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by Anton Bitel

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# ONE MISSED CALL

## CAST

**Ko Shibasaki** Yumi Nakamura  
**Shinichi Tsutsumi** Hiroshi Yamashita  
**Kazue Fukiishi** Natsumi Konishi  
**Anna Nagata** Yoko Okazaki  
**Atsuhiko Ida** Kenji Kawai  
**Mariko Tsutsui** Marie Mizunuma  
**Yukata Matsuchige** Ichiro Fujieda  
**Goro Kishitani** Oka  
**Renji Ishibashi** Dt. Yusaku Motomiya  
**Karen Oshima** Mimiko Mizunuma

## CREW

Directed by **Takeshi Miike**  
Produced by **Yoichi Arishige** and **Naoki Sato**  
Executive Producer **Hiroshi Okawa**  
Associate Producers **Ryoichi Fukuyama** and **Daisuke Kadoya**  
Screenplay by **Minako Daira**  
Based on the Novel by **Yasushi Akimoto**  
Editor **Yasushi Shimamura**  
Director of Photography **Hideo Yamamoto**  
Art Director **Tetsuya Uchida**  
Composer **Koji Endo**  
Production Manager **Kenichi Kamata**



# ONE MISSED CALL 2

## CAST

**Rie Mimura** Kyoko Okudera  
**Hisashi Yoshizawa** Naoto Sakurai  
**Renji Ishibashi** Dt. Yusaku Motomiya  
**Peter Ho** Yu Ting Chen  
**Haruko Wanibichi** Sachie Mizunuma  
**Mariko Tsutsui** Marie Mizunuma  
**Shadow Liu** Mei Feng Wang  
**Asaka Seto** Takako Nozoe  
**Chisun** Madoka Uchiyama  
**Karen Oshima** Mimiko Mizunuma

## CREW

Directed by **Renpei Tsukamoto**  
Produced by **Yoichi Arishige** and **Naoki Sato**  
Executive Producer **Kazuo Kuroi**  
Associate Producer **Daisuke Kadoya**  
Screenplay by **Minako Daira**  
Based on the Novel by **Yasushi Akimoto**  
Editor **Soichi Ueno**  
Director of Photography **Tokusho Kikumura**

# ONE MISSED CALL: FINAL

## CAST

**Maki Horikita** Asuka Matsuda

**Meisa Kuroki** Emily Kusama

**Keun-Suk Jang** Ji-nu An

**Ekira Asakura** Minori Yazawa

**Yu Kamiwaki** Mari

**Rie Tsuneyoshi** Natsuko

**Arisa Naito** Yuki

**Rakuto Tochihara** Shinichi Imahara

**Kazuma Yamane** Teruya Mikami

**Takashi Yamagata** Takehiro Koizumi

**Takanori Kawamoto** Kohei Takei

**Yuta Ishida** Kensuke Hisamoto

**Karen Oshima** Mimiko Mizunuma

**Miina Obata** Yoko Takayama

## CREW

Directed by **Manabu Asô**

Produced by **Kazuo Kuroi**, **Yoichi Arishige** and **Akira Yamamoto**

Screenplay by **Minako Daira** and **Shiro Kuroi**

Based on the Novel by **Yasushi Akimoto**

Director of Photography **Kazushige Tanaka**

Music by **Koji Endo**, **Toshiko Ezaki** and **Junichi Matsuda**

## HAUNTING BY PROXY: MISDIRECTED MESSAGES IN THE *ONE MISSED CALL* TRILOGY

by Anton Bitel

### *J-horror en abyme*

At the dead center of *One Missed Call* (*Chakushin ari*, 2003), literally halfway through its running time, there is a lengthy set-piece involving a live television broadcast. After several university co-eds have died one after the other in unusual circumstances, each a few days after getting a phone message from their future selves that records the moments immediately leading up to their death, a canny TV producer has caught wind of this story (rumors of which have spread like a virus) and tracked down the latest person to receive such an uncanny call. Terrified for her very life, Natsumi (Kazue Fukiishe) is lured onto the show – against the advice of her best friend Yumi (Ko Shibasaki) – by the promise of help from a professional exorcist.

What follows might properly be called a shitshow, as the concrete banalities of reality television come into confused collision with something supernatural and surreal. On the one hand, the producer goes out of his way to exploit and sensationalize this story, staging and packaging Natsumi's mortal fears as public entertainment, complete with a live interview, a panel of talking heads, a dramatic countdown, and – absurdly – ad breaks. On the other hand, there really is something strange being captured on camera, something that, despite the producer's initial belief that his team is behind it, goes beyond his or indeed anyone's powers. The professional exorcist is blasted violently, mid-ritual, across the studio floor by an invisible force, and like a grotesque puppet, poor Natsumi has her limbs contorted and broken, until her head is eventually twisted clean



off. All this happens not just before the very eyes of Yumi, who is standing horrified next to Natsumi in the chaos of the television studio, but also live on-air, broadcast to the nation.

This centerpiece to *One Missed Call* is also a *mise en abyme*, reflecting the work in which it appears. In packaging Natsumi's intense anguish and unnatural demise for mass audio-visual consumption, this television show is like both the film into which it has been interpolated and J-horror itself. It is significant here that Natsumi is the first character in the film to receive the premonition of her death not in voicemail form, but as an actual video clip (another *mise en abyme*). Both the video clip and the live show capture not just Natsumi's presence, but a ghostly apparition, breaking inexorably through into the real world in an intrusion as irrational as Sadako's iconic emergence from the television set in Hideo Nakata's *Ring* (1998). If J-horror is, broadly speaking, the genre wherein our primal fear of death cannot be contained and controlled even by the trappings of modern technology, then this sequence, where an avatar of doom materializes simultaneously from a mobile phone and a television transmission, is J-horror writ large – and we are all, as viewing witnesses, made aware of our own susceptibility to its viral curse. We might feel secure watching these dramas of mortality, but ultimately none of us can escape death's ineluctable call.



### Haunting by proxy

“Abuse spawns more abuse,” is how Yoko (Anna Nagata) summarizes the subject of the university lecture that she has been attending, shortly before she falls victim to the deadly phone call. While clearly one kind of horror which *One Missed Call* addresses is the inevitability of human mortality, the other source of its horror is the cycle of abuse. The ‘primal scene’ that explains the origins of its telephonic hauntings is the death by asphyxiation of 10-year-old Mimiko Mizunuma during an asthma attack. Around this time, Mimiko's younger sister Nanako was already showing signs of severe physical abuse, and the girls' mother Marie, rumored to have stood by doing nothing while Mimiko choked to death, disappeared shortly afterwards. This led Ritsuko, the girl's case worker, to suspect the missing Marie of ‘Munchausen syndrome by proxy’, a psychiatric disorder which makes those affected damage others in order to draw oblique attention to themselves. Ritsuko also becomes the first historic victim of the Mizunuma curse, transmitted from one person to another via the contacts lists in their mobile phones, and endlessly replaying a scenario of domestic trauma through others' fragile bodies.

In fact, as will eventually be revealed, all was not quite as it seemed in the Mizunuma household, but nonetheless Munchausen syndrome by proxy is an





apt analogue for the enactment of the curse itself, whose haunting is visited with serial vicariousness upon third parties. All the victims in this film are proxies for Nanako, both horrifically harmed and insufficiently recompensed with the ghost's signature jawbreaker candy. That the heroine Yumi is herself a victim of domestic abuse allows the Mizunuma story to project easily onto her own in a supernatural hall of mirrors. Here, however, all abuse is misdirected, in a never-ending spiral of cruelty and rage.



### Miike Rings the changes

Takashi Miike, the director of the first *One Missed Call* film, already had history with both horror and J-horror. Miike's *Audition* (1999) would, as his first film to receive a theatrical release in the UK (in 2001), prove key in raising the director's international profile, would help whet a growing western appetite for a loose grouping of films then being labelled (by UK distributor Metro Tartan) as 'Asia extreme', and would lay the groundwork for the later 'torture porn' movement (as Eli Roth acknowledged by granting Miike an honorific cameo in 2005's *Hostel*). Yet *Audition* was, for all its viscerality, much more concerned

with mental than physical scarring, making it a distant (and more sophisticated) relative to the *Hostels* and *Saws* of the mid-Noughties; and its preoccupations with sadomasochism and psychosexual themes ensured that it would always sit out on the margins of J-horror, having far less influence on the subgenre's central tropes than, say, Nakata's *Ring* cycle, Takashi Shimizu's various *The Grudge* projects or Kiyoshi Kurosawa's *Pulse* (*Kairo*, 2001). Tellingly, it would be those films, rather than *Audition*, that would get American remakes.

Four years after *Audition*, however, Miike made his first return to horror with *One Missed Call* – a more standard J-horror (adapted from pop guru Yasushi Akimoto's novel *Chakushin Ar*) which certainly would go on to get its own remake in 2008. That remake, directed by Eric Valette, was also an utter critical flop, and still holds a rare 0% rating on Rotten Tomatoes' 'Tomatometer.' This is in part because, by 2008, the wheels had fallen off the J-horror bandwagon, its tropes now well and truly ossified – and even by 2003, Miike was typically ahead of his times in already identifying the subgenre as a collection of by-then well-worn clichés and conventions which he recombined in a highly self-conscious manner that bordered on parodic pastiche.

When Miike has Yumi racing against the clock to lift a pre-ordained, phone-delivered curse before it kills her, he is channeling *Ring* (the prime influence



here, and also arguably the urtext of J-horror). When he has a ghostly child hiding in an apartment's cupboard, he is evoking *Ju-on: The Grudge* (2002). When he shows the exterior of an old residential building with a water tank prominent on the roof, and follows it immediately with a shot of characters ascending in the building's elevator, he is referencing Nakata's *Dark Water* (*Honogurai mizu no soko kara*, 2002)

All this, no less than Miike's use of the live TV show as a reflex for the film itself, is a way for the director to show that he knows his way around the now old and creaky infrastructure of the J-horror house, before branching off into his own new extension. This process takes place in the film's second half, precisely in an old abandoned hospital building where the film's events unhinge themselves from any semblance of reality's spatiotemporal norms. Here everything comes full circle, as the dark, dingy hospital appears, in the final, hallucinatory scene, to have had a complete makeover, and as Miike returns to the motifs of his own earlier *Audition*, revealing an older man (Ritsuko's detective brother Yamashita, played by Shinichi Tsutsumi) at the sadosexual mercy of a much younger smiling woman dressed all in white (and with acts of penetrative torture on her mind). It is as though Miike has taken a bog-standard J-horror scenario, and in the end remade it, by proxy, in the image of his own brand.



### The two sequels

"Haven't you heard that tune before?" Kyoko (Rie Mimura) asks her kindergarten colleague Madoka (Chisun) of the familiar ring tone that heralds the passing on of the Mizunuma curse, adding later, "It's that same ring." Meanwhile, police officer Motomiya (Renji Ishibashi) states, "I said it before: this case defies easy answers" – something which he in fact had stated before in *One Missed Call*.

Framed as expressions of *déjà vu* (or *déjà entendu*), these lines are all instances in which Renpei Tsukamoto's *One Missed Call 2* openly declares itself to be a sequel. Likewise, the film is flush with signifiers of its sequel-y status: characters who are identical twins (natural figures for a sequel's repetitions), multiple echoing returns of motifs established in the original, and even wholesale recapitulations of its scenes. Yet much as *One Missed Call* sets itself up to be a J-horror like all the others, only to diverge significantly from this course in the end, *One Missed Call 2* announces its identity as a straight sequel, only to depart significantly from the first film – and it quite literally departs, given that it sends its mostly Japanese characters to rural Taiwan to mine the source of a curse similar – but not identical – to that in the original. Similarly, the ghostly villainess



at the film's center, Li Li (Nana Koizumi) – note the reduplicated name, another gesture towards the iterative tendency of sequels – comes with a rumored backstory that recalls, without exactly reproducing, the myth of *Kuchisake-onna*, or the 'Slit Mouthed Woman.' All these approximate, asymmetric relations reflect the sequel's relationship to the original – familiar, but full of enough unexpected deviations and digressions to stave off the boredom of repetition. It effectively abandons the Mizunuma mythology, only to return to it at the very end in order to set up the trilogy closer.

That said, Manabu Asô's *One Missed Call: Final* (2006) is perhaps the strangest of the three entries. Opening with an extreme close-up of a rooster, and then maintaining its recurrent chicken motif with all the monomaniacal glee of Giulio Questi's *Death Laid An Egg* (1968) or Alan Parker's *Angel Heart* (1987), it follows a group of Japanese high schoolers on a class trip to Busan in South Korea who find themselves haunted by the vengeful – if conflicted – spirit of classmate Asuka (Maki Horikita) whom they had earlier bullied into a suicide attempt. The comatose Asuka, now merged with Mimiko Mizunuma's ever-wrathful ghost, visits the pupils one after another through their mobile phones, this time presenting them with a moral conundrum: either face their doom, or pass it on, irrevocably, to one of their 'friends.'



The 'rules' here are different. Now the time between receiving the call and meeting a painful death can be mere minutes, so that these adolescents die in rapid succession. For the most part the teens display an ugly readiness to turn against one another, in a vicious, high-stakes battle royale that reprises their cruel and callous mistreatment of Asuka. Only Asuka's best friend Emiri (Meisa Kuroki) and Emiri's deaf Korean boyfriend Ji-nu. (Keun-Suk Jang) show any capacity to bridge gaps and reach out across divides, opening up backdoors to forgiveness, self-sacrifice and collective action. Meanwhile, Mimiko has taken possession of Asuka's computer and e-mail account, making her both literally viral in her sinister influence, and perhaps the first on-screen ghost to be partially busted by a distributed denial-of-service attack. Eventually, and in a manner that never quite makes sense, Mimiko's curse is ended – or at least escaped – but half the fun here is seeing these unpleasant kids forced to face their own part in a selfish pecking order, as all their chickens come home to roost.

*Anton Bitel lances free in a heady world of genre cinema, and contributes regularly to Sight & Sound, Little White Lies, SciFiNow and VODzilla.co. He blogs at ProjectedFigures.com.*



# ABOUT THE TRANSFER

*One Missed Call*, *One Missed Call 2* and *One Missed Call: Final* are presented in their original aspect ratio of 1.85:1 with 5.1 and 2.0 stereo sound. The High Definition digital transfers were provided by Kadokawa.





## PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Michael Mackenzie**  
Executive Producers **Kevin Lambert, Francesco Simeoni**  
Technical Producer **James White**  
QC **Nora Mehenni, Alan Simmons**  
Production Assistant **Samuel Thiery**  
Blu-ray Mastering and Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**  
Design **Obviously Creative**  
Artwork **Matt Griffin**

## SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Anton Bitel, Sarah Kelley, Andrew Kirkham, Tom Mes, Edwin Samuelson





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