English translation release of Spiral, the sequel to Ring, Suzuki may indeed scare up more American readers.



Koji Suzuki's creepy novels are Hollywood favorites. Top: Naomi Watts in *The Ring*.

How do American horror and Japanese horror differ?

In American [and British] horror, it seems to me there are a lot of stories where monsters appear, like Freddy or Frankenstein. And American monsters are almost always male or masculine in character. Japanese ghosts or spirits are usually fe-