

THE FRIDA ZINEMA

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J-HORROR



HORROR OF THE INFORMATION AGE

by Rose Morse

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There aren't many images in horror, particularly from the last 27 years, quite as iconic as the long-haired girl crawling from the well and towards the camera, closer and closer until she breaks the fourth wall of reality and crawls out of the television. This iconography originates from the 1998 j-horror classic, Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* (also known as *Ring*), a masterpiece of slow burning tension and atmosphere, grappling with themes such as the legacy of violence, and horror in the information age. *Ringu* has proven to be very influential, being one of the first horror films to portray informational virality that would become prescient with the advent of the internet and the boom of the information age.

In 1993, the internet finally became public access, via the World Wide Web, opening up these uncharted waters to anyone with a computer and a dial-up connection (which, admittedly, was a limited number of people). This led to a new world where information is the highest valued commodity, and the platforms used to facilitate the spread of information became all important. Within *Ringu*, there is a videotape that curses its viewer to be dead within 7 days of viewing, and the only way to beat the curse is to spread it to another person, effectively shifting the curse onto them unless they spread the tape to another person, and so on ad nauseam. This creates a chain of virality, where the video is seen by an audience of an ever increasing size, thus spreading the curse to more and more people. While the film uses charmingly analogue VHS tapes to spread the video, it's metaphorically representative of the newfound ways people were spreading content. Through things like Bulletin Board Systems, early forums, blogs, etc, anyone from

anywhere in the world who had an internet connection could access this ever growing web of information and communication. *Ringu* explores the darker sides of this phenomenon, painting an image of virality that digs up new pain for old wounds.

The curse on the videotape originates from a series of deeply disturbing events. Shizuko Yamamura, a powerful psychic, was subjected to a series of demonstrations by Dr. Ikuma, a doctor obsessed with proving the existence of ESP. During one of these demonstrations, a journalist accused Shizuko of faking her psychic powers, which angered Shizuko's daughter Sadako, an even more powerful psychic, to kill the man with a psychic power induced heart attack. Dr. Ikuma then murdered Shizuko and Sadako, pushing Sadako down a well where she remained for 30 years, keeping herself alive through anger. Sadako channels this anger into a cursed videotape that is then released to the world, spreading her anger onto anyone who dared to watch the tape. Sadako's return is symbolic of the manifestation of the

legacy of violence, of past crimes, of old wounds. The anger that so viciously haunts Sadako in many ways is a righteous anger. Dr. Ikuma murdered not only her, but her mother, and left Sadako to rot and die at the bottom of that well. The anger drove her to survive all those decades, and while her body rotted, her spirit was never given rest, left to reside in a mysterious videotape. The tape eventually reaches the film's protagonist, Reiko Asakawa, as she investigates the tape's origins while racing against the clock of the curse. This race against time is thrilling and engaging, helped by excellent direction and sound design.



Hideo Nakata's direction is simply sublime. The use of space between the character, the camera, and the environments themselves build an incredibly unnerving and haunted atmosphere. This film is one of the few that really creeped me out, and during my very first viewing years back, I had to watch in chunks because I would get so scared. My absolute favorite moment is the end where Sadako kills Ryuji, and it's the close-up shot of Sadako's eye. The pure anger and malice that is captured in that shot is so palpable, and is imagery that remains so powerful twenty seven years later. Overall, Hideo Nakata's *Ringu* is one of the best j-horror films ever made. The atmosphere is incredibly well-built, the performances are all very strong, and the ending is one of the most memorable in horror. *Ringu* remains immensely influential to this day, with many contemporary films taking clear inspiration, such as the recent *Smile* films. *Ringu* is a true classic, not only within j-horror, but horror at large.



KOTOKO

An Underrated Psychological Nightmare

by Travis Brunner



While *Tetsuo the Iron Man* is widely praised by cinephiles everywhere, there are surprisingly few Shinya Tsukamoto films that have a lasting impact in the grand scheme of cinema. This is almost certainly because his work is very inconsistent, similar to David Cronenberg's filmography. There are often signature sequences in his films that provide an intense, visceral experience, but the whole of it doesn't fully match up to its best moments.

That being said, there are select Tsukamoto films outside of *Tetsuo* that I consider to be great, and *Kotoko* is one of them. Its dreamlike atmosphere is juxtaposed by harsh sonic sequences, creating a dynamic experience that's hard to forget. It feels reminiscent of later works by Ari Aster, but with a much more grounded style and rough-around-the-edges approach. I find *Kotoko* very inspiring due to the ambitious, yet achievable nature of its production value. It looks like it was made for almost nothing, yet feels quite grand at times. It even won best film at Venice Film Festival 2011, despite being shot on consumer grade digital cameras with minimal actors and locations. To me, this is proof that vision and determination is all you need to make a great film. Resources don't mean anything if you can't make a genuine impact with nothing at your disposal.

While this film is certainly stylized per usual, I find the story to be genuinely tragic compared to Tsukamoto's other films. It achieves a level of emotional connection to its character that seems lost in films like *Gemini*. Kotoko, as a character, is morally complex in a way that I imagine is hard to make audiences connect to. Her actions are not necessarily redeemable, but I still find myself taken by her struggles. We

find at the very beginning that Kotoko has paranoid hallucinations, making her a danger to herself and others. She also experiences severe flashes of harm OCD, having terrible fantasies of how easily she could injure her child. Despite hallucinated characters or events being a common cliché in other films, this fully works for the story Tsukamoto is trying to tell. The debilitating nature of her mental illness causes her so much confusion and anguish, that I can't help but feel overwhelming sadness when something significant in her life turns out to be a fabrication.

Halfway into the film, we meet Tanaka, played by Tsukamoto himself. Tanaka is Kotoko's self-proclaimed stalker who falls in love with her in spite of her delusions, self-harm, and abusive nature. Although she rejects him multiple times, she eventually realizes that she needs someone to care for her and agrees to marry him. This is strangely a high point for her character, because after a small adjustment period, she becomes genuinely happy with him. The only other time she's felt this is when playing with her son. However, this relationship is far from healthy. I believe the only way Kotoko could have a relationship is with someone like this, who breaks down all of his boundaries and submits to her abuse. He's even willing to let her process her own anguish by beating him, almost to the brink of death. Of course, it's unreasonable that Tanaka would continue to love Kotoko when she treats him like this, so after some time, we find out that he was a fabrication and doesn't really exist. This is genuinely heartbreaking, because with Tanaka, she thought she found someone who will love her unconditionally, despite the way she is.

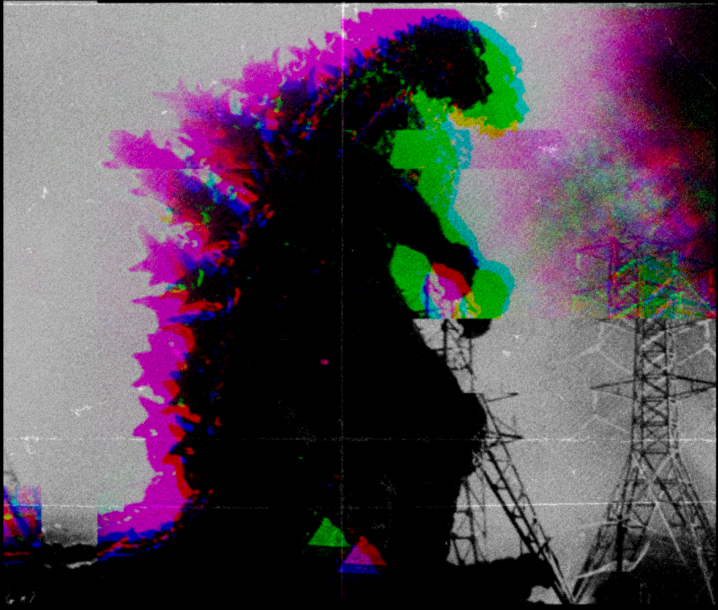
To me, the message of this film is

clear: No matter what, Kotoko will likely never be fit for any sort of human relationship, whether it's with a romantic partner, or her own son. She's doomed to destroy everything she touches. This is why, during a manic fit, she makes the tragically ironic decision to end her son's life, in order to save him from the constant danger of being around her.

The ending sees Kotoko living out her days in a mental institution, only being let outside to smoke cigarettes daily. It's left ambiguous as to whether her son is really dead, as she gets a surprise visit from him after a vague amount of time passes. He appears as a young teenager, casually and affectionately telling her about school and soccer practice before leaving. Whether this really happened, we don't know and neither does she. Kotoko's world is so disorienting, that we as an audience are left with no idea why she's there or how much time has passed. I personally think that this teenage son is something that her brain fabricated to try and comfort her. Likely some sort of defense mechanism, attempting to make her feel less guilt-ridden over what she's truly done.



שֵׁשׁ הַיָּמִים



בְּשֵׁשׁ הַיָּמִים



Helter Skelter (2012)

Artwork by Crystal A.M. | [@harlequinofmars](#)

Ghost as Plague:

Fatal Transmission and Infectious Haunting in J-Horror

by Shane Robinson



1. The Grudge

2004's *The Grudge* scared the shit out of me. At 19, I hadn't yet begun thinking hard enough about movies to dissect exactly why. It would have been easy to wave a hand at Kayako's warped face and impossible movement and leave it at that, but as lingeringly freakish as the visuals were and still are, they were surface level. There was something...internal in what bothered me about *Grudge*. I found myself reminded very little of any ghost story I could recall, and thinking instead of the movie *Outbreak*, which had crippled me for days in childhood with the idea of an unavoidable, airborne death. The ghosts I knew were confined, pinned to a house or a stretch of woods. Even if they were more mobile, there were rules to this

travel: a bound object, a broken rule, a family tie. Kayako and Toshio seemed to be bound by no rules at all, other than an absolute fatality rate for any person who crossed their paths. They had the temerity to enter public restrooms, follow people home and crawl under their blankets. They could keep pace with someone riding a city bus.

Their presence spread from person to person. Nothing slowed their transmission. And if they came into contact with you, you were fucked. There was no laying remains to rest, no righting of the begetting injustice. There was contact, and there was death.

And what awfully brutal, physical symptoms came with those deaths. A terrified paralysis, a rigor mortis that set into the body while it was still alive. Fear so strong that contact with it could lock the body up, could even kill entirely on its own. And even for those whose contact was still in its incubation period, a fevered eating of the mind that left its victims helplessly bedridden.

Decades later the DNA of *Ju-On* is everywhere in the horror genre, but at the time I'd never encountered an idea like this: ghost as plague, fear as a fatal transmission vector.



I had, of course, also seen *The Ring* at this point. My mother, bless her eternally, shared my love of the horror genre and was always willing to watch anything that entered public discussion in any major way, so we were on that one as soon as we could get a Netflix disc into our mailing queue. (I think she was also the one to make sure we watched the original Japanese *Ju-On*, fairly shortly after *The Grudge* itself; at the very least I watched it with her at some point. Exact timeframes are muddled, recalling that far back.) While the germ of the idea of an infectious ghost was done in *Ringu* first, or at least concurrently with *Ju-On*, it didn't strike me with quite the same mute terror. In *Ringu*, all one had to do to avoid the curse was to skip out on watching the video tape. If *Ju-On* was an airborne disease, *Ringu* was a bottle labeled TOXIC FUMES. Still scary, sure, but just, like...don't take the cap off. The traditional horror movie element of punishment for foolishness was still present in *Ringu*, to say nothing of the ability to forestall the curse by passing it to another. *Ju-On* was an altogether crueller beast. Reason and

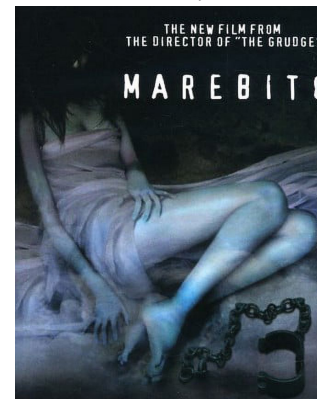
ritual were useless things, and that senselessness was the central part of the fear.

As one often does when one has one's spine shaken half apart by an idea, I fell in love. It would be a few years, though, before I'd find more works with that same kind of infectious terror, to reawaken my fascination.

2. Hollywood Video and Tartan Asia Extreme

Around 2010, I lived in Modesto, a place most California natives will have a thing or two to say about re: infection and plague vectors. For maybe half a year, a roommate and I had a standing weekend tradition: we would drive to Hollywood Video (and rest in peace to all the lost and bygone rituals of those places, the unearthing of titles you'd never heard of in your entire movie-viewing life). We would wind our way back to the questionably-titled Foreign Films section, tucked in the far corner. Our aim was one shelf in that section, always the same shelf: the one that held the J-horror, K-horror and other -horror titles.

We watched a lot of movies in that span. If we hadn't watched it yet, we rented it. If we liked it, we usually wound up renting it again. There was a particular label we looked for especially: the distinct yellow and white spine lettering of Tartan Asia Extreme. We would jump on anything we hadn't already seen by the distributor, which led us to a number of movies that have now rightfully earned fairly legendary status: *Oldboy*, *Audition*, *Battle Royale*. It also led me to a lesser-known film by *Ju-On* director Takashi Shimizu - 2009's *Marebito*.



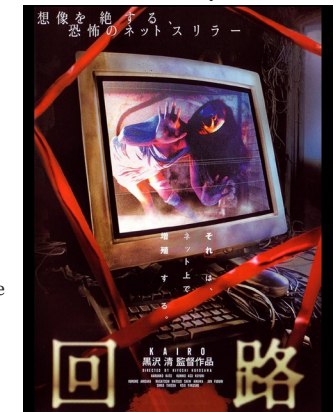
3. Marebito

Marebito is a quasi-found-footage film centered on Masuaka, an unhinged freelance cameraman who has become obsessed with understanding the fear he sees in those around him, a fear he suspects is tied to some greater force or conspiracy. When he records a video of a hysterical man in a subway station who gouges his own eyes in an effort to unsee... something that he has witnessed in the subway tunnels, Masuaka becomes obsessed with witnessing it for himself. There are no ghosts in *Marebito*; the creatures Masuaka occasionally glimpses are the amusingly-titled Dero, or 'detrimental robots'. The concept is enthusiastically cribbed from the truly lunatic writings of Richard Sharpe Shaver, an early 20th-century writer for science fiction magazines who maintained that his works were not fiction, that the spaces under the earth were populated by an artificial race who utilized ancient alien technologies to collectively torture and hobble humanity. But the creatures are seldom glimpsed, and really very secondary to the focus of the film, the very idea of fear.

I did not immediately realize that *Marebito* shared its director with *Ju-On*, but it seems obvious on consideration. *Marebito* represents a direct inversion of the message of Shimizu's previous film. Where the fear in *Ju-On* is a miasma, ever-present and corroding everything, in *Marebito* it is a rare and hidden prize. The protagonist wants a fear he cannot find. His desperation to be infected is immense; it drives him to do awful things. Eventually, after pedestrian stalking and murder aren't enough, he abandons any semblance of the remnants of his ordinary life and descends impossible

distances into the earth, searching for what the man he filmed found. *Marebito* stunned me from the first watch. I immediately realized that I was seeing the other half of the equation, what I'd been missing in my understanding of *Ju-On*. The vengeful ghosts weren't the disease, they were the vector. The sickness was fear.

In the end, though it costs him everything, Masuaka is successful - even tucked away innumerable stories below any human habitation, the J-horror plague of fear manages to find its host. The film's final shot lingers on Masuaka's face as he lies in a paralyzed rictus of terror near-identical to those of Kayako's victims.



4. Pulse

There was another ghosts-as-infection movie I watched during that prolonged devouring of the single Hollywood Video shelf, one that didn't belong to the Tartan Asia Extreme lineup. It was a subtle movie, one that didn't impact me overmuch initially, but that sat dormant in my head, waiting for a 2020s rewatch. That movie was Kiyoshi Kurosawa's 2001 *Kairo*, released in the United States as *Pulse*.

Immortalized in Concrete:

True Crime Exploitation Horror in V-Cinema

by Brian Ly



Some of the most defining films of the J-horror movement originated from V-Cinema, Japan's direct-to-video industry, where many budding filmmakers who have since become art house darlings and international festival circuit regulars, such as Hideo Nakata, Takashi Miike, and Kiyoshi Kurosawa, cut their teeth in an ecosystem operating outside the more established path in the traditional studios, where they could experiment in a space with looser censorship standards. This naturally made it also the home of the absolute dregs of Japanese cinema, as it was the domain of the Four Heavenly Kings of Pink and J-splatter, where directors truly pushed the boundaries on social taboos. One level deeper than even the most abhorrent of Hisayasu Sato's films were the exploitation films of perhaps one of the most viscerally horrific juvenile murder cases in history.

The murder of Junko Furuta is one of the most chilling true crime cases in modern Japanese history, and to describe it in graphic detail would be an exercise in exploitation in itself. Beyond the forty-day period of

captivity, rape, and torture that ultimately led to her untimely death by encasement in a metal drum filled with concrete, it's a case study in the dehumanization of an individual, the dissociation from personal responsibility, and the complacency of those on the periphery that perhaps only contributes to how horrifying this incident truly was beyond the actual physical and sexual violence. The fact that it was adapted into five completely different films in the Japanese film industry thus far (as well as one in India) is nothing short of disconcerting, but it's at the very least intriguing to consider why there is such a continued fascination for this subject matter and how it fits within the greater true crime genre. Whereas most true crime media tend to be psychological studies on the mind of a serial killer, the films that have adapted this case tend to be centered more around the emotional disconnect of the captors as well as the actual torture of the victim, not a surprise given their aesthetic grounding in the shock torture tradition of V-Cinema exploitation. It's perhaps more of an illustration of the Western

vs. Eastern paradigm when it comes to collective dissociation that defines the case, yet there's a common shared morbid curiosity in the unimaginable extent of the depravity of humans.

For the most part, these films are not good and are arguably not even worth watching. If you want classical shock torture porn that allegedly made Charlie Sheen cry to the FBI that he watched a real snuff film, go watch the *Guinea Pig* films. What is worth interrogating, however, is how so many of these films were made and why they continued to be made, from a more analytical standpoint. The short answer is that people are sick as fuck, but there's a bit more to that, even if there generally isn't much to find all that redeemable from an art perspective. These films exist as a continuing dialogue and cautionary tale that keeps the case in the public consciousness, even amidst the admittedly abject conditions by which they were created. They do represent the shifts in the way artists, if they can even be called that, engage with the subject matter through time and context, and beyond all the noise, there's perhaps at least somewhat of a worthwhile story to be told that reveals a bit about Japanese cinema and society as a whole.

The first film to tackle the subject matter just six years after the case was the aptly named *Concrete-Encased High School Girl Murder Case: Broken Seventeen-Year Olds* (the original Japanese title translates simply to *Concrete-Encased High School Girl Murder Case*), which took a docudrama approach with narration over a reenactment of the case, exploring some of the backstory and motivations to explain how it all transpired, as well as the circumstances surrounding the case that illustrated how everyone was involved one way or another and how those on the periphery were ultimately complicit in the crime. It's not a pure exploitation film in aesthetic, less about reveling in the graphic detail and torture that occurred in the crime itself so much as documenting and depicting the actions as they

had occurred. Rather than the actual graphic depiction of the torture, the film explores the dissociation of the criminals and their detachment from their own actions as a result of the diffusion of responsibility, to the point that they begin to no longer view her as human after continued mutilation had rendered her completely unrecognizable. Exploitation, however, was an inevitability given the salaciousness of the case, and just two years later, *Juvenile Crime* sensationalizes the actions of the crime through a fictionalized portrayal. At its core it's an incredibly stylized punk film, beginning with an aggressive rape scene of an unrelated schoolgirl and repeated scenes of violence by the captors toward their own mothers, establishing a predisposition toward violence, foreshadowing the later depiction of the real-world events, which don't actually come through until well over halfway through the film, with much of the runtime interspersed with gratuitous sex scenes, a signature of the pink film genre. The actual juveniles are never referred to by name but are anonymized by the signifier of just "Juvenile" followed by a letter, which serves both not to gratify the criminals and to further disassociate them from their actions.

If there was any film that even made this entire exercise remotely worthwhile, it would be *Sabaku*, directed by one-time director Casino, rumored to be a pseudonym used by Hisayasu Sato, and it wouldn't come as a surprise considering the casting of fellow Four Heavenly King director Kazuhiro Sano, who's absolutely made a name for himself as an actor in the pink film industry in his own right, as well as the familiar face of recurring Sato stable member and muse Kiyomi Ito. What's perhaps more interesting than any sort of intrigue surrounding the exact pedigree of this film is just how nicely it slots into his queer pink film oeuvre, continuing the conversation on the queer experience in Japan. The film flips the gender of the victim to a boy named Jun Furuta, and that instantly changes the

entire dynamic of the case in a rather profound way. Rather than focus on the torture of the victim himself, the film instead is actually structured as a revenge flick about a father, played by the aforementioned Sano, who subjects his son's killers to their own retribution, an example of a father who finally follows through on the hollow threat of doing to someone what they did to his child. Though the storytelling of the film is rather hazy, emblematic of the Sato style, what is revealed through flashbacks and various references is this recurrent feeling of homophobia, whether it's of the two boys who would rather be killers than have their sexuality revealed or the sinking realization that the father's own rejection of his son's sexuality may have led to his inevitable fate. Despite his claim to fame being quite literally depicting what had never been seen on celluloid before in both the most viscerally graphic and morally repugnant way possible, Sato attaching his own name onto a film based on the real-life crime may have been a bridge too far even for him. Nonetheless, regardless of who truly made this film, it's clear that they felt they had something to further explore within the queer pink space from the primal fear of being exposed as a gay man in Japan at the time that would push someone as far as murder.

The two films that have been made since are not particularly noteworthy on their own, but that's perhaps a worthwhile observation in itself, reflecting the continued evolution of these films. *Concrete*, despite its obvious title, involves the case only very briefly in its depiction within its storyline, and while there are certainly exploitations of the sexual violence as a recurring theme within the film, it's a more standard yakuza film focused more on the lead's descent into the world of crime. It's less of a case study of the killer than a hollow attempt to garner sympathy for a tortured soul and their descent into crime, which feels like it's missing the point of the absolutely abhorrent crime at the center that completely invalidates any sort of prevailing

concern that may be ailing them. The latest film to tackle the case was *Concrete Encased Murder Film*, which actually seemed compelling at the onset with another gender bend, depicting a group of girls torturing other girls, and perhaps more of a product of its production context and era of filmmaking, it has some of the most gory scenes of any of these films, admittedly aided by modern special effects. The similarities end after they encase a girl in concrete early on in the film, and it devolves into a confused amalgamation of bullying, yakuza, and male sub-domination, with, of course, plenty of gratuitous nudity. While there hasn't been a film made about the case since, it's clear that this one likely won't be the last, as the intrigue surrounding true crime is one that only continues to grow. What's particularly striking is how these films are more concerned with the suffering of Junko Furuta, with her killers typically rendered anonymous, and though that doesn't necessarily absolve them of any sort of responsibility for their actions, it's worthwhile to consider that there's a certain complicity, dissociation, and an overall cultural and systemic failure to create the conditions for the crime.

The fact that these films continue to be made is replaying the horror again and again, reanimating the corpse of Junko only to revel in her torture in full gory detail rather than let her rest in peace, and perhaps that says less about the absolute hacks who churned out this garbage so much as it does about a captive audience of true crime obsessives that continue to eat this shit up, chasing a particular dopamine hit that fiction could never truly replicate. Horror as a genre is one that exists behind artifice and, when truly distilled to its core, is essentially an exercise in emotional manipulation and a special effects showcase, but the deepest extent of human depravity is real, revealing what people are truly capable of, and honestly, there's nothing more horrifying than that.

WHEN THE REVOLUTION

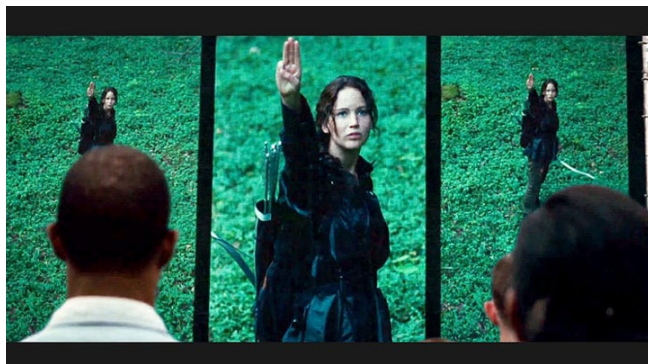


by Thomas Robinett

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In the spring of 2012, the first *The Hunger Games* (2012) movie took my middle school by storm. From recess arguments debating who would win the games, to kids raising three fingers and whistling that four-note tune in solidarity against a pop quiz, it felt like a cultural landmark that I needed to experience firsthand. The one obstacle was my parents, who barred me from watching due to its morbid premise of kids killing kids. I was twelve, too young to buy myself a PG-13 ticket, but in a few weeks, I would turn thirteen and finally be able to see what

all the hype was about. I went in excited for the action and suspense of the games themselves but came out of the theater contemplating the darker system behind the spectacle and the role of the authoritarian Panem government that hosts and celebrates these gladiatorial games. I became a big fan, reading the books and watching the sequels. To me, the premise was entirely unique until I heard rumblings about a darker Japanese predecessor, *Battle Royale*, and I absolutely had to see where it all began.



Battle Royale (2000) is set in a dystopian Japan, renamed The Republic of Greater East Asia, a fascist society born out of recession. The Republic's fictional rise to power mirrors the conditions of the 'Lost Decade' in the 1990s, when Japan's 'Bubble Economy' burst. The economic recession led to the continued inflation of the Yen, which continues to the present. Japan's student protests in the late 1960s were just as notable as those in the US at that time, and students again organized in the 1990s as a reaction to the lack of job opportunities from this recession. In *Battle Royale*, youth protest and mass unemployment is the direct cause for the BR Act, instating the infamous battle royale

games. The template for these death games, as seen in and all iterations including *The Hunger Games* are established in *Battle Royale*: a group of selected kids are forced to fight to the death until one is left standing. This deathmatch is instigated to assert the government's grasp on power by diverting attention away from itself by provoking anger and fear towards each other.

Novelist Koushun Takami wrote *Battle Royale* (1999) during this political uncertainty, weaving his political anxieties within this story. Takami's novel was set to win the 1997 Japan Grand Prix Horror

Novel Competition. However, no award was given due to the tense political climate of Japan and moral panic about recent crimes. The Kobe Child Murders, where a fourteen-year-old boy killed two younger children, resulted in politicians calling for censorship in the media. Senator Shizuka Kamei criticized, "Movies lacking any literary or educational merit are made for just showing cruel scenes". Across the world in the US, the deadliest school shooting in history (at that point in time) occurred at Columbine High School, coincidentally occurring within the same month as *Battle Royale*'s official release in April 1999. Blaming violent media fueled similar reactionary outcries

in the US after Columbine, but the media that portrays violence is not the cause of this tragedy or any other. *Battle Royale* rather serves as a mirror reflecting the conditions of society that lead to violence, not celebrating or romanticizing it, but rather metaphorizing a story about kids forced to commit atrocities against other kids by a government, in means of control and entertainment.

Battle Royale (1999) became a best seller at release and developed into a movie by director Kinji Fukasaku, who infused the story with his own wartime trauma. Fukasaku was only 15 (the same age as his characters) during World War 2 when he became the sole survivor of a bombing of an ammunition factory. This traumatized Fukasaku, becoming disillusioned with nationalism and the war effort. "Everything we'd been taught in school about how Japan was fighting the war to win world peace was a pack of lies. Adults could not be trusted." Upon the movie's release, Japanese censors rated *Battle Royale* (2000) R15, barring teens from seeing it (much like how I wasn't allowed to see *The Hunger Games*). Fukasaku, being the antiauthoritarian filmmaker he is, encouraged teens to ignore the censors and sneak into the theater.

Battle Royale was never about beating the game fair in square, but rather ultimately overthrowing the system that forced them to play in the first place. Of course, the main lure of this movie is watching the edgy spectacle of child violence promised by its advertising. However, acts of empathy and kindness become rebellion against the violence inherent in these games. The heroes in this story aren't necessarily the strongest or smartest, but those who refuse to play the

game by the intended rules, instead turning their rage against their adult captors.

Today, the 'battle royale' genre has once again transformed into the medium of video games. *Fortnite: Battle Royale* (2017) has all the violence and frills (and name) of *Battle Royale* but abandons the political subtext. Instead, is a multiplayer video game where the competition against other players in the arena becomes the sole point of the game. In *Fortnite*, there are no authoritarian overlords forcing competition, but rather players opting to and taking pleasure in playing *Fortnite* as intended by the programmers. Much like the movies, these games are marketed to and played by kids. Kids have easy accessibility to *Fortnite* because it is free to play with colorful cartoon violence, getting as many people in the door as possible. Once the gamers are hooked, their favorite IP like Travis Scott and Superman is conveniently available for purchase as cosmetics, transforming their player base into obedient consumers. *Battle Royale* is the perfect case study of art that rebels against capitalism will inevitably become a product bought and sold within it.

Battle Royale is more than a movie, book, or game, but an idea that continues to evolve since its conception. In 2000, it was a warning about Japan falling into authoritarianism. In 2012, the story was westernized and reimagined as a symbol of youth solidarity. Today, we no longer need an authoritarian government to force us to fight each other, because we can just log in and do it ourselves. *Battle Royale* was never about which contestant wins the game, but rather who profits from keeping us playing.

Poster &
Writing by T



NOBUHIKO DEMASHIKI

Buck

The Cat

There is a whole sub-genre of J-horror kaibyō or ghost cat movies. With such a long tradition dating back to kabuki theaters days of spooky cat stories, I don't think this sub-genre would be so long lived if there was not a shred of truth in them.

Recently I have been watching a lot of kaibyō movies...and I am starting to think my cat is out to get me. He is always looking at me with that plotting menace only a possessed ghost cat would have. I have narrowed down my cat's motives to one of two cat type yokai.

I adopted my cat from an old folks home so maybe he is a Hausu style kaibyō. My cat never lets me sleep, he is running around all over me at night and waking me up early in the morning. I am so tired...I am starting to think my cat is feeding on my youth, like the old lady and Blanche the white cat in Hausu.

Maybe my cat is a Kuroneko style bakeneko. Maybe my cat is the vengeful spirit out for revenge for one of the many people I have wronged. My cat is constantly luring me in to false sense of safety with his purring then jumping and attacking my hand in the flying chānori style of classic kabuki theater...and I did push that old lady down the stairs that one time...

Whatever the case is I am being bedeviled by a supernatural cat spirit. Please send help!



Cover art by Jesse Carnacho (@candycolorclown)



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For the 14th edition of The Frida Zinema we invited local artists and writers to explore the world of Japanese horror! From analysis on the pervasiveness of ghosts and The Internet in the genre to a deep dive on the ethics of true crime horror, and much more in between, we proudly present this latest issue and extend our greatest thanks to everyone who contributed in bringing it to life! We hope you enjoy!