

BOMB  
(Bakudan)  
by Katsuhiro Go  
2022, Kodansha



### Author Profile

Born in 1981. Currently regarded as one of the most hotly-anticipated Korean-Japanese mystery writers in the Japanese literary awards scene. Making his awards debut with the Edogawa Rampo Prize, a prize that produced literary sensations including Natsuo Kirino and Keigo Higashino, his works have continued to claim award after award. *Bakudan* (Bomb) was nominated for the Naoki Prize, viewed as one of Japanese literature's most prestigious awards. Influenced at an early age by David Fincher's *Seven*, he attended Osaka University of Arts' Visual Concept Planning Department. His writing is characterized by its ability to conjure cinematic images in the reader's mind. His works are acclaimed for their depiction of the desires that swirl within the hearts of people living in the modern day, as well as the ambivalence born of morals and ethics that force them to suppress these desires.



### Awards and Nominations

*Dōtoku no jikan* (Lessons of morality) – Winner of the 61st Edogawa Rampo Prize

*Shiroi shōdō* (White impulse) – Winner of the 20th Ōyabu Haruhiko Award

*Raion burū* (Lion blue) – Nominated for the 31st Yamamoto Shūgorō Prize

*Hinaguchi Yoriko no saitei na rakka to yakekuso kyanonbōru* (Yoriko Hinaguchi's awful fall and desperation cannonball) – Nominated for the 72nd Mystery Writers of Japan Award for Best Novel and Best Short Story

*Suwan* (Swan) - Winner of the 41st Yoshikawa Eiji Literary Prize for New Writers and the 73rd Mystery Writers of Japan Award for Best Novel and Best Short Story, and nominated for the 162nd Naoki Prize

*Oretachi no uta wo utae* (Sing our song) – Nominated for the 165th Naoki Prize

*Bakudan* (Bomb) – Nominated for the 167th Naoki Prize

## Reviews

“A shocking explosion of suspense and mystery that could be considered the writer’s masterpiece” –Nozomi Ōmori (Critic)

“Just how many times will this writer continue to outdo his previous masterpiece?”-Akiyuki Sengai (Critic)

“This is not so much *The Dark Knight* as it is *The Batman*.” -Bookseller

“An impact like that of a bomb! This was such a magnificent read that I went through it in one go without having the time to even breathe! Once I reached the end, I was left feeling stunned.” -Bookseller

## Synopsis

Isao Todoroki, a middle-aged detective at Nakano Ward’s Nogata Police Station, is in the middle of investigating Tagosaku Suzuki. The suspect was arrested for assault and property damage. Going under a false name, Suzuki is a middle-aged man with round large eyes and chubby body. While drunk he had begun kicking a liquor store’s vending machine, and then hit an employee who had tried to stop him.

While it should be a simple case, Todoroki finds himself frustrated by Suzuki, who has been able to deflect police questioning.

*“For a long time, I’ve always had a little confidence in my ability to see the future. Right at 10PM, in Akihabara, something will happen.”*

Todoroki viewed it was the ramblings of a drunk. However, right at 10PM, Ise jumped into the interrogation room to report that an explosion had happened in an abandoned building in Akihabara.

*“According to my precognition, this will happen three more times. The next explosion will happen in one hour.”*

Todoroki cannot see this “foresight” as a mere coincidence. He struggles to force Suzuki to tell him where the other bombs are.

*“Somewhere, something will explode, someone will die, and people will be sad. But it’s not as if they would lend me 100,000 yen. If I were to die, nobody would be sad. I doubt anyone would even try and stop my death.”*

After Suzuki continues to avoid giving any specific answers, another explosion happens at 11PM, just as predicted. Due to failing to stop the explosion, Todoroki is taken off the case.

In his stead, the middle-aged and gentlemanly Detective Kiyomiya and somehow other-worldly Detective Ruike from the First Investigation Division are assigned to the case.

Suzuki suggests playing a game called “nine tails” with Kiyomiya.

*“It’s a very simple game. I will ask you nine questions. You just have to answer them. At the end, I will determine the shape of your soul.”*

*“My soul?”*

*“Yes. The shape of your soul, detective.”*

After asking seemingly nonsensical questions, Suzuki suddenly asks a key question.

*“Detective, you are holding someone’s hand. You are walking along a hill with this person. Is this person Yūkō Hasebe?”*

Kiyomiya couldn’t hide his shock at hearing the name. Yūkō Hasebe was a detective stationed at Nogata four years ago. A weekly magazine publicized an incident where the detective was spotted masturbating at a crime scene, which was considered an unprecedented police scandal. Afterwards, Hasebe died by suicide by jumping in front of a train. While he had an ex-wife as well as a son and daughter, the family had broken up following the suicide. Just what connection did Suzuki and Hasebe have?

As the game continues, Ruike notices Suzuki raised his finger at certain points in the conversation. “Hanshin Tigers baseball team,” “A monster that is half-beast, half-human,” “Roast tongue meat,” “Are the only words of the gods ‘mother’ and ‘child?’”. Ruike thinks that these words are clues as to the location of the bomb. Since the tiger is one of the zodiac animals also assigned to hours in the day, the placement of the tiger would suggest the bomb would go off at 4AM. A monster, or yōkai, that is half-human, and half-beast would be the Kudan. Meanwhile, the Japanese word for tongue is shita, which combines to be Kudanshita. In Japanese, “Are the only words of the gods ‘mother’ and ‘child?’” (kami no kotoba wa haha to ko nomi ka) is a palindrome, which makes him think of the classic Japanese palindrome ‘shinbunshi’, or newspaper. He comes to the conclusion that it all comes together to *a news dealer’s shop in Kudanshita will explode at 4AM.*

Detectives immediately begin searching the location. Through the quick-wittedness of Officer Kōda, they determine that the bomb was planted onto one of the paper delivery bikes. However, as it is already time for newspapers to be delivered, the bikes have already left the news dealer’s shop, making it harder to find the bomb. Kōda and her partner manage to find a bike that most likely has the bomb, but having no time to disarm the bomb they move the bike to a secluded location, where it explodes.

With no time to rest, Suzuki’s second question begins.

*“Is it true that all lives have equal value?”*

Suzuki plans to cruelly persuade Kiyomiya, as he cites the way people will ignore the homeless on the street while children viewed as having potential will be lavished with special attention.

Four hints are given in this conversation.

- The first finger is raised while Kiyomiya isn’t paying attention
- In response to the voices of children in a kindergarten near his house, he says, *“Hey you kids, can’t you be a little quieter?”*
- *“Two nights come about. The two nights happen, and become orange. As such, it is Thursday.”*
- *“There’s that saying. ‘The mountain has labored and brought forth a mouse.’ But why do mice gather in such groups? Don’t they cry out, squeaking as they do? Horses are much quieter, lined up along their feeding stations. Their cages are lined up, right? How did it go again. Oh dear, I’m having a hard time thinking. There is an important question here, Detective Kiyomiya. That question is whether you are able to make the right decision.”*

From the second hint, Kiyomiya becomes sure that the next target is children. While Ruike argues that “We don’t have enough information, we should talk to him more,”

Kiyomiya forces him to hurry up and solve the riddle. Ruike determines that from the Japanese words for 'night' (yoru) and 'Thursday' (Mokuyōbi), the first 'two nights' become yoyo, while the first character of Thursday can be read as 'gi', forming the location of Yoyogi. Meanwhile, the zodiac position of the mouse is north, while the horse would be the south.

Various bombs are found in kindergartens across Yoyogi, but Ruike feels that they are missing something. At 11PM, when the bombs were expected to go off, an explosion occurred at the unexpected location of Yoyogi Park's south gate. Every Monday there, food is distributed to the local homeless population.

*"Wasn't it fortunate that the only victims were leeches who live off the generosity of others? That makes my ninth question. Just now, did you feel relieved?"*

Feeling enraged that Suzuki called out his subconscious weighing of the lives of children and the homeless, Kiyomiya breaks Suzuki's finger. But at the same time, he feels his soul somehow break.

*"Thank you, Detective Kiyomiya. That was quite fun. Who will be my next opponent?"*

At the same time, Todoroki visits the residence of Hasebe's ex-wife Asuka. It seems that Asuka lives together with her daughter Miu, while her son Tatsuma is nowhere to be seen. With her life turned into shambles due to the death of Hasebe, Asuka speaks spitefully to Todoroki, but notes that she doesn't know Suzuki. Todoroki gets the contact information of Tatsuma, and leaves.

While Kiyomiya and Ruike are not there, Suzuki gives a certain clue to the clerk, Ise. Suzuki notes that he may have left his smartphone at the last cafe he went to. With the thought of taking the credit for such a find himself, Ise urges his former colleague Yabuki, who is currently out looking for clues, to head to the cafe. Bringing Kōda along, Yabuki finds a smartphone in the cafe and an address written on a note inside the phone's case. It leads to a share-house used by Tatsuma and a few others. Yabuki, certain that they have finally found the clue to bust the case wide open, heads into the dilapidated-looking Western-style building without informing his superiors.

When Yabuki and Kōda enter the building, they find a screen on the wall playing a video message Hasebe recorded just before he died, directed to his family. Realizing a room is hidden behind the screen, they find the corpse of what seems to be Tatsuma. Trying to head close to confirm, Yabuki is blown away by a bomb planted on the floor and ends up with fatal wounds. At the same time, Todoroki arrives, having determined the address from the number given to him by Asuka. He is able to rescue the badly-wounded Yabuki as well as Kōda.

It seems that Tatsuma quit his job after his father's death and started living in a share-house. The bomb that Yabuki triggered also left the corpse in an unrecognizable state.

They also find the bodies of two other residents, Yamawaki and Kaji, who had been poisoned. Yamawaki worked restocking drinks for vending machines, while Kaji worked at the newspaper dealer's that was targeted by one of the bombs. However, Kaji had been fired from his job for bad behavior.

Ruike takes the place of Kiyomiya as they continue the interrogation.

*"Tell me, detective. Have you ever wanted to kill a person?"*

*“Of course I have. Every day, I feel it. The old guy on the crowded train who burps in my face, the lady with the heavy cologne, the blonde teen working at the convenience store who forgets to provide me my chopsticks. I always wish they’d get bitten by a Gila monster.”*

*“Why leave it to a lizard? You could just kill them if you really wanted. As a detective, I’m sure you know all kinds of methods for escaping arrest.”*

*“Because it’s quite a chore. It wouldn’t be worth the effort. That’s the reason I haven’t killed anyone yet.”*

Carefully threading the line, Ruike slowly corners Suzuki with his questions and answers. At that moment, a video-message prepared by Suzuki is delivered to media outlets and influencers all across the country.

*“I am making a national announcement.*

*I have planted a bomb in the capital. Many bombs, all across the city. They have all been planted in places where they will be difficult to find.*

*Once a certain condition has been met, they will all go off. Countless lives will be lost. Even those who are lucky to be saved will probably be left disabled. This is how much destructive power they hold.*

*They might go off tomorrow, or even today. It might happen in one second. But then again, it could be in ten years. I made sure that they won’t be ruined by rain or wind. And don’t think they might run out of power if you wait for long enough. I promise you they have been designed to go off, no matter what.*

*This is not an indiscriminate act of terrorism. This is a fair judgement, I made sure to take the time to consider who deserved to be sentenced”.*

At Suzuki’s video, the nation goes into a panic. A second video, designed to be broadcast once the first video reaches a certain number of views, states that the only location without any bombs is the Nogata Police Station, and by killing Suzuki all the bombs will be stopped. In fear of the bombs, countless citizens descend upon the station.

Ruike lies and tells Suzuki that of the two people they found in the share-house, one was still alive. Suzuki, who until now has displayed a sense of calm, seems to panic at hearing the news.

Noticing that the four previous bombs had no consistency in their placement, Ruike realizes that Suzuki had accomplices. And from Suzuki’s response, he also realizes that there is a fifth accomplice.

As they stare each other down, Kōda leaps into the room. Filled with hate at the fatal wounds inflicted upon Yabuki, and the video designed to press him to act, she points a gun at Suzuki. While she is stopped at the last second and taken from the room, Suzuki rejoices at the desire to “kill” displayed by Kōda and tells the others about the final bombs.

*“The target is all the train stations across Tokyo.”*

Todoroki investigates the share-house’s former residents. It seems that Tatsuma, Yamawaki, and Kaji all talked about the troubles of daily life and methods for a painless death. It seemed that a housemate that Tatsuma would sometimes bring along had joined the group through a forum dedicated to discussing suicides.

A former resident mentions how a pitiful-looking homeless person in their 50s was to be brought over, just before he left the share-house. When asked about the bombing incidents, he notes that there was another resident who was an anime fanatic and spoke of Akihabara

as the most beautiful place in the world. He also raises an unexpected comment that he wasn't sure whether the anime fanatic was the culprit of the bombing in Akihabara as he worshiped the place.

Todoroki remembers that a bag filled with empty cans was left in the share-house. Todoroki calls Ruike, and tells him that the bombs may have been built with beverage cans and were planted by Yamawaki along his delivery route. However, they are unable to respond in time as explosions go off at major stations along the Yamanote Line.

The police are stunned, seeing that they were hopeless against the worst terrorist act in postwar history. However, Todoroki was suspicious of the destroyed corpse of Tatsuma. Was the body blown up to cover up the fact that he was the only one who hadn't died from poison?

Ruike also has his doubts relating to the nature of the explosions. Asagaya Station, which juts out from the ring of the Yamanote Line. That sticks out to him. In addition, Suzuki never quizzed him on the Yamanote Line. He wasn't able to. With these two points as the beginning of his deduction, Ruike solves the mystery behind this case.

It was Asuka, the ex-wife of Hasebe and Tatsuma's mother who was involved in the case. She was the fifty-year old pitiful homeless person that Tatsuma had brought along. Having started plans for planting the bombs, Tatsuma had dumped Asuka onto her daughter Miu in the hopes that she would be out of the way.

Three days before the plan was to take place, Asuka had been told by Tatsuma about the case, and killed him. She didn't want her life, already so ruined by her former husband, to be made any worse. While the cause of death was uncertain, Yamawaki and Kaji were already dead by this point.

To fix the situation, Asuka invited Suzuki to the share-house. Upon regarding the situation, Suzuki decided to coopt the bomb plot for his own. While he wasn't aware of the entire plan, he knew that Akihabara and Yoyogi were places that would never be chosen, and so after planting the bombs in Akihabara and Yoyogi, he was able to "foresee" them.

Todoroki realizes that the second video's message of "Come and kill me" was directed to Asuka. Suzuki had even sent a bomb to Asuka with the plan of getting her to kill him. Asuka arrives at the station with the bomb, but after Kōda's impassioned plea and a call from her daughter, she surrenders. However, the bomb that she had was a fake.

As Suzuki is taken away, Ruike speaks to him. He wonders if Suzuki, to whom Asuka was the one source of kindness during his time as a homeless person, lost heart that she had viewed him as a substitute for Tatsuma and then betrayed him.

But, Ruike says, perhaps the truth is that Asuka wanted him to convince her to surrender. That pretending not to see the innate goodness of people is what makes Suzuki feel incomplete, something he hates. Suzuki begins to shake. Ruike may not have been able to stop a terrible incident from happening, but in the end, he was at least able to send a ripple through Suzuki's own soul.

A month later, Asuka and Suzuki are formally arrested. While Suzuki protests his innocence, the overwhelming amount of evidence against him makes it likely that he will receive a capital punishment sentence. However, there is one thing that still remains a mystery. If the bomb Asuka was given was a dud, then where is the final bomb hidden?

Even to this day, its whereabouts remain unknown.