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HORRORS OF MALFORMED MEN

江戸川乱歩全集　恐怖奇形人間
Edogawa Ranpo zenshu - kyofu kikei ningen

Original release date: 31 October 1969
99 minutes

CREW

Directed by **Teruo Ishii**
Screenplay by **Masahiro Kakefuda, Teruo Ishii**
Produced by **Shigeru Okada, Kanji Amao**
Based on "The Strange Tale of Panorama Island" by **Edogawa Rampo**
Director of photography **Shigeru Akatsuka**
Lighting by **Yoshiaki Masuda**
Audio recording by **Hiroo Nozu**
Production design by **Akira Yoshimura**
Music by **Masao Yagi** (uncredited music also by **Sou Kaburagi**)
Edited by **Tadao Kanda**
Assistant director **Tomoomi Yoda**

CAST

Hirosuke Hitomi / Genzaburo Komoda **Teruo Yoshida**
Hideko / Hatsuyo **Teruko Yumi**
Jogoro Komoda **Tatsumi Hijikata**
Toki Komoda **Mitsuko Aoi**
Chiyoko Komoda **Michiko Kobata**
Shizuko **Yukie Kagawa**
Hirukawa **Asao Koike**
Mie **Mie Hanabusa**
Miki **Yoko Koyama**
Kei **Kei Kiyama**
Kin **Michi Tanaka**
Hayashida **Toshio Oida**
Takeshi **Masaomi Kondo**
Masseuse **Yoshiko Kato**
Guard **Hideo Ko**
Female patient A **Yumiko Katayama**
Female patient B **Asano Kanamori**
Male patient A **Sachio Miyagi**
Male patient B **Isamu Tsuchihashi**
Priest A **Toru Yuri**
Priest B **Akira Oizumi**
Doctor **Kichijiro Ueda**
Nurse **Kyomi Sakura**
Hunchback A **Ken Sawaaki**
Hunchback B **Misao Kawasaki**
Clerk **Chiyo Okada**
Madman **Hideo Ayuba**
Madwoman **Reiko Mikasa**
Slashed woman **Miki Obana**
Manservant / Kogoro Akechi **Minoru Oki**

HORRORS OF MALFORMED MEN

by Jasper Sharp

My first encounter with *Horrors of Malformed Men* (*Edogawa Ranpo zenshu - kyofu kikei ningen*, 1969) came at an early age, through a single haunting image with nothing in the way of accompanying text in *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies* (1973) by the esteemed British film historian Denis Gifford. Though Gifford's focus was on European and American classic horrors, largely of the Gothic variety, this seminal publication contained a number of evocative stills from Japanese examples of the genre, providing my first introduction to many titles which only several decades later would I get the chance to see, including Kinji Fukasaku's *The Green Slime* (*Ganmâ dai-3-gô: Uchû daisakusen*, 1968), Ishirô Honda's *Matango* (1963), Haruyasu Noguchi's *Gappa the Triphibian Monster* (*Daikyojû Gappa*, 1967) and Honda's *Destroy All Monsters* (*Kaijû sôshingeki*, 1968).[1]

Who knows where Gifford acquired these images from... Few of these Japanese fantasy features had been released in the United Kingdom at the time of this publication, and certainly *Horrors of Malformed Men* never was. Indeed, even in its own country of production, it remained a tantalisingly elusive title for a period of almost five decades. All prints were pulled from circulation by its studio, Toei, shortly after its original release date of 31 October 1969. It was only recently made available for the local home viewing market, with a DVD release finally arriving in October 2017, some ten years after its worldwide DVD debut courtesy of North America's Synapse Films.

The film's unofficial circulation by way of nth generation VHS dupes and sporadic midnight screenings at repertory cinemas like the Shin-Bungeiza in Tokyo's Ikebukuro district had seen it acquiring a macabre mystique in its homeland, its mythic status amplified by a book about the film published in 1995 as part of the *Japanese Cult Movie Collection* series, and a section in *Japanese Special Effects: A Complete Collection of Phantom Films* from 1997. It was only to receive its first ever international airing in April 2003, screening as part of the Udine Far East Film Festival's six-film 'Teruo Ishii: The King of Cult' retrospective, curated by Mark Schilling, with the director himself in attendance.[2]

1 - Gifford, Denis. *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies* (Hamlyn, 1973). The film is captioned with the singular translation of the original Japanese title, *Horror of Malformed Men*, while *Matango* is mistakenly written as *Matanga, Fungus of Terror*.

2 - *Edogawa Ranpo zenshu - Kyofu kikei ningen (Nihon karuto eiga zenshu)* (Tokyo: Wides Publishing, 1995) and *Nihon tokusatsu: Genso eiga zenshu* (Tokyo: Keibunsha, 1997).

Horrors of Malformed Men's suppression has less to do with its contents than its labelling. The word *kikei* in the original title, literally comprised of the characters for 'strange' and 'form', is considered bluntly offensive in Japan when used as a term to describe the physically disabled, although none of those appearing onscreen genuinely fit within this category. The word certainly has none of the countercultural cachet that its English-language equivalent 'freak', for example, acquired in the 1960s.

Not that the contents aren't shocking in their own right. A lurid mixture of the erotic, the subversive and the carnivalesque that could only have hailed from Japan at the tail end of the seditious 60s, this head-long plunge into the pre-Oedipal psyche represents a perfect marriage of the minds of the author, Edogawa Rampo (1894-1965), whose extraordinary tales from the 1920s serve as its inspiration, and Teruo Ishii (1924-2005), the director responsible for bringing his nightmarish visions to the screen.[3]

Ishii began his career at Shintoho in the 1950s with such lowbrow potboilers as *Flesh Actress Murder: Five Criminals* (*Nikutai joyû koroshi: Gonin no hanzaisha*, 1957), the four-film early sci-fi serial *Super Giant* aka *Starman* (*Kôtetsu no kyojin*, 1957) and organised crime dramas like *Flesh Pier* (*Nyotai sanbashi*, 1958). Following the studio's bankruptcy in 1961, he went freelance, predominantly directing for Toei, for whom he delivered a solid hit with the ten-film *Abashiri Prison* (*Abashiri bangaichi*, 1965-67) yakuza jailbreak series starring Ken Takakura. Outside of *Horrors of Malformed Men*, Ishii is best known for his unflinching series of historical torture-as-erotic-spectacle titles like *Shogun's Joy of Torture* (*Tokugawa onna keibatsu-shi*, 1968) and *Orgies of Edo* (*Zankoku ijô gyakutai monogatari: Genroku onna keizu*, 1969), as well as the Meiko Kaji vehicle *Blind Woman's Curse* (*Kaidan nobori-ryû*, 1970), one of his few films made for Nikkatsu during this period.

Co-scripting *Horrors of Malformed Men* with screenwriter Masahiro Kakefuda, a man also responsible for penning, amongst many other titles, *Orgies of Edo*, the notorious nunsploitation movie *School of the Holy Beast* (*Seijû gakuen*, 1974) and various entries in the ten-title trucker series starring Bunta Sugawara, *Truck Guy* (*Torakku yarô*, 1975-79), Ishii appears unfettered from the commercial constraints of his previous yakuza and torture films. The result is a film which unfolds to a hypnagogic dream logic quite akin to Rampo's prose.

Rampo himself emerged out of a clash between two very different cultural forces; those of the traditions of his homeland and Western traditions of the literary and cinematic macabre.

3 - Most English sources write the first name as 'Rampo' rather than 'Ranpo', although the latter is in accordance with revised Hepburn romanization system. For the purposes of consistency, we have adopted the more commonly used spelling of 'Rampo' in this booklet.

The name itself is a pseudonym masking his birth-name of Tarô Hirai. The characters comprising it spell out the pun "Conflict walking along the banks of the River Edo" - aptly so, considering that his first published short story, 'The Two-Sen Copper Coin' ('Ni-sen dôka'), arrived mere months after the Great Kantô Earthquake of 1923 had levelled much of Tokyo and the surrounding area. Read the name aloud, however, and a second pun emerges: Edogawa Rampo is the phonetic rendering of one of his most significant sources of inspiration, Edgar Allan Poe.

Poe was not the only figure to fuel Rampo's fervid imagination. He also avidly devoured the newly translated mystery and detective fiction of a host of other Western writers, including Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, H. G. Wells and Maurice Leblanc. His most famous creation, Kogorô Akechi, was a private detective who took centre stage in many of his novels and short stories. In the vein of Sherlock Holmes, Akechi brought rational explanations to the seemingly irrational literary worlds wrought by Rampo's prose (the name itself is formed from the characters for 'bright' and 'intellect'), whilst also adopting all manner of cunning disguises to get to the heart of mystery and often deploying his legendary judo skills to get him out of a tight spot.

Rampo was also not alone in pushing forth a new literary genre of the *fantastique* in Japan, reconstituted for a local readership from the narratives, themes and tropes of his overseas models. Others such as Yumeno Kyûsaku (1889-1936), Unno Jûza (1897-1949) and Umehara Hokumei (1901-46) also emerged at this time of burgeoning mass culture. Together they fabricated sensationalistic self-contained irrational worlds in the fields of science-fiction, fantasy and horror, inspired by cultural, technological and scientific developments during the period of rapid internationalisation of the late Taishô era (1912-26). Their works were regularly serialised in the popular magazine *Shin Seinen* ('New Youth'), launched in 1920 and itself symptomatic of this new modernity.

Nevertheless, this shock of the new was met with considerable resistance from more conservative forces during the period of hardship and reconstruction following the trauma of the 1923 earthquake. The hyperreal illusionary worlds such authors created were seen as contaminating the national mindset and corrupting the minds of its youth. All of these writers faced increasing difficulties with the censors following the passing of the Peace Preservation Law (*Chian ijihô*) of 1925, their works labelled dismissively as *ero-guro nansensu* ('erotic grotesque nonsense'). Rampo was the only one to continue his writing career into the post-war period.

One of the earliest discussions of *Horrors of Malformed Men* in the English language, in *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror* (1984), makes the misleading claim that "Edogawa

appears to have borrowed liberally from H.G. Wells's novel *The Island of Dr Moreau.*"[4] Wells's 1896 story was first published in Japan in 1924. The Rampo novella, *The Strange Tale of Panorama Island* (*Panorama-tô kitan*), which provides the main narrative through-line for Ishii's film, came two years later in 1926. It is one of the most recent of the author's works to make it to English readers, with Elaine Kazu Gerbert's translation appearing as late as 2012, and the celebrated manga artist Maruo Suehiro's graphic novelisation, originally published in Japanese in 2008, coming six months later in 2013.

However, the plot of *Panorama Island* is substantially different from Wells's story. It follows a penniless novelist named, as in Ishii's film, Hirosuke Hitomi, who fakes his own death then climbs into the coffin of a recently deceased former school mate who is his spitting image, from which he is duly resurrected to claim his dead double's inheritance. Hirosuke then uses his ill-gotten gains to construct an elaborate fantasy world of statues and live performers on a remote island, a type of living fantasy diorama, or rather panorama, of his own creation.

Indeed, Rampo seems more inspired by his American namesake's 1839 short story 'William Wilson', but what is more interesting is the extent to which he draws upon the ideas and language of cinema in this tale of a man who uses his wealth to construct his own reality. The culture of Rampo's heyday was not only marked by an increased exposure to contemporary American and European literature, but also to imported films. Cinema not only brought moving images from an alien otherworld closer to the everyday experience of Japanese citizens, but magnified them to grotesque dimensions. In 1925, Rampo published a highly illuminating essay entitled 'Eiga no Kyôfu', or 'The Horror of Film', in which he writes:

"When I watch a moving picture, I become frightened. It is the dream of an opium smoker. From the one-inch celluloid springs a crowd of giant players, who weep, laugh, become angry and fall in love. An apparition of the Land of the Giants described in Swift unfolds vividly before my eyes. Filling the screen, a face one thousand times larger than mine looks my way and grins. What if that were my own face! Film actors carry on without going mad. Have you ever seen your face in a concave mirror? In the concave mirror, your face, smooth as a baby's, changes into something terribly pitted and bumpy, like the surface of a moon seen through a telescope. Skin like fish scales, pores like caverns – I find the concave mirror horrifying. Screen actors must be staring endlessly into concave mirrors. Truly it is odd that they do not go mad."[5]

4 - Hardy, Phil (ed.). *The Aurum Film Encyclopedia: Horror* (Aurum Press, 1984; 1996 paperback edition), p. 208.
5 - LaMarre, Thomas. *Shadows on the Screen: Tanizaki Jun'ichiro on Cinema & "Oriental" Aesthetics* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 2005), p. 110. Lamarre translates the word 'kyôfu' in the Japanese title as 'terror'.

Interestingly, not only was *Panorama Island* published in the year following Rampo's reflections on cinema, but so was the short story 'The Hell of Mirrors' ('Kagami jigoku'), in which a man's fanatical obsession with his own image sends him spiralling into insanity after he confines himself within a sphere with a mirrored interior. The story was memorably filmed by Hisayasu Satô in the 2005 anthology movie *Rampo Noir* (*Ranpo jigoku*). 1926 also saw the publication of the novel *The Dwarf* (*Issunbôshi*), in which Detective Akechi sets out on the trail of the diminutive killer of the title. It was filmed the following year by Sanjûgo Naoki and Seika Shiba, and released under the same name, although sadly no remnants of this production exist.

As the original Japanese subtitle, *Edogawa Ranpo zenshû* ('Edogawa Rampo Collected Works') makes clear, Ishii's adaptation of *Panorama Island* also integrates elements from a number of the author's other best-known stories from this particularly fertile period. Notably there is 'The Human Chair' ('Ningen isu', 1926), in which an obsessive stalker develops a special chair with a secret compartment to conceal himself within so he can feel the warmth of his object of desire, and 'Watcher in the Attic' ('Yaneura no sanpôsha', 1925), transformed in 1976 by Tanaka Noboru into one of the finest entries in Nikkatsu's Roman Porno erotic line and similarly incorporating a number of other Rampo short stories within its dream-like narrative.

The most significant addition, however, is *The Ogre of the Secluded Isle* (*Kotô no oni*, 1929), an Akechi murder mystery novel delivered as a gobbet of much-needed exposition at the tail end of *Horrors of Malformed Men*. In other words, any similarities to *The Island of Dr Moreau* did not originate from Rampo, although it is entirely possible that the director Ishii himself drew from the Paramount film version made by Erle C. Kenton, *Island of Lost Souls* (1932), released in Japan in 1933 as *Jûjin-shima* ('Beast Man Island'), for his own hybridization of the author's tales.

Horrors of Malformed Men emerged during a period of renewed interest from the film world in Rampo's work. The 1960s saw two versions of his 1934 novel *Black Lizard* (*Kurotokage*), in which Akechi goes head to head with a notorious female jewel thief: the first, starring Machiko Kyô and directed by Umetsugu Inoue for Daiei studio in 1962, was followed by Kinji Fukasaku's better known version in 1968, featuring the female impersonator Akihiro Miwa. The relaxed censorship climate of the end of the decade also saw the adaptation *Blind Beast* (*Môjû*, 1969), the eye-popping Yasuzô Masumura directed Daiei release in which a blind sculptor abducts a beautiful young girl to serve as his model.

Between 1956 and 1959, Toei had paved the way for the post-war resurgence in Rampo's popularity with a string of low-budget B-movies for the kids' market based on another of

his other famous creations, *The Boys Detective Gang* (*Shônen tantei-dan*) series, which he started to write in 1937, at a time when the censors were clamping down on the more sensationalistic materiel with which he made his name, and which he recommenced after a hiatus of over a decade during the war, with the stories serialised in the youth magazine *Shonen Club* (*Shônen Kurabu*) up until 1960.

The appeal of Rampo's writing to a director of Ishii's generation seem obvious. Ishii was born in 1924, coming of age during the jingoistic, militaristic and socially conservative climate of the 1930s and 1940s. The early imaginary worlds created by Rampo and his *ero-guro* contemporaries would have provided a gateway into a more liberal, cosmopolitan and fantastical past, a past then receding into the distance.

As he told Tom Mes for Midnight Eye in 2005, "Every boy from my generation up until the generation of Shinya Tsukamoto, who I get along with very well, has read the work of Edogawa Rampo. His writing was serialised in a magazine called *Shonen Club*, which was very popular among boys for many years. It's because we all began reading him during our childhoods that we feel very close to Rampo's work."[6]

The reference to Tsukamoto is a reminder that the director of *Tetsuo: The Iron Man* (1989), born in 1960, himself later adapted Rampo's *The Twins* (*Sôseiji*, 1924) – of which traces can be detected in *Horrors of Malformed Men* – for the screen as *Gemini* (1999), and as an actor played Detective Akechi in Ishii's later Rampo mash-up *Blind Beast vs. Killer Dwarf* (*Môjû tai Issunbôshi*, 2001).

It is also impossible not to see the shadow of the A-bomb hanging over the film, expressed as much by the confetti of flesh marking the climax as by the degraded physicality and spasmodic contortions of Jôgorô, played by the Rasputin-like Tatsumi Hijikata (1928-86), and the mutants he is responsible for; their primal, animalistic convulsions performed by members of his Ankoku Butoh ("Dance of Darkness") troupe.

Hijikata was, alongside Matsuo Ôno, the founder of the Butoh modern dance form first presented to a resistant public in 1959. As his biographer Stephen Barber explains, Butoh was a reaction against a Japanese dance scene seen as emulating the West and a "project of intensive reformulation of the human body … the human body had been consumed into ashes at the close of the first half of the 20th-century, and that history then rebuilt itself as though nothing had happened, when everything had changed."[7]

6 - Mes, Tom. *Midnight Eye interview: Teruo Ishii.* http://www.midnighteye.com/interviews/teruo-ishii/. 28 January 2005.
7 - Barber, Stephen. *Hijikata: Revolt of the Body* (Creation Books, 2006), p. 5

Throughout the 1960s, Hijikata remained very much an underground, fringe figure. The three performances he made for Ishii, which include *Orgies of Edo* and *Blind Woman's Curse*, represent his only in commercial cinema. Nevertheless, the following year, 1971, would see him performing as a sorcerer celebrating the birth of humankind, dancing on a desolate mountain covered with belching volcanic smoke in a short film entitled *The Birth*, directed by the classical composer Toshirô Mayuzumi.

It was the only film ever made for the Astrorama system, developed exclusively for the Osaka Expo of 1970, which employed five interlocked 70mm projectors that magnified their images as a seamless whole onto the 30-meter diameter dome of the Green Pavilion (*Midori-kan*). In this epochal celebration of Japan's emergence as a major economic and political power, Hijikata's broken form loomed overhead, expanded to grotesque dimensions in what still to this day counts as the world's largest ever projection of an analogue film. One imagines it would have all been enough to drive poor Rampo insane.

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ONCE UPON A TIME IN JAPAN: TERUO ISHII (1924-2005)

by Tom Mes

Decades from now, historians of Japanese film will probably still be wondering how to classify Teruo Ishii. Ishii, after all, was mentored by Mikio Naruse and Hiroshi Shimizu, two filmmakers that any respectable historian will point to as belonging among this formidable cinematic nation's very finest. Nevertheless, Ishii went on to become the director of *Super Giant* (*Kotetsu no kyojin*, 1957), Japan's first superhero film, replete with glittery tights and codpiece.

During his initial tenure as a director at the short-lived (1947-61) Shintoho studio, Ishii also delivered the *Line* (*Chitai*) series, a string of moody, noirish exposés of the Tokyo underworld, its multifarious denizens, and the profligate vices offered by a night-time capital transitioning from the free-for-all hunger of the post-war ruins to the neon-lit prosperity of an economic miracle. Ishii was also the man behind the taut escaped-convicts-chained-together caper *Abashiri Prison* (*Abashiri bangaichi*, 1965), a Toei studios production so astonishingly successful that Ishii subsequently remade it close to a dozen times over the course of as many sequels, while also making a megastar out of a young Toei contract player named Ken Takakura.

Making what amounts to essentially the same film year in and year out, even over a decade or more, is not in itself an obstacle to recognition in the annals of Japanese cinema, as the case of Yoji Yamada, director of the 48-part *Tora-san* series that ran from 1969 through 1997, proves. Indeed, Yamada is considered something of a master filmmaker by some – though it must be said that these voices form a rather select group consisting almost exclusively of those who have paid his salary since the late 1950s.

But pigeonholing eternal Shochiku studio employee Yamada is a rather more comfortable exercise than attempting the same with the freelance and footloose Ishii. Yamada, for one, never made a series of lurid and fanciful depictions of torture techniques through the ages nor curious hybrids of yakuza movie, ghost story and sideshow grotesquery featuring hunchbacked dwarves and cats lapping up blood. And let's not even mention the sword-

wielding but bare-naked yakuza sex queen slashing her way through an onslaught of underworld thugs in the driving rain.

Ishii, as you may have surmised by now, was a filmmaker of astounding diversity, at ease in any genre but with an undeniable – indeed, proudly displayed – proclivity for the phantasmagorical. 'The King of Cult' they call him in Japan and that at least is something to go on.

Ishii's birth in 1924 in Tokyo's Asakusa entertainment district dropped him right into the pulsing heart of Japan's exuberant Taisho democracy, that heady petri dish of short-lived but deeply influential artistic and social liberty that spawned avant-garde cinema, *moga* flappers and authors of the calibre of Junichiro Tanizaki and Edogawa Rampo. The carnivalesque legacy of *ero-guro nansensu* ('erotic grotesque nonsense'), the period's favourite catchphrase, would forever remain a part of Ishii's artistic DNA. He once remarked that he didn't consider filmmaking as anything more than having a great time. And it shows. His films exemplify popular genre cinema at its most shamelessly enjoyable: colourful and action-packed, frequently silly but never less than thoroughly entertaining. It is true that his pictures are occasionally shoddy and contain abundant lapses of logic, but as the gobsmackingly wonderful *Blind Woman's Curse* (*Kaidan nobori ryu*, 1970) proves, these form no obstacle to the viewer's intense delight. On the contrary, sometimes the eccentricity of his films is so sustained that Ishii conjures dream-like narratives and visions. *Horrors of Malformed Men*, with its almost rhizomatic approach to interweaving stories by Rampo, is perhaps the finest example, hailing as it does from the director's giddy peak in erotic-grotesque filmmaking during the late 1960s and early 1970s, when, liberated from the formulaic millstone that had become the *Abashiri Prison* series, Ishii was set free to indulge his every whim in an industry that was becoming increasingly permissive toward depictions of boobs, blood and elaborate fetishistic torture sessions.

Ishii was certainly no stranger to on-screen excess; witness the inclusion of extended sequences of carnal cavorting set in the Yoshiwara red-light district in his violent and gorgeously stylised 1973 chanbara *Bohachi Bushido: Code of the Forgotten Eight* (*Bohachi bushido: Poruno jidaigeki*), based on the manga by *Lone Wolf and Cub* creators Kazuo Koike and Goseki Kojima. However, Ishii's personal and quite unmistakable brand of licentiousness always exudes an old-world decadence that works to charm rather than offend his viewers. A result of his characteristic blend of an idiosyncratic approach to verisimilitude and his penchant for extravagant decors steeped in stained glass, trap doors and red roses.

Even among his later films, though, one finds delightful oneiric oddities, notably in the unsteady shape of Ishii's pair of Yoshiharu Tsuge adaptations, *Gensenkan Inn* (*Gensenkan shujin*, 1993) and *Wind-Up Type* aka *Screwed* (*Nejishiki*, 1998), starring Tadanobu Asano, for which one critic cited David Lynch, Ken Russell and Jan Švankmayer as closest cinematic kin.

Ishii's 1991 straight-to-VHS actioner *The Hitman* (*Za Hittoman – Chi wa bara no nioi*), on the other hand, adheres somewhat regrettably to the no-frills aesthetic that marks most of Toei's V-Cinema quickies of the period: it's all double-breasted suits, mid-range Toyota sedans and drab office buildings. And yet the film's subtitle *Blood Smells Like Roses* could hardly be more Ishii-esque.

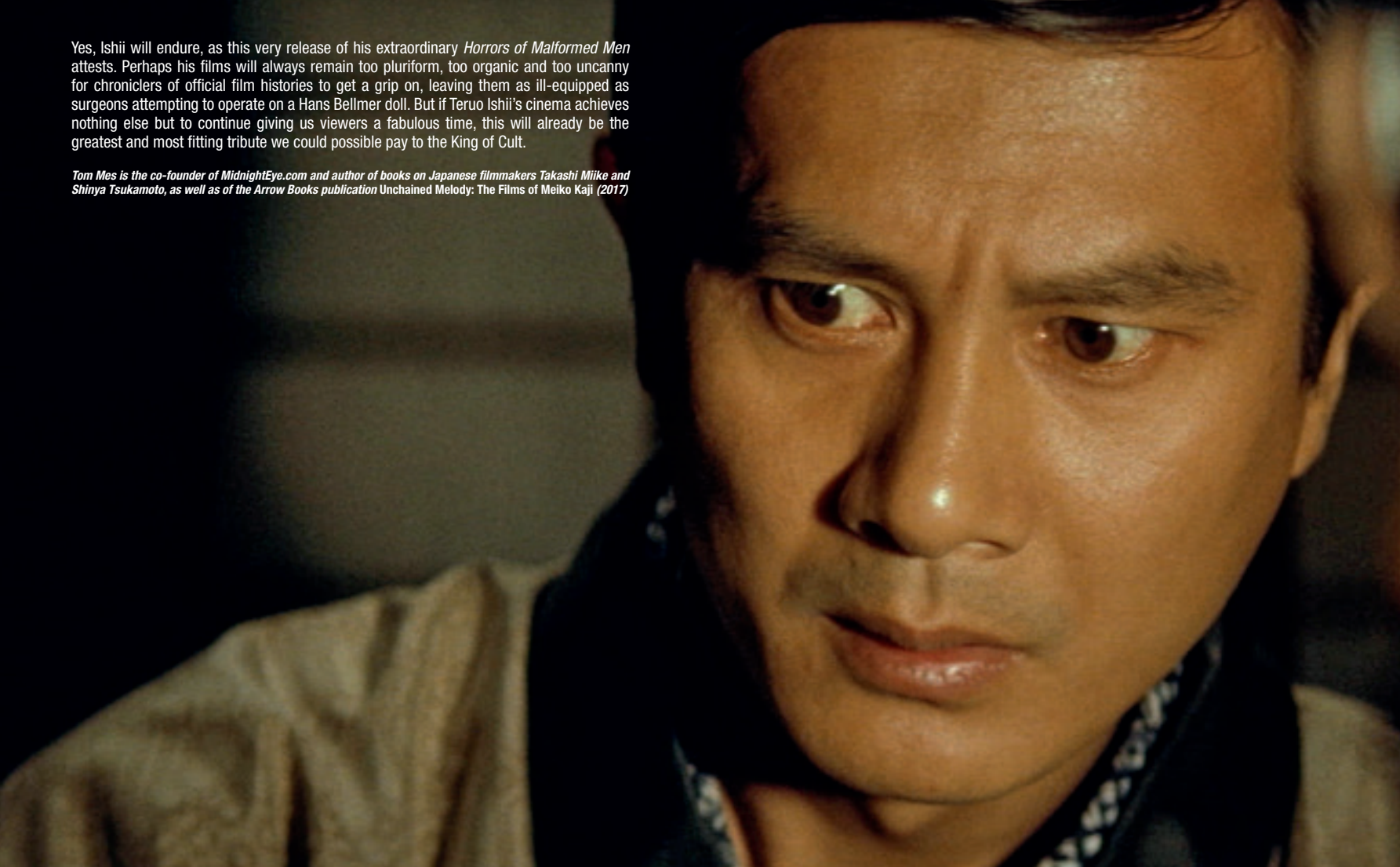
The video aesthetic also hampers *Japanese Hell* (*Jigoku*, 1999) and *Blind Beast vs. Killer Dwarf* (*Moju tai Issunboshi*, 2001), his last two films as well as his final forays into the gaudy realm of *ero-guro*: one an attempt to remake his old Shintoho stablemate Nobuo Nakagawa's infernal 1960 masterpiece *Jigoku* and the other a renewed stab at merging tangentially related Edogawa Rampo stories. Having been shot on what appears to be a standard broadcast-issue Betacam camera, the films come across as rather televisually composed and altogether too literal to achieve anything resembling the hallucinatory heights of yore. Yet even these, in every sense of the word, minor entries contain a certain irreverent energy that makes them unmistakably a part of Teruo Ishii's body of work, which pulsates with fleshy, vivacious and unabashedly decadent fervour.

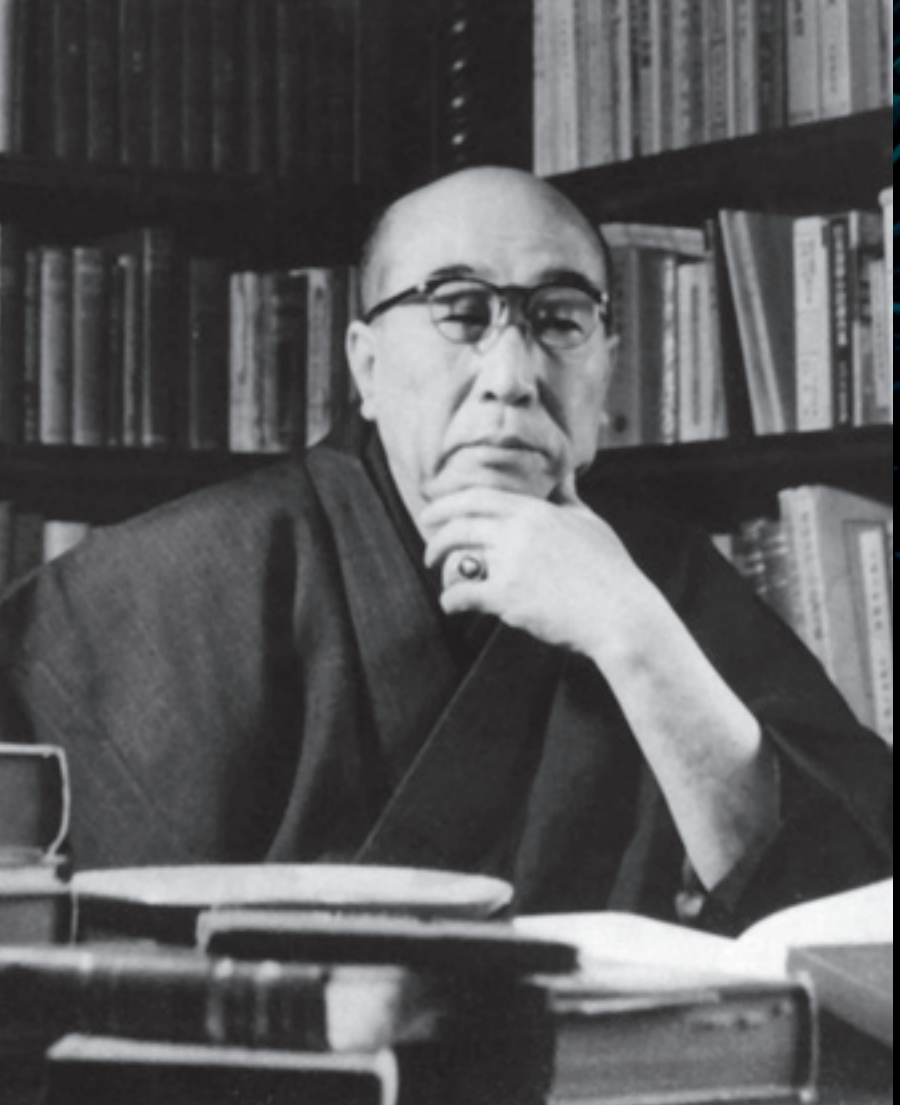
In 2003, Ishii received belated, but much-deserved, international recognition thanks to film critic Mark Schilling, who set up a retrospective of the director's works at the Udine Far East Film Festival in Italy and also prominently featured the filmmaker in his publication *The Yakuza Movie Book* (published the same year). In the latter tome, Ishii mused readily about his long-cherished dream as a filmmaker: to helm a gangster epic about the post-war yakuza, starring his old chum (and still superstar) Ken Takakura, to be titled *Once Upon a Time in Japan*

Ishii would, however, take his unmade dream project with him into the great beyond, when he shed his mortal coil in 2005 after a lengthy battle with lung cancer. For the fact that such a colourful and distinguished career ended with a pair of noble failures, it is tempting to argue a decline in Japanese cinema's ability to deliver delightfully stylish jolts. However, Teruo Ishii has a legacy of spiritual and aesthetic heirs in today's film world, something of which few of his peers, even the most prestigious, can boast: the gleeful excesses of Takashi Miike, the *ero-guro* stylings and love of flesh-and-blood shenanigans of Sion Sono, and the Rampo-inflected perversions of Shinya Tsukamoto, to name but three of the most towering presences in contemporary Japanese cinema.

Yes, Ishii will endure, as this very release of his extraordinary *Horrors of Malformed Men* attests. Perhaps his films will always remain too pluriform, too organic and too uncanny for chroniclers of official film histories to get a grip on, leaving them as ill-equipped as surgeons attempting to operate on a Hans Bellmer doll. But if Teruo Ishii's cinema achieves nothing else but to continue giving us viewers a fabulous time, this will already be the greatest and most fitting tribute we could possible pay to the King of Cult.

Tom Mes is the co-founder of MidnightEye.com and author of books on Japanese filmmakers Takashi Miike and Shinya Tsukamoto, as well as of the Arrow Books publication* Unchained Melody: The Films of Meiko Kaji *(2017)





REMEMBERING EDOGAWA RAMPO (1894-1965)

by Grady Hendrix

In Japan, popular legend said that Edogawa Rampo wrote at night, lit by a single guttering candle, hidden in a storehouse that he called "the castle of illusion", surrounded by *muzan-e*, woodcuts depicting fabulously gory murders and torture. Called the father of Japanese detective fiction, denounced by critics as "unhealthy", founder of the Mystery Writers of Japan, and promoter and caretaker of his illustrator, Jun-ichi Iwata's, massive, decades-long study of homosexuality in Japanese history and literature, Rampo contains multitudes. Most of them contradictory.

Probably Japan's most famous popular writer, he derived his style and subject matter from the Western detective story. Considered an author mostly read by young men, many of his stories ooze a morbid eroticism. A fiercely driven writer whose complete works run to thirty volumes (over fifty novels and novellas, a near-infinite number of short stories), Rampo considered himself a lazy dilettante. He enthusiastically embraced modern technology like printing presses, telescopes, and fingerprinting, yet he wrote dread-choked essays about the existential horror of cinema's depiction of human bodies and radio's disembodiment of the human voice.

But maybe Rampo feels like such a contradiction because we misunderstand him. Take his name. Born Taro Hirai in 1894, he adopted the pen name "Edogawa Rampo" in 1923. As Ellery Queen wrote in 1951, "If you say the name Edogawa Rampo aloud, and keep repeating it, the name will seem to grow more and more familiar; and it should, because it is the verbal translation of the Japanese pronunciation of Edgar Allan Poe." Which is true, but that misses its Japanese roots. At the time, Japanese writers loved to come up with clever pen names for themselves, and Rampo's actually means either "randomly walking along the Edo River," or "the rambler of the Edo River" a reference to his proclivity for coming up with story ideas on epic strolls through the old city of Tokyo.

An economics student at Tokyo's Waseda University, Rampo floated from job to job before he turned 30 and published his first detective story, 'The Two-Sen Copper Coin' ('Ni-sen doka'), in *Shin Seinen* ('New Youth') magazine. Before that fateful moment, Rampo's résumé' read, in his own words:

"My first job, at a trading company, ended in failure. From there I worked as a factory clerk, owned a used bookstore, and became a reporter for an economics magazine. Then I became the editor of *Tokyo Puck*, did a stint at a Chinese noodle shop, worked as a lawyer's aide, and a labour movement's secretary. I also worked as a bureaucrat in city hall, joined a cosmetics manufacturer, and became an adman for the Mainichi Shimbun newspaper. I never stayed at any of these jobs for more than six months or a year."

Shin Seinen was a strange fit for Rampo. Launched in January 1920, it was a right-wing magazine encouraging educated kids living in the countryside to go abroad to study, work, and, eventually, rule. Packed with articles by military officers about self-improvement, and think pieces about the glories of colonialism, the first issue opened with a poem encouraging its readers to be "leading lights in a doomed world." In keeping with its international outlook, the publisher demanded translations of foreign fiction, so its editor-in-chief ran detective stories to stand out in a marketplace drowning in translations of foreign adventure tales and historical romances.

The first issue launched with a serialized Sexton Blake mystery and 'The Eye of Osiris' featuring Richard Austin Freeman's scientific detective, Dr. Thorndyke, but it also featured an ad offering prizes for original Japanese mystery stories. Rampo answered this ad in 1923 with 'The Two-Sen Copper Coin' and subsequently *Shin Seinen* became home for a new wave of Japanese mystery fiction. Which Rampo soon abandoned...

In 1925, Rampo wrote 'The Human Chair' ('Ningen-isu') about a chair builder who crawls inside his favourite creation to enjoy the erotic experience of women sitting on him. Published that same year, his 'The Red Chamber' ('Akai heya') depicts a club of bored dilettantes titillated by a member's confession of his one hundred secret thrill killings. At the climax, the murderous member reveals that his confession is false and declares them a bunch of pathetic voyeurs:

"Without warning, a blaze of lights caught all of us huddled in the centre of the fantastic room, blinking foolishly at each other. For the first time since joining the group I realized how artificial everything looked in our so-called room of mystery. And as for ourselves, we were just a bunch of fools..."

It's hard not to read it as Rampo's raised middle finger farewell to the logical, rational detective story and its fans. Critics declared his new, more macabre work "inauthentic", "unhealthy", and declared that it gave a "bad name" to detective fiction. But by 1927, *Shin Seinen* had a new editor-in-chief who changed the magazine's focus from country youth to urban hipsters, rejecting detective fiction in favour of Rampo's more modern fare. Only it wasn't really so modern.

Japan's tradition of the strange tale stretches all the way back to *The Tale of Genji* (*Genji monogatari*, circa 1021), which featured death by possession. Ueda Akinari (1734–1809) wrote about priests whose love for dead boys drives them mad, sending them out to roam cemeteries, dig up corpses, and lick the rotting meat from their bones. In 1866, the woodblock artist Tsukioka Yoshitoshi published the brutal series, *Twenty-Eight Famous Murders with Verse* (*Eimei nijuhasshuku*), each one a gory true crime poster, the same ones, legend has it, that surrounded Rampo when he wrote.

But *Horrors of Malformed Men* was inspired less by Yoshitoshi and more by Edgar Allan Poe. Rampo's serial novella in *Shin Seinen*, *The Strange Tale of Panorama Island* (*Panorama-to kitan*) (October 1926 - April 1927) was inspired by Poe's obscure short story 'The Domain of Arnheim', written in 1847 as Poe's wife and first cousin, Virginia, whom he'd married when she was 13 years old, lay dying of consumption, at the age of 24. Poe's story concerned a young man named Ellison who, through a random stroke of luck, inherited $450 million and used it to create an isolated set of gardens to honour the "supreme majesty and dignity of the poetic sentiment" by the "creation of novel forms of beauty".

In *Panorama Island*, one of Rampo's typical dissolute layabouts, Hirosuke Hitomi, is leading a "purposeless, humdrum existence day by day" when he sees a newspaper article about an old classmate's death. In "a wonderful piece of luck" Hitomi and the dead classmate are physically identical, so greedy Hitomi digs up the guy's corpse, assumes his identity, takes over his family fortune, and drives it into the ground creating an island paradise full of dazzling illusions.

Incorporating an idea from his previously published 1924 story, 'The Twins' ('Soseiji'), about a twin who murders his brother, steals his identity, and then his wife, Rampo has Hitomi take his purloined spouse to Panorama Island, leading her through long tunnels to emerge in dazzling, overlit panoramas depicting surreal tableau. Overwhelmed by the effect, she faints and Hitomi strangles her. Then, in practically a parody of the classic dinner table scene from mystery novels, a detective leaps out of nowhere with a cry of "Aha!" and denounces Hitomi's crimes. Hitomi launches himself into the sky in a firework and dies.

With its long scenes of wandering through tunnels to emerge in bizarre set-pieces, its body swapping twins, its death by human fireworks, and its ambush detective, it's easy to see *Panorama Island* in *Malformed Men*. Director Teruo Ishii even included digest-sized cameos

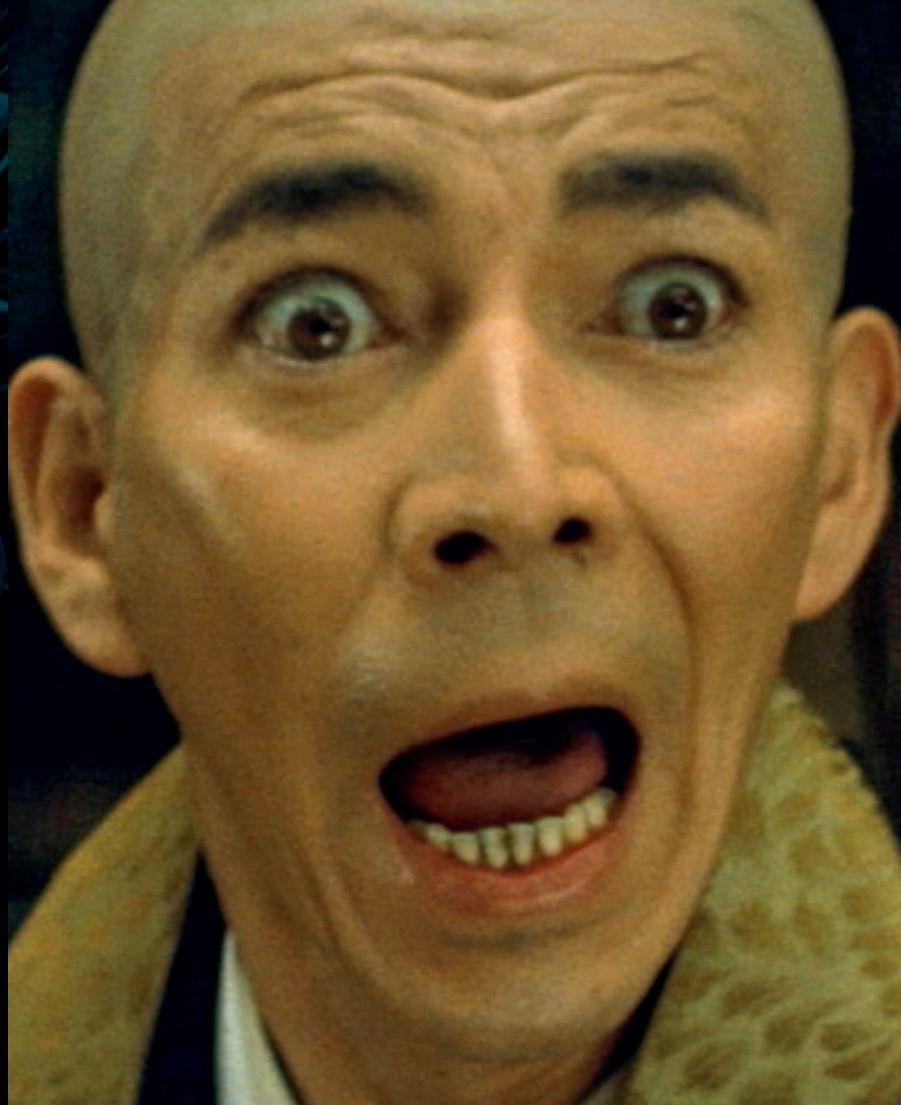
for two of Rampo's most famous stories, 'The Human Chair' and 'Watcher in the Attic' ('Yane-ura no Sanposha', 1925), and crammed in yet more Rampo by making the detective who pops out of the caves at the end Kogoro Akechi, Rampo's Sherlock Holmes character, an amateur sleuth, and smug asshole, who solves crimes the cops can't handle. But the most Rampo thing about *Malformed Men* is its surreal, dreamlike, unclassifiable tone.

There's an argument to be made that Rampo is part of the *ero-guro nansensu* (erotic, grotesque, nonsense) movement that crawled out of the Taisho era (1912 - 1926) and was, as Jim Reichert wrote in the *Journal of Japanese Studies*, "a pre-war, bourgeois cultural phenomenon that devoted itself to explorations of the deviant, the bizarre, and the ridiculous." There's no doubt that a lot of Rampo's more lurid work, like 'The Caterpillar' ('Imo Mushi', 1929), his story about a quadruple amputee war veteran that anticipated Dalton Trumbo's *Johnny Got His Gun* (1971) by 42 years, is a prime example of *ero-guro nansensu*. But what does that actually mean?

There's no single satisfying definition of *ero-guro nansensu*. Was it resistance to increasingly imperialist tendencies in Japanese culture? Sadomasochistic porn? A feminist wave surfed by "the modern woman"? A sign of cultural decadence? Was it political? Pornographic? A bit of both? Without manifestoes or slogans, it's an art movement without a centre, and that suits Rampo right down to the ground because there's a dark, empty core at the heart of his work which may be the reason it's lasted: he can't be explained, only experienced.

In an interview with director Shinya Tsukamoto, who adapted Rampo's story 'The Twins' into his movie *Gemini* (*Soseiji*, 1999), Tsukamoto refers to Rampo's work as containing "that old darkness" which is as good an attempt as any to boil Rampo down to his essence. Do his stories say something about Japan, about Rampo's possible homosexuality, about his life, about the evolution of Japanese detective fiction, about World War II, about anything? Maybe ultimately they tell us something about Rampo himself that can't be summed up in a single thesis statement. Obsessed with sex and death, logic and surrealism, detectives and maniacs, Rampo's work is a self-negating contradiction, a maze of mirrors, an inescapable haunted castle, and at its centre sits Rampo himself, lit by a single flickering candle, surrounded by his influences from out of Japan's past, writing a story that is a mystery, to which only he knows the solution.

***Grady Hendrix is an American author, journalist, and screenwriter known for his best-selling 2014 novel* Horrorstör. *He is contributor to* Playboy Magazine *and* The New York Post*, and was one of the founders of the* New York Asian Film Festival.**



ABOUT THE TRANSFER

Horrors of Malformed Men is presented in its original aspect ratio of 2.35:1 with mono sound.

The film was scanned and restored from the original film and audio elements by Toei Company Ltd. Scanning was undertaken at 2K on a Golden Eye scanner and colour grading was completed on a DaVinci Resolve. Picture restoration was performed using MTI Correct and PF Clean. Some instances of picture and audio damage remain in this presentation, in keeping with the condition of these materials.

PRODUCTION CREDITS

Disc and Booklet Produced by **Francesco Simeoni**
Associate Producer **James Blackford**
Executive Producer **Kevin Lambert**
Technical Producer **James White**
QC **Nora Mehenni**
Blu-ray Authoring **David Mackenzie, Fidelity in Motion**
Subtitling **The Engine House Media Services**
Artist **Dan Mumford**
Design **Obviously Creative**

SPECIAL THANKS

Alex Agran, Grady Hendrix, Minoru Kawasaki, Sigrid Larsen, Don May Jr. and Synapse Films, Tom Mes, Leroy Moore, Anthony Neild, Marc Schilling, Jasper Sharp, Naoki Shinozai, Toei Company, Shinya Tsukamoto, Marc Walkow, Daichi Yashiki

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