KIYOSHI MITARAI

Made by Aquitosias



Murder in the Crooked House by Soji Shimada

FSIQ **FSEQ** **FSSQ** **FSAQ** **Miscellaneous** **Manipulation** **Deception** **Psychology** **Intelligence** **Strategy** **Planning** **Thinking** **Reasoning** **Foresight** **Traps**

Before He Walks In

Two men are dead in a house that leans, at the northern tip of Hokkaido, both of them in rooms locked from the inside with no way in and no way out. Four officers have been living in the building for five days and have nothing. On the night of 30 December the chief investigator gives up and wires Tokyo. Tokyo sends an astrologer.

Here is everything Mitarai is carrying when the door opens. No badge, no rank, no power of arrest, no power to search, no forensic access. The murder weapon evaporated five days ago and there was never

a fingerprint or a length of rope to find. Every person in the house has already been questioned to exhaustion by men who question people for a living. Three of the four officers despise him before they have seen his face. His entire staff is one illustrator who, by his own later assessment, cannot act. Eiko puts him in room 10, where the first man was stabbed, a room with no bath and no toilet.

He is also five days late, which is worth saying plainly, because it is the one limit in the book he cannot argue with. Both victims were dead before the telegram was sent. Nothing he does can be counted as prevention. Whatever he is going to produce has to be produced out of a scene that has already been walked over, photographed, dusted and given up on.

Everything below happens in the ninety six hours after that.

The Board

The house is the thing to understand first, because every deduction in this document is really a deduction about the house.

Kozaburo Hamamoto, sixty eight, president of Hama Diesel, retired to the top of Hokkaido and built the Ice Floe Mansion. The floors slope five degrees. The furniture has had its legs cut down to stand level on them. Guests fall over and the owner finds it funny. Attached to the west end is a glass tower that leans harder than the house does, reached from the main building by a drawbridge staircase that only comes down when the owner lowers it. Around the foot of the tower is a fan shaped flower bed nobody can make sense of. Every room in the west stack has a ventilation hatch above the bed, and the hatches line up vertically. The stairs run in two separate flights, east and west, with a ten centimetre gap left at every corner between the last step and the wall. Room 3 is papered floor to ceiling in tengu masks and its window is kept open thirty centimetres in a Hokkaido winter for ventilation nobody needs. Icicles more than a metre long hang off the eaves.

Every one of those features is load bearing for a murder. None of them looks like anything except a rich eccentric with too much money.

Christmas Eve, 1983. Thirteen people in the building, family, staff and invited guests. On the first night Kazuya Ueda, a chauffeur, is found in room 10 with a knife in him, the door locked, one wrist roped to the bed frame, both arms raised over his head, hips twisted so the legs sit at right angles to the body, and a smear of blood by his left hip. Before that, at five past one, the face of the Golem doll appeared at the third floor window of Kumi Aikura and then vanished. There is no ledge under that window. The doll itself is found in the snow the next morning, taken apart at the joints and laid out in a line, its head buried far away to the west. Two stakes are standing in the snow near the wall and are gone by the time anyone thinks to ask about them. There are no footprints anywhere.

The second night, Eikichi Kikuoka dies in room 14 in the basement with a knife in his back, a white cord on the handle, the door bolted three ways and barricaded from inside with his own sofa and table. At the estimated moment of death the owner of the house is at the top of the tower drinking brandy with the chief investigator, with a record playing, and has arranged for his daughter, his grand nephew and a constable to be at the billiard table all night. Nobody hears anything except the chef, who reports a hissing like a snake sliding, mixed with a woman sobbing, and is not taken seriously.

After five days the police have two locked rooms, no weapon beyond the knives, no prints, no rope, no footprints, no motive for anyone, and a suspect list they have already worked through twice. Hamamoto was struck off it early, because on paper he and Kikuoka were mild business acquaintances who had met fewer than ten times in their lives. Ozaki has settled on the chauffeur as a burglar and Kikuoka as a jealousy killing and cannot make either stand up. Ushikoshi has stopped pretending and sent the telegram.

That is the board. A murder method built into the architecture of a building, run by a man who spent forty years on it, against a detective who arrives with nothing and gets four days.

Act Three, Scene One. The Drawing Room

The telegram arrives before he does and Ozaki reads it out. Whoever wrote it says this man is the only person in the country suited to a case this strange. Ushikoshi asks whether he is with the first division. Ozaki says he is a fortune teller. Okuma starts laughing and says a dog would have been more use, ideally a police dog, since a sniffer dog beats a bent old man shaking bamboo sticks. Then Ozaki produces the smear. The Umezawa case, he says, was solved by a detective in the first division, and this astrologer has been going around ever since taking the credit and behaving as though it were his. Ushikoshi says his friend Nakamura is not a frivolous man, sighs, and says he does not want to meet a person like that.

So the room he is about to walk into has already decided. Not neutral, not sceptical. Contemptuous, with a specific story attached explaining why he is a fraud.

He arrives near midnight in fog with Ishioka. Nobody at the door says a word about the journey. And then something happens that is easy to read past. Ishioka notes that the officers had him completely wrong, because when Mitarai smiles at people warmly he turns into a man who is unexpectedly easy to talk to. He can do it. It is available to him. Ushikoshi is halfway through the introductions and the room is thawing.

[Social Skills, Self Management]

Then he throws it away on purpose, inside thirty seconds, and never picks it up again for five days.

He interrupts his own introduction like a visiting dignitary. Here I am, he says, you have all been kept waiting, I am Mitarai. Then, without changing tone, this is human power, human power causes degradation, it makes the puppet stand up, which is obviously derived from the lever principle. This is called Jumping Jack Flash, the marionette that comes out once, bows and leaves the stage. A sad phantom. I have flown all this way to the north country to kneel and pay my respects before his coffin goes into the ground.

The officers stop liking him mid sentence and Ishioka watches the goodwill evaporate. He keeps going. The year end sales in Tokyo, women with shopping bags shoving each other, and how quiet it is out here by comparison. Then a piece of needling aimed at the police specifically, that on 4 January they will all have to go back to the front line, poor things, but at least they will have a story to tell.

[Acting Skills, Disguise, Misdirection, Self Regulation, Unpredictability]

That speech is not nonsense and it is worth reading twice, because at the very end of the book the killer picks it up and finishes it. In his confession Hamamoto says that for twenty years his life was something his own puppet could have performed for him, that only the beginning was creative and the rest was a snowman rolling, and then he asks, what was it you said the other day, Jumping Jack something. Mitarai supplies the name. Hamamoto tells him that the brief truth of a puppet is not the Golem, it is himself. Every person in that drawing room heard a lunatic being funny about dolls. One man in the room was being described to his face, and he is the one who eventually works it out and says so.

[Psychological Insight, Information Control, Conceptual Thinking, Individual Manipulation]

Three claims come out inside a minute of comedy. He will finish this in three days. Two bodies are enough and nobody else is going to become a cold one now that he is here. And he already knows who the killer is. All three are true and all three are delivered in a register that makes them impossible to

take seriously. The third one is the load bearing lie about a truth, because he does know, or is one conversation away from knowing, and saying it out loud is the safest way to bury it.

[Prediction, Bluffing, Strategic Deception, Information Control]

Sasaki asks who, on behalf of the room. Do I really have to say it, he answers. Everyone holds their breath. It is that Golem thing. The room laughs, the joke lands, and the people most relieved are the four police officers. He adds that he would like some hot tea and then to go upstairs and meet it, and that there is no hurry, since it is not going anywhere.

Look at what that answer does. It gives the household a culprit that cannot be interrogated, so nobody in the building starts privately suspecting anybody, which keeps the atmosphere loose. It gives him a stated reason to go up to room 3 and spend as long as he likes with the mask wall and the doll, on the first night, with the owner escorting him. And it plants the sentence in eleven memories, so that five days later, when he wants the whole household to troop down to a basement room at midnight to hear him explain the doll crimes, that request sounds like the same running joke rather than an instruction.

[Misdirection, Mass Deception, Setting Traps, Planning Preparation Process]

The cost of the clown is worth pricing honestly, because it is not free. He spends four days being talked over, dismissed, laughed at, thrown out of a crime scene, and discussed as a lunatic by men in the next room. He accepts a bedroom that is also a murder site. He lets his only friend in the building conclude that he has failed. None of that is comfortable and none of it is ever answered back.

[Composure, Mental Fortitude, Perseverance, Determination]

What he is buying is a specific man. Hamamoto waited forty years, built a house around a method, ran physical trials until he knew the exact ice thickness the thing needed, and secured his alibi by walking the chief investigator up a tower for brandy at the hour of the killing. That is a patient, careful, self controlling opponent who will tighten every contingency he has the moment he sees competence in the building. Against a man like that the correct opening is not a display of ability. It is to look like the one arrival that changes nothing, and to look like it for as long as the preparation takes.

[Cold Reading, Psychological Profiling, Planning Risk Calculation, Strategy Foresight]

And the by product is the part that actually wins the case. From this night on, everything he does in front of witnesses gets filed as eccentricity instead of work. Dressing a doll. Asking for a hat. Cutting a cord off a wrist. Removing a head. Sitting in a corner all evening. Not one of those actions is ever queried by anybody, including the man who built the house, because the person doing them has been established as somebody whose actions do not mean anything.

[Concealment, Strategy Orchestration, Planning Coverage]

Act Three, Scene Two. The Tengu Room

Tea finished, he asks where the Golem is. Ushikoshi asks whether he intends to arrest it. No, he says seriously, not tonight, there is no need for that. He wants to go up and confirm whether it really is the murderer he thinks it is. Okuma pretends to be impressed. Hamamoto stands up and offers to take him.

Read that answer literally and it is true in every part. He does want to go and check the thing he thinks is the murder instrument. He does not intend to do anything about it tonight. The false part is only the pronoun, and nobody in the room is listening to the pronoun.

[Sophistry, Bluffing, Information Control]

The door opens onto the clown figure and he calls it by name before Hamamoto can. Sleuth. Hamamoto lights up and asks whether he has seen the film. Three times, he says, and it has no real resonance, the critics were probably right that it is second rate, and he likes it anyway. Hamamoto tells him it is his favourite picture, that he saw the stage version in England, that the collection in this house started partly because of that film, and that he is delighted somebody knows it. Mitarai then tells him something he does not know, which is that the doll in the film does not exist as an antique. He has looked across the whole of Europe for one. It must have been built for the production.

That exchange is worth pricing. Ninety seconds after entering the room he has established shared taste with the owner, matched him on a subject the owner is possessive about, and then handed him a piece of information the owner did not have and would want, which is the specific move that converts a shared interest into a debt. The material was not researched for this case. He simply spent years of his own life looking for a doll from a film he half admires, and it happens to be the exact key that fits this man.

[Knowledge, Crystallized Intelligence, Hot Reading, Relationship Management]

Then he finds the Golem in its corner and starts shouting loudly enough that everybody in the drawing room comes upstairs to watch. This is bad. The thing is naked. Two hundred years of obsessive resentment are packed into it, and leaving it standing there in that state is an insult to it, and this is dangerous, and this is the root cause of every tragedy this house has produced. Something must be done. And it is a great shame, Mr Hamamoto, that a man of your standing failed to notice it.

The last sentence is the one doing the work. It is flattery and a reprimand in the same breath, delivered publicly, to a proud man in front of his own guests, by somebody who has already been classified as insane. Hamamoto answers, helplessly, by asking what he is supposed to do about it. He has not agreed to anything. He has been manoeuvred into asking for the instruction.

[Acting Skills, Sophistry, Direct Manipulation, Verbal Manipulation, Persuasion, Guilt Tripping]

Ishioka is sent down for a pair of jeans he had already written off, plus an old sweater out of Mitarai's own bag. Ishioka tries twice to talk him out of it and gets shouted at. The doll is dressed while its dresser hums. The police academy graduates stand there with sour faces and, being men trained to endure, say nothing at all.

Four separate jobs are being done by that outfit. A silhouette in jeans, sweater and a wide brimmed hat is installed in the visual memory of every person in the building on night one, so that a man sitting in that corner in those clothes on night five reads as furniture. The head becomes coverable, which means it can be removed for two days and returned without anybody inspecting it. The owner of the collection, a possessive man, is made to authorise the alteration personally rather than have it done behind him. And all of it is performed in the middle of a crowd, so there is no version of events in which anyone later remembers it as furtive.

[Short Term Planning, Planning Coverage, Planning Accuracy, Strategy Alignment, Setting Traps]

Sasaki asks him whether this is really the culprit. Absolutely, he says, this fellow is thoroughly vicious. Hamamoto, amused, asks whether the doll killed two people because it was left standing there naked. If it stops at two, Mitarai says, we are lucky. Then he folds his arms and says it is still not enough.

Not enough. It has a sweater and a coat, what else does it need. A hat, he says. It needs a hat. This fellow's head is the key. The head has to be hidden.

He says it out loud, in front of the killer, four officers and the whole household, and it is the literal truth of the plan. The head is the key and the head does have to be hidden. Every person present

converts it into a lunatic's aesthetic complaint about a doll, because that is the only category he has left them.

[Information Control, Bluffing, Unpredictability, Strategy Shielding]

He asks the room whether anybody has a hat, any hat, only a loan. Kajiwara the chef volunteers, cautiously, that he has a leather cowboy hat, the kind from westerns. Mitarai almost screams. A leather cowboy hat. Ideal for the prevention of crime. This is a gift from God. Fetch it immediately, please. The chef goes downstairs with his head on one side and comes back with it, and is thanked as the single greatest contributor to the case.

This is resource acquisition under total constraint. He has no equipment, no budget on site and no authority to requisition anything, so every physical object the operation needs has to be talked out of somebody who lives here. The jeans come off his friend, the sweater out of his own luggage, the hat off the staff. He also remembers Kajiwara's name for the rest of the book while being unable to hold anybody else's, which is a defect and a priority list at the same time.

[Resource Management, Strategy Efficiency, Improvisation, Persuasion, Memory]

The hat goes on with a dance step. Perfect, he says, now there is definitely no problem, and he stands there rubbing his hands. And Ishioka, who has spent the whole scene embarrassed, writes down the verification himself without knowing it. The Golem, he says, has become even more unpleasant to look at. It now looks like a real person sitting there.

That is the objective of the entire disguise, confirmed by an independent observer, on the first night, five days before it is needed.

[Planning Accuracy, Disguise, Visual Spatial Intelligence]

One thing is left. The cord is still wound round the doll's wrist. Can this come off now, he says, and cuts it.

That cord was tied there by Hamamoto and it is the deliberate false signature of the case, the thing that taught four officers that cord on a weapon means a killer was present. Mitarai removes it casually, in front of the man who tied it, with a throwaway line, and does not explain and never mentions it again. He has declined the bait and told its author that he has declined it, and the author cannot react without identifying himself as the author.

[Seeing Through People, Deduction, Information Control]

Downstairs afterwards he sits talking and laughing with Hamamoto and the guests, and gets on best of all with Sasaki. The two of them are still going late into the night on psychiatry. Ishioka watches this and records his interpretation, which is that the medical student is treating his friend as a patient, since that is what a psychiatrist and a case look like when they are getting along.

That is the recruitment. It happens on night one, in an open room, in front of everyone, and the only witness who cares enough to write it down files it as a joke about how strange his friend is. Note what the target has to be able to do. Lie still under a professional pathologist, know the blood volume of a heart wound well enough not to overdo it, spend days without food hiding in wardrobes, and keep his mouth shut in front of four police officers and a killer. Mitarai identifies all of that from one late conversation on the first night and is right.

[Psychological Profiling, Social Intuition, Individual Manipulation, Planning Formulation]

The room he is given is room 10, where Ueda was stabbed, which tells you exactly how welcome the household considers him. Eiko does at least have a folding bed carried in, since the bed in there is a

genuine single. There is no lavatory and no shower, so the two of them have to borrow the officers' room to wash. After midnight he climbs into the uncomfortable little bed without a word of complaint recorded anywhere.

[Composure, Mental Fortitude]

Act Three, Scene Three. Room Fifteen, the Police Room

They hold a meeting about him the same night. Ozaki opens by demanding to know which asylum the man escaped from and why officers should have to babysit a psychiatric case. Ushikoshi tries to calm it down, points out that Nakamura of the first division vouched for him personally, and suggests they wait and see what he can do. Ozaki says he has already seen what he can do, which is put trousers on a doll. Okuma agrees that if that catches killers, policing has become an easy job. Ozaki finishes with the summary: in his entire life he has never seen anyone from every possible angle, an idiot.

This is the instrument reading. Four trained investigators, one full evening of exposure, and the output is unanimous contempt with a psychiatric explanation attached. Nobody in the building has him filed as a threat, which includes the one person in the building who would act on it.

[Acting Skills, Mass Deception, Strategy Shielding]

Then Ozaki produces the sentence that matters. Right now he is clowning around with a doll, but if another murder happens, he is quite capable of pouring ketchup on the corpse. Ushikoshi goes quiet, because he believes it.

The senior officer in the building has just been told, out loud, the exact shape of the trick that is coming, and it is being offered as an insult. Five days later Mitarai explains his casting choice and the reason lands precisely on it. Sasaki is a medical student, so he does not need ketchup, and he knows what a heart wound actually bleeds. The one suspicion the police were primed to have is the one thing the operation is built to defeat, and the defence was chosen before the suspicion was voiced.

[Anticipation, Planning Risk Calculation, Planning Invincibility, Strategy Shielding]

The other thing this scene does is sort the officers for him. Ozaki is loud, contemptuous and certain, and later suggests slapping servants who will not talk. Okuma follows whoever is talking. Anan, asked directly for an opinion, says he has none. Ushikoshi is the only one who argues for waiting, the only one who trusts a colleague's judgment over his own irritation, and the only one who takes the ketchup remark seriously enough to sit with it.

Ushikoshi is the man who gets read into the plan a few days later, and he is the only one. Ozaki, Okuma and Anan are used without being told, which is why Ozaki is furious at the end and gets asked whether he would have helped if he had known. The sorting was done here, on the first night, on a few minutes of behaviour, by a man everyone in the room believes is not paying attention.

[Cold Reading, Psychological Profiling, Psychological Analysis, Social Cognition, Social Intuition, Seeing Through People]

Act Three, Scene Four. The Drawing Room, 31 December

The morning is clearer and somewhere in the house a hammer is going. The two women have asked for the ventilation hatches to be sealed, because the sight of them has become unbearable, and Togai and Sasaki are up there being gallant about it. Sasaki mentions that he might as well seal his own room while he is at it. The officers on the sofa agree that this is a relief and that the hammering makes it feel like New Year's Eve.

Nothing in that paragraph looks like anything. It is the operation being installed by the household, at the household's own request, with the police approving it as a safety measure. Room 13 is sealed above the bed by the man who is going to be found stabbed in it the following afternoon, using a hammer handed to him by a rival, in front of witnesses, while everybody treats it as chivalry. When the locked room is examined the next day, the seal is already certified by four officers who watched it go up and by the two women who asked for it.

There is no way to prove Mitarai put the idea in the women's heads. What can be said is that the request arrives on the morning after his first night in the house, that Sasaki volunteering to seal his own room is the single most convenient sentence anyone speaks in the entire novel, and that Sasaki had spent the previous night talking to him alone until very late.

[Indirect Manipulation, Social Manipulation, Planning Preparation Process, Setting Traps, Strategy Alignment]

Then a noisier man comes in shouting something incomprehensible. Mr Nandaimon. Nobody answers and the drawing room sits in an awkward silence. Mitarai tilts his head, puzzled. Constable Anan works out by sixth sense that this is probably aimed at him and stands up, because he understands Mitarai very well by now. I am Anan, he says. Mitarai apologises and asks for directions to the Wakkanai station.

Ishioka gives the defect its exact shape here. Give the man a date of birth once and he has it permanently. Give him a surname and it is gone, and when he gets one wrong the first time, correcting him has no effect at all, because he will simply go on using the wrong one. This is not modesty about names or a joke he is running. It is a hard split between two kinds of storage, and the human one is broken.

[Memory, WMI]

He takes the doll's head off and tells the house he is sending it to forensics for a second examination. The officers discuss it after he leaves. Okuma jokes that he may take their heads off next. Ozaki asks Hamamoto seriously why anybody would want the head, and Hamamoto, who does not like the head coming off his own doll, guesses fingerprints. Ushikoshi says fingerprints were done days ago and are useless in a case like this, because criminals watch television, and because in a household case a print on a door handle proves nothing.

So the head leaves the building with the owner of the collection watching it go, the police having supplied the innocent explanation themselves, and the last word on the subject being a senior officer explaining why the errand is pointless. It goes to Kyoto instead, to a doll maker who is a mutual friend of Mitarai and Ishioka, to have a mask of that face built. Sasaki carries it. The job takes two full days and Mitarai telephoned ahead before any of this started.

That is the longest lead item in the plan and it is started first, on day two of four, before the fake murder, before the note, before anything else. The finish date of the whole operation is fixed by this errand, and everything else is arranged backwards from it.

[Planning, Short Term Planning, Planning Preparation Process, Methods, Strategy Logistics, Strategy Length]

He comes back after midday looking pleased, having ridden in with the police pathologist, who mentioned he had business nearby. So I invited him in for tea, he tells Ishioka, in the tone of a man discussing his own house. A figure in a white coat is already coming through the front door. Then he remembers he should actually produce tea and shouts for it, addressing Anan as Mr Nandaimon and asking him to fetch Kajiwara, whose name he has again got right. Anan, offering no protest whatsoever, disappears towards the back of the house, having apparently decided to change his surname.

The clock strikes three with a forensic pathologist sitting in the drawing room holding a cup of tea. The scream comes ninety seconds later.

A body that is going to be certified needs a certifier, and a certifier who is summoned by telephone after a death arrives late, asks questions and takes the body somewhere with a mortuary. A certifier who is already in the building drinking tea when the scream happens is a guest doing a favour. The pathologist was hitchhiked, invited and seated three hours before he was needed, and every person in the drawing room watched it happen and read it as the lunatic being socially inappropriate again.

[Planning Coverage, Planning Invincibility, Strategy Logistics, Resource Management]

Ishioka records the room at three o'clock, and it is worth listing because Mitarai built it. Present: Ishioka, Mitarai, three detectives, Anan, Hamamoto, the Kanais, Yoshihiko, the Hayakawas, Kajiwara in and out of the kitchen doorway, and the pathologist. Absent: Eiko, Kumi, Togai, Sasaki. Four people missing, two women and two men.

Then a man shouts somewhere in the house, and Ishioka notes that it does not sound like a scream of pain, it sounds like somebody who has seen something impossible. Mitarai kicks his chair back and runs. The officers are still arguing about which direction the sound came from and are unwilling to follow him anyway, so only Ushikoshi and Anan go after him. Ishioka reasons on the way that it has to be Togai or Sasaki, since the other absentees are women, and cannot narrow it further. Mitarai does not hesitate for a moment. He goes straight to room 13 and hammers on the door shouting Sasaki's name.

The tell is available to any reader who wants it, and nobody in the room takes it, because a man who has been an idiot for two days is not a man whose certainty means anything.

[Acting Skills, Strategic Deception, Composure]

He wraps his handkerchief round the door handle before trying it, in front of the police, which is correct procedure and also puts no fingerprints of his on a door he may already have used. Locked. He asks Hamamoto for the spare key and Hamamoto sends Kohei running for Eiko. Ozaki arrives late, shoulders past and hammers on the door himself with no better result. Somebody suggests breaking it down and Ushikoshi says wait for the key. Eiko brings it, it turns, and the door still will not open, because the second lock is engaged, the oval catch below the handle that throws an iron tongue out sideways and can only be worked from inside. Hamamoto says, of course, the other lock. Ushikoshi orders the door broken and Ozaki and Anan put their shoulders through it.

Every one of those steps is performed by somebody else. Mitarai asks for the key and then stands back. The police break the door. The owner of the house confirms the second lock. The locked room is authenticated by the people it is meant to convince, using their own hands, and the man who built it contributes nothing except the initial request.

[Strategy Orchestration, Strategy Shielding, Logical Manipulation, Mass Deception]

Sasaki is on his back in the middle of the room. The medical textbook on the desk is still open. There is no sign of a struggle. A mountain knife identical to the previous two is in his sweater near the heart with the usual white cord hanging from the handle. And his chest is moving.

He is not dead. That is the detail everybody in the house misses and the reason the whole thing survives contact with a professional. A corpse gets examined. A dying man gets stabilised and carried out fast, and nobody argues.

Ozaki charges in and starts shaking him by the wrist, shouting at him to say what he saw. Mitarai stops him. Then he calls for the stretcher from the car outside, and Ozaki turns on him and tells him that

nobody has any reason to take orders from a lunatic like him, that he should get out of the way and stop interfering, and that professionals will handle this. Mitarai answers instantly and pleasantly. Quite right, that is exactly what should be done. Come on, let us get out of the way. Doctor Nagata, if you would.

That is the highest pressure moment in the operation and the correct move is to lose the argument as fast as possible. Pushing back would keep four officers standing in the room watching a man who is pretending. Instead the room is cleared of him by the one officer most eager to clear it, and the only person left beside the body is the doctor. Nagata says the situation is dangerous, that the patient cannot speak and must not be spoken to, which is the sentence the entire fake murder needs, and it comes out of a genuine pathologist who has not been told anything.

[Composure, Stress Tolerance, Impulse Control, Strategy Shielding, Planning Contingency]

The stretcher arrives and Mitarai and Nagata lift Sasaki onto it together. Ishioka notes that there is almost no blood at all, and does not follow the thought anywhere. Anan and the doctor carry him out.

[Planning Accuracy, Knowledge]

Then something happens that nobody planned. Eiko throws herself at the stretcher in tears, shouting at Sasaki not to die, in front of the entire household, and Togai appears from somewhere and watches her do it. A woman who has spent the whole book being imperious has just published her own feelings to everybody present, over a man who is not injured, because of a scene staged by a guest.

This is on the bill. It is also the first hard evidence in the book of the lever the endgame will use, since it demonstrates in public that this household runs on people caring more about each other than they admit. Nothing indicates Mitarai engineered it. What he does with it is not use it at all, and at the end he refuses to be the one who explains any of it to her.

[Emotional Realization, Empathy, Self Awareness]

Ozaki carefully takes down the small piece of paper nailed to the wall, which is obviously left by the culprit and is not shown to anyone for some time. It promises revenge on the Hamamoto family. It is a forgery in Mitarai's handwriting, and later, when Ushikoshi says he is glad he never ordered handwriting analysis, Mitarai tells him his friend would like to write the next one.

The note is the only part of the operation that survives the afternoon and keeps working. Within hours it has moved Hamamoto out of the tower and down into room 12 under guard, which is the first time in the book the killer's sleeping arrangements are set by something the detective wrote.

[Fabrication, Threats, Fear Inducement, Event Manipulation, Setting Traps]

The interrogations that follow are the yield. Togai has no alibi, admits he was walking outside alone, and is told to his face that he is not short of a motive. Kumi and Eiko both claim to have been in their rooms. And Kajiwara, who has been sitting on something for a week because he thought it was meaningless, finally says that on the night Kikuoka died he was leaning against the pillar by the kitchen door and heard, inside the noise of the blizzard, a hissing like a snake crawling. Around eleven o'clock. The exact moment of the murder.

That is the sound of the icicle coming down the staircase, and it enters the record because a fake murder shook the household hard enough to make a chef mention something he had already dismissed twice. The operation was designed to force a confession. It generated corroborating physical evidence as a side effect.

[Event Manipulation, Strategy Effectiveness, Information Gathering]

The casting logic is given later in his own words and it is worth putting here, because every part of it was decided before this scene. Sasaki is in his sixth year of medicine, so he does not need ketchup and he knows exactly how much a heart wound bleeds. Ishioka is rejected on the grounds that he has no acting ability at all, and that if he lay on a floor with a knife in his chest somebody would pull it out and tell him to get up. And the body had to be a guest who was already living in the house, because a stranger dying puts no pressure on Hamamoto at all.

Three criteria: medical competence, performance under professional examination, and pressure value to one specific man. Ishioka, the obvious choice by loyalty and availability, fails two of them and is not used.

[Planning Risk Calculation, Psychological Profiling, Critical Thinking, Decision Making]

Act Three, Scene Five. The Library, 1 January

New Year's Day, 1984, and the two of them have been sitting in the library since morning. Ishioka's reading is that Sasaki's murder cost his friend his professional face and he has been in a slump ever since. He does not answer when spoken to. He makes triangles and squares with the fingers of both hands and mutters. Ishioka wishes him a happy new year, gets an absent noise, has to repeat it, and is finally asked, with irritation, congratulations on what.

Ishioka needles him about the boasting, and asks whether he wants to go and watch the officers tearing the walls and ceilings out of rooms 13 and 14. Mitarai laughs at that, once, through the nose.

[Acting Skills, Cognitive Discipline, Composure]

Two things escape while he is playing exhausted, and both of them are checkable.

First, he bets that this evening the officers will be collapsed in the drawing room chairs with blistered hands, and specifies further that the young one, Ozaki, being the age where a man works hardest, will be noticeably better behaved tonight. That evening Ozaki cannot lift his right arm, sits rubbing it, and stays silent because he is afraid that if he opens his mouth he will complain about it.

Second, asked whether rooms 13 and 14 might have some mechanism in them, he answers that it is out of the question that they do. He is right, and he is the only person in the building who is certain of it, and the reason he is certain is that he already knows the mechanism is the staircase.

[Prediction, Psychological Profiling, Deduction]

Ishioka pushes and asks whether he has understood everything. His friend reacts as though hot water had been poured down his back, stares at the ceiling and makes another low noise. No, he says hoarsely, he is stuck. Ishioka asks whether he even knows what he ought to be thinking about, and Mitarai looks at him with what reads as surprise and says that this is exactly the problem.

Ishioka becomes frightened for him. He offers to help. He is told that talking is useless and the thing needs solving instead, and then Mitarai says something that goes straight past him. A staircase has an up side and a down side. Which side will people stand on. That is the problem. There may be no solution at all, and he is being forced to gamble.

That is not a man who has lost the thread. That is a man who already knows what the killer will do and does not know where he can safely stand while it happens, which is the exact question he spends the final act answering by elimination. He says it out loud, to his own biographer, in the middle of a performance of failure, and it is not decoded by anybody, including the reader.

[Metacognition, Planning Risk Calculation, Probabilistic Reasoning, Strategy Foresight]

Ishioka gives up and asks a plain question instead. Why was Ueda's body arranged in that dancing posture. Oh, that, says Mitarai. Anybody who spends a day in this room will understand it. This room. Yes, he says, the answer is in here. Ishioka looks around and sees nothing but bookshelves and accuses him of fobbing him off.

The library holds the semaphore reference. He has already located the source of the dying message and identified which shelf in the house explains a corpse, and he gives the answer away for free, correctly, in a tone that guarantees it will be taken as evasion.

[Knowledge, Pattern Recognition, Connecting The Dots, Information Gathering]

Then the performance goes further than a friendship should reasonably stand. Ishioka proposes that Sasaki killed himself. Mitarai takes what looks like a real blow, freezes, and says slowly that suicide, yes, that is a thought, that had not occurred to him, so that is another approach. His shoulders drop. Ishioka concludes that if his friend has missed something that simple the outlook is bad. Mitarai then remarks that treating it as suicide would confuse them even further, and Ishioka loses his temper and accuses him of caring about the great detective pose instead of admitting he does not understand, and tells him that if you do not know something you should say so, and that a moment's vanity only produces greater humiliation later. Mitarai says he is tired and would like a rest.

He is being told off for dishonesty and incompetence, by his closest friend, over an operation that is at that moment running exactly to schedule, and he takes it and says nothing. The cost of the disguise is highest here, and it is paid in the one relationship in the book he actually values.

[Acting Skills, Mental Fortitude, Stress Tolerance, Impulse Control, Determination]

Then the library door bangs open and Eiko and Kumi come in without noticing the two men in the corner. What follows is four pages of a fight that starts with Kumi working on Sasaki, Togai and Kajiwara, moves through Eiko threatening to explain publicly what a company president's secretary does for a living, and arrives at Kumi describing Eiko throwing herself on the stretcher like a servant girl wailing after her master. Eiko accuses Kumi of murder. Kumi tells her to put a rope round his neck if she thinks she owns him. Eiko orders her out of the house. Kumi says she would love to leave. Mitarai, sensing personal danger, gets halfway out of his chair to run.

The door slams, Kumi is gone, Eiko stands there in a daze, and eventually looks round the room and finds two frightened spectators sitting in it like paupers in the royal box. The blood leaves her face. Even from across the room her lips can be seen shaking. She asks whether they have been there the whole time.

Hello, says Mitarai, bravely.

That is his opening move with a woman who has just discovered that a stranger heard her worst four minutes. What he offers her from there, once Ishioka has almost repaired the situation, is that he wanted to see which side would win, and that until a few minutes ago he had believed a library was a place for reading books. His own later account of the error is that he should have cheered for one of them.

Note what this is not. It is not cruelty, and it is not the clown act, because there is no tactical use in humiliating Eiko and he does not do this kind of damage to Hamamoto or to Kajiwara or to the officers he needs. It is a straightforward hole where social instinct should be, showing through in the one moment of the day when nothing was being staged.

[Social Awareness, Social Intuition, Empathy]

Act Three, Scene Six. The Drawing Room, the Night of the First

At dinner the officers are ten times more exhausted than even Mitarai predicted. Okuma manages his hundred and first repetition of what on earth is going on and nobody answers. Ushikoshi, almost whispering, lists what they do not know: why a metre of white cord is tied to a mountain knife, why two stakes were standing in the snow on the first night, and how three locked rooms are possible when the last two are perfect. He says that they stripped the walls, ceilings and floors and found nothing, that the heating pipes were untouched, and that at this point he is prepared to believe a demon did it. He says that if anybody could explain this insanity in ordinary terms, he would get down and beg them to. Ozaki, rubbing his right arm, says no such person exists.

The man who could is sitting at the same table having dinner, and stays quiet. Ishioka notes with relief that Mitarai does not make any of his stupid jokes at the officers tonight and behaves himself, and attributes it to the telling off he got in the library, or to lost confidence.

[Impulse Control, Information Control]

Then he spends nearly an hour on Wagner with Hamamoto, who has aged ten years in a week and gone quiet, but comes back to life the moment music or art is mentioned. The argument Mitarai makes is that Wagner was the first revolutionary to break, in music, the harmony that Europe had been building and sustaining since the middle ages. That he went about the crown more thoroughly than Lola Montez ever did with Ludwig the First, working through the innocence of Ludwig the Second, probably because he had perceived what lay behind a theatrical absolute monarchy. That before those two arrived, European cities had reached a real balance between the stone, glass and timber they were made of. That the design concept of the ideal city treated the city as an enormous stage set, a theatre, in which everything people did counted as performance. And that glass, the newest technology of the period, happened to be mature at exactly the size that fixed the most important element of that stage set, the facade, because nothing larger could be made, which is why no glass tower like this one was possible then.

Hamamoto keeps up with all of it, pushes back about Wagner borrowing money from a king who was already funding him, and asks what part the young and innocent Ludwig actually played. Mitarai answers that ordinary Bavarians had an interest in painting him as a madman, and that his father built an unnecessary triumphal arch in Munich in imitation of Paris.

[VCI, Knowledge, Crystallized Intelligence, Analogical Reasoning]

Then, without a break, he turns it. But the person I am most interested in at the moment is you, Mr Hamamoto. You do not look like Ludwig the Second and this house is not Neuschwanstein. A man as intellectual as you would not build a house like this at the far north for no reason at all.

Hamamoto deflects, says it is an overestimate, that Tokyo has worse guest houses. Mitarai asks whether this house is a guest house. Yes, says Hamamoto. I do not see it, says Mitarai. Any more than I can see you as a mere frivolous man, says Hamamoto. They sit in silence for a while.

Everything about that exchange is a controlled disclosure. An hour of genuine art history buys the standing to say it, the compliment carries the accusation, and the accusation is phrased so that it cannot be repeated to anyone as an accusation. He has told the killer that he can see the building has a purpose, and the killer has told him back that he does not believe the clown act either. Both men are now aware, and neither can act on it. At the very end of the book, confessing, Hamamoto says the house had a definite purpose, just as this gentleman said the other night.

[Direct Manipulation, Individual Manipulation, Hot Reading, Seeing Through People, Information Control]

Hamamoto says he is an extraordinary man and that he cannot guess what he is thinking. Mitarai says he is probably a little harder to understand than the police officers over there. Asked whether the

police have found anything, he says their heads are in the same condition as when they arrived, and that they are like the ornamentation on the front of a Gothic building, in that the house will not fall down without them.

Then Hamamoto asks him directly whether he knows the truth and who the killer is. If we are only talking about the culprit, he says, one glance is enough. Who. I believe I said. That doll. Hamamoto says he does not believe he is serious. Even you say that, says Mitarai. In any case this is a crime that took a great deal of work, our game of chess appears to have started some time ago, and it would be rude to an artist of this quality to call check in some ordinary way.

That is a promise, made to the killer, four days before it is kept, and it is kept exactly. He does not call check in an ordinary way. He puts on the man's own doll's face and speaks from its chair.

[Bluffing, Strategy Vision, Unpredictability, Cunning]

Intermission. 1 to 3 January

From the evening of the first, because of the threatening note, Hamamoto stops sleeping alone in the dangerous tower room and moves down to room 12, guarded by Okuma and Anan. Ishioka records that there was some argument about the decision and declines to write it up.

The killer's own sleeping arrangements are now set by a forgery, ratified by the police, at the request of the household, and it removes him from the tower for the rest of the book. Whatever Hamamoto might have done from up there, he is not up there any more.

[Fabrication, Event Manipulation, Strategy Orchestration]

The second passes with nothing criminal happening. The officers spend the day putting back what they destroyed the day before, and Ishioka notes drily that they do not really put it back. Mitarai has no dealings with them at all. Ushikoshi, having decided the astrologer is useless, comes to Ishioka for ideas instead, and Ishioka produces four honest questions: the raised arms and twisted hips, the knife in the right side of Kikuoka's back rather than the left, why the two killings were consecutive during the period of heaviest police presence rather than spaced out, and whether the east and west staircase layout really forces anyone going from rooms 1 and 2 to rooms 13 and 14 to pass through the drawing room.

Those four questions are good. The third and fourth are load bearing and the answers are the storm and the drawbridge. The narrator gets that far on his own and the chief investigator is grateful for it, which is the measure of what an intelligent, honest, unhurried approach produces on this case. Neither of them can convert any of it, and Mitarai has had all four answers since roughly the second day.

[Deduction, Fluid Intelligence, Fast Thinking]

On the third the builders come back and the walls and ceilings are restored, and Mitarai and Ishioka are finally allowed to move out of room 10 and into room 13, the room where Sasaki was supposedly stabbed two days earlier. Around midday an officer returns the Golem's head, sampling complete. Mitarai thanks him, carries it up to room 3, puts it back on the body and replaces the leather hat. Okuma and Ushikoshi listen carefully to the forensic report on the recovered items, which is that the knife, the cord and the thread are all things anyone can buy in any hardware shop, and it tells them nothing.

The head has now completed a round trip to Kyoto and back, has had a mask built from it, and has been reinstalled by the detective in front of the police, who supervised its return themselves and are at that moment being briefed on how useless the analysis was.

[Strategy Logistics, Misdirection, Planning Accuracy]

The weather turns that afternoon. By two o'clock the house is as dark as evening and a blizzard is obviously coming. This matters more than anyone in the building except two men understands, because the killing method needs loud weather outside, and so does the endgame.

By dusk the household is coming apart. Kumi insists she can hear faint human breathing through her ceiling. Hatsue Kanai sees a dead man standing in the falling snow and goes half hysterical. Ishioka writes both off as the guests' vague terror reaching its limit.

[Fear Inducement, Mass Manipulation, Event Manipulation]

At dinner on the third nobody can eat. The women leave their cutlery in front of them and listen to the wind. Eiko puts her left hand on Togai's right and says she is frightened. Ishioka states the position precisely: every living person in the house is seated at that table, including the four officers. And white smoke begins drifting down the drawing room stairs.

Mitarai is the first to notice, and announces the fire in the tone of a man pointing out a policeman at a police box. The officers throw down their forks and go up the stairs. Hamamoto, white, follows because he is afraid for room 3.

The fire is on Eiko's bed in room 2, lit with lamp oil, and is put out while still small. Nobody can work out who did it or why. Ishioka repeats for emphasis that every single person was at the table. Room 2 was unlocked and the landing window was unlocked, so it does not even qualify as an impossible crime, but the household has now been given something it cannot explain away: there is at least one more person in this building.

Look at what that fire is actually for, because it is the least obviously purposeful thing in the operation and does the most jobs. It destroys the bed in room 2, which is the reason Eiko cannot be carried back to her own room the following night. It produces a twelfth person, unaccounted for, in front of every witness at once, with an alibi for everybody, which means the household will believe in an intruder without any prompting. It draws Hamamoto up the stairs in fear for the tengu room, confirming to Mitarai where his attention sits. And it is timed for the evening before the trap, so the fear is fresh.

[Planning Intricacies, Planning Coverage, Strategy Complexity, Tactical Complexity, Setting Traps]

Final Act, Scene One. The Landing of the West Staircase

Yoshihiko comes down from room 8 on the third floor. Ushikoshi has gone to room 13 to talk to Mitarai about something. Everyone else is in the drawing room, because the wind is up exactly as it was on the night Kikuoka died and nobody wants to go to bed early. Coming down past the tengu room the wall ahead rises like a cliff, two storeys of it, rooms 12 and 10 stacked on top of each other, and because room 12 has a door but no window the surface is unbroken except for two twenty centimetre ventilation hatches in a vertical line. The stair light is dim.

Near the bottom he looks up for no reason he can afterwards explain, at the hatch of room 10, the room where Ueda was killed, and catches the small square of light inside it in the act of going out. The afterimage stays on his retina. He stands there facing a huge dark wall listening to the wind and feeling like a man alone in open country, then runs for the drawing room.

He counts the room himself, one by one, and Ishioka records the count. Hamamoto, Eiko, the Kanais, Togai, Kumi, the Hayakawas, Kajiwara, Okuma, Ozaki, Anan. Everybody except Mitarai and Ushikoshi. He takes them all back to the corridor and points at the wall.

Ozaki turns to Ushikoshi and asks straight out whether either of them has been in room 10. Ushikoshi says room 10, has something else happened, we have been in room 13 the whole time. Yoshihiko and Hamamoto can both see from his face and his voice that he is not lying, because he is not lying.

That is the structural defence of the entire operation. The man doing the walking is officially dead, so the two men actually running it are always together, always accounted for, and never have to say a false word to anybody. Anyone who tries to solve the haunting by tracking absences arrives at the same two names and finds them clean every time. Ushikoshi, who is the one officer read into the plan, is used here precisely because a true answer from a senior policeman closes the question in a way that no invented alibi could.

[Planning Invincibility, Strategy Shielding, Logical Manipulation, Anticipation]

Okuma suggests there may be an animal in the house, an orangutan perhaps, and Hamamoto asks whether this is the Rue Morgue. Everyone looks doubtful. Then Kajiwara, who never speaks, says that some ham seems to have gone missing from the refrigerator. And some bread. Asked whether this has happened before he says he does not think so, then that he is not really sure, and apologises.

Ozaki says they should go and search room 10. Mitarai, sounding bored, says it will be a waste of effort and they will not find anything. The officers go out into the snow anyway. The hatch lights up while the rest of them wait, and Yoshihiko shouts that this is the light. Ozaki reports back that the padlock on the door is properly fastened, that snow has settled on top of it, that the room is freezing, and that there is no sign anybody has been in there.

So Mitarai's prediction is confirmed in front of witnesses, the search is conducted by the police at their own insistence, and the negative result is entered into the record by the officer most hostile to him. He did not have to argue anyone into anything. The house is now certain there is a twelfth person in it, and equally certain that person cannot be found.

[Prediction, Mass Deception, Strategy Control]

An hour later Hatsue Kanai goes up the west stairs alone to fetch something, glances over the rail at the basement corridor, and sees a pale white shape gather into a human figure. It slides the length of the corridor without a sound, towards room 14, where Kikuoka was killed. The door of room 14 opens by itself in answer. And as the figure is about to disappear inside, it turns its head, slowly, and looks at her. It is the Golem's face with its faint smile. She screams until she blacks out.

When they take her up to room 3, the Golem is sitting against the window frame in front of the mask wall exactly where it always sits. Ozaki asks whether this is the face. She will not look directly at it and does not need to, and says there is absolutely no mistake. Then Ushikoshi asks the question that decides it. Was it wearing the hat, and these clothes, when you saw it. She says she cannot remember details like that, that it was definitely the face, that smile that makes your skin crawl, and then, unwillingly, that now he mentions it she does not think it had a hat on. Asked to confirm, she says no, it is no good, she cannot remember small things like that. Her husband says this is what he means about her not being right in the head.

The only witness who saw the real thing gives the single most accurate observation in the book, that there was no hat, and destroys her own credibility doing it, because a woman who cannot say whether a hat was present is a woman who imagined the whole episode. The costume was built five days earlier so that the one detail a terrified witness would get right is the one detail that makes her sound unreliable.

[Planning Intricacies, Planning Invincibility, Anticipation, Psychological Profiling]

The officers stand there with nothing to say, because she has a point and none of them can answer it. Then Mitarai speaks, sounding smug, and says that this is what he told them all along. The culprit is that fellow. It pretends to be a doll but do not be fooled, it can move about freely, it can take its own joints off and get through small holes, and it kills without changing expression. Vicious. Now, you are going to go and check room 14 next, are you not. Fine, he will explain its various crimes when they get

there. And officer, better not touch it, if you value your life. And Mr Kajiwara, you mentioned tea just now, so would you and Mr Hayakawa bring it down to room 14. Room 14 will do nicely for an explanation.

Every element of the trap is set inside that one speech. The entire household is moved to the room where the bed is, at midnight, voluntarily, because a man they think is a fool has offered to be entertaining. The tea is ordered from the staff so that cups will be circulating. The destination is presented as the officers' own idea, which Ozaki did in fact propose. And it is all delivered in the voice they have been trained for five days to ignore.

[Setting Traps, Strategy Orchestration, Mass Manipulation, Indirect Manipulation, Tactics]

Final Act, Scene Two. Room Fourteen

The clock in room 14 says midnight. Kajiwara and the Hayakawas bring in a tray of teacups and the crowd, with almost nowhere to stand, starts moving towards it. Mitarai picks up two cups, one in each hand, cheerfully, hands one to Ishioka and one to Eiko standing beside him, then hurries the saucers over as well and collects his own. Ishioka jokes that it is unusual to see him being so attentive. Now you have nothing to complain about, he answers.

[Non Verbal Deception, Composure]

Togai, standing rigid with his cup, tells him to hurry up and explain this ridiculous business, if he can. The whole room turns to Mitarai together like soldiers on a parade order. Explain, he says, looking blank. There is nothing to explain. As he has already said, this is a series of murders committed by the Golem while under the control of a vengeful dead spirit.

Then he starts on an Ainu legend. According to his research, before the house was built this was all open country, and one evening long ago a young Ainu man threw himself off the cliff in front of the house. Ishioka, listening, can tell it is being invented on the spot and assumes his friend is stalling for time. The young man had a lover called Pirika, which means beautiful, and she followed him over. Ever since then, in spring, blood red irises open all over this area. The villagers had meant to separate them, the two spirits wandered the district afterwards, and once this house was built they finally had somewhere to settle.

Ishioka works out where it came from. The restaurant they ate at on their first night was called Pirika, there was a photograph of irises on its wall with a verse printed under it, and he has never in his life heard of a red iris. So the source material was collected in a country restaurant on the way in, on day one, before Mitarai had seen the house, and it is sitting there available five days later when a plausible way to burn four minutes in front of the whole household is suddenly required.

[Improvisation, Fabrication, Fast Thinking, Creativity, Memory]

A cry comes from somewhere. Eiko has her hand to her forehead and is folding over. This cup, she says, and while Ishioka is still taking it from her she goes down on the floor. Togai and Hamamoto run to her. Ushikoshi says to lift her onto that bed.

It is a sleeping drug, says Mitarai, leaning over her. Let her sleep like this and she will wake up perfectly well in the morning. Hamamoto asks whether he is certain it is a sleeping drug. Absolutely certain, he says, look, she is snoring peacefully.

Then Hamamoto asks who did it, and turns on the servants, who back away with their hands up saying it is nothing to do with them. The culprit is in this room, he says, in a voice that is not an old man's voice, and Ishioka can see what he must have been like when he was young. This place is too dangerous. Take Eiko back to her own room. It is not a request.

And now the doors close, one after another, and not one of them is closed by Mitarai.

[Emotional Manipulation, Individual Manipulation, Setting Traps, Emotional Understanding]

Ozaki says Eiko's bed has been burnt. Hamamoto looks like a man who has taken an electric shock, because he is the only person present who understands what that means. Ushikoshi says that since it is a sleeping drug she is better left lying where she is. Hamamoto asks for the hatch to be plugged. Somebody points out that doing it from inside means standing on the bed she is lying on. He says do it from outside, then. Mitarai says that hammering next to the ear of a woman who has been drugged may give her a violent headache in the morning, which is an objection dressed as concern for the daughter and cannot be argued with by a father in front of witnesses.

Hamamoto says the room is dangerous anyway. Mitarai asks why, given rooms 10 and 13, since surely anywhere is the same. Ishioka spells out what everyone in the room is thinking without needing it said: room 13 had its hatch completely sealed and it made no difference, so what would sealing this one achieve. The killer's own successful method has become the argument against the one precaution that would save his daughter.

[Logical Manipulation, Sophistry, Emotional Facilitation, Cunning]

Hamamoto stands with his fist clenched and his head down. Then Ushikoshi offers the compromise that finishes it. If you are that worried, someone will sit outside all night. Not sleeping in the room, obviously. The door gets locked and a chair goes in the corridor. Anan, you take it, and if you cannot manage, say so and swap with Ozaki. There is no spare key for this room, so hold the key yourself. Anan, we do not know who the culprit is. It could be one of us. So nobody at all gets in, no matter who, including me and Okuma. The door opens in the morning when everyone is up and assembled. Mr Hamamoto, we will need your cooperation with that.

Then he says he is getting sleepy after the fortune teller's interesting story and suggests everybody go to bed.

The last exit is sealed by the senior police officer, on his own initiative, in front of the whole household, in a form that specifically forbids anyone including the police from entering. And the fifth exit, the one that was never available, is the one Mitarai identified days earlier: Hamamoto cannot explain to the police how he knows his daughter is about to be killed without explaining how he killed Kikuoka.

Hamamoto says quietly that even so, several people have been murdered in locked rooms, and he is not easy about it. That is a man who has just been shown five closed doors and can count.

[Strategy, Strategy Fortitude, Planning Invincibility, Setting Traps, Indirect Manipulation, Anticipation]

Final Act, Scene Three. The Tengu Room

The house is asleep and only the wind is loud. A key turns in the door of room 3, very slowly. The door opens softly and the light from the corridor picks out the faces of the dolls, including the faint smile of the Golem. Somebody comes in on tiptoe, walking as though on thin ice, and when he reaches the window the light from outside catches his profile. It is Hamamoto, which it has to be, since only he holds a key to this room.

He does not so much as glance at the figure sitting against the window frame with its legs out. He goes to the mask wall and starts taking masks down. Some go on the floor, about ten stay in his arms, and a round patch of bare white plaster appears in the middle of the south wall where the masks had covered it. He bends into the corner for a brick, straightens up with it in his right hand, and turns round.

The Golem's toes have already moved. The wooden joints made a noise, the legs drew slowly in, the thing stood up with the same faint smile still on its face, took one stiff marionette step towards him and raised a hand into a circle to close on his throat.

Hamamoto convulses. The fear freezes on his face and the wind goes on outside and it takes visible effort not to cry out. The tengu masks drop round his feet one after another and finally the brick goes down with a heavy sound. Then the fluorescent light comes on like lightning and the room is as bright as noon. He turns to the doorway by reflex and every officer is standing in it.

Control the scene. The words come from the Golem.

[Strategy Execution, Setting Traps, Fear Inducement, Disguise, Composure]

Why were you taking the tengu masks off the wall, Mr Hamamoto. There can only be one reason, which is that you are the only man alive who knows that these tengu masks killed Eikichi Kikuoka.

It is phrased as a question and then answered before he can respond, which leaves him nothing to deny and no version of events to build. Then the doll takes off the hat, pulls the smiling face down with its hand, and Mitarai is underneath it. This is a mask, Mr Hamamoto. Good likeness, is it not. Forgive me the small trick. I learned it from you.

Hamamoto says he understands now why the doll was dressed. He calls it splendid, says he must admit he has been completely defeated, says he has always meant to live cleanly, and states in one sentence that he killed Ueda and Kikuoka. No defence, no bargaining, no request for a lawyer, and no attempt to run for the thirty seconds where running was still available.

That is the promise from the Wagner conversation being kept in full. Check was not called in an ordinary way. It was called by the man's own doll, wearing a face built in Kyoto from a head the police carried out of the building themselves, from the one chair in the room with a clean view of the mask wall, five nights after he told the killer to his face that this game had been going for a while.

[Strategy Effectiveness, Strategy Vision, Tactical Complexity, Individual Manipulation, Cunning]

Final Act, Scene Four. The Drawing Room

Ten minutes to three in the morning. Hamamoto sits down with his pipe, says that a night like this suits an abnormal confession, because the one person he does not want to hear it has taken a sleeping drug and is asleep. Everybody in the house except Anan and Eiko drifts in, unable to sleep with the wind going.

Mitarai offers immediately to move somewhere else with fewer people present. Hamamoto declines, says he has no right to make that kind of demand, and that these people have been terrified for a week and have earned the explanation. Then he asks for one thing and hesitates over it. My daughter, he says. Mitarai answers plainly that if he wants Eiko woken up, unfortunately it cannot be done, because the drug is strong.

Two things are happening in those few lines. The offer of privacy is real and it is made before the man has admitted anything, at a moment when Mitarai holds every card and could stage the confession in front of the largest possible audience. And the refusal about Eiko is delivered without softening, because there is nothing to soften, and because a lie about it now would be found out in six hours.

[Emotional Understanding, Empathy, Self Regard]

Hamamoto works out on his own that Mitarai drugged Eiko and set fire to her bed, and says he is thoroughly confused about how, since Mitarai was with them the whole time. That is answered with, we will come to it in order, and then: what I am about to say, please correct me wherever I am wrong.

That sentence turns the confession into a joint reconstruction. The killer is no longer being interrogated, he is being invited to check somebody's work, which is a thing a proud technical man will do compulsively. Every correction he makes is a further admission and it does not feel like one to him. Hamamoto answers that he doubts corrections will be necessary.

[Direct Manipulation, Persuasion, Psychological Profiling, Cunning]

He starts, hurrying, with the murder he says gave him the most trouble, which is Ueda. The motive would not come. Then, he says, thinking about the Kikuoka murder made it obvious at once. The original plan was to kill only Kikuoka. That is what the time and the money and this house with its mechanism were all for. But Ueda also intended to kill Kikuoka, and if Ueda got there first, everything Hamamoto had spent forty years on was wasted. So Ueda had to go first. Is that right.

Hamamoto confirms it and fills in what Mitarai could not have known: that Kohei had hired Ueda to avenge his daughter, that Hamamoto offered to pay the money back himself to cancel the contract, and that Ueda refused because he had his own grudge over an insult to his mother.

That is the hardest deduction in the book in terms of pure reasoning, because it is a motive derived from another motive with no evidence attached to it at all. Everyone else in the case treats the two killings as one series with one purpose. Mitarai separates them, identifies which is the real one, and derives the second from the logistics of the first.

[Deduction, Abductive Reasoning, Causal Reasoning, Non Linear Thinking]

Next, the cord. He tells Hamamoto that the killing of Kikuoka absolutely required a knife with a cord tied to the handle, and that a cord on the knife used on Ueda was mechanically pointless, so the first cord exists purely to establish the second as normal. Correct, says Hamamoto.

Then he says there is one thing he still does not understand: why was Ueda's right wrist roped to the bed. Hamamoto answers that he does not understand it either. He was panicking. He had never killed anybody with a knife, he was afraid the man would run into the corridor while dying, and he was frightened of that right arm in particular because Ueda was a trained Self Defence Forces man twice his strength. It was not planned and he only rationalised it afterwards.

The single element in the entire crime with no design behind it is the single element Mitarai flags as not fitting. He has reverse engineered a forty year plan closely enough to detect the one improvisation inside it by feel, and he says so out loud rather than inventing a purpose for it.

[Pattern Recognition, Metacognition, Seeing Through People, Distillation]

And that accident, he points out, is what produced two separate false impressions the police never recovered from. It made room 10 look like a room a murderer had physically entered, which then made room 14 look the same by precedent. And it gave a dying man the idea that he could leave a message, because his wrist was already tied up in the air.

Both arms raised into a U is the semaphore character Ha. Ueda learned flag signalling in the Self Defence Forces. Nearly every character in that system needs two separate arm positions to form. Ha is the one that can be made in a single motion. A dying man with one wrist tied has exactly one letter available and it happens to be the first syllable of the name of the man who stabbed him.

[Knowledge, Crystallized Intelligence, Pattern Recognition, Non Verbal Reasoning]

The room interrupts with the questions it has been carrying for a week: the two stakes in the snow, the doll looking in at Kumi's window, the male scream that came thirty minutes late. Ishioka notes that Mitarai gets careless and brief in this mode because he has known the answers for days. Trivial things, he says. Where shall I start. They are all connected anyway.

To erase footprints in snow you could walk backwards bent over, wiping as you go, using the same line both ways, and it would not hold up. So instead you let it snow again, only on the places you walked. Ishioka objects that you would have to ask heaven for snow, and only over your own tracks. Mitarai tells him it is the other way round. You walk where it can snow. It comes off the roof. Shake the snow off the roof and in ordinary conditions with no wind it lands at the eaves, but this house leans, so anything falling vertically lands about two metres out. That strip is narrow and runs along the line of the roof beam and you cannot stray outside it, so you want a marked line to walk. Drawing one is troublesome and the first fall of snow would erase it. Hence two stakes.

Then the doll. It is there because that stretch is a place where snow cannot be made to fall, since only the area under the eaves works. Along the stair you can hang outside the handrail and reach the corner without printing, but from the west corner of the building to the stair there is nothing to be done, so you lay a doll down and walk across it. And it does not reach far enough lying whole, so you take the arms and legs off and step from piece to piece. Which is why the one doll in the collection that comes apart at the joints was the one taken.

[Deductive Reasoning, Perceptual Reasoning, Spatial Intelligence, Problem Solving]

Here is the chain, in order, as he had it within about a day of walking through the door.

P1. The Golem's face appeared at a third floor window at five past one and there is no ledge under that window.

P2. There were no footprints anywhere in the snow.

P3. The head was found buried far to the west, at a distance consistent with being thrown as hard as a man can throw.

P4. The torso and limbs were found separated and laid in a line running from the west corner of the building towards the stair of room 10.

P5. Two stakes stood in the snow about two metres out, parallel to the wall, and were gone by morning.

P6. The ground there is paved and will not take a stake.

P7. The snow was dry powder, it stopped at half past eleven, and the air was still.

P8. The house leans five degrees and there is an iron ladder from the drawbridge to the roof.

P9. Eiko woke cold at about half past midnight, went to shut the drawbridge door, and found it not properly closed.

P10. The male scream came thirty minutes after the estimated time of death.

P11. On the Ueda knife the cord was soaked in blood.

P12. On the Kikuoka knife the cord was clean, though there was far more blood in the bedding.

P13. The bed in room 14 is bolted to the floor, unusually narrow, made up with a thin electric blanket, and sits directly under the hatch.

P14. Hamamoto had the servants turn the heating up higher than usual that night.

P15. Kajiwara heard a hissing like a snake crawling at about eleven, only on the blizzard night.

P16. Hamamoto took the chief investigator up the tower for brandy at exactly the right hour, and put his daughter, his grand nephew and a constable into an all night billiards game.

P17. Ueda's right wrist was roped to the bed, both arms raised over his head in a U, hips twisted so the legs sat at right angles to the body, with a small circle of blood by his left hip.

P18. Ueda came out of the Self Defence Forces.

P19. The window of room 3 is kept open thirty centimetres at all times for ventilation nobody needs, on a wall covered floor to ceiling in tengu masks, and there is a ten centimetre gap at every stair corner.

P20. Icicles more than a metre long hang off the tower, which he had expected before he arrived.

C1. The footprints were not erased, they were buried, by snow shaken off the roof onto the strip where a leaning building puts it. The stakes were not supports. They were markers for a straight line to walk along.

C2. The dismembered doll is a set of stepping stones for the one stretch that lies outside the fall line, which is why the doll that comes apart was the one used.

C3. The head was the way back in, after being stranded on the roof, using three feet of rope and a scream to move people around the building.

C4. The killer is whoever owns the tower. Only a man who can reach the roof through the drawbridge, who knows it can be left ajar, and who knows his own daughter well enough to bet on how she will react, plans it that way. Mitarai says he had the name the moment he heard about the face at the window.

C5. The weapon was an icicle with a knife inside it. The clean cord against the bloody cord proves it: one blade went in by hand, the other had its cord frozen where blood never reached. Hang a knife under the eaves, let the ice form, dip the tip in hot water to expose the edge, keep it in the freezer.

C6. The delivery system is the building. With the drawbridge down, the stairs become one continuous slide from the tower to the hatch of room 14. The five degree tilt forces anything sliding to hug the south edge the whole way, so it steers itself through the ten centimetre corner gaps. The permanently open window of room 3 is the entry, the tengu noses are the rail across that wall, and the narrow bolted bed under the last hatch fixes the target's heart in place. With the heating up and the blanket on, the weapon is water by morning.

C7. The posture is not staging by the killer, it is a dying message by the victim, in semaphore, using the only character a man with one tied wrist can form.

C8. The appearance of an intruder inside both sealed rooms was manufactured by accident, out of one panicked knot, and the cord on the first knife was planted to make cord look like a signature rather than a mechanism.

C9. None of it convicts anybody. Release the icicle partway down instead of from the top, adding arm strength, and rooms 1 and 2 are in play, and so is the housekeeper, who really did go up the tower that night. Anyone with a window could have grown the ice outside it. The weapon melted five days ago. There are no prints, no rope in the building, and the motive is forty years deep in a war story with no paper anywhere in the world. The police had already struck Hamamoto off, because on paper he and Kikuoka were mild acquaintances who had met fewer than ten times. Therefore the only remaining route is to make the culprit explain himself.

[Deduction, Deductive Reasoning, Abductive Reasoning, Systematic Reasoning, Pattern Recognition, Fluid Intelligence]

So I decided the culprit would have to explain it himself, he says. That is, corner him until he has nowhere to go, and then the action he takes will itself be the confession. And then, unprompted, he adds that the savage method of hounding a man and beating a confession out of him is not one he cares for. Ishioka records that he says this while glancing at Ozaki, who a few chapters earlier proposed slapping servants who would not talk.

There is an easier road available in that room and he names it in order to refuse it, in front of the officer who would have taken it, without accusing him of anything.

[Emotional Realization, Self Awareness, Determination]

The lever is stated flatly. Since he already knew who it was, he decided to make the man believe that the thing he loves most, his daughter's life, was about to be taken by the same method used on Kikuoka. Which is why she was put to sleep on the bed in room 14. The father would understand

exactly what was happening and would be unable to tell the police how she was going to be killed, because he would have to explain how he knew, so he would have to stop it himself.

And, luckily, there was a blizzard outside. The method needs loud weather, because an icicle coming down a staircase makes a noise. Ishioka gets there: that is why the two murders were consecutive, because the killer could not afford to miss a storm night. Mitarai confirms it and adds that if tonight had been as quiet as a graveyard he would have run the plan anyway, since everything was already in place.

[Emotional Manipulation, Individual Manipulation, Planning Aim, Determination]

Then the branch analysis, which is the most careful thinking in the book. Hamamoto does not know who is trying to kill his daughter, so he cannot negotiate directly, and assumes it is one of Kikuoka's people using his own method against him. Since the drawbridge is shut and cannot be opened quietly, he will assume the attack comes from the top of the east staircase in the main building. So will he go to the east stairs, risking a face to face collision with the killer, or will he block the west stairs instead. That is hard to call and there are several possible patterns. He might put a brick on the west stairs and then run to the east.

One thing, Mitarai says, he was sure of. Hamamoto would take the tengu masks off the wall. A brick that can be lifted away in a second will not satisfy a frightened father who cannot stand on the stairs all night, and the night is long, and he does not know when the attempt will come. But the position of the tengu noses is delicate, so removing them, burning a few or snapping the noses off, seals the eastern attack one hundred percent. He could not imagine the man not doing it.

He admits the gamble honestly. It might not go that way. He might not remove the masks and might use some other method, so there is an element of luck in it.

[Anticipation, Probabilistic Reasoning, Planning Risk Calculation, Strategy Foresight, Psychological Profiling]

The branch was not chosen because it was most likely. It was chosen because of what it proves. If Hamamoto is seen taking the masks down, he is ninety nine percent unable to explain himself. Anybody else caught doing it could say they suddenly worked out the method in bed and acted alone because they dislike the police. Hamamoto cannot, because it is his own daughter, and a father who has worked out how his child is about to be murdered and does not tell the police is unnatural. There is exactly one explanation left, which is that he is the killer.

That is the whole design in one paragraph. The trap does not catch him doing something incriminating. It catches him doing something innocent that only a guilty man could have a reason to hide.

[Logical Reasoning, Setting Traps, Short Term Strategy, Methods, Strategy Fortitude, Planning Invincibility]

Then the seating problem, which is the question he was chewing on in the library. Where do you watch from. Hiding next door in the library fails, because Hamamoto will check the adjoining room before entering room 3, and being found there is not even suspicious at that hour, so he can still claim he has just worked out the method. He is a public figure and could survive the claim that the design of the house was pure coincidence.

Waiting and coming up afterwards fails too. Catching him holding masks he has already removed is weak evidence, and he can say he could not sleep, came to look and found room 3 wrecked, and with your intelligence you would improvise a strategy out of having just got out of bed. By then the masks are already down, only the west stairs remain, and calling the police in would actually help you.

And trying to out hide the architect inside his own building he concedes outright. You are the designer. You know where a person can be hidden in this house many times better than I do. I could not win a contest like that against you.

What the ending requires, therefore, is that the man be caught in the act of taking masks off the wall, and, so that there is no trouble afterwards and the thing resolves cleanly, that he see with his own eyes that Mitarai is present. Which makes that superb hiding place my box seat.

Three options examined, three rejected for named reasons, one of them by admitting he would lose a straight contest to his opponent, and the remaining position identified as the only chair in the room that satisfies both requirements. It is also the chair the killer will not look at, because he has walked past that doll every day for years.

[Planning Risk Calculation, Strategy Shielding, Convergent Thinking, Self Awareness, Decision Making]

Hamamoto asks how the mask was made and how he got hold of it so fast. Mitarai says he took the head off and had an artist he knows make it. Hamamoto examines it and says the workmanship even copies the small scratches, and asks whether Hokkaido has craftsmen that good. Only Kyoto, says Mitarai. He and Ishioka have a mutual friend there who is a master doll maker. Ishioka realises out loud who is meant. Leaving here on the evening of the thirty first, the work could not be finished before the morning of the third even at maximum speed, and he had telephoned in advance, so the whole thing could not be resolved until the night of the third.

Two full days of work, says Hamamoto, and then tells him he has a good friend. Ishioka asks whether he sent a policeman to Kyoto. No, says Mitarai, one could hardly ask an officer to run that sort of errand. Ishioka asks when the finished mask arrived and Okuma cuts across and says small details like that do not matter.

The finish date of the operation was set by a craftsman's working time in another city, fixed by a telephone call made before the fake murder happened, and everything else in four days was arranged to land on it.

[Short Term Planning, Strategy Logistics, Strategy Efficiency, Strategy Length, Resource Management]

Before that, though, Mitarai stops the technical discussion and says there is one thing he does not understand, which is the motive, since a man like Hamamoto does not kill for amusement and had no private connection with Kikuoka at all. Ishioka objects that the room 13 locked room has not been explained yet. That, says Mitarai impatiently, does not need explaining.

Hamamoto offers to explain it himself. Mitarai says that in that case there is one more person who has a right to hear this and he should be brought in. Okuma assumes he means Anan and gets up. Mitarai stops him at the door. While you are there, would you also fetch Sasaki from room 13.

Ishioka writes that Okuma's expression at that moment could not have been beaten if a flying saucer had landed on his nose and a two headed alien had climbed out, and admits he was wearing the same face himself. Sasaki walks in with Anan, the only cheerful moment in the whole affair, and the room actually cheers. Back from heaven, says Mitarai. Heaven appears not to need doctors, says Sasaki, and complains that a week with no food and no water, hiding in room 10, then waiting outside in the snow, then folding himself into the wardrobe in room 2, nearly finished him off.

[Strategy Effectiveness, Mass Deception, Planning Accuracy]

The rest of the operation is inventoried in a few lines. The breathing above Kumi's ceiling, the ghost Hatsue saw, the fire on the bed, the light in the hatch, and the missing ham and bread were all Sasaki.

He was the one who went to Kyoto. The threatening note was written by Mitarai, and Ushikoshi says he is glad he never ordered handwriting analysis, and is told that Ishioka would like to write the next one.

Ozaki says, with anger in his voice, that there was no need to deceive the police as well. Mitarai answers with a question. If I had told you the plan, would you have helped me without a word of argument.

Okuma says he is amazed the stubborn old men at headquarters agreed to any of it. That, says Mitarai, was the hardest part of this case. They only gave grudging permission because Nakamura kept working on them over the telephone. Ushikoshi mutters that Nakamura has good judgment, and only Ishioka hears it.

So the operation required authorisation from a police headquarters for a staged murder, obtained remotely, through a third party, by a man with no standing, while the officers physically present were kept in the dark. Ushikoshi confirms that he was told the killer's name and the general outline and instructed to do as he was told, and that he did.

[Influence, Persuasion, Indirect Manipulation, Resource Management, Experience]

Ushikoshi then works out the last piece on his own, that this is why Hamamoto kept urging Yoshihiko and Eiko to stay at the billiard table, since there is no stronger alibi than being with police officers. Hamamoto nods without speaking. Ozaki remembers that the hair he collected in room 14 must have come off Hamamoto while he was turning the door handle in company, and then, belatedly, that the cord was stained on Ueda and clean on Kikuoka although both had blood around them, and says he should have noticed sooner.

The clue that broke the case is available to the investigating officer, in his own notes, and he arrives at it after the arrest.

Then Mitarai asks for the motive in a manner Ishioka finds slightly cruel, flat and businesslike, the way he always is at this point in a case, and it makes Ishioka's chest ache. But Ishioka also records that he never does what police officers usually do, which is turn arrogant the moment they know who the culprit is, and that towards a worthy opponent like Hamamoto he does not forget to show respect.

The story that comes out is forty years old. A small engine works in the ruins after the war. The owner's daughter Fumiko, who needed him. A worthless politician's son named Hiramoto who was going to be allowed to marry her. And Noma, a childhood friend Hamamoto had believed died in Burma, turning up in Tokyo dying of tuberculosis, hunting the officer who had tortured his unit for sport, who had arrested Noma's lover as a spy on the grounds that a beautiful woman must be a spy, abused her, imprisoned her, and had all the prisoners massacred during the retreat, then ordered his men to conceal that the order was his, so that the subordinate who carried it out was executed and the officer went home. Noma had one bullet left and could not bring himself to use it, because the officer had nothing left to lose and told him death would be a relief. So the two friends traded. Noma would spend his single bullet on Hiramoto. Hamamoto would kill the officer later, once the man had a great deal to lose. Hiramoto died. Hamamoto got the woman and the company, and carried a photograph of the officer and a slip of paper with his address in his inside pocket for forty years while the suits got more expensive. The officer was Eikichi Kikuoka.

And at the end of it he tells Mitarai that the last few years of listening to nothing but flattery had been like being sealed in concrete, that hearing Wagner recently made him notice it, and that he thinks he has managed to break part of it. Then he calls back the Jumping Jack Flash speech from the first night, says the brief truth of a puppet is not the Golem but himself, and says that for twenty years his work could have been done by one of his own dolls. He says he kept a promise made forty years ago to an irreplaceable version of himself.

Nobody in the room speaks. Ishioka writes one line under it, that this may be the price of success.

[Emotional Understanding, Empathy, Interpersonal Intelligence]

Final Act, Scene Five. The Hill

Hamamoto is the one who asks for this. During the confession Mitarai asked whether he had solved the flower bed puzzle, said no when it came back to him, and Hamamoto told him that with the riddle still standing he would not consider himself properly beaten. So at sunrise the whole party walks up the hill in the wind, breathing white.

They turn to face the mansion and the leaning tower. The glass is throwing gold straight back at them in the morning sun. Mitarai puts his hand up to shade his forehead and stands looking at it, and Ishioka assumes he is admiring the view, and is wrong. He is waiting for the golden glare to fade.

Then he speaks. That is a chrysanthemum, is it not. Yes, says Hamamoto. A broken chrysanthemum.

The fan shaped bed round the foot of the tower, reflected in the curve of the mirrored cylinder and seen from high up and far off, resolves into an enormous flower with a snapped neck. Ishioka cannot see it until it is pointed out. The officers make a low noise a few seconds after that.

[VSI, Perceptual Reasoning, Spatial Intelligence, Composure]

Then he runs the thing backwards out loud. On flat ground you would need a helicopter to look at it. Standing in the middle of the bed you see nothing at all. It has to be viewed from a long way off and from above, and this hill happens to be here, and even the top of it is not high enough, which is why the tower is tilted slightly this way, so that it can be seen clearly. That is the main reason the tower leans at all. Hamamoto nods without a word.

The most conspicuous object on the property turns out to be a viewing angle. Every character in the book, including a mathematics inclined university student who stares at the flower bed for the entire novel, treats the tilt as the eccentricity of a rich madman. Mitarai treats it as evidence of a sightline and works out where the observer was meant to stand.

[Deduction, Abductive Reasoning, Causal Reasoning, Lateral Thinking]

Ishioka gets there half a second later and says it out loud: kiku for Kikuoka, and breaking it is a declaration of intent to kill him. Hamamoto confirms it and adds the part nobody could have deduced. He never intended to run, he wanted to serve the sentence, and he built the thing because he wanted somebody, one day, to see through the single crime of his life at a glance. Also, the Noma family were florists, Noma's father was a famous chrysanthemum grower who used to build flower dolls out of them for exhibitions before the war, and Noma had dreamed of taking over the business. So the flower is an offering to a dead friend as well as a target marker.

Then he asks his last question. Why did you spend the whole week playing the fool.

Mitarai looks confused, and says that was not an act, that is what he is like.

Hamamoto does not believe him. He says it was done to make him relax his guard, and that if Mitarai had shown a clear head from the start he would have raised his own and not been taken in. Then he admits the rest: he had half sensed that Eiko falling asleep was a trap, and even now, saying it, he cannot be easy about it, because if it had not been a trap he could not have lived with himself.

Two readings of the same five days sit side by side there and the book never settles between them. The killer's reading is that it was a calculated performance and it worked. The performer's reading is that no performance was involved. Both men are looking at the same evidence and the honest position is

that some of it was tactical and some of it was simply true, which is also the reason the tactic was available to him in the first place.

[Intrapersonal Intelligence, Self Awareness, Reflective Thinking]

Hamamoto asks what he thinks of Eiko. Mitarai is blank for a moment, then says carefully that she plays the piano well and is a well brought up woman. And, says Hamamoto. And she is an extremely selfish egotist, says Mitarai, although not as bad as I am.

Hamamoto looks away and laughs, tells him that they are alike in a great many ways but differ decisively on that one point, that thinking about what he has become, Mitarai is correct, and that he is glad to have met him.

[Self Awareness, Intrapersonal Intelligence, Emotional Realization]

Then he asks Mitarai to be the one who explains everything to Eiko, and says he will not press it. Mitarai says there is somebody better suited than me, and takes the offered hand. Somebody who wants money more, says Hamamoto. Somebody who has a use for money, says Mitarai. I imagine you were the same.

That refusal is one line and it is the most self aware thing in the book. He drugged that woman, used her as bait against her own father, and burned her bed. He does not go near her afterwards, does not collect any credit from her, and hands the job to somebody who will do it better and be paid for it. And he does it without announcing that he is doing it, which is why it reads as indifference on a first pass.

[Emotional Realization, Self Awareness, Emotional Facilitation]

The handshake ends and Ishioka notes that the two hands will probably never touch again. Soft hands, says the killer. You do not do much work. Mitarai laughs and says hands only get rough if you hold on to money the whole time.

Epilogue

Summer is ending, or in the far north perhaps autumn. The house is rotting, full of spiders and dust, and nobody has visited it or wanted to buy it. Sasaki and Togai both failed to marry Eiko. Kumi opened a shop in Aoyama and sent an invitation, which neither man has used.

Then, out of nowhere, on some ordinary day, Mitarai says to Ishioka: do you really think Kohei Hayakawa asked Ueda to kill Kikuoka only to avenge his daughter.

Ishioka asks how he could possibly know otherwise. It is simple, says Mitarai. Hamamoto could not have run the icicle trials alone. Adjusting the tengu noses meant standing in room 3 while somebody at the top of the stairs released the ice, over and over. Who would he have asked. Kohei, says Ishioka. There is nobody else it could have been, says Mitarai. Which means Kohei knew for years what his master intended.

So the contract on Kikuoka was an attempt to have the killing done by somebody else and spare Hamamoto the name of murderer. It failed because Hamamoto had already decided. And Hamamoto went to prison without ever noticing the loyalty, insisting throughout that he ran every experiment alone, which was his own way of protecting his servant. Kohei kept his real motive buried and let the incitement charge stand, because his sentence is much lighter than his master's, and afterwards there will be a girl who has lost both parents and will need somebody to look after her.

This is the purest deduction in the book because there is nothing physical in it at all. No scene, no evidence, no suspect, no case left to solve. It is one structural necessity, that a solo experiment needed two pairs of hands, followed all the way through to a motive nobody involved ever admitted and a piece

of mutual protection that both men carried out silently in opposite directions. He produces it months later, unprompted, about a case that closed, for no reason except that it had been sitting there.

[Deduction, Deductive Reasoning, Psychological Insight, Emotional Understanding, Reflective Thinking]

Anti Feats

He cannot hold a name for four days. Anan spends the whole book being called Nandaimon and has quietly accepted it by the second morning, standing up on instinct whenever a meaningless syllable is shouted into a room. Correcting him does nothing, because once a name is wrong in his head it stays wrong permanently. This is the same man who files a stranger's date of birth after hearing it once and never loses it.

[Memory, WMI]

He has close to no social instinct running when he is not deliberately using one. The library is the clean sample, because nothing there was staged. Two women tear each other apart over a man, a dead man's reputation and a rumour of prostitution, he hides instead of announcing himself, and when Eiko discovers him he tells her he wanted to see which side would win, and that until a few minutes ago he had believed a library was somewhere people read books. Ishioka had almost patched it and watches the repair come apart in two sentences, then tells him he is seriously considering ending the friendship. His own diagnosis of the error is that he ought to have cheered for one of them, which is not a better instinct, it is the same absence wearing a different hat.

[Social Awareness, Social Intuition, Empathy]

Then the bill, which other people pay. He drugs a woman who agreed to nothing and lays her in a basement as bait in a trap aimed at her own father. He sets fire to a bed in somebody else's house. He frightens a middle aged woman into a screaming blackout with a costume, and her husband uses it to tell her in public that she is not right in the head. He runs a fake homicide past a real pathologist. He lies to a police division for five days and has their chief investigator lie to his own subordinates on his behalf. Ozaki, who is unpleasant but not wrong, points out at the end that there was no need to deceive the police as well, and gets a question instead of an answer.

[Emotional Manipulation, Mass Manipulation, Fear Inducement, Fabrication]

The plan rests on a single lever, which is that this particular man loves his daughter enough to throw away forty years of work for her. Remove the daughter, or make him a colder father, and there is no reduced version of the operation underneath it. One branch beats it outright, which is Hamamoto sitting still until dawn, and nothing in the design addresses that branch at all. Mitarai says so himself, that there is an element of luck in it and the man might have chosen some other method. Hamamoto states afterwards that it smelled like a trap and he walked in anyway, so the cost of doing nothing was unbearable, but unbearable is not impossible.

[Planning Contingency, Strategy Adaptability, Planning Risk Calculation]

And the operation is never stress tested. Nothing in four days forces it off its rails, not once. Sasaki is never discovered, no officer breaks ranks, Hamamoto never does the one thing that would have beaten it, and the blizzard arrives on the right night. He is never shown failing to adapt because he is never made to, so adaptability leaves this book unproven rather than low. The tightness of a plan and the durability of a plan are not the same property, and only the first one is on display here.

[Adaptability, Strategy Adaptability, Strategy Resilience]