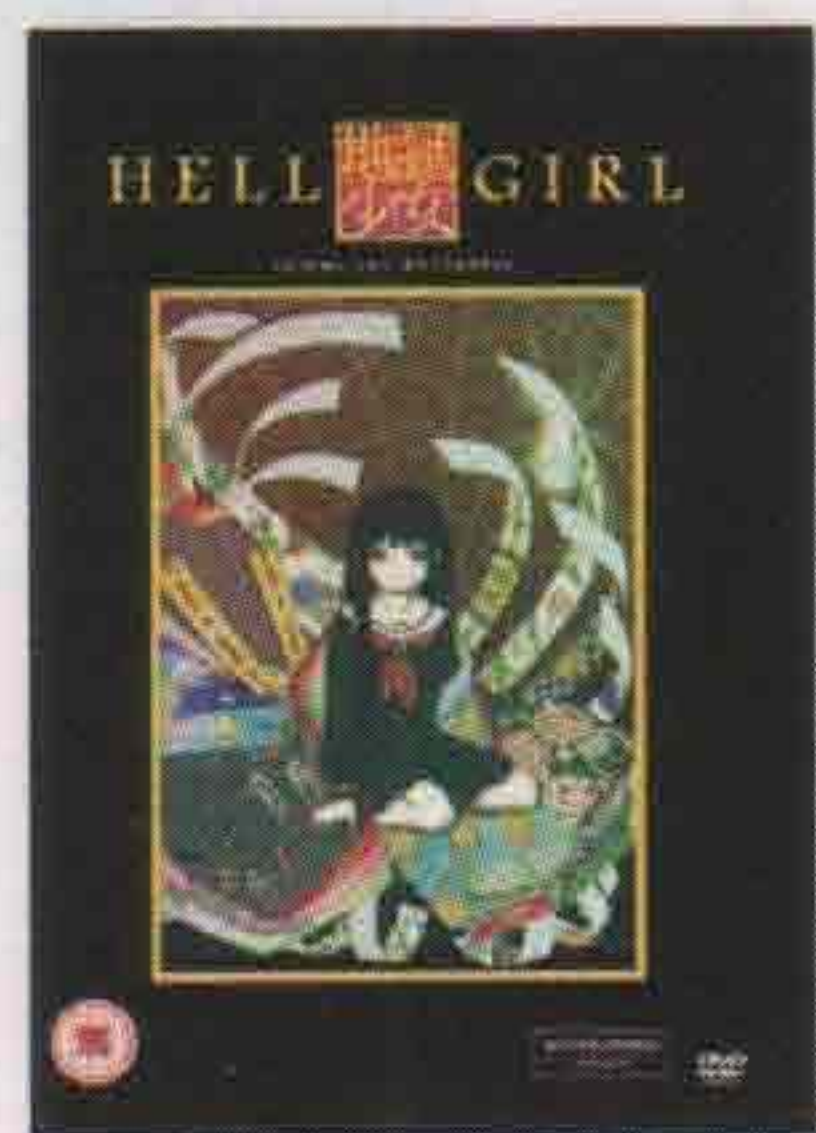




**SEQUELS**  
 As well as a sequel, *Jigoku Shoujo Futakomori*, the anime also inspired a manga by Miyuki Eto (currently being released by Del Rey), a game for the Nintendo DS and a live action TV series starring Sayuri Iwata as Ai Enma.

# Hell Girl Vol. 1: Butterfly



**AVAILABLE:** 18 Feb  
**LABEL:** Revelation Films  
**CERTIFICATE:** 15  
**NO. OF DISCS:** 1 Disc  
**RETAIL PRICE:** £21.99  
**RUNNING TIME:** 125mins  
**SERIES LENGTH:** 6 vols

A popular Japanese urban legend tells of a mysterious website called the Hell Correspondence which only appears on the stroke of midnight. It promises vengeance to the bullied, the wronged and the downtrodden if the name of their tormenter is entered. Ai the Hell Girl, or *Jigoku Shoujo*, will honour your requests and ferry that person to eternal suffering.

Although a frightening legend to some, Ai is a lonely girl who lives in a twilight world with her unseen grandmother and an Apple Mac for company. Whilst her promise of vengeance sounds promising, the stories forget to mention that her service comes with a price: if you want to condemn someone else, then it's not just their soul that suffers – your soul is also forfeit.

Each episode of the series is very much stand-alone and somewhat formulaic in its '– of the week' format. For example, the first episode focuses on a girl named Mayumi who is charged with looking after charity money raised

by her class, only for it to go missing. She is then blackmailed by Aya, the real thief, after borrowing enough from her to replace the lost sum. Eventually Mayumi has enough of being bullied, stalked and abused, and decides to take matters into her own hands by invoking Hell Girl.

Ai is not alone in her task: she is accompanied by three companions, Hone Onna, Ichimokuren and the kindly old man Wanyuudou. These three walk in the human world, following potential clients and their victims and assisting in their torture, before Ai takes them to urge the bully to repent and own up to what they've done. Wanyuudou also serves as the straw doll that Ai gives to her clients, his scarf turning into the red thread which, when pulled, seals the covenant.

The series might be predictable, but that is a large part of its addictive charm. Knowing that the various people Ai meets will accept her offer makes each episode that much darker; the anticipation that much sweeter. Ai herself appears for only a short time, and much of her dialogue

is formulaic – yet her character design is both beautiful to look at and oddly disturbing.

The dubs are some of the most impressive yet. Even in English, Ai and her assistants are perfectly creepy. The dub is faithful to the original Japanese – although Ai's signature line "ippen shinde miru?" ('would you like to see what death is like?') now becomes "Perhaps it is time to die?". The subtitles are excellent, and the series is fantastic for repeat viewings, each time allowing you to delve deeper into the motivation of the characters and appreciate the emphasis on story, and the chilling depth of Ai's offer.

If you want something genuinely different then *Hell Girl* might be what you're searching for. It mixes dark horror with a distinctive take on the Japanese concepts of death and hell. Even in the moment when Ai sentences souls to hell in her floral kimono and ferries them to their infernal destination, it's hard not to marvel at the beauty of the animation. *Hell Girl* is a must-see series and is sure to be one of the big hits of 2008. Check out our feature on the *Hell Girl* franchise on page 042 while you wait for the release of this fantastically gothic animation.

LESLEY SMITH

Deliciously dark and seductive, *Hell Girl* beckons you towards damnation with an addictive sweetness.

FILM ★★★★★ EXTRAS ★★★☆☆



**DVD EXTRAS**

The extras on this disc aren't stellar but neither are they commonplace. As well as the usual opening and ending animations and trailers, there are also character profiles, a PV for the ending theme 'Karinui', which is sung by Ai's voice actress Mamiko Noto, and a featurette looking at its creation. Fascinating stuff.