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# The Black Lizard and Beast in the Shadows

by EDOGAWA Rampo

translated by Ian HUGHES

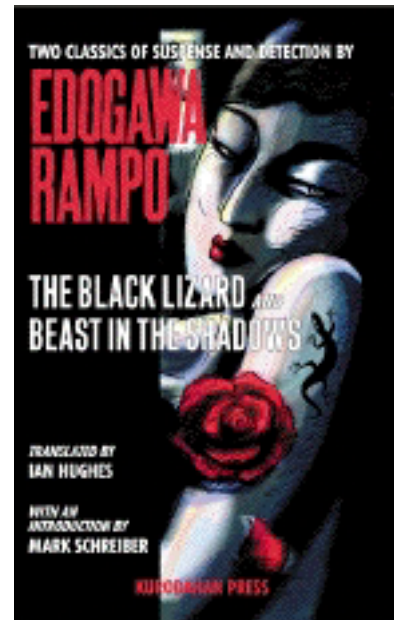
introduction by Mark SCHREIBER

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Edogawa Rampo (pseudonym of Hirai Taro, 1894–1965) is the acknowledged grand master of Japan's golden age of crime and mystery fiction. In the early part of his career, he created the Japanese gothic mystery, developing the work of Edgar Allan Poe and related nineteenth century writers in a distinctly Japanese form. This part of his career coincided with a great flowering in Japanese literature and culture, a relatively free and uninhibited popular press being a defining feature of the times. In this context, Rampo's dark vision and extravagant grotesquery found an avid readership, and had a profound influence on other writers. Public morals tightened in the years leading up to Japan's Asian and Pacific wars, and censorship was tight in the war years. Rampo's early work fell out of favour, and he turned to adventure stories with detective characters in leading roles. After the war, he concentrated on stories for young readers, and on developing the Japan Association of Mystery Writers.

The Edogawa Rampo Prize, originally endowed by Rampo himself, is awarded annually to the finest work of the year in the mystery genre. It is the most important prize of its type in Japan. Edogawa Rampo – whose name is meant to be read as a punning reference to 'Edgar

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Allan Poe' – remains popular and influential in Japan. His work remains in print, in various different editions, and his stories provide the background for a steady stream of film, television, and theatrical adaptations.

The Black Lizard (*Kurotokage*) first appeared as a magazine serial, published in twelve monthly instalments between January and December, 1934. It features Rampo's main detective character, Akechi Kogoro: a figure who combines elements of Poe's Auguste Dupin with the gentleman adventurers of British golden age detective literature. The Black Lizard herself is a master criminal and femme fatale, whose charged relationship with detective Akechi and unconcealed sadism have inspired shuddering admiration in generations of readers. The story has been adapted for film and television several times, most notably in a 1968 feature film that included a cameo by Mishima Yukio, and a title song with lyrics by the celebrated novelist. Mishima was also involved in the stage adaptation the same year conceived and directed by Miwa Akihiro, in which Miwa himself played the part of the Black Lizard. It is largely thanks to this classic of 1960s Japanese theatre that the story remains associated with sexual transgression and blurred boundaries between male and female, hunter and hunted, detective and criminal.

Themes of deviance and sado-masochism are central to *Beast in the Shadows (Inju)*, a tale from the height of Rampo's grotesque period, which appeared in serial form between August and October, 1928. This tale of secret identities, violent sexuality, and dark crimes stands in stark contrast to the genteel detective stories then popular in English literature. It bears comparison with the American pulp fiction serial, the genre that led to the classic modern American crime novel, and with the more extravagant moments of film noir. *Beast in the Shadows*, however, recalls classic themes in Japanese popular fiction, with origins in the illustrated novels and mass market shockers of the Edo period (1600–1868). Rampo's special contribution was to combine this strain in Japanese literature with styles and atmospheres imported from Europe: from Oscar Wilde and Maurice Maeterlinck, to Rampo's own contemporaries in the American pulps and English novels.

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