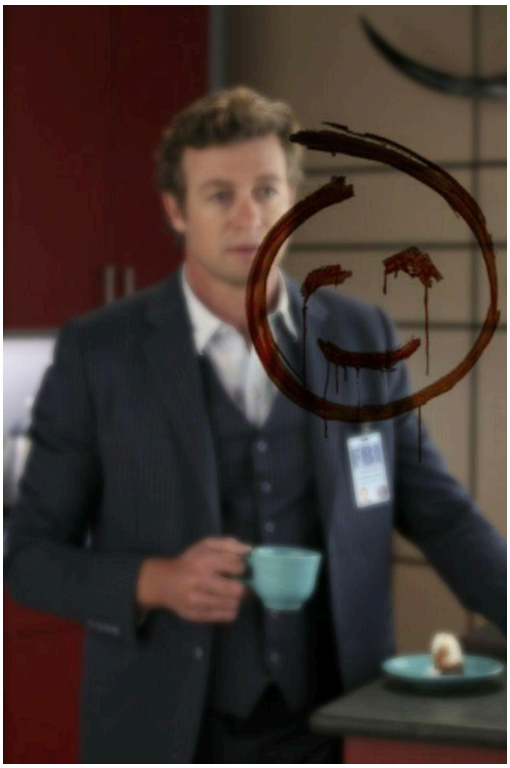
TIMOTHY CARTER STRATEGY/FAKE RJ STRATEGY

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This document is an analysis of the Timothy Carter strategy, a little-known strategy within the SCD community. Through this work, the aim is to provide a broader perspective on the strategic complexities carried out by Red John starting “Strawberries and Cream” the season three finale of “The Mentalist” and ending in “Little Red Book”



CONTEXT: Patrick had devised a strategy to locate Red John’s accomplice within the CBI, who was accused of killing Todd Johnson, a person who worked for Red John and was about to talk. His plan consisted of providing five possible locations of Hightower to each of the five suspects within the CBI who might be working for him. To carry out this plan, Patrick used different methods with each of them, but, in summary, he managed to distribute different information among the suspects.

Additionally, he arranged hotel rooms with different numbers for each possible accomplice, so that any reaction would be crucial in identifying the real traitor. Jane informed each of the suspects about different rooms; these are the rooms and the corresponding names:

ROOM 705 - LAROUCHE
ROOM 605 - BERTRAM
ROOM 505 - CRAIG O'LAUGHLIN
ROOM 405 - BRENDA
ROOM 305 - ARDILES

So how did RJ discover this? As we later find out in the sixth season, Gale Bertram was a member of the Blake Association, which was under Red John's control. Brenda was also working for corrupt organizations. However, we will focus on the information that Bertram and Craig gave to Red John. This means that when Jane informed both Craig and Bertram of different locations for Hightower within the same hotel and with vertically aligned rooms.

STRATEGY OBJECTIVE:

At this point, Patrick planned for Red John to sacrifice one of his pawns, but what he didn't foresee was that Red John would change his approach to sacrifice a pawn, using him to send Patrick to jail while simultaneously retreating. Now we should probably explain how he achieved this.

STRATEGY:

The situation he has been placed into forces Red John to verify which of these versions is correct. To do so, he sends an assassin to Bertram's room, initiating a vertical verification process to determine if Hightower is there.

However, Red John anticipates an alternative scenario: that it could all be a trap devised by Jane. In light of this possibility, he instructs the assassin to commit suicide if it is confirmed that they are being ambushed. This is reflected in the assassin's behavior, as she pauses for a few seconds in the

room before opening the curtains. This moment of hesitation indicates that she was evaluating the situation, following Red John's instructions to act cautiously in case of a trap, before proceeding with her mission.

After the team discovers that the assassin left a rope, handcuffs, drugs, and a bag in the room, they conclude that her intention was to take Hightower to Red John. In response, Patrick Jane says, "maybe," indicating that he wasn't sure. This outcome was exactly what Red John had anticipated. It will be explained in more detail later, but the key point here is that this discovery helps protect Red John's strategy. By leaving those items at the scene, it reinforces the assumption that the assassin was there to capture Hightower. With this tactic, Red John has several objectives: he is testing Patrick while also setting up a way to have him arrested and then withdraw.

The episode continues with Van Pelt asking O'Laughlin to join her in relieving Lisbon's shift with Hightower. O'Laughlin initially refuses but eventually agrees.

Later, we see Patrick approach Bertram and inform him that someone tried to kill Hightower, emphasizing that she was framed and is telling the truth. Patrick then adds that he plans to take the story to the media but can ensure Hightower surrenders peacefully. However, he insists on speaking with Bertram to make a deal, expressing his trust in him. Patrick ends the conversation by stating that Hightower wants to meet at 2:00 PM and that he will pick Bertram up at exactly 1:30 PM. Bertram immediately picks up the phone and makes a call.

Red John had anticipated several key moves at this point. First, he predicted that Van Pelt would ask O'Laughlin to accompany her, as it is later revealed in the series that O'Laughlin was in contact with Timothy Carter through a connected phone. The fact that she told O'Laughlin the real location of Hightower implies that it was predicted through the logic that Jane couldn’t carry out such a plan alone, so he would probably have his CBI team with him. Using his emotional understanding, Red John was able to predict how Grace would be very defensive of O'Laughlin but would remain silent until what seemed like the

end. Red John had ordered Timothy Carter to call O'Laughlin, predicting that Van Pelt would want him to go with her to Hightower's house. By sending the assassin to the room where Bertram is first and instructing him to wait, he creates the illusion that the identity of the mole has already been discovered. Additionally, Red John also anticipated Patrick's actions.

When Patrick tells Bertram to accompany him, Bertram immediately makes a call. Although it is not explicitly shown who he is calling, it becomes clear that it is Red John, as Bertram follows a specific order that triggers various reactions. This suggests that Red John had previously instructed Bertram to contact him if a situation like this arose.

Therefore, Red John not only predicted that Patrick would make this move but also ensured that Bertram was prepared to act according to his plans.

Patrick takes Bertram to a shopping mall, expecting Red John to make an appearance. However, as we've established, Red John had shifted his focus—he no longer intended to kill Hightower but instead planned to retreat. With this in mind, Patrick sits with Bertram in the mall while Cho keeps an eye on them from a distance, and Rigsby monitors the surveillance cameras.

It’s clear from Patrick’s demeanor that he harbors suspicions about Bertram. As they converse, Bertram asks, "Who would try to kill her?" Patrick replies, "That's hard to say," before adding, "Red John, of course." He then elaborates on his belief that Red John has an ally within the CBI, someone whose influence stretches across the state and who has powerful friends.

Bertram listens, but his skepticism is evident. He responds, "I beg of you, Patrick, seek help." Patrick, undeterred, questions him: "I sound crazy, don't l?" He pauses briefly, then adds, "Maybe I am... or maybe not," locking eyes with Bertram as he speaks. Bertram meets his gaze and replies calmly, "No, you’re not crazy. You just look like a man who’s pushed himself too hard, who’s reached the end of his rope.”

Upon hearing the metaphor, Patrick Jane quickly reasons once again about what he had suspected earlier regarding the rope, and asks Bertram if he happened to have killed Todd Johnson. Bertram denies it, and Patrick then reasons further, thinking that it must have been O'Laughlin, as the assassin needed the rope to lower herself to room 505. He informs Cho and Rigsby, who rush to Hightower's house. Patrick nervously calls Lisbon, knowing that O'Laughlin had been with Van Pelt. Rigsby also calls Van Pelt, but she cuts him off as she is with O'Laughlin. Additionally, Red John had ordered O'Laughlin to kill anyone protecting the entrance to the house. Red John's strategy was completely safeguarded.

At this point, everything was unfolding exactly as Red John had planned. First, the metaphor with Bertram aligns with Patrick’s reasoning, and this reaction causes Cho and Rigsby to leave the scene because Red John needed Patrick to be alone with Timothy at the time of their conversation.

Red John anticipated that O'Laughlin would miss in and die in order for this scenario to occur, both Lisbon and Grace had guns it was very unlikely a shootout would occur and he would survive. He needed Patrick to realize the phones were connected, and his plan was for O'Laughlin to miss the shot on purpose, but without it seeming obvious. This created the opportunity for Patrick to instruct Lisbon to check O'Laughlin's phone, which would lead to the thought that Timothy Carter, who was close to Patrick, was actually Red John or the one giving the orders. He expected Patrick to reason this out as if he was there then he was told about Madeleine, if he was a mole then he would've told Red John, so the last person to be called is Red John, he set this up by having Craig call Carter.

O'Laughlin's miss doesn't seem intentional at first glance, as he shot quickly, and the impact wasn't fatal, but rather near Lisbon's shoulder. However, what was really happening was that Red John had meticulously planned this scenario: by having O'Laughlin miss, he created the space necessary for Patrick to use O'Laughlin's phone and, therefore, get closer to the revelation that Timothy Carter was involved in the plan, leading everything to the conclusion that Red John had anticipated.

Then, Patrick sees Timothy and confronts him. Timothy Carter plays with Patrick a bit, saying that he was making him uncomfortable, but then he admits to being Red John. What's interesting here is that Red John's two main objectives are reflected.

Timothy Carter says: "When O'Laughlin told me about your little trap, I was so happy. The perfect opportunity to teach you one last lesson in humility. But no. You prevailed for once. Bravo. Sincerely, bravo. And you know what? It's a good thing. It confirms what I've been thinking. It is time to quit."

Timothy Carter reveals that Red John initially perceived Patrick's trap as an opportunity to humiliate him, but in the end, Patrick overcame all the tests he had set. One of Red John's main objectives was to test Patrick. To achieve this, he strategically aligned certain events: for instance, the assassin carried a rope to descend into the rooms, but this element was also connected to the metaphor Bertram later used—a carefully crafted detail by Red John for Patrick to deduce that O'Laughlin was the traitor.

Red John does not waste his allies unless there is a greater purpose, and in this case, he accepted sacrificing members of his organization to achieve his final objective. Once he ensured that all events unfolded as planned, the true purpose of his strategy became clear: to retire, leaving Patrick with one last calculated message.

Patrick stared at him intently, as we saw in the scene, Patrick wasn't sure if Timothy was Red John. Then, Timothy Carter apologizes, and Patrick says that he will get his revenge. Timothy is disappointed, stands up, and starts to leave, but Patrick stops him and says that he's not sure if he's Red John. This is where Red John's prepared contingency comes into play.

"Your wife was very clean. She smelled like coal-tar soap and lavender. Your daughter smelled like sweat and strawberries and cream. I expected it was some kind of kids' shampoo."

Explanation of this contingency:
He abused PJs emotions about that night his family died by mentioning their smell. PJ knowing that this information is correct and that RJ would know this would skip over the possibility of this being a set up, which would already have been difficult to predict, partially due to his emotions. This effectively steers Janes emotions to cloud up his thoughts and gives the logical parts of his mind enough to go off of and buy into the act. This is extraordinary simple yet effective as it's been shown Jane's senses and memories are very keen and through mentioning olfactory stimuli that Jane would very likely remember it brings him back to that moment. This is even supported by the events of one episode where Jane directly compares untrained human memory to having thrown everything that happened to you into a dark closet, it can only find big obvious things and things you don't need. With this he rapid fires a few ideas jogging everyone's memory until they remembered what the inmates name was. This was in S3E21 just a few episodes before this one so we know that this stimulus would certainly hold some influence.

This type of strategy has a double impact. On one hand, it reopens deep emotional wounds that destabilize Patrick, preventing him from thinking clearly. On the other hand, by introducing an apparently irrefutable detail, it forces Patrick to consider what he is hearing as sufficient proof of authenticity.

The strategy works not only because the comment is personal, but also because it appeals to Patrick's senses, directly connecting him to sensory memories of his family. This type of connection is hard to ignore and blocks his ability to analyze the situation rationally. Even if Patrick wanted to stop and consider the possibility that all of this was a deception, the way the information is presented drives him almost automatically toward the desired conclusion.

Another layer of complexity in this contingency lies in its timing and context. Red John not only uses an intimate and sensory detail but introduces it at a moment of extreme tension, when Patrick is already emotionally shaken by the confrontation

and the uncertainty of whether Timothy Carter truly is who he claims to be. This detail is not mentioned randomly: it is carefully timed to coincide with Patrick's mental state, which is oscillating between doubt and anger at that precise moment. By striking at this vulnerable point, Red John maximizes the impact of the comment, ensuring that the emotional weight overwhelms any critical analysis Patrick might attempt.

Back to strategy:
Patrick, upon hearing Timothy's words, emotionally breaks down. Timothy notices this and begins to leave, but Patrick tells him to wait. In that moment, Patrick shoots him with a gun he had hidden in his pocket. Red John has successfully orchestrated a situation where Patrick kills someone in public. Jane was pushed to kill Timothy Carter (under the impression that he was Red John) publicly because he said he was leaving and retiring. Jane understands RJs influence so he knows that he would never be able to get his revenge, and by saying he was going to leave he pressures Jane with limited time.

We move on to episode E1 S4. The police arrest Patrick Jane and take him into custody. Later, we see him in an interrogation room, where the detectives ask him what happened. Patrick explains that the man he killed was Red John, and he tells them how he was responsible for the death of his wife and daughter. He provides details about what happened that night, mentioning that the man he killed admitted to being Red John and knew things about his wife and daughter that only he could know, like the smell they had at the time of their death. The detectives question him, asking if he can prove those claims. Jane responds that the man had a weapon, which supports his testimony. He also mentions that he received a call at 1:15 a.m. from an FBI agent, Craig O'Laughlin, who is known to be an accomplice of Red John. However, the detectives tell him there is no evidence of what he claims and assure him that none of it happened. Finally, the detectives tell him that he is either lying or has gone crazy.

There are some things to note here, Jane had been hunting Red John for years with the intent of slaughtering him, so logically Red John could anticipate the sense of pride he would testify

with. In context with the other details it paints a picture of Jane as a man who has gone mad.

What I will say next is just an additional point. Red John has successfully covered up his crime, and indirectly causes detectives and even Jane's colleagues to doubt his sanity. The gaslighting is hard to believe, especially considering Patrick's situation, where even he doubted whether Timothy was really Red John. A situation like this could make Jane question things himself. However, this is not part of Red John's main goal. In fact, Red John wants to ensure that Patrick doesn't go to prison forever, and we will explain why later.

One of the reasons he chose Timothy Carter is that he's a respected local businessman who is a husband and a father without a criminal record. Without any proof Jane this also makes Jane look crazier.

He had a man, a security guard, switch the cell phone and swipe the gun. Given the fact that a gun was fired in a public area and that there is now a corpse on the floor this creates a gap where he has a security guard take the gun while blocking the view of the camera with his body, which could've been premeditated since Red John was contacted about the location beforehand. Carter had and made it look like Jane went crazy and shot a man who was not in fact Red John. Since he would likely share the fact that the man had a gun and since no gun was found this would contradict his story.

Another reason Carter was chosen was that beyond the surface he is a deeply disturbed man, equally vital is that his wife also was. Since his wife is also rather messed up that means that Jane will have material to work off of and prove his innocence, after all his objective isn't to permanently imprison Jane.

The episode continues with Bertram going to the room where Lisbon is recovering, informing her that she is suspended. I wanted to mention this because here Bertram is not following Red John's orders, as this action in itself does not fulfill any of Red John's plans. Bertram is acting on his own and, obviously, feels nervous that he could be caught, but he hides it.

At this point in the story, Patrick Jane is in jail, and when visited by Lisbon, he tells her that he believes he did the right thing and is willing to live with the consequences of his actions. Lisbon, though skeptical, eventually understands, realizing that he hasn’t lost his mind. Meanwhile, the team decides to investigate the case.

Cho and Rigsby handle reviewing the mall footage, while Lisbon and Van Pelt go to speak with Sally Carter, Timothy Carter's wife. Their goal is to gather clues suggesting that Timothy might be Red John. However, Sally denies these accusations, describing Timothy as a good man and mentioning that when Debbin Lubin, a girl from the church, disappeared, he organized a search to find her, gathering volunteers to help.

To understand what is happening, it’s important to recall previous events. Red John chose Timothy Carter as a potential suspect because of his facade as an exemplary man, but also because Red John saw through him and deduced that he was actually holding Debbin Lubin captive. This detail is key, as it is part of Red John’s strategy to make Patrick Jane uncover the true nature of Timothy Carter. By revealing this secret about the Carter family, Red John aims for Patrick to see beyond the facade of Timothy as a good person, in order to prove that he is truly Red John.

Red John’s choice of Timothy Carter is strategic. By considering various factors, he successfully involves Patrick in the process of uncovering the truth behind the Carter family, leading to a crucial revelation that justifies Red John’s identity, leaving the real Red John free.

Another key detail is not just the complexity of who Timothy Carter is, but that this gives Patrick an out by learning that he killed a bad man, though not the real Red John.

Lisbon goes to the jail to update Jane on the situation, telling him they found nothing to incriminate Timothy Carter; in fact, quite the opposite. Patrick asks about his background, and Lisbon says:

"Only son of missionaries, born in Africa, until they moved to the United States in 2006."

Jane responds:

"In summary, he appeared five years ago, which indicates a false identity."

As we see in the episode, Timothy Carter's identity is designed to make Patrick suspicious, motivating him to investigate Sally Carter's house. Red John chose the perfect person for the strategy to work.

Closing up the loose ends that appear. Red John in S2E8 was stated through Rebecca to be similar to Jane in seeing through people. One would presume that for such a vital aspect of his plan such as selecting the victim he would check for himself. Therefore it is rational to assume he noticed something odd with not only Carter but his wife, since he noticed something wrong with Timothy and connected it to the missing girl case he involved himself with he knew he had a fucked up secret so he chose him because his wife was also crazy and so Jane could use her to find the girl he kidnapped so that Jane could use this in his trial to save himself.

Cho and Rigsby go to check the security cameras. When they review the footage, there were three people who had been near the body: first a waitress, then a security guard, and a forensic doctor. Rigsby asks the forensic doctor if he saw any weapon, and the forensic doctor says no. Rigsby asks again to confirm. Cho talks to the waitress, and she says the security guard told her to stay away from the body. At this point, it's obvious the guard was involved in some way and that he had taken Timothy Carter's phone and gun. Cho asks a security supervisor for the guard's name and address. The guard's name was Ron Deutsch.

Rigsby and Cho go to the guard's house and find him dead, electrocuted in the bathtub with a hairdryer. Rigsby calls

Lisbon and mentions it was odd that the guy, being bald, died with a hairdryer.

Quickly explaining this step in Red John's strategy: he sought to silence the guard, but he also limited any possibility of countering the strategy, such as confirming that Red John was alive. This step is quite effective for his goal of retreating.

In parallel, Patrick managed to post bail from jail thanks to a poker game in which he won a million dollars.

Red John anticipated this would happen since he wanted Patrick to uncover the secrets of Timothy Carter and Sally Carter. However, honestly, this part of the strategy doesn't seem impressive to me, as we know Patrick usually solves complex problems easily or as soon as the opportunity arises.

After getting out of prison, Patrick meets Sally Carter, which confirms the suspicions he had developed during his time behind bars. Quickly, he devises a plan to unveil the dark secrets she was hiding. In the end, Patrick accomplishes what Red John had always wanted: discovering the truth about the Carter family and the secrets they had been keeping.

At the trial Jane is forced to take one of two choices, both of which are beneficial to Red John

1. Choose to stay in prison which lets Red John evade capture forever
2. He can use what Red John provided him to get himself an innocent verdict, but this means he would have to involve himself in a slippery slope of lies and would throw the FBI on his trail giving Red John a significantly more advantageous position

In the hearing, Patrick makes a series of shocking statements. He claims that Timothy Carter appeared out of nowhere five years ago, and that he didn't kill Timothy, because, in reality, Timothy Carter never existed—only Red John did. He also reveals details of the crime and points out that Sally Carter refused to speak. This convinces the panel of judges that Timothy Carter was actually Red John.

At the end of the episode, it is revealed that Patrick was aware that Timothy Carter was not Red John, as he had seen his strategy, and knew at that moment that he had no other choice. Red John, by employing all his tactics, leaves Patrick with only one option: to lie about Timothy Carter's identity. With this awareness, Patrick is able to present convincing arguments that exonerate him of all charges, leaving the audience convinced of his innocence, but also without the possibility of seeking true revenge.

Now we need to focus on episode E2 S4, where the outcome of the strategy is revealed. At minute 26:30, Sally Carter is found dead in her cell. Lisbon comments that she sharpened the handle of a spoon and cut her throat and wrists. At this point, Red John had ordered Sally to write a letter in which she expresses her sorrow for the loss of her husband, referring to him as Red John. In this way, she deceives everyone, reinforcing the idea definitively through the words of someone close to him.

It's important to note that Timothy Carter and Sally Carter were soulmates. Red John understood that, after Sally's arrest, she would be completely vulnerable. After losing Timothy and being exposed, she was in a state of depression over the loss of her husband. Red John took advantage of her vulnerability, ordering her to write the letter and then inducing her to commit suicide. This move closed any possibility of obtaining further information about Timothy Carter for Patrick.

Another key factor is that Sally was clearly influenced by her husband's death, her sadness was evident. Red John hid from Timothy that he would die, and then took advantage of Sally's emotional void to force her to follow his orders and commit suicide, writing the letter in the process.

At the end of the episode, Patrick uses Rosalind, a blind woman who had met Red John, to confirm whether Timothy Carter was really Red John. He does this by asking her to touch Timothy's dead body, and when she says she has never met him, it confirms Patrick's suspicions. However, it also confirms that Red John intended to condemn Patrick by withdrawing from the scene,

ensuring that he would never be able to seek revenge. This is reflected in Timothy's words during his conversation with Patrick: "Doomed to an endless angry search for a vengeance you will never have."

Aims that this achieves:
With this strategy formulated in mere hours Red John achieved multiple directives some of which contribute to plans that span years.
1. Set up Bertram for the suspect list plan. He accomplished this through the meeting in the mall. Jane's uncanny ability to read others would have been able to pick up on Bertram's acting skills. Even logically this makes Bertram suspicious as if you think about it through Jane's perspective after getting out of jail all of this means that Red John uncovered his strategy while it was unfolding. He could then connect this to what he picked up on at the mall and realized that the existence of multiple moles explains his failure. This connects to his long-term plan to frame Bertram after orchestrating Jane's list.
2. Send Jane to jail even though he would get out (partially orchestrated by Red John) so that the FBI would think he is crazy and keep tabs on him so that RJ can use the BA to keep closer track of PJ. If what Red John did to set up Jane would be undone by Red John himself why would he go through the trouble in the first place? This is a net-gain for Red John. Through making Jane look as if he's had a moment of insanity others in law enforcement would keep an eye on him as shown through the actions of Homeland Security and the FBI later on in the series. Given Red John's monumental influence in the Blake Association he would logically have a few friends in these organizations which would allow him to keep a closer eye on Patrick through more inconspicuous methods. This even helps him out in the S4 finale where he discovers Jane's plan with his FBI influence.
3. Outsmart Patrick. It's been shown time and time again Red John wants to prove he is above Jane and through this strategy he achieved a victory even if it's merely temporary.
4. Put Jane's mental abilities to the test. This is related to the previous point.
5. He could retire. This retreat is a solid strategy as RJ leaves enough for PJ to realize the man he killed wasn't RJ and also leaves enough for him to prove himself innocent through

some sophistry but that would require him lying about RJs death so he stops the investigation into him. Even if he is made to reappear as is what happened with the San Joaquin Killer this would still harm Patrick as it would cast doubt on whether or not Jane had actually ever killed him. Causing a slippery slope to push Jane further and further which supports point number two as the FBI would want to investigate.
6. Leaving Patrick without the opportunity for revenge, this is mentioned by Timothy Carter in his conversation with Patrick. And also Red John letting Rosalind be alive, makes Patrick confirm that Red John is still alive. This ties back into the previous point

STRATEGY SUMMARY

The summary of the strategy would be this, you can use it in a debate.

Uses an assassin to confirm if Hightower was in the rooms. If she wasn’t, he instructs the assassin to wait a few seconds, and if they showed up, she would commit suicide to distract Patrick with Bertram.

Instructs Bertram to use a metaphor about Patrick's sanity, relating it to a rope, in order to make Patrick reconsider the assassin’s actions.

Chooses the ideal man to play the role of the fake Red John.

Predicts that Van Pelt would want O'Laughlin to accompany her to Hightower's house.

Predicts that Patrick would instruct Cho and Rigsby to head to the location where Hightower was, since O'Laughlin would be with them.

Predicts that Patrick would ask Lisbon to check O'Laughlin's phone, as it would be obvious someone was giving him orders.

Orders Timothy to sit in the café near Patrick to make him believe he was Red John as soon as the phone rang.

As a contingency, instructs Timothy Carter to describe the scent of his wife and daughter in case Patrick doubted.

Sends a security guard to confiscate Timothy's gun and phone, anticipating that they would search him.

Ensures the security guard is prepared, anticipating and predicting that he would be interrogated.

Predicts that, due to Timothy Carter's and his wife's criminal behavior, he could convince the judges that Timothy was Red John, even without solid evidence.

Manipulates Sally Carter into committing suicide so she wouldn't reveal further details about his identity in the future.

Leaves Rosalind alive so that Jane could later confirm Timothy was not Red John.

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