



"POLTERGEIST"



"THE RING"



"THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT"



"SHUTTER"

ZOOM

Ghosts in the machine

When Harry Houdini tried to contact the dead, he used séances, mediums and crystal balls. Were he alive today, the magician and escape artist would just whip out a VCR, shortwave radio or video camera — in the movies, supernatural images and voices are popping up on electronic devices of all kinds.

In "Shutter," opening Friday, it's a camera that proves conduit to the afterlife. A Japanese schoolgirl killed in a car accident seems to haunt the fashion photographs of Joshua Jackson. "Dawson's Creek" was never like this — or maybe Dawson just never looked closely enough at his home movies.

Here are five more movies where the medium isn't the message — it's the machine. *Michael Giltz*

■ POLTERGEIST (1982)

Technological crystal ball: The test pattern on the television set calls out to adorable little Carole Anne, who announces: "They're here!" — "they" being vengeful spirits who kidnap her.

IT solution: Don't build your housing development on top of a sacred Indian burial ground.

■ THE RING (2002)

Technological crystal ball: In this U.S. remake of a Japanese flick, reporter Naomi Watts discovers that a menacing VHS tapes "haunted" — watch it and you'll be dead within a week. Of course she watches.

IT solution: VHS? Apparently, ghosts aren't up on the latest technology. Switch to Blu-ray DVD.

■ THE BLAIR WITCH PROJECT (1999)

Technological crystal ball: Three young people disappear after trekking into the woods with a video camera — and their shaky footage found a year later seems to document spooky goings-on.

IT solution: Don't shoot movies on hand-held camcorders. If you use an old-fashioned film camera, you'll need a bigger crew — meaning a better chance of surviving when the killing starts.

■ FREQUENCY (2000)

Technological crystal ball: A shortwave radio with really good reception lets Jim Caviezel speak to his late firefighter father (Dennis Quaid) 30 years in the past. Warning his pop about the blaze that killed him seems like a good idea — until altering history unleashes a killer that threatens Caviezel's mom.

IT solution: Take up video games. Maybe if Caviezel had another hobby this whole mess wouldn't have happened.

■ WHITE NOISE (2005)

Technological crystal ball: Michael Keaton uses a radio tuned to static to communicate with his dead wife via EVP — electronic voice phenomena — but it also puts him in touch with ghostly bad guys.

IT solution: Satellite radio. You get loads of channels, Howard Stern and no static. ♦