

"RING"

The Wheat Brothers

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WHAT'S GREAT --

It's a very scary ghost story, but with a ticking clock.
It's a thrill ride, but also a haunting moral tale.

The terror, mystery and drama of DEATH are tied into two powerful family dramas. Parallel stories separated by time and dimension, but linked by an evil, deadly video tape.

In the best tradition of classy Omen/Exorcist type horror, it's about parents being willing to die for their children. Also it's about parents who kill their children. The ghost's parents did it intentionally, the heroine may have done it through carelessness.

ALSO COOL -- TELEVISION PARANOIA

From the first scene, there's a sense that TVs can be threatening and frightening. They can go on by themselves. Their images can be seriously creepy. They can tell you things you don't want to know. They can have real power.

This can be built up beyond what's in the Japanese version. For instance, at one point after the kid has seen the video, his mother is watching him walk past a bank of TV sets in a Good Guys or Mall. She's freaked to see that her "infected" son creates weird "disturbances" as he goes by each set.

WHAT DOES IT NEED?

It has to be Westernized a bit. For one thing, that means faster pace, bigger scares, and more intense death scenes. But it also means addressing Western attitudes and reactions to ghosts and ghost mythology.

In the West, there's a contradictory point of view on ghosts. They aren't taken as matter-of-factly as they are in Eastern cultures, but most Westerners basically want them to exist. In our traditions, there's something dangerous and compelling and sexy about ghosts, and you could play with all that.

But... for the innately skeptical Westerner, it's going to work best if there's a clarification of the mythology, both in terms of the ghost's back story and the rules.

For instance, in Western ghost mythology, one of the main reasons ghosts are around is because they "died bad." Because of sudden, violent deaths, they've left behind unfinished business, so they come back to punish and protest and to reenact their own deaths.

WESTERNIZING THE CHARACTERS A BIT --

Another thing that feels like it's needed for an American "translation" is more texture for the leading characters.

There are a pair of major conflicts built in for the leading lady... the threat to her own life, and then to her child... but she can also be given some personal conflicts that work in parallel with those ghostly ones.

For instance, the Japanese mother left her kid alone more than she should have, but didn't feel particularly guilty about it. Why not play on that element a bit? And she's snooping on her own dead niece, which provides the foundation for added moral ambiguity about family betrayal. (So it's a bigger deal if she's caught snooping or stealing "evidence.")

A BIG THING ABOUT THE HEROINE --

She has to believe the unbelievable in order to save herself and her child. She has to cross the line over to what some would consider insane beliefs. She can still be in denial until her son watches it. But then she has to become almost fanatical. (Like Gregory Peck, Ellen Burstyn or Rosemary.)

SO WHAT'S HER STORY?

Rather than a video journalist (shades of *Scream*), she could be a print journalist who used to be a rising star at a hip, fictional Rolling Stone type magazine.

Having a kid wasn't compatible with the kind of on-the-road reporting she'd been good at, or with her marriage. She settled down to a less exciting (and financially rewarding) life in Seattle. For the sake of her son, she does bad freelance work to make a buck. Things like Travel Magazines that don't pay enough for her to travel, and funky articles for mediocre rags.

HER CONNECTION TO THE FIRST DEATH --

It's because she's the Aunt of the girl who dies in the opening that she gets drawn in. An opportunistic former editor (who had tried to ruin her in the past) needs her for her contacts, and lures her into covering this story with offers of money and a chance to return to the big time. But, at the very least, it'll require journalistic compromises, family betrayal, and work-related abandonment of her child.

Then when it goes from Urban Myth to personal/family danger, the stakes in these areas are cranked up considerably. And the moral conflicts can only get stronger.

THE OPENING --

It can be milked a bit more. Made scarier. Playing with the Urban Myth element. The Niece not only confesses that she's seen the tape, she has a tape. The friend doesn't buy it. It can't be real.

When the Niece gets back from the phone call with her parents, she discovers her friend watching the tape. We don't see it, but we see the terrified reactions. They try to turn it off. It still plays after it's unplugged.

The friend freaks and splits. Leaving the Niece to face her horrifying, (but off-screen) death alone.

WHY AN EXTRA TAPE --

For one thing, if there's supposed to be an emerging new "Urban Myth" surrounding the tape and the curse, the Niece and her three friends can't be the first to have died.

Also, by having the Niece's friend watch it several days before the heroine, it means there can be a "demonstration" death in the middle of the one week the heroine is facing. This would really ratchet things up emotionally for her, especially since she could witness this death right around the time her son becomes "infected."

The exact one week timing of the friend's death would confirm to her that the curse is real, and show how horrifying the consequences are. Not just for her, but for the audience.

SO THERE'S A PROGRESSION OF DEATHS --

The first one all anticipation, but off screen. A second that shows more, but still holds back the final details of what's in store. Then the husband's would be the full deal.

Also... It would allow for a couple of extra layers of Omen style investigation done by the heroine and her ex-husband. They would be able to dig deeper into the unknown.

THE INVESTIGATION --

At first she's just doing it as a job. It's compelling, but not at all believable to her. (Which is why she watches the tape when she finds it.)

What's interesting initially is the discovery that there were simultaneous deaths of four kids who were friends. Was it murder? Ritual suicide? They all happened at exactly the same time. That can't be a coincidence. What was the link? The tape. And a very freaky manner of death.

THEY ALL DIED WEIRD --

It's not just sudden heart failure with twisted face. There's a real reason for face and death. The victims of the video suffocated. They all died with an expression that looks like they were gasping for air. Combined with fear.

If there had been water in their lungs, their autopsies would have said drowning. It had all the signs. Except water.

WATER BECOMES A THEME --

It's a key element of the mythology. The heroine and audience don't know it yet, but they'll eventually discover that the ghost who's doing the killing died a horrible death in water. When she kills, she's duplicating the horror and agony she experienced when she drowned in the well.

The cops and doctors can't figure it out. How could a young couple drown in a car? Or the Niece in a dry room?

SHE FINDS AND WATCHES THE TAPE --

The heroine doesn't take the rumors about the tape and curse seriously until she watches it. She finds it while snooping in her niece's room. (Deceiving her sister in the process.)

The first viewing of the tape is very heavy for both her and the audience. Not only are the abstract and surreal images really strange and powerful, but there are physical things that accompany the viewing. Sounds, feelings, movements around the room. She can't turn it off, and can't look away.

She becomes a believer, and realizes she's in deep shit. She needs an ally.

SHE HOOKS UP WITH HER EX-HUSBAND --

There's estrangement and tension, but also trust deep down. She met and married him on the road, where he was an ace Rock'n'Roll Techie. He works for a local TV station now, so he's the one who has access to video equipment. He's able to copy the tape, and study it in greater detail.

He's got rough edges, but isn't a bad guy. He wasn't responsible enough to stay with her and their kid, but we can understand what she saw in him. And why she split from him. We should wonder if they'll get back together, and appreciate the noble sacrifice of his death.

He's a skeptic, but is willing to drop everything to help. At first, he figures a lunatic is scaring and killing people. He doesn't buy the curse. But he comes around.

HE TRIES TO OUTSMART THE CURSE --

She doesn't want him to watch it. Although not a believer, he takes precautions before viewing it. He uses a mirror, but just sees snow. He takes a peek. Oops. The image is there, and now he can't look away.

He tries to trick it again when the phone rings. Instead of taking the call, he screens it with his answering machine. It's just static. Until he lifts the phone. He can hear the threat. (Which the audience never actually hears.)

(The phone call can be freaky for her too. It comes in on her cell phone, and she doesn't realize until afterwards that its power wasn't on.)

TRACKING THE TAPE TO THE LODGE --

They discover another similar death. A young woman and her fiancé both died at the same time, on opposite sides of town. She had the weird drowning effect, but he was hit by a car while on his motorcycle. And... they were acquaintances of the Niece and her friends.

The heroine looks into the motorcycle death. She discovers that the intersection where he died has a camera to catch speeders.

SHE CHECKS THE IMAGES --

Right before the accident, the motorcyclist was struggling with his helmet. Trying to rip it off. And his face looks really strange. She has the Medical Examiner check. The kid was dead before he was hit. It's as though he had drowned.

(Also, like other photos of "infected" tape victims, his face looks "blurry" in the traffic pictures.)

She looks at the couple's calendars and credit card records, and finds out what they were doing exactly a week before their deaths. They were at the secluded mountain lodge.

AT THE LODGE --

She checks things there, and gets some more clues about the origins of the tape. This was where it was first recorded.

The lodge was built recently, and has very weird vibes. She knows it's connected, but can't figure out how.

STUDYING THE TAPE --

Her ex-husband uses high-tech equipment to go over the tape, frame by frame. With higher resolution, the ominous images become clearer. And creepier.

One of the images is an extreme close up of an eye, with a word written in its center. Zooming it, it's readable as a woman's name. What's it mean? Is it the girl in the tape?

The shot of a mirror that doesn't have a camera or cameraman in view makes him wonder whether the tape could somehow have been made without one. These images got onto the video tape. But was it through ghostly rather than electronic means?

TRACKING DOWN THE NIECE'S FRIEND --

The heroine finds out that the girl had a breakdown and is under a suicide watch at a mental hospital. The niece died one week ago, so if the friend watched the tape that night, her time is about to be up.

AT THE HOSPITAL --

The teenager is getting very worked up. She's been carving today's date on her arm. And she won't go near a TV. She's decided to kill herself rather than suffer a horrible death.

So they've strapped her into a wheelchair, and are taking her to a padded cell. But as they head there, things start to happen around the hospital. Lights flicker. The TV in the day room blinks on and off. Doors slam. Other patients are getting agitated.

While orderlies go to deal with the growing chaos, they leave the girl strapped in her wheelchair in a security office.

SECURITY INCLUDES CLOSED CIRCUIT MONITORS --

The girl is terrified by the sight of them. When their views of the hospital turn to snow, she freaks. Although it's still kept from the audience, she starts seeing something horrific on the screens. But she's strapped in, and can't move.

As her chair turns by itself, she screams and chokes. She's struggling to keep her head up, as though she's drowning. An unseen force slams her chair over. When she hits the floor, she's dead. Her face twisted. Water spills from her mouth onto the floor. Inexplicably, it instantly evaporates.

The heroine gets to the hospital too late, but sees the deadly results.

THINGS GO FROM BAD TO WORSE --

When she gets home, she finds her son asleep in front of the TV, and the tape in the machine. He watched the video. It's like discovering that your child has swallowed a poison for which there's no antidote.

There's not only huge new jeopardy awaiting the kid at the end of a week, but other scary things start happening to him. In addition to TV's acting up, there are incidents involving water.

SHE AND HER EX REDOUBLE THEIR EFFORTS --

The only major clue they have now is the name they discovered on the tape. They comb through news databases looking for any stories about women by that name.

The heroine is getting more intense. Is she going to flip out like the crazy girl in the hospital? Is she going to harm her kid?

THEY MAKE A DISCOVERY --

There was a deadly ferry accident in Puget Sound 30 years ago. A newspaper photo shows the ferry boat that sank. Its name matches the woman's name in the eye. Even the lettering.

It turns out the disaster had been predicted by a woman who lived on one of the San Juan Islands. They have to go there to find out more about her.

ON THE ISLAND --

They're surrounded by water. Both are getting bad feelings from the place. And the growing sexual tension between them isn't helped by being thrown together at an island Inn.

They resist getting a room together, but during the night, he's awakened by her climbing into his bed. It instantly gets very hot and heavy. Until someone comes to the door. It's the heroine. She's not in his bed. Nobody is now. He's just fucked a ghost.

THE LOCALS AREN'T HAPPY --

People don't like having the past dug up, but they learn more about the psychic woman, and about the woman's little girl. Also, flashes the heroine is starting to have are allowing her to see images from the child's life.

It turns out the mother was investigated by a psychology professor. She was an amazing subject.

He made a name for himself by writing about her clairvoyance. He ended up marrying her and adopting her daughter.

And then she had the premonition about the ferry accident. After it sank, and dozens were killed, the woman had a breakdown. She took another ferry exactly one week later, and threw herself and her daughter off the back. The mother drowned, but the little girl survived.

AS THEY DIG DEEPER --

They learn that the woman never had psychic powers until after her child's birth. And she never had a vision when the girl wasn't with her. What if it wasn't the mother? What if it was her daughter? Maybe the girl was able to project images of evil to her mother. Could she also be able to project images of death onto a video tape?

But nobody knows what happened to that little girl. She was taken away by her stepfather. They moved to a mountain retreat. The same mountain area where the Lodge is located.

WHEN THEY GET TO THE LODGE --

The pieces are starting to fit together. They find a well under the cabin. The same well from the tape. It's another connection to water. The girl must have drowned here.

To find out, the husband lowers the heroine into the old well. As she goes down, she sees the horrible fingernail scratches. She looks up to tell her husband, he's not the one staring down into the well. It's the girl's stepfather.

The heroine freaks out, and slips from the rope. Dropping the last 10 feet, she splashes into the water. When she comes up for air, she's not in the well any more. She's out in the middle of Puget Sound.

A FERRY IS BEARING DOWN ON HER --

She ducks under the water as the huge boat passes above her. Its propellers churning close to her.

She surfaces again, and calls out to the people on the ferry. Everybody is dressed in old fashioned clothes, and no one is paying any attention to her.

But she sees a woman struggling with a little girl at the back of the boat. The two of them tumble into the water. The heroine swims closer. It's the mother and daughter. Is the woman trying to kill her child?

UNDERWATER --

The heroine can now see the truth. It's the daughter who's dangerous. The child is using Carrie-like powers to force her mother under. The mother's face is contorted with fear.

The little girl turns. Her eyes lock on the heroine, who tries to scream, then fights her way back to the surface. She's scared. Running out of breath. And back in the well. It's the portal to the other side.

With time running out, the heroine searches through the well's murky water. When she finds a skeleton, there's no question who it is.

THE MYSTERY OF THE GIRL IS SOLVED --

She was murdered by her stepfather. He must have realized she was evil, and wanted to protect the world. When a lodge was later built over the sealed well, the girl's evil spirit haunted the place.

The threat was localized until the ghost found a new outlet. The images were imprinted on magnetic tape through a burst of astral projection, and the video became a transmitter of evil.

And the evil spreads like a virus. It's the ghost's rage, being passed from hand to hand.

BUT THE HEROINE REALIZES THAT A WEEK HAS PASSED --

She's alive. Which means she's broken the dead girl's curse. Solving the mystery and recovering the bones protected her. Everything's going to be fine now. Or is it?

THE HUSBAND'S WEEK IS UP --

Back at his apartment, he's awakened by his TV coming on. This time we see what happens.

As the beautiful but horrific ghost crawls out of the TV set, water spills into the room with her. Windows implode and more water gushes in, quickly filling the room.

Gasping for a final breath in an air pocket near the ceiling, the husband manages to scratch something in the plaster with his keys. And then he's dead. Floating high above the floor in his now seemingly dry room.

When she shows up later, the heroine sees no trace of water. But she finds his keys. And looks up. She spots the sign he scratched on the ceiling. It's an unbroken circle.

SHE STILL HAS TO FIGURE IT OUT --

She hasn't saved her son yet. But as she watches the boy toss pebbles into a pond, she notices that it causes circles to spread out across the surface. Interlocking rings.

Why did she live? How was she different from those who died? She made a copy of the video tape and gave it to someone else. By creating a ring, she kept the curse going. It freed her, but passed the evil along. To survive, you have to copy the tape and spread its deadly message on to others.

HER FINAL MORAL DILEMMA --

Can she pass the tape along, knowing that someone will die? It may be wrong, but it'll save her son. She has to do it.

So she sends it to her publisher, and prays he'll watch it. He's a scumbag. Morally, she can accept responsibility for his death if it means the life of her child.

TAG --

We see a copy of the tape one last time. It's being added to a stack of other videos. A film festival selection committee is reviewing entries. They pick the evil video off the stack, pop it into a machine, and settle back to enjoy the show.