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CAST

Nanako Matsushima Reiko Asakawa
Hiroyuki Sanada Ryūji Takayama
Rikiya Ōtaka Yōichi Asakawa
Miki Nakatani Mai Takano
Yūko Takeuchi Tomoko Ōishi
Hitomi Satō Masami Kurahashi

Daisuke Ban Dr. Heihachiro Ikuma
Rie Inō Sadako Yamamura
Masako Shizuko Yamamura
Yōichi Numata Takashi Yamamura
Yutaka Matsushige Yoshino
Katsumi Muramatsu Kōichi Asakawa

CREW

Directed by **Hideo Nakata**
Screenplay by **Hiroshi Takahashi**
Based on the novel by **Koji Suzuki**
Produced by **Takashige Ichise, Shinya Kawai** and **Takenori Sentō**
Executive Producer **Masato Hara**
Director of Photography **Jun'ichirō Hayashi**
Music by **Kenji Kawai**
Production Designer **Iwao Saitō**
Film Editor **Nobuyuki Takahashi**

Please note that, while the correct English translation of the series' title is *Ring*, trademark restrictions in the US have necessitated it being released using the transliteration "*Ringu*".



RINGU: THIS VORTEX OF EVIL ENERGY

by Alexandra Heller-Nicholas

Through its dark poetics, Hideo Nakata's 1998 film *Ringu* articulates the intoxicating, fascinating, and terrifying tension between the traumas of the past and anxieties about technology's impact on the future like no other cultural phenomenon. With a near-constant emphasis on the primal majesty of the ocean and the unrelenting omnipresence of televisual white noise, these two hissing abstract beasts grant *Ringu* a fundamental gothic texture, evoking what Leslie Fielder once described as "the pastness of the past... the sense of something lapsed or outlived or irredeemably changed." This material sense of something lost that finds itself literally embedded in a videotape – which, in 1991 when Koji Suzuki's source novel was published, was a symbol of ubiquitous modern technology – collapses the past into the present and speaks to our fears of an increasingly technology-dominated future. As protagonist Reiko's sidekick Ryūji says early on in Suzuki's novel: "Somewhere, there's this vortex of evil energy. I know. It makes me feel... nostalgic." Revisiting the film on updated digital home entertainment formats in 2018 makes this observation even more profound, and the history of media technology since that 1998 film is now part of the story of *Ringu* and its endurance.

There is, perhaps fittingly, a long history of our fear of technological change and its association to tales of the supernatural. In his book *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, Jeffrey Sconce wrote that "tales of paranormal media are important [...] not as timeless expressions of some underlying electronic superstition, but as a permeable language in which to express a culture's changing social relationship to a historical sequence of technologies."¹ Nakata's *Ringu* is a perfect example of this, a tale of a haunted videotape inextricably linked to the tragic story of its supernatural antagonist, Sadako Yamamura (Rie Inō), that causes the viewer's death seven days after viewing. Ryuji's "vortex" foreshadows the dominant visual and narrative motif of

1 - Jeffrey Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*. (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009)



the well, an object of profound personal importance to Nakata, who was inspired by the ghost story *Bancho Sarayashiki* and Japanese folkloric and kabuki performance traditions. In an interview with Donato Totaro in 2000, Nakata mentions this tale and says:

When I lived in the countryside in Japan I saw a well, about 5 meters deep, which is maybe not that deep, but for me as a child, it seemed like a bottomless hell. Because I thought once I got inside it I would never get out of it. The relationship between the well and the TV monitor [...] is that the monitor itself is the tube or connection to hell.²

This idea of portals between literal and symbolic dimensions – between past and present, reality and the supernatural – is nowhere clearer than that famous scene in which Sadako slithers out of the well towards the viewer. Not satisfied with merely breaking the fourth wall, she annihilates it completely when she crawls through the television screen, into our world, to kill Ryūji (Hiroyuki Sanada), who watched her cursed tape a week beforehand. Linking her pain of the past with his pain of the present, the antiquity of the haunted well merges with anxieties about contemporary media technology, forming the foundations of a horror movie nightmare like no other.

B4 and After

There is much to be said about the endurance of *Ringu* and its myriad sequels, remakes and reboots, and its parallels with the media's desire to spread and reproduce like a supernatural virus. Suzuki himself commented upon this very phenomenon, noting in 2004 that "it's a little like the virus idea of *Ringu* itself [...] it just keeps getting replicated." Despite an earlier (and somewhat pedestrian) attempt to adapt Suzuki's novel to the screen – Chisui Takigawa's 1995 television movie *Ring: Kanzenban* (or *Ring: The Complete Edition*) – the series would begin in earnest with Nakata's *Ringu*, followed by the duelling sequels *Rasen* (1998) and Nakata's *Ringu 2* in 1999; *Ringu 0* (2000); *Sadako 3D* (2012), and *Sadako 3D 2* (2013). Hollywood would launch its own reimagining of the material with

2 - Donato Totaro, 'The "Ring" Master: Interview with Hideo Nakata' in *Offscreen*. (Web. Volume 4, Issue 3, July 2000)

The Ring (2002), *The Ring Two* (2005), and F. Javier Gutiérrez's 2017 *Rings*. There was a South Korean adaptation in 1999 directed by Kim Dong-bin called *The Ring Virus*, and it was adapted by playwright Anita Sullivan for a BBC Radio 4 radio play in 2015. There were the Japanese television series *Ring: The Final Chapter* (1999) and *Rasen* (1999), the videogames *The Ring: Terror's Realm* and *Ring: Infinity*, both released in 2000. This is not to forget the horror-franchise mash-ups *Hikiko-san vs Sadako* (2015), *Bunshinsaba vs Sadako* (2016), and *Sadako vs. Kayako* (2016). And of course, the books kept coming, too: after his 1991 novel, Suzuki would continue his series with *Spiral* (1995), *Loop* (1998), *Birthday* (1999), *S* (2012), and *Tide* (2013). In 2005, there was even the manga *The Ring Volume 0: Birthday* (written by Hiroshi Takahashi, screenwriter of Nakata's two Japanese films and *Ringu 0*).

Ringu is not unique in its status as a Japanese horror film adapted from earlier material; the *Tomie* series and *Uzumaki* (2000), for example, are both based on manga, and Ueda Akinari's 17th century supernatural story collection *Ugetsu Monogatari* was famously turned into one of the great classics of Japanese cinema, Kenji Mizoguchi's *Ugetsu* (1953). Similarly, *Ringu* continues an exploration in Japanese cinema of the relationship between human subjectivity and technology, a theme vibrantly explored in movies including *Akira* (1988) and *Tetsuo: Iron Man* (1989). But it is the sheer scale and longevity of the *Ringu* series that renders it such a unique phenomenon: by 2004, the novel had sold more than ten million copies in Japan alone. While perhaps not reflective of the specific style and tone of Suzuki's writing, its influence and popularity has often been compared to the work of US horror novelist Stephen King.

Upon its initial release in 1991, sales of the novel were at first slow, and it wasn't until Nakata's 1998 film that the story would achieve its impressive status of global blockbuster. While keeping the premise and much of the basic storyline the same, Nakata recast the male protagonist Kazuyuki Asakawa as a struggling single mum, Reiko Asakawa (Nanako Matsushima). He also visually brought Sadako to life explicitly through the iconography of the traditional *onryō* spirit – a *yūrei* or ghost driven by a thirst for vengeance – denoted by her white kimono, messy black hair and white-blue skin color, as well as many of the details within the cursed video itself, which contained wholly new additions by the filmmaker



and screenwriter Hiroshi Takahashi. Inspired by, but certainly not entirely loyal to, Suzuki's novel, Nakata's film about the tape of Cabin B4 became one of the most global horror stories of all time.

Revisiting Ringu

To undertake a complete study of differences and similarities across all the *Ringu* variations would be an exhaustive (although profoundly fascinating) task, and one that many critics and fans alike have endeavored to undertake. But at the core remains that haunted videocassette itself: the investigative avenues within all versions of the story are provided by the contents and consequences of that original tape, the primary motivating action across all versions triggered in some way by the deaths it caused, and threatens to cause again. Thanks to a release like the one in your hands, we can revisit *Ringu* with high definition Blu-ray technology rather than the original VHS through which so many discovered the film. Technology is not static; as *Ringu* reminds us, it is radically kinetic. Just as the virus and Sadako's methods of spreading her vengeful curse across the series evolved, so too have the media formats we employ to watch and re-watch *Ringu*. In short, it means something entirely different to talk about a haunted videocassette in 1989 than it does in 2018.

But even before the Hollywood remake was launched, VHS had a very different cultural meaning in Japan at least. The release and sudden popularity of the PlayStation 2 in Japan in 2000 brought DVD viewing to a huge number of Japanese households, its dual function as a DVD player and games console resulting in a direct increase in DVD movie sales. The speed with which the DVD format was embraced by American consumers was also impressive: by mid-2003, DVD rentals outsold videocassettes by a long way. The US Video Software Dealers Association's Sean Devlin Bersell stated at the time that "Americans have accepted DVDs faster than they did black-and-white TV, color TV, VCRs and CD players," while Randy Hargrove of Blockbuster Video noted, "DVD has been the fastest-growing commercial electronic in history."³ In short, the ubiquity of VCR technology changed very quickly in the early 2000s, but this importantly did not

impact its popularity. But surely to watch a film or television series, read a book or manga, or play a computer game about a haunted videocassette at a time where VCRs were the dominant mode of watching pre-recorded movies says something radically different about that technology (or technology in general) when that technology is considered *passé*, particularly for the fashion-conscious adolescent market to whom these narratives were initially aimed. The *Ringus* that appear in 1991, 1996, 1998, 2002, 2012, and 2017 by sheer technological advancements and trends are forced to represent videocassette technology in startlingly different ways – from a ubiquitous dominant medium found in every home to one that was, simply and suddenly, a retro nostalgia trip.

At stake here is much more than a curious history of domestic film exhibition technologies. Rather, it raises a vital question: why is Nakata's first *Ringu* film from 1998 still so damned scary, even now that VCRs are virtually non-existent outside the homes of cinephiles, techno-phobic grandparents, and full-throttle hoarders? The answer lies within much broader and more fundamental truths in the film that transcend the specificity of its media format: the inevitability of death, the excruciating long-term torment of unacknowledged abuse, and the loneliness and alienation inherent to late capitalism itself. All of these are threaded together by anxieties about encroaching media technologies and the all-too-pervasive knowledge that – now perhaps even more so than twenty years ago when Nakata's film was first released – we need to decode the media images we are bombarded with every day like our very lives depend on it. Sadako crawls through that television screen from the analog beyond to determine our fate today as much as she did twenty years ago. The lessons she teaches about the toxicity of viral media is one that feels more urgent now than ever.

Alexandra Heller-Nicholas is a film critic from Melbourne, Australia. She is the author of seven books on cult, horror, and exploitation cinema, including Rape-Revenge Films (McFarland, 2011), Suspiria (Auteur, 2016), Ms. 45 (Columbia University Press, 2017), Masks in Horror Cinema: Eyes Without Faces (University of Wales Press, 2019), and the forthcoming book 1000 Women in Horror (BearManor Media).

3 - Anna Bakalis, 'It's unreal: DVD rentals overtake videocassettes' in *The Washington Times* (Web. www.washingtontimes.com/news/2003/jun/20/20030620-113258-1104r. June 20, 2003)



ABOUT THE RESTORATION

Ringu has been exclusively restored by Arrow Films and is presented in its original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with stereo and 5.1 audio.

The original 35mm camera negative element was scanned in 4K resolution at Imagica, Tokyo. The film was graded on Digital Vision's Nucoda Film Master and restored at R3Store Studios in London. The stereo and 5.1 mixes were remastered from the original audio files at Deluxe Audio Services.

All materials for this restoration were made available by Kadokawa Corporation.

The grading was supervised and approved by Director of Photography Jun'ichirō Hayashi.

Restoration supervised by James White, Arrow Films

R3Store Studios: Gerry Gedge, Jo Griffin, Rich Watson, Nathan Leaman-Hill, Emily Kemp

Deluxe Audio Services: Jordan Perry

Kadokawa Corporation: Etsuko Furutsuki

Imagica: Mito Ryohei

Special thanks to Jun'ichirō Hayashi for his participation.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and booklet produced by **Michael Mackenzie**

Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**

Technical Producer **James White**

QC Manager **Nora Mehenni**

Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**

Blu-ray and DVD Mastering **Fidelity in Motion (David Mackenzie)**

Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**

Art and Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Kat Ellinger, Philip Escott, Daniel Griffith, Alexandra Heller-Nicholas,
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