

Movie review: Bring Back The Dead balances tears and fears



Jesseca Liu is the mother who loses her son and withdraws from people around her. -- PHOTO: GOLDEN VILLAGE

🕒 PUBLISHED JAN 7, 2015, 9:23 AM SGT

✉
Boon Chan Assistant Life Editor (<mailto:bchan@sph.com.sg>)

Review Horror

BRING BACK THE DEAD (PG13)

85 minutes/Opens tomorrow/**1/2

The story: Jia En (Jesseca Liu) loses her seven-year-old son, Xiao Le, in a car accident and she withdraws from the people around her, including her husband (Jacko Chiang). When nanny Madam Seetoh (Liu Lingling) offers to help bring the boy's soul back, Jia En readily agrees. But strange things begin to happen soon after and she starts to wonder if it is really her son who has returned. Based on the short story *Bringing Back The Dead* by Wong Swee Hoon.

This marks a good start to a year that has a bumper crop of local films slated for release.

Writer-director Lee Thean-jeen's third feature film after the comedies *Homecoming* (2011) and *Everybody's Business* (2013) is easily his best work to date. He keeps a tight focus here, effectively dispensing with the back story in sepia-tinted flashbacks over the opening credits.

The characters are quickly sketched out and introduced: Jia En can be a stern mother, but she loves her son and losing him on his birthday hits her hard; her husband tries to be supportive, but is soon defeated by her overwhelming grief. Madam Seetoh is something of a wild card, appearing almost a little too conveniently just when she is needed.

Doing well to carry the movie on her shoulders alone as Jia En, former MediaCorp star Jesseca Liu goes through grief, desperation, hope, suspicion and mounting terror, taking the audience along on her roller-coaster of emotions.

Bringing back the dead involves a ritual with all manner of instructions to follow strictly and any detail could easily go wrong.

Most crucially, Jia En asks: "How will I know if he returns?" "You'll know," is the short answer from the medium.

Horror flicks often require one to suspend disbelief because of too-convenient or ludicrous plot twists. Not in this case - the story logic is impeccable and devastating.

Lee does not go for cheap scares, instead he builds tension with quiet moments and assured pacing. He wants to fill audiences with dread of a malevolent spirit, but he also wants them to be emotionally invested in the story.

For, ultimately, *Bring Back The Dead* is a moving tale of parental love and the twisted lengths it can compel one to go to.