

AT THE MOVIES

“THE GRUDGE”

A movie that made me excited for John Cho to die onscreen just so it would end

By Stacy Nguyen
NORTHWEST ASIAN WEEKLY

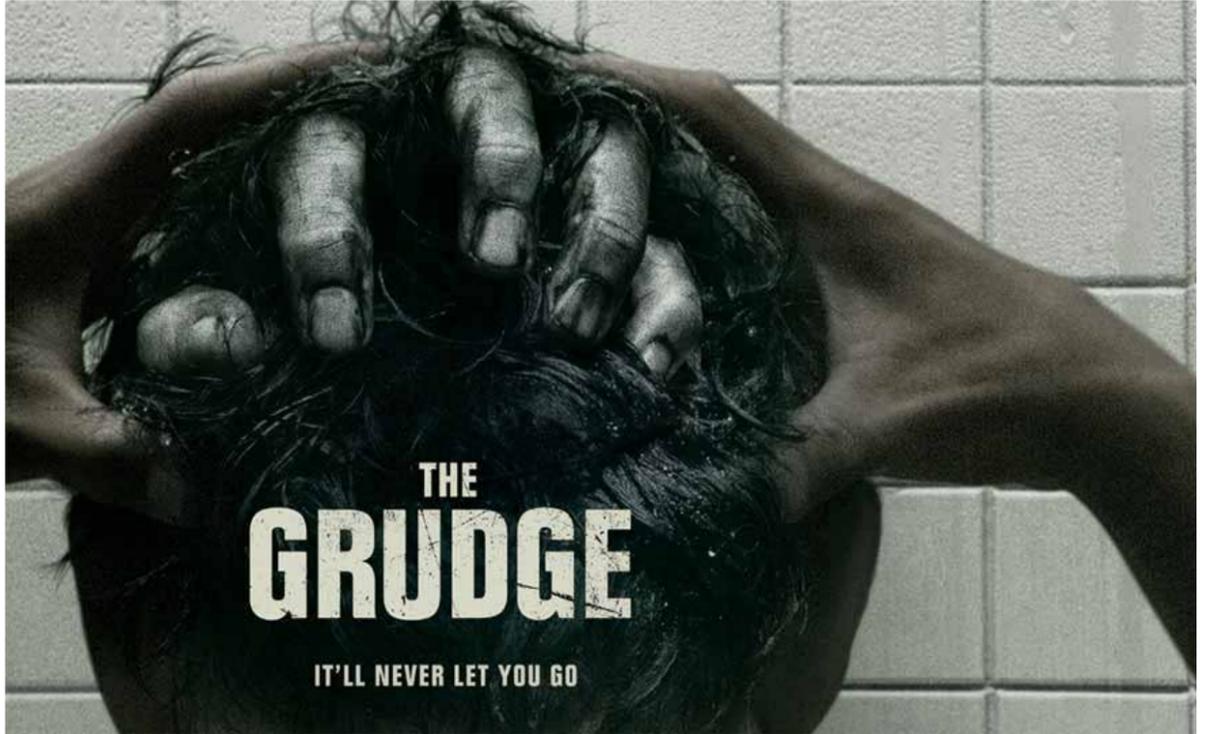


Do you know what you do as a grieving parent and a cop, when you stumble on a death curse with an inescapable grip on all who befall it?

Yeah, you make the most bewildering, most irresponsible decisions repeatedly, destroying all emotional connections with your audience until they are completely sick of watching you limp tiredly toward the grim finish line.

“The Grudge” is a reboot of the American film series that kicked off in 2004, which was a remake of Japanese horror film series “Ju-On.” It features a really talented ensemble cast consisting of Andrea Riseborough (the grieving mother and cop), Demián Bichir (the cop’s partner), John Cho (nice real estate agent who goes into cursed house), Betty Gilpin (real estate agent’s wife and business partner, pregnant), Lin Shaye (dying and/or aging woman in grips of dementia — or she’s just crazy), Frankie Faison (husband of dying and/or aging crazy and/or haunted woman), and Jacki Weaver (assisted suicide consultant).

The premise of the movie, which gets explained via interstitial text in the first few minutes of the opening



sequence, is that when someone dies in great rage, a curse is born: the Grudge.

What this means is anyone who enters a cursed house

becomes infected with the Grudge and will start being

see *THE GRUDGE* on 13

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WEEKLY SPECIALS

JANUARY 8 - 14, 2020

<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 14px;">BLACK COD STEAKS</p> <p style="font-size: 10px;">Excellent to steam or pan fry. Longline caught for the highest quality.</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 18px; color: red;">15.99 lb</p>	<p style="font-size: 10px;">“Sun Luck” (14 oz)</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 14px;">TOFU</p> <p style="font-size: 10px;">Assorted Variety</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 18px; color: red;">1.59</p>	
<p style="font-size: 10px;">From our Sushi Case</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 14px;">CALIFORNIA ROLL</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 18px; color: red;">6.49</p>	<p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 14px;">CHICKEN THIGHS</p> <p style="font-size: 10px;">Boneless & Skinless</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 18px; color: red;">1.99 lb</p>	<p style="font-size: 10px;">Premium</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 14px;">BROCCOLI CROWNS</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 18px; color: red;">1.39 lb</p>
<p style="font-size: 10px;">“Sho Chiku Bai” (1.5 L)</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 14px;">SAKE</p> <p style="font-size: 10px;">Original or Extra Dry</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 18px; color: red;">7.99</p>	<p style="font-size: 10px;">“Otafuku” (15.9/16 oz)</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 14px;">OKONOMIYAKI or TAKOYAKI FLOUR</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 18px; color: red;">2.99</p>	<p style="font-size: 10px;">“Samyang” (600 g)</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 14px;">HOT CHICKEN FLAVOR GYOZA</p> <p style="font-weight: bold; font-size: 18px; color: red;">3.99</p>

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■ ASTROLOGY

Predictions and advice for the week of January 11–January 17, 2020

By Sun Lee Chang



Rat — Is something holding you back? Try your best to shift your focus from the past to the present.



Ox — If you have nothing to prove, then why engage in the competition? The answer might surprise you.



Tiger — Out of a difficult situation, the truth emerges. In fact, that outcome alone might make it worth the discomfort.



Rabbit — Growing tired of a recurring conflict? Take steps to resolve it completely, lest it come back in another form.



Dragon — Does your partner bring out the best in you? A little push and pull are necessary to promote mutual growth.



Snake — You have defied the odds to get to where you are now, but there is more awaiting you around the corner.



Horse — Pleased that the quiet period is over? To get your creative juices flowing, you desire energy and movement.



Goat — On the fence about a potential new acquisition? First determine whether it is a need or a want.



Monkey — While it sounds counterintuitive, one way to allay your fears is to face what you are afraid of.



Rooster — Have you been sounding the alarm to no avail? Find another method to get your message across.



Dog — Rather than continuing on in the same vein, see if your results improve by mixing it up a little bit.



Pig — Infusing an element of practicality into an interesting idea will give it a much better chance of being adopted.

WHAT'S YOUR ANIMAL SIGN?

RAT 1912, 1924, 1936, 1948, 1960, 1972, 1984, 1996, 2008, 2020 **OX** 1913, 1925, 1937, 1949, 1961, 1973, 1985, 1997, 2009 **TIGER** 1914, 1926, 1938, 1950, 1962, 1974, 1986, 1998, 2010 **RABBIT** 1915, 1927, 1939, 1951, 1963, 1975, 1987, 1999, 2011 **DRAGON** 1916, 1928, 1940, 1952, 1964, 1976, 1988, 2000, 2012 **SNAKE** 1917, 1929, 1941, 1953, 1965, 1977, 1989, 2001, 2013 **HORSE** 1918, 1930, 1942, 1954, 1966, 1978, 1990, 2002, 2014 **GOAT** 1919, 1931, 1943, 1955, 1967, 1979, 1991, 2003, 2015 **MONKEY** 1920, 1932, 1944, 1956, 1968, 1980, 1992, 2004, 2016 **ROOSTER** 1921, 1933, 1945, 1957, 1969, 1981, 1993, 2005, 2017 **DOG** 1922, 1934, 1946, 1958, 1970, 1982, 1994, 2006, 2018 **PIG** 1923, 1935, 1947, 1959, 1971, 1983, 1995, 2007, 2019

*The year ends on the first new moon of the following year. For those born in January and February, please take care when determining your sign.

THE GRUDGE from 8

stalked and haunted by the ghosts that died a violent death, eventually leading to their own deaths. The Grudge is like a virus, a disease with an inevitable conclusion — of which there is no cure.

There's a bleakness to the concept as well as a certain rigidity. Because the concept is narrow, there is little room for surprises. Maybe because of this, director Nicolas Pesce made a scary movie with exactly no surprises. It rolls out really predictably.

It's also pretty scary. It scared the crap out of me because I'm a wuss and very susceptible to great sound design and jump scares. (These are the moments when everything is dark onscreen, and there's really tense orchestral music as the protagonist breathes really heavily and looks wide-eyed down an empty hallway in terror. And they see nothing. But then they round a corner and the freaking face of a corpse leaps out at them at the same time the music shrieks and the corpse screams.)

I hate jump scares so much. In addition to anxiety attacks, they give me the sense that I'm being completely manipulated. It's like a friend randomly jumping out of the bushes, grabbing you, and screaming, "See! Told ya I'm scary!" After you get over the near-heart attack, you want to punch your friend in the face and be like, "That was cheap. Real cheap."

That's what this movie feels like. Getting punked by some harmless creep waiting in the bushes over and over. It's the kind of fear that rolls out over the movie's runtime — but doesn't linger after you leave the theater. It doesn't stick with you because the movie didn't make you think about anything.

This movie, which pulled out so many horror movie visual tropes, made me angry as I was watching it. I'm sick of looking at impossibly dark houses. I'm sick of torrential rain at night and blue skies the next day. I'm sick of characters that don't make one good decision ever. I'm sick of creepy little girl children with long dark, wet hair covering their faces. I'm sick of little boy children who don't have the sense that their mom

is having a breakdown so they should freaking tell their teacher so that CPS can come and take their ass away from their mother. I'm sick of the irresponsible way that mental health is portrayed and further stigmatized in these movies. (The protagonist visits a psychiatric hospital at one point, a place full of disturbed and seemingly violent men who howl scarily at her, not at all reminding us that people with mental illness are among some of the most vulnerable individuals in society, but rather reminding us that people with mental illness are individuals who are so far beyond our empathy that they should be quarantined and caged like animals.)

Seriously, this movie just pissed me off.

I know, I know. You wanna know about John Cho. Well, he features in one of the side stories and he plays an all-around good guy who goes up to a house that 0 ne-hundred percent is clearly haunted. Multiple times. He's the dude when, presented with really compelling evidence to GTFO of the death house, decides to go upstairs to look in the bathtub full of black water instead. So I actually have no sympathy for his character here. (I still love you, John Cho.)

Here are some other random asides:

— The movie is set in 2004, but strangely looks like it's set in 1994. I don't know what that's about, except for maybe director Pesce wanted to set the movie in a more analog era and felt handcuffed by the franchise's timeline. In any case, it was real distracting — but admittedly really beautiful and sad-looking.

The movie is an hour and a half. Its tight editing ensures that the plot moves at a clip — maximizing jump scares almost right away. The byproduct of this efficiency is that there's literally no time to give a crap about any of the characters because we don't know them as people. I couldn't wait for everyone to die because I did not care about any of them.

Over the years, many Asians have casually observed to me that it's hard to remake Asian horror for American audiences because East Asian cultures have a different kind of relationship with ghosts and the supernatural. We like, take it way more seriously and it's more mythic and generational, I think. A lot of the feeling of horror

depends on understanding context and the subtext of the culture. I think for this reason, there is always something dull, soulless, and perfunctory about American remakes of Asian horror because certain concepts are impossible to translate.

There are some people of color in this movie. There's Faison, Cho — and there's Bichir, who is Mexican American and gallivants around the film giving exposition like a champ in a Mexican-Spanish accent. All of their last names are white as hell and that was distracting as hell. Cho's character's last name is Spencer. Bichir's character's last name is Goodman. Real Anglo.

I know white people don't care about these details, and that's why these are their names in the movie. I bet Pesce wrote this movie with white people in mind but then cast Cho and Bichir and forgot to rename them 'cause why bother?

The problem is that people like me spend the entire movie wondering if Cho's character is like, a South Korean adoptee or something. Or maybe he's a major feminist and took his wife's last name? Maybe Bichir's character was also adopted? Or maybe his father witnessed a serious crime and then was put into witness protection by the FBI in the 'burbs but the family still held onto their cultural roots, as evidenced by the Roman Catholic imagery everywhere in that dude's mom's house?

There's also Faison's character who was apparently married to a white woman for decades because they are both in their 70s. Their characters could've been married before anti-miscegenation laws were struck down — and weirdly enough, not once did this guy allude to race as he was reflecting, as his wife was losing her grip on reality and dying from an unnamed terminal illness. It was weird, man. Colorblindness is weirdly contrived sometimes. ■

"The Grudge" is out in theaters right now. Check local listings and showtimes.

Stacy Nguyen can be reached at stacy@nwasianweekly.com.

MANZANAR from 5

He had been close to graduating from high school when his family was sent to Manzanar. After his father's death, Masaru Matsumura had to support his mother and three siblings when they returned to Santa Monica. He had to take a job as a gardener as his father had done.

Kazue Matsumura said her mother, widowed at 43,

worked two or three jobs, according to the oral history she gave Manzanar.

Ito Matsumura was 102 when she died in 2005. She was buried with a lock of her husband's hair and his name on her gravestone.

Most of what Lori Matsumura knows of the camp came from her grandmother and an aunt who lived across the street from the little home where she grew up in Santa Monica.

Now that her curiosity has been sparked, Lori Matsumura has no one to ask about their experiences in camp or the impact of her grandfather's death on the family. Her father died last summer at age 94, the last of his generation.

"I wished I would have dug a little deeper and found out more stories from my dad," she said. "He didn't talk about it much. I wished I would have asked more questions." ■