

# THE 36 STRATEGIES

THERE ARE ONLY 36 STRATEGIES UNDER THE SKY



The 36 Strategies presented here are the result of the oral folk tradition of ancient China; they are not the result of a single author, as is *The Art of War*. With a bit of creativity, many of them can be applied to nearly every situation, from guerrilla property destruction to public demonstrations, to outright insurrection; thusly, anarchists will find much to interest themselves with herein. We suggest that affinity groups sit down together to read each strategy in turn, and discuss how it can be applied to the various struggles they find themselves involved with.

Of course, there are certain strategies that may seem to never be applicable to anarchist struggle, strategies that disgust, or simply seem misguided. But this does not mean that we shouldn't remain aware of all the 36 strategies; our enemies have discarded all sense of mercy and we can expect them to do *anything* in their power to stop us as we attempt to save the world.

## CHAPTER 1—WINNING STRATEGIES

**Strategy 1**—*Deceive the sky to cross the ocean.*

Moving about in the darkness and shadows, occupying isolated places, or hiding behind screens will only attract suspicious attention. To lower an enemy's guard you must act in the open, hiding your true intentions under the guise of common, everyday activities.

**Strategy 2**—*Surround Wei to rescue Zhao.*

When the enemy is too strong to attack directly, then attack something they hold dear. Know that in all things they cannot be superior. Somewhere there is a gap in their armor, a weakness that can be attacked instead. You may try to attack the relatives or dear ones of the enemy to weaken them psychologically.

**Strategy 3**—*Borrow one's hand to kill. (Kill with a borrowed knife.)*

Attack using the strength of another (because of lack of strength or because you do not want to use your own strength). Trick an ally into attacking your enemy, bribe an official to turn traitor, or use the enemy's own strength against them.

**Strategy 4**—*Make your enemy tire themselves out while conserving energy.*

It is an advantage to choose the time and place for battle. In this way you know when and where the battle will take place, while your enemy does not. Encourage your enemy to expend their energy in futile quests while you conserve your strength. When they are exhausted and confused, you attack with energy and purpose.

**Strategy 5**—*Use the opportunity of fire to rob others. (Loot a burning house.)*

When a country is beset by internal conflicts, when disease and famine ravage the population, when corruption and crime are rampant, then it will be unable to deal with an outside threat. This is the time to attack.

**Strategy 6**—*Feign an attack in the east and attack in the west.*

In any battle the element of surprise can provide an overwhelming advantage. Even when face to face with an enemy, surprise can still be employed by attacking where they least expect it. To do this you must create an expectation in the enemy's mind through the use of a feint.

## CHAPTER 2—ENEMY DEALING STRATEGIES

**Strategy 7**—*Create something from nothing.*

You use the same feint twice. Having reacted to the first and often the second feint as well, the enemy will be hesitant to react to a third feint. Therefore the third feint is the actual attack, catching your enemy with their guard down.

**Strategy 8**—*Secretly utilize the Chen Chang passage. (Repair the highway to take the crude path.)*

Attack the enemy with two convergent forces. The first is the direct attack, one that is obvious and for which the enemy prepares their defense. The second is the indirect, the attack sinister, that the enemy does not expect and which causes them to divide their forces at the last minute, leading to confusion and disaster.

**Strategy 9**—*Watch the fires burning across the river.*

Delay entering the field of battle until all the other players have become exhausted fighting amongst themselves. Then go in full strength and pick up the pieces.

**Strategy 10**—*Knife sheathed in a smile.*

Charm and ingratiate yourself to your enemy. When you have gained their trust, you move against them in secret.

**Strategy 11**—*Plum tree sacrifices for the peach tree. (Sacrifice the silver to keep the gold.)*

There are circumstances in which you must sacrifice short-term objectives in order to gain the long-term goal. This is the scapegoat strategy whereby someone suffers the consequences so that the rest do not.

**Strategy 12**—*Stealing a goat along the way. (Take the opportunity to pilfer a goat.)*

While carrying out your plans be flexible enough to take advantage of any opportunity that presents itself, however small, and avail yourself of any profit, however slight.

## CHAPTER 3—ATTACKING STRATEGIES

**Strategy 13**—*Startle the snake by hitting the grass around it.*

When you cannot detect the opponent's plans launch a direct, but brief, attack and observe your opponent reactions. Their behavior will reveal their strategy.

**Strategy 14**—*Borrow another's corpse to resurrect the soul. (Raise a corpse from the dead.)*

Take an institution, a technology, or a method that has been forgotten or discarded and appropriate it for your own purpose. Revive something from the past by giving it a new purpose or to reinterpret and bring to life old ideas, customs, and traditions.

**Strategy 15**—*Entice the tiger to leave its mountain lair.*

Never directly attack an opponent whose advantage is derived from their position. Instead, lure them away from their position, thus separating them from their source of strength.

**Strategy 16**—*In order to capture, one must let loose.*

Cornered prey will often mount a final, desperate attack. To prevent this, you let the enemy believe they still has a chance for freedom. Their will to fight is thus dampened by their desire to escape. When, in the end, the freedom is proven a falsehood, the enemy's morale will be defeated and they will surrender without a fight.

**Strategy 17**—*Tossing out a brick to get a jade.*

Prepare a trap, then lure your enemy into the trap by using bait. In war the bait is the illusion of an opportunity for gain. In life the bait is the illusion of wealth, power, and sex.

**Strategy 18**—*Defeat the enemy by capturing their chief.*

If the enemy's army is strong, but is allied to the commander only by money or threats, then take aim at the leader. If the commander falls the rest of the army will disperse or come over to your side. If, however, they are allied to the leader through loyalty, then beware; the army can continue to fight on after their death out of vengeance.

## CHAPTER 4—CHAOS STRATEGIES

**Strategy 19**—*Remove the firewood under the cooking pot. (Remove the stick from the axe.)*

When faced with an enemy too powerful to engage directly you must first weaken them by undermining their foundation and attacking their source of power.

**Strategy 20**—*Fish in disturbed waters.*

Before engaging your enemy's forces create confusion to weaken their perception and judgment. Do something unusual, strange, and unexpected; this will arouse the enemy's suspicion and disrupt their thinking. A distracted enemy is thus more vulnerable.

**Strategy 21**—*Slough off the cicada's shell. (False appearances mislead the enemy.)*

When you are in danger of being defeated, and your only chance is to escape and regroup, then create an illusion. While the enemy's attention is focused on this artifice, secretly remove your people, leaving behind only the facade of your presence.

**Strategy 22**—*Shut the door to catch the thief.*

If you have the chance to completely capture the enemy then you should do so, thereby bringing the battle or war to a quick and lasting conclusion. To allow your enemy to escape plants the seeds for future conflict. But if they succeed in escaping, be wary of giving chase.

**Strategy 23**—*Befriend a distant state while attacking a neighbor.*

It is known that nations that border each other become enemies while nations separated by distance and obstacles make better allies. When you are the strongest in one field, your greatest threat is from the second strongest in your field, not the strongest from another field.

**Strategy 24**—*Obtain safe passage to conquer the Kingdom of Guo.*

Borrow the resources of an ally to attack a common enemy. Once the enemy is defeated, use those resources to turn on the ally that lent you them in the first place.

## CHAPTER 5—PROXIMATE STRATEGIES

**Strategy 25**—*Replace the beams with rotten timbers.*

Disrupt the enemy's formations, interfere with their methods of operations, change the rules that they are used to following, go contrary to their standard training. In this way you remove the supporting pillar, the common link that makes a group of people an effective fighting force.

**Strategy 26**—*Point at the mulberry and curse the locust.*

To discipline, control, or warn others whose status or position excludes them from direct confrontation; use analogy and innuendo. Without directly naming names, those accused cannot retaliate without revealing their complicity.

**Strategy 27**—*Pretend to be a pig in order to eat the tiger. (Play dumb.)*

Hide behind the mask of a fool, a drunk, or a madman to create confusion about your intentions and motivations. Lure your opponent into underestimating your ability until, overconfident, they drop their guard. Then you may attack.

**Strategy 28**—*Remove the ladder when the enemy has ascended to the roof. (Cross the river and destroy the bridge.)*

With baits and deceptions lure your enemy into treacherous terrain. Then cut off their lines of communication and avenue of escape. To save themselves they must fight both your own forces and the elements of nature.

**Strategy 29**—*Deck the tree with bogus blossoms.*

Tying silk blossoms on a dead tree gives the illusion that the tree is healthy. Through the use of artifice and disguise make something of no value appear valuable; of no threat appear dangerous; of no use appear useful.

**Strategy 30**—*Make the host and the guest exchange places.*

Defeat the enemy from within by infiltrating the enemy's camp under the guise of cooperation, surrender, or peace treaties. In this way you can discover their weakness and then, when the enemy's guard is relaxed, strike directly at the source of their strength.

## CHAPTER 6—DEFEAT STRATEGIES

**Strategy 31**—*The beauty trap. (The tender trap, use a woman to ensnare a man.)*

Send your enemy beautiful women to cause discord within their camp. This strategy can work on three levels. First, the ruler becomes so enamored with the beauty that they neglects their duties and allows their vigilance to wane. Second, other males at court will begin to display aggressive behavior that inflames minor differences hindering co-operation and destroying morale. Third, other females at court, motivated by jealousy and envy, begin to plot intrigues further exacerbating the situation.

**Strategy 32**—*Empty fort. (Mental trap; empty a fort to make the enemy think it is filled with traps.)*

When the enemy is superior in numbers and your situation is such that you expect to be overrun at any moment, then drop all pretence of military preparedness and act casually. Unless the enemy has an accurate description of your situation this unusual behavior will arouse suspicions. With luck they will be dissuaded from attacking.

**Strategy 33**—*Let the enemy's own spy sow discord in the enemy camp. (Use enemy's own spy to spread false information.)*

Undermine your enemy's ability to fight by secretly causing discord between them and their friends, allies, advisors, family, commanders, soldiers, and population. While they are preoccupied settling internal disputes their ability to attack or defend is compromised.

**Strategy 34**—*Inflict injury on one's self to win the enemy's trust. (Fall into a trap; become baited.)*

Pretending to be injured has two possible applications. In the first, the enemy is lulled into relaxing their guard since they no longer consider you to be an immediate threat. The second is a way of ingratiating yourself to your enemy by pretending the injury was caused by a mutual enemy.

**Strategy 35**—*Chain together the enemy's ships. (Never rely on but a single strategy.)*

In important matters one should use several strategies applied simultaneously. Keep different plans operating in an overall scheme; in this manner if any one strategy fails you would still have several others to fall back on.

**Strategy 36—*If All Else Fails, Retreat.***

If it becomes obvious that your current course of action will lead to defeat then retreat and regroup. When your side is losing there are only three choices remaining: surrender, compromise, or escape. Surrender is complete defeat, compromise is half defeat, but escape is not defeat. As long as you are not defeated, you still have a chance.

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