

The First Breath of Tengan Rei

レイ、最初の呼吸



72 minutes
Color/HD
English & Japanese w/English subtitles

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Logline

A young Okinawan woman named Tengan Rei kidnaps the teenage son of a U.S. Marine who was convicted of raping her when she was a girl.

50 Word Synopsis

A young Okinawan woman named Rei journeys to America to confront Nelson, a former Marine convicted of raping her a decade earlier. Rei kidnaps Nelson's teen son Paris, holding him captive in a motel. As Rei prepares to face Nelson, Rei and Paris make unexpected discoveries about each other.

100 Word Synopsis

A young Okinawan woman, Rei, journeys to America to confront two former Marines convicted of assaulting her ten years ago. She kidnaps Paris, the teenage son of one of the Marines, and holds him captive in a motel. Rei and Paris are drawn to each other, as his father closes in on them.

Set against the ongoing American military presence on the Japanese island Okinawa, the film explores the psychic consequences of occupation, for occupier and occupied. It questions the possibility of transformation for the victim and perpetrators of a heinous crime, finding hope in the hard road of forgiveness.

250 Word Synopsis

U.S. Marines Nelson and Carter raped a teenage Okinawan girl named Rei and left her for dead in the ocean. She survived. The firestorm ignited by the trial subsided after the sentencing. Rei grew up swallowing her pain, to protect Okinawa's delicate interdependence with the military.

When the Marines are released, Rei's overwhelmed by unresolved memories – to survive she must find and confront the Marines in America. Rei surveils Nelson and Carter, who struggle to rebuild their lives. Nelson grasps to reconnect with estranged teenage son Paris. Rei senses in Paris the key to her redemption, a safer surrogate for his father.

Rei tails Paris to a secluded riverbank where he repairs a motorboat. Paris spots Rei. She panics, kidnapping him at gunpoint. Nelson fears how Paris will react to his history, as much as he fears for his son's safety.

Rei holds Paris captive in a motel, frightened yet thrilled at this alien young man under her power. Rei reveals her past to Paris, who knows little of his father's crimes.

Exposed, Rei frees Paris. On the edge of embrace, Paris topples Rei and escapes. Nelson makes an ambiguous denial to his son. Paris begs Rei not to provoke Nelson further, fearing the violence he senses in his father.

Rei can't abandon her mission. Paris steals her gun and commands her to flee with him by boat to Canada. Rei lets Paris believe he's in control, knowing Nelson awaits them on the river.

500 Word Synopsis

Nelson and Carter, two U.S. Marines, kidnapped a teenage Okinawan girl named Rei, brutally raped her and left her for dead in the ocean. But she survived. The Marines' trial set off a firestorm over American military abuses. But once the soldiers were convicted and sentenced, the controversy subsided. Rei grew up holding her pain inside, pressured not to upset the Okinawans' delicate interdependence with the military.

After learning that Nelson and Carter had been released and returned home, Rei was overwhelmed by her unresolved memories. She decided that the only way to survive was to confront the Marines for their crimes.

Rei travels to Chicago and begins surveiling Nelson and Carter, who are struggling to rebuild their lives. Nelson has regained custody of his estranged teenage son Paris and is grasping to reconnect with the reluctant young man.

Rei envies Nelson's relationship with Paris, when she has been left alone. Rei senses in Paris the key to her redemption, an alluring and less threatening surrogate for his father. Rei tails Paris to a secluded riverbank where he repairs a motorboat. Paris spots Rei. She panics, kidnapping him at gunpoint.

Rei holds Paris captive in her motel. Nelson searches in vain for his missing son. Rei's an unlikely kidnapper, at turns capricious and sensitive, frightened yet thrilled despite herself at this alien young man under her power. As Rei and Paris learn to communicate, they discover a mutual fascination. Rei slowly reveals her past to Paris, who knows little of his father's crimes.

Rei drops clues to Nelson that she is the kidnapper. With growing dread and shame Nelson pieces together the situation. Nelson is as afraid of how Paris will react to his history, as he is afraid for his son's safety.

Once Rei has completely exposed herself to Paris, she's overcome by guilt and releases him from his bonds. Just as they're about to embrace, Paris knocks Rei to the floor and escapes. Burdened by his new knowledge, unable to return to his father, Paris runs to his boat. Rei follows Paris, and tries to make him understand her actions.

Paris calls Nelson, who makes an ambiguous denial. Paris pleads with Rei not to provoke Nelson further, fearing the violence he has sensed in his father. When Rei insists on continuing her mission, Paris steals her gun and commands her to flee with him by boat to Canada.

Rei lets Paris believe he's in control, knowing that their course is still bound to lead to a final confrontation with Nelson that will change all their lives forever.

Director's Statement

The First Breath of Tengan Rei is a revenge drama that evolves into a tale of redemption and reconciliation. Set against the ongoing American military presence on the Japanese island Okinawa, the film explores the psychic consequences of occupation, for both occupier and the occupied. It questions the possibility of transformation for the victim and perpetrators of a heinous crime, finding hope in the hard road of forgiveness.

The First Breath of Tengan Rei combines the perspectives of Japanese and American creators, cast and crew to explore the complex relationship between the two countries and seek universal truths about occupation, healing and forgiveness. The film employs an intimate and deeply personal approach, challenging audiences to find their own answers to the questions the film raises.

The film's fictional story is inspired by a pattern of crimes committed by U.S. service members stationed in Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and elsewhere, a pattern that sadly persists to this day.

The First Breath of Tengan Rei is a Japanese/American co-production, filmed in Okinawa, Japan, and in Chicago, USA, in 2006 and 2007. It is the first feature film by co-directors Junko Kajino and Ed M. Koziarski, fellows of the IFP Narrative Rough Cut Labs in New York City. Junko was a finalist for the Adrienne Shelly Foundation Director's Grant.

Principal photography of present-day scenes set in the U.S. was filmed in Chicago and Northwest Indiana in August 2006 and March 2007. Okinawan scenes, which take place 10 years earlier, were filmed on the remote islands of Yagaji, a former leper colony, and Kourijima, off the northwest coast of Okinawa, which itself is hundreds of kilometers off the southwest coast of Japan, nearer to Taiwan.

A native of mainland Japan, co-writer/director/producer Junko Kajino traveled to Okinawa several times to meet Okinawan people and explore their distinct culture, history and perspectives on the controversial subjects addressed in the film.

The filmmakers endeavored to treat the subject with the sensitivity it merits, allowing a variety of Okinawan, mainland Japanese and American perspectives to inform the material. The star of the film, Erika, is an Okinawan native now living in Tokyo.

The First Breath of Tengan Rei was filmed in High Definition, employing the Panasonic HVX200 tapeless HD DVC-Pro camera at 720p and edited in Final Cut Pro on a Macbook Pro. Footage was captured to the laptop live on set using a Panastore drive. Audio was similarly recorded directly to hard drive using a DEVA recorder. Audio and video was recorded entirely with no moving parts, processing or digitization and has existed in entirely virtual form throughout production and post-production.

Composer Mark Messing is combining traditional Okinawan and contemporary Western elements in the original score, employing the Okinawan stringed instrument sanshin along with a variety of Western and Eastern instruments.

Co-writer/producer/directors Junko Kajino & Ed M. Koziarski

100 Word Director Bios

Ed M. Koziarski and Junko Kajino are a Chicago-based husband/wife writing/directing/producing team. Junko and Ed are 2007 fellows of the IFP Narrative Rough Cut Lab for their film *The First Breath of Tengan Rei*. Their short film *Homesick Blues* won best film at IFP/Chicago's Flyover Zone Film Festival, and was a selection of international festivals including Hawaii, Chicago, Amsterdam Asian, Cinequest Online, and Kansai. Ed was line producer and Junko was production manager of *Street Thief*, a selection of the Tribeca Film Festival broadcast and released on DVD by A&E Indie. They are developing a feature-length version of *Homesick Blues*.

200 Word Director Bios

Junko Kajino and Ed M. Koziarski are a Chicago-based husband/wife writing/directing/producing team. Junko and Ed are 2007 fellows of the IFP Narrative Rough Cut Lab for their film *The First Breath of Tengan Rei*. Junko was a finalist for the Adrienne Shelly Director's Grant. Their short film *Homesick Blues* won best film at IFP/Chicago's Flyover Zone Film Festival, and was a selection of international festivals including Hawaii, Chicago, Amsterdam Asian, Cinequest Online, and Kansai. They are developing a feature-length version of *Homesick Blues*.



Ed was line producer and Junko was production manager of the verité-style feature film *Street Thief*, a selection of the Tribeca, Locarno and Chicago film festivals that was broadcast and released on home video by A&E Indie. Junko and Ed have worked in key production positions on numerous independent features, shorts, music, and educational and instructional videos.

A native of Inashi in Nagano, Japan, Junko studied social welfare at the Japan College of Social Work in Tokyo. She studied film and video at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio and received a B.A. in film and video from Columbia College Chicago.

A native of Chicago, Illinois, Ed received a B.A. in writing and communications from Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. He writes about film for publications including *The Chicago Reader*, *ReelChicago* and *PerformInk*.



Cast Bios

Erika – Lead Actress (Rei)

Born in Okinawa, Erika (AKA Erika Oda) was selected from 3,000 applicants and came to the attention of international audiences with the female lead role in *After Life*, an official selection of the 2000 Cannes Film Festival by renowned director Hirokazu Kore-eda (*Nobody Knows*). She appeared in Ryuhei Kitamura's sci-fi epic *Alive*, Kazuo Kuroki's *A Boy's Summer in 1945*, and the NHK drama *Melody of the Heart*. Erika returned to Cannes in 2005 in Shinji Aoyama's apocalyptic parable *Eli, Eli, Lema Sabachthani?* She appears opposite Japanese superstar Tadanobu Asano (*Zatoichi*) in Taro Hyugaji's romantic drama *Portrait of the Wind*. She reunites with Asano for Takeo Kimura's *Kobuhiroba*, featuring Masatoshi Nagase (*Mystery Train*) and Rie Miyazawa (*Tony Takitani*). Erika stars in Masanori (Pavilion Salamander) Tominaga's latest film *Konna Otona no Onna no Ko*. She has appeared in the Japanese TV series *Hen*, *The Last Song*, *Out* and *One More Kiss*, and has been seen widely in TV commercials, theatre and print advertising.

Katori Eason as Paris

19-year-old Katori Eason of Wilmington, North Carolina, made his screen debut at age 8 in the Family Channel film *The Ditchdigger's Daughters*, appearing alongside Kimberly Elise (*Diary of a Mad Black Woman*). He performed with Louis Gossett, Jr. in the CBS film *To Dance With Olivia*. Katori also acted in Michael Apted's CBS film *Nathan Dixon*, and in the independent films *Blood Moon* and *Dead Heist*. An accomplished violinist, choral singer, and stage actor, Katori is a sophomore at Hampton University in Virginia.



Sean Nix as Nelson

A Chicago theatre veteran, Sean Nix began his acting career at Northwestern University. He has appeared in TimeLine Theatre's *Guantanamo: Honor Bound to Defend Freedom* and their world premiere of *Martin Furey's Shot*. He performed in Profiles Theatre's critically acclaimed *Glory of Living* and *Reparations*, Congo Square Theatre's premiere of *The House That Jack Built*, and *Blues for an Alabama Sky* at Victory Gardens Theatre. He understudied for Harry J. Lennix (*The Matrix*) in Northlight Theatre's *Permanent Collection*. Sean has also appeared at Collaboration, MPAACT, A Red Orchid Theatre, Bailiwick, eta Creative Arts, Act One Studios and Excaliber Shakespeare Company.



Ric Arthur as Carter

After completing a tour of duty in the U.S. Marine Corps, during which he was stationed for six months in Okinawa, Ric Arthur studied theater at Northeastern Illinois University. He has had lead roles in the independent films *The Promise Keeper* and *Cerebral Inferno*, and a supporting role in the forthcoming *Eden Court* (alongside Thomas Lennon of *Reno 911!*). Ric is an ensemble member at Urban Theater Company, where he is appearing in the complete works of Miguel Piñero. He has performed at Bailiwick, Apple Tree Theatre, CityLit Theatre, TireSwing Theatre and Revolution Theatre.



Crew Bios

Masayuki Koide – Producer

Koide is the producer of the film *Superiority of Addicts* (2007). He worked as a director for Fuji TV and as a producer for animation companies Sunrise (*Cowboy Bebop*, *Gundam*) and Gainax (*Evangelion*). He directed the films *Kanpai* (2001), *Nigatsutekikoji* (2003), and *Fururi* (2005 – top seller at the Puchon Film Festival in South Korea).

Yuko Kajino – Producer

A Japanese native fluent in four languages, Yuko studied at the University of Beijing and Indiana University, traveled throughout China and Tibet, and was an environmental volunteer at Carara National Park, Costa Rica. She produced the feature film *The First Breath of Tengan Rei* and the short *Sweet Treatment*.

Stephen Combs – Director of Photography

Stephen Combs is the cinematographer of Jim (Bullet On A Wire) Sikora's feature *The Earl*, adapted by Brett Neveu from Neveu's own play. Stephen's short film *Totally Sadie* is a selection of film festivals including Queens International.

Christopher Boscardin – Editor

Chris has worked as an editor on countless short films and television commercials. He has over twenty feature films to his credit including the documentary *Call it Democracy* and the fictional films *East of Sunset*, *Nightingale in a Music Box*, *Analyze This* and *The Fugitive*. A native of Chicago, Illinois, he studied Cinema and Photography at Southern Illinois University.

Mark Messing – Composer/Sound Designer

Mark composes and designs sound for film, theatre, and live events through his company Maestro-Matic. He has scored films including *Design* (Sundance Film Festival), *Flying* (Cannes Film Festival), *Dirty Work*, *Betaville*, *Danny's Wish*, *The Unspoken*, *Temporary Girl*, *Marilyn*, *Running Time*, *Siam in Light*, *Compensation*, and *The Acedia Thing*. He has composed for plays at the Lookingglass Theatre, Redmoon Theatre, and

**The First Breath of Tengan Rei
A Homesick Blues Production**

Produced, Written & Directed By:

Junko Kajino & Ed M. Koziarski

Producer:

Masayuki Koide
Yuko Kajino

Director Of Photography:

Stephen Combs

Editor:

Christopher Boscardin

Production Designer:

David Christopher Krause

Music & Sound:

Mark Messing
Lou Mallozzi

CAST

Rei Tengan:

Erika

Paris Land:

Katori Eason

Nelson Land:

Sean Nix

Henry Carter:

Ric Arthur

Organist:

Samuel Widemon, Sr.

Choir:

Charles Arrington
Joyce Arrington
Jermaine Terrell Basley
Theresa Bowers
Latichia Brown
Latoya Brown
Latianna Clay
Tarleysa Clay
Andrianna Cooper
Bertha Davis
Anton Gary
Sharyl Griffin
Samantha Ingram
Annie Liddell
Debrah Lovings
Antonecia Shannon
James R. Shannon
Debra Thomeson
Gladys L. Walker
Balynn Widemon
Cloie Wigley
Deborah Williams

Minister:

Rev. Robbie Jacquette

Interrogator:

Kevin Jeong

Police Officer:

Takashi Kamimura

CHICAGO CREW

Production Manager:

Stewart Groves

First Assistant Director:

Shadie Elnashai

Second Assistant Director:

Karla Strum

Costume Designer:

Marina Kucher

Key Make-Up/Hair:

John Sharo

1st Assistant Camera/Additional Operator:

Hunter Whalen

Additional Camera Operator:

Kevin Pittman

Additional Assistant Camera:

Justin Watson

Key Still Photographer:

Will Okun

Still Photographer:

Santiago

Still Photographer/Videographer:

Steven Leach

Videographer:

Suree Towfighnia
Benjamin Steger
Caleb Lawson

Gaffer:

Kevin Pittman

Best Boy Electric:

Eric Zunkley

Additional Gaffer:
Tom Wood

Key Grip:
John Arturi

Grip:
Brian Sowell
Bily Salazar
Ashley Pavicic

Art Director:
Adri Siri watt

Master Carpenter:
Mike O'Neil

Puppet Designer:
Laura Annis

Storyboard Artist:
Steven Leach

Set Decorator:
Molly Sullivan
Kristine Borcz

Sound Recordist:
Kevin J. Summers
J.T. Mueller
Chad Miner
Adam Tagala

Boom Operator:
Kevin Faber
Justin Shell
Michael Woodnorth

Stunt Coordinator:
David Samo

Scuba Consultant:
John Karas

Assistant For Erika:
Kipp Hendricks

Additional Assistant For Erika:
Jessica Renslow

Production Coordinator:
Felix Zhu

Second Second Assistant Director:
Greg Kindra

Key Production Assistant:
Kipp Hendricks
Ryan Van Ert

Publicity Coordinator/Production Assistant:
Ken Stachnik

Production Assistant:
Dave Cain
Mark A. Cesarik
Vicky Chan
Jason Harrington
Debbie Kaplan
Caleb Lawson
Natalie Poston
Adam Rench
Charles Rogers
Santiago
Joel Schoerner
Dan Stimeling
Steven Wu

OKINAWA/JAPAN CREW

First Assistant Director:
Yohei Tani

Second Assistant Director:
Takashi Sekiya

Key Makeup/Hair:
Miyuki Mizuno

Assistant Camera:
Takayuki Matsumoto

Still Photographer:
Tamako Kouda
Mariko Nagatomi
Yuko Yokota

Gaffer:
Masao Kanazawa

Key Grip:
Hidenori Nagate

Sound Recordist:
Benjamin Steger

Production Supervisor:
Hidehiro Ito

Production Coordinator:
Remi Otsuka

Dialogue Coach For Erika:
Sean Muramatsu

Production Assistant:
Yuuji Hamasuna
Megumi Jinno
Riki Kinjou
Shuuhei Ooshima
Shinnosuke Takemoto
Takanori Yamada

POST-PRODUCTION

Sound Mixer:
Jacob Ross

Music Mixer:
Graeme Gibson

Audio Post-Production Supervisor:
David Carlson

Audio Post-Production Assistant:
Nic Berlin

Dolby Encoding:
Rob Ruccia

Assistant Editor:
Caleb Lawson

MUSICIANS

Guitar
Jim Becker

Percussion
Paul Brannon

Piano
Ronnie Kuller

Cello
Fred Lonberg-Holm

Percussion
Frank Rosaly

Guitar
Gary Kalar

Percussion
Brent Roman

Violin
Chishuan Yang

Sanshin/Vox
Shizuko Tanada

Fox Paw and On The Up Yall
Written and Performed by Benn Jordan
Courtesy of Benn Jordan

Tinsagunu Hana
Performed by Erika
Traditional

Satokibi Batake
Written by Naohiko Terashima
Performed by Erika
Courtesy of Yôko Terashima

Satokibi Batake
Written by Naohiko Terashima
Performed by Mark Messing
Courtesy of Yôko Terashima

Produced in Association with Excellent Film Co. Ltd.
And Split Pillow, NFP

This film was a selection of the 2007 IFP Narrative Rough
Cut Lab

Music recorded at Maestro-Matic.

Post-production sound services by Experimental Sound
Studio, Maestro-Matic and Uptown Recording.

HD Camera Equipment provided by Zacuto Rentals, Inc.

Grip/Electric Equipment provided by Product Productions
and AND Okinawa, LTD.

Video mastering by TeleVersions.

No animals were harmed in the making of this film.

Filmed on location in the Chicago Metropolitan Area, USA,
and Yagaji and Kourijima, Okinawa, Japan.

This motion picture is a work of fiction. Any resemblance
to any actual incidents, institutions or events is purely
coincidental.

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January 13, 2009

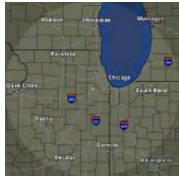
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'First Breath' an international labor of drama

By Robert K. Elder | Tribune reporter
January 2, 2009

The description "revenge film" doesn't really fit "The First Breath of Tengan Rei."

Although a Japanese rape victim travels to Chicago to confront the former servicemen who assaulted her—even taking one man's son hostage—it doesn't play like a traditional revenge fantasy.

No, it's more of a pensive, sprawling drama, in the tradition of director Wong Kar Wai ("In the Mood for Love").

It's an apt comparison, says Ed M. Koziarski, who wrote, directed and produced the film with his Japanese wife, Junko Kajino. Wong was an artistic touchstone for them, as was [Spike Lee](#), says Kajino.

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"It's not about politics or culture, it's about human beings," she says.

That's not to say "First Breath" isn't a political film.

"It was my wife who originally brought us the project," Koziarski says. "I was reluctant to take it on because it was such a heavy story. But I saw it as a way to explore how much people can change through a horrific event."

At the time they were considering the project, which echoes a 1995 sexual assault of a 12-year-old girl abducted by three servicemen outside Camp Hansen in Okinawa, [President George W. Bush](#) was citing Japan as a model occupation for Iraq. Bush forwarded the idea that post-[World War II](#) reconstruction of Japan was "the good occupation," Koziarski recalls.

"It was important for us to call into the question if there is something such as a 'good occupation,'" he said.

The film was shot on Okinawa and in Chicago through 2006 and 2007, with Okinawa-born actress Erika in the lead role. While in Okinawa, they shot in the aftermath of a typhoon, "which really added to the intensity of the scene," Koziarski says.

The film had a "secret preview in Okinawa," Kajino says. "It's a really, really painful movie to watch for them. They are having a hard time receiving it."

Next up for the filmmaking couple is a feature called "Homesick Blues," an expansion of an earlier short about a Japanese woman who comes to Chicago to sing the blues.

It's not exactly autobiographical for Kajino, however.

"She's not a blues singer, but in terms of the [immigration](#) experience and being an artist

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in a foreign culture—that she identifies with," Koziarski says.

"*The First Breath of Tengan Rei*" screens at 8 p.m. Saturday and 7:45 p.m. Wednesday at the [Gene Siskel Film Center](#), 164 N. State St. For tickets and more information, visit [siskelfilmcenter.org](#) or [homesickblues.com](#).

LaBute readings: Filmmaker and playwright [Neil LaBute](#) (who lives in suburban Chicago) will be the man of the hour at Profiles Theatre, 4147 N. Broadway. Pre-show reception begins at 6:30 p.m., readings at 7:30 p.m. Saturday. Tickets are \$50 at 773-549-1815 or [profilestheatre.org](#).

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
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Film inspired by rape of Okinawa girl by U.S. troops

By [David Allen](#), Stars and Stripes
 Pacific edition, Sunday, December 14, 2008

"Never let them forget."

That's the tagline for "The First Breath of Tengan Rei," a new independent film that focuses on an Okinawa woman who travels to Chicago to confront two Marines who abducted, raped and left her for dead a decade ago.

And if the story line sounds familiar, it should. The directors loosely based some of the plot on a 1995 incident that gained international notoriety and drew thousands of anti-base protesters to the streets.

In that case, two Marines and a Navy corpsman from Camp Hansen abducted a 12-year-old schoolgirl from the main street in Kin and took her to a beach — her hands tied and her eyes and mouth duct-taped shut — where she was beaten and raped.

Two of the men were sentenced to seven years and the third to 6½ years of hard labor in a Japanese prison.

The girl's family later moved from Kin, and she has not been heard from publicly since. "Tengan Rei" examines what could have happened 10 years later.

In the movie, the girl was 16 when she was abducted, and now — at 26 — she journeys to Chicago with an unclear intent, perhaps only to find out what happened to her assailants after they were released from prison and to make sure they know how the incident scarred her for life.

But her search leads her to kidnap the 16-year-old son of one of the Marines, and the tale turns to one of redemption and reconciliation.

"Tengan Rei" is the first feature-length film by writers and



Courtesy of Ed M. Koziarski

In "The First Breath of Tengan Rei," a woman raped on Okinawa 10 years ago kidnaps the 16-year-old son of one of her attackers.



Zoe MacKenzie Photography

Ric Arthur plays one of two Marines who abduct and rape an Okinawan schoolgirl in "The First Breath of Tengan Rei," an independent film loosely based on a 1995 incident on Okinawa. Arthur was a Marine training on Okinawa during the time two Marines and a Navy medic were tried for the crime in a Japanese court.

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Tengan Rei is the first feature-length film by writers and directors Ed M. Koziarski, a native of Chicago, and his wife, Junko Kajino, originally from Nagano, Japan. It had its premiere showing in November at the Gene Siskel Film Center in Chicago.

Koziarski said the film, financed by backers in the United States and Japan and made for "under a million dollars," next will be screened at an international film festival in India and then at a return engagement in Chicago.

Arrangements also are being made for distribution in Japan and major U.S. cities, he said.

A DVD should be released early next year.

It was filmed on Okinawa and in Chicago in 2006 and 2007. The Okinawa scenes took place on the tiny Yagaji Island, the site of a former leper colony located north of Nago, Okinawa.

The film stars Okinawa-born actress Erika, who had to learn English almost from scratch to play the part of young Tengan Rei.

"We thought a part like this must be played by an Okinawan actress, and we found Erika, who has starred in some Japanese movies, TV and advertising," Kajino said in a telephone interview from their Chicago home. "She really prepared and was connected to the part. She played it with her body and her heart."

After a preview on Okinawa last summer, some anti-base activists said the movie should have made a stronger case against the U.S. military presence on the island. Kajino said that's not what their project was about.

"A lot of people wanted us to express strong political issues, but as filmmakers we are more interested in telling compelling stories," she said. "We want to take the viewer on a personal journey, get them to ask their own questions."

Koziarski said they approached the political issue of the military occupation of more than 20 percent of the main island of Okinawa in a "deeply intimate and personal way, challenging audiences to find their own answers to the questions the film raises."

In preparation for the film, Kajino made several research trips to Okinawa to explore the distinct culture of the Okinawan people and get their perspectives on the base controversy and the social stigma attached to victims of sexual assault and rape.

"This was something in the back of my mind for a long time," she said. "Women who are attacked tend to be silent; they try not to talk about it. I wish the environment would change, that women would be more open and break the stigma."

One of the messages Kajino wanted to convey in the film was how such crimes affect both sides — the perpetrator and the victim.

She said that talking with Okinawans and American servicemembers "changed my way of looking at soldiers 180 degrees."

"They are isolated, too, and feel disconnected," she said. "Though the two cultures live side by side, there are still walls."

In the film, Rei tells the kidnapped boy the truth about the rape and his father's long absence from home during his tour in Japan. The boy, Paris, had believed his father had served time in the brig for disrespecting an officer.

After the two Marines raped her, she was left for dead on the beach at the water's edge and was swept to sea by the incoming tide. She struggled to the surface and took her first breath in her new life as a victim.

"I thought the ocean was cleaning me and taking away the stain they put in me," she tells Paris. "But the stain was still there. It never goes away."

The directing team had asked if the movie could be screened on base in Okinawa. It would be something the military might want to show newcomers to the island, Koziarski said.

Lt. Col. Douglas Powell, head of Marine Corps Public Affairs in Japan, nixed the idea after reading some reviews.

"It's not a movie we would show," he said Wednesday. "It wouldn't be appropriate."

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Beverly kid is making movies

(Opening shot): A young boy who looks remarkably like Opie Taylor is playing catch with his Dad in the back yard of a home in Chicago's Beverly community.

(Cut to 25 years later): On a former leper colony near Okinawa, a Japanese girl is running through a typhoon. She's in obvious emotional distress. As the camera pulls back, a movie crew becomes visible. There, in the middle of the organized chaos, is that Opie character from Beverly, all grown up.

What's he doing? How did he get there? And isn't this the stuff movies are made of?

Ed M. Koziarski, 33, the Opie lookalike, is the co-producer, co-director and co-writer of a feature length movie, "The First Breath of Tengan Rei," showing at the Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State St. in Chicago on Nov. 21, 22 and 24. He shares the writing, producing and directing credits with his wife, Junko Kajino, a native of Nagano, Japan.

I first met Koziarski when he was a toddler. His father, also named Ed, was a colleague of mine at the SouthtownStar, formerly the Daily Southtown, for 30 years. His mother, Rita, is a

The younger Koziarski now is one of the leaders in Chicago's independent film community. Growing up, he spent a lot of time at his grandparents home on the East Side of the city, and those impressions left an indelible mark.

There are scenes in "Tengan Rei" that were shot near the 103rd Street bridge and in Hegewisch. Other Chicago-area locations include Logan Square, Pilsen, Beverly, the East Side and Northwest Indiana.

The movie is about a young Japanese woman who kidnaps the teenage son of a U.S. Marine convicted of raping her when she was a girl.

While she holds the teenager captive, "the two are drawn together despite the scars of the past, as they prepare for a final confrontation" with the teen's father, according to a press kit description.

The cast and crew came from Japan and Chicago. The Okinawa scenes were actually shot on an even smaller island that was once a leper colony.

"While we were shooting the scenes there, a typhoon came up," Koziarski said. "I quickly rewrote the script so that we could write the typhoon into the movie. Fortunately, it wasn't a really big typhoon, so we were able to shoot through it,



PHIL KADNER

and I think it really is one of the most dramatic moments in the film."

Koziarski attended Metcalfe Elementary School in Beverly through the sixth grade and then, through an accelerated program, attended seventh through ninth grades at Morgan Park High School. From there, he entered the Illinois Math and Science Academy in Aurora, where he graduated.

He met his future wife at Antioch College in Ohio, whose alumni include Rod Serling and Coretta Scott King. Koziarski was a senior film student there.

As I spoke to him on the phone, Koziarski was working by day as second director on "Hannah Free," a movie starring Sharon Gless of "Cagney and Lacey" TV fame, that's shooting in Chicago, while laboring

For the past 10 years, Koziarski and his wife have been striving to put together their projects from scratch. They write the scripts, travel around the world to drum up money for their projects, pull a cast and crew together and then try to find some more cash to keep the project going.

Their first effort was "Home-sick Blues," about a Japanese musician who dreams of singing the blues in the States.

They put enough money together to make a movie short, which was accepted in several festivals and awarded the best film at IFP/Chicago's Flyover Zone Film Festival. But they never were able to find the money to turn it into a full-length feature film.

"We're still working on that," Koziarski said with a laugh.

For the last two years, they've been working on "Tengan Rei."

So how do you drum up the cash to make a movie?

"You start with friends and family," Koziarski said, "and then you ask everyone you know in Chicago and then you reach out across the country. My wife made several trips to Japan, where she was successful in getting a grant."

When asked how much the film cost, Koziarski will only



Ed M. Koziarski (above) is the co-producer, co-director and co-writer of a feature-length movie, "The First Breath of Tengan Rei," showing at the Gene Siskel Film Center, 164 N. State St. in Chicago on Nov. 21, 22 and 24. He shares the writing, producing and directing credits with his wife, Junko Kajino (below), a native of Nagano, Japan.



say, "We made it for under \$1 million."

But the fight to get the film out to the public is now in front of him. It doesn't have a distributor.

"It's harder for independents now than ever before, so what they do is lease a movie house

and split the profits," he said. "That's what we're doing with the Gene Siskel theater."

General admission tickets for the screenings are \$9 and can be purchased at the film center box office or from Ticketmaster at (312) 575-8000 (www.ticketmaster.com).

"This film is inspired by a true story. I think the struggles of Koziarski and his wife would make an even better movie."

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