

Before the Film and Publication Review Board

6/2002

Comment [MJM1]: Please check this series number – I have had to guess at it!

In re:

Appeal against the classification of the film *The Ring*

Award

Professor Karthy Govender (Chairperson)

Description

The film *The Ring*, directed by Gore Verbinski, is a horror thriller that is a remake of a series of Japanese films called *Ringu*. Four young people watch a video and then receive a message that they have 7 days to live, and each dies within that period. Rachel, an investigative journalist who is associated with one of the girls, receives this information and sets out to find out what happened. She locates the video and shares it with her former boyfriend, Noah. Both receive the telephone call prophesying their death within 7 days. They then start the process of unravelling the story behind the video, and discover the tragic Morgan family. They had adopted a daughter called Samara who destroys their lives and appears to be the evil protagonist in this film. Rachel's son seems to have certain clairvoyant powers and is able to communicate, at some level, with Samara. He also sees the video and is thus under threat. The film plots the desperate attempts of Rachel and Noah to resolve this issue before the expiry of the seven days. They discover that Samara was imprisoned by her father and subsequently suffocated by her mother, and dumped in a well. During a harrowing experience in a deep well, they discover Samara's body there and remove it. It appears that her spirit is appeased by this and all is now well. There is a

calming and serene atmosphere as they drive back home. But like most films of this genre, there is a final twist. Samara returns and kills Noah. For some reason, Rachel and her son are unharmed, but this indemnity does not extend to others who watch the video film. *The Ring* ends on this inconclusive and confusing note.

The Ring was reviewed for classification on the 30 October 2002 by examiners of the Film and Publication Board. They unanimously decided that a '16(V)' classification would be appropriate, and based this conclusion on the adult thematic content and the scenes of horror and violence. United International Pictures appealed against this classification, asserting that the film contains mild language and implied violence which is threatening but not explicit. They suggested that a '13' classification would be most appropriate in this instance. Ms Jean Westmore, on behalf of the Board, submitted written arguments amplifying the reasons provided by the examiners. She contended:

- *The Ring* is a supernatural horror film that is set in a realistic context, which adds to the menace and threat.
- The story line is confusing and potentially disturbing to young viewers, as it has no closure.
- The story behind the video is disturbing: it involves a mother murdering her daughter, and the possessed in the film are children.

This is a horror film dealing with the supernatural, but without graphic scenes of violence. The film uses a number of techniques such as close-up filming to heighten anticipation, the use of sound first to build up the tension and suspense, and then to assail our senses during the scenes designed to frighten. It also uses images that suggest impending catastrophe, such as the dark and ominous gathering of the clouds, and focuses on the consequences and aftermaths of violent conduct rather than the violent conduct itself. There is no gore in this film, but there is a pervading sense of menace throughout. The excellently shot scene with the horse on the ferry is such an example. The horse appears calm and relaxed, it then senses something, and becomes increasingly agitated. The music and the movements of the horse convey the sentiment that something is about to happen. The horse breaks out of its

paddock, and in a demented fashion bolts towards the side of the ferry. The music that had been building up during the entire scene now reaches its crescendo. The horse lunges overboard, and disappears under the water and below the ferry. The scene culminates when we see the blood of the animal oozing to the surface, having been mangled in the ferry's propeller.

We are of the opinion that, given the absence of any scenes of intense violence, there is no need for the classification to be accompanied by any advisory about violence.

It was apparent to us that any classification below '13' would be inappropriate. The real issue before us was whether the classification ought to be '13' or '16'. We were of the opinion that this film was well made and sought to achieve its objective through a series of cinematographic techniques rather than using gore and violence. It thus made classification more difficult.

After a careful consideration of the issues, we are of the opinion that the issues that formed the basis of the video justified the more restrictive classification of '16'. Anna Morgan desperately tries to have a child, but miscarries repeatedly. The Morgans then adopt a child who appears to enjoy harming people. She is confined to a psychiatric institution, and then locked away in a barn by her father, and is later suffocated with a black plastic bag by her mother and dumped down a deep well. This family becomes dysfunctional only after Somara arrives at their home, and the entire family is destroyed, it appears, as a consequence. Anna Morgan seeks relief by falling from a cliff, while the father, in a somewhat elaborate ritual, electrocutes himself in a bath. There is no clear explanation for this behaviour, and this could weigh heavily on, and be very disturbing for, children under the age of 16. This sense of anxiety is compounded by the fact that at the end of the film issues are left unresolved, coupled with a sense that an evil force has been unleashed. These are the factors that finally convinced us that the most appropriate classification would be that the film is unsuitable for persons under the age of 16.

During the hearing we were told by Ms Westmore that the Board might implement a 'mature

accompaniment' category as a pilot programme in the near future. This would allow the reviewers to supplement any age categorisation with the additional requirement that children should be accompanied by adults. If this option were open to us, we would have given this film a '13' classification together with a requirement for mature accompaniment. Such a classification would have been most appropriate one.

Conclusion:

We are of the opinion that the film *The Ring* should be classified as being unsuitable for children under the age of 16 years. This is the unanimous opinion of all the members of the Board who heard this appeal.

Professor K. Govender

Comment [MJM2]: In the absence of the names of the Review Board members who heard this appeal, I have deleted the "Concurred by" line. There is also no date given for the hearing.