

IV. Tactical Dispositions

1. Sun Tzu said: The good fighters of old first put themselves beyond the possibility of defeat, and then waited for an opportunity of defeating the enemy.

To place oneself beyond the possibility of defeat requires complete understanding of the situation. It is easy to secure oneself in a castle or other fortified position, easily able to defend against all attacks. It is less easy in a situation with few or no such established defenses, yet this same advice applies to battles upon the open field as well as fortified positions. We may find ourselves beyond the possibility of defeat through our mobility, and our security in avoiding the enemy.

We wait for the opportunity to defeat the enemy, but in this we must be watchful; remember that Sun Tzu has said "All warfare is based upon deception." Thus, we must be certain that the opportunity that we perceive is not itself a stratagem of the enemy. The enemy himself waits for us to offer the opportunity for our own defeat.

2. To secure ourselves against defeat lies in our own hands, but the opportunity of defeating the enemy is provided by the enemy himself.

We ourselves control our own destiny; we are less able to influence others.

3. Thus the good fighter is able to secure himself against defeat, but cannot make certain of defeating the enemy.

We cannot know our opponent as well as we know ourselves: we can only watch, and wait, and test the enemy for the understanding that will show us the victory.

4. Hence the saying: One may know how to conquer without being able to do it.

How many times have we looked out upon a field of battle and said to ourselves "If only the enemy were to release his flank!" or "I just need an opening *there*, and victory is mine!" Yet the enemy makes no mistakes, and we continue to wait, constantly planning for an opening that may or may not appear.

5. Security against defeat implies defensive tactics; ability to defeat the enemy means taking the offensive.

It is good to remember that defensive tactics need not appear as such: moving our forces in such a way that the enemy refrains from engagement is also defensive, though it may appear to our enemy as if it were an attack.

It is said that in a certain battle once fought near the Table of the Giants, the Shades of Bleakwoode gathered together at a point between their allied Omnicron Snipers and the enemy Grimnak. The dinosaur-rider declined to advance, fearing the devourers, and thus the Snipers were placed beyond possibility of defeat. In this way, the commander of Shades and Snipers practiced defensive tactics, though they were perceived by her opponent as an attack directed at Grimnak.

6. Standing on the defensive indicates insufficient strength; attacking, a superabundance of strength.

Standing on the defensive in one place does not suggest that we are on the defensive in all places: we may lack strength in one part of the battlefield, while possessing a superabundance of it in another. We defend where we do not wish to be defeated; we attack where we wish to achieve the victory.

A smaller force may defeat a larger if it is secure against defeat, for it can wear away at the enemy until it possesses a superabundance of strength in one or another part of the battlefield.

7. The general who is skilled in defense hides in the most secret recesses of the earth; he who is skilled in attack flashes forth from the topmost heights of heaven. Thus on the one hand we have ability to protect ourselves; on the other, a victory that is complete.

Oh! In how few games is this principle clear! The general who is skilled in defense knows to keep his low-defense units behind hills and trees, walls and ruins, until it is their time to strike. The general who is skilled in attack knows to attack from the heights, where line-of-sight is greatest and height advantage multiplies his power.

8. To see victory only when it is within the ken of the common herd is not the acme of excellence.

Though it is not the acme of excellence, neither should we shun victory when it is in our grasp!

In a well-known battle for control of a certain map that the forces of Laur sought to bury in the confines of Migol's tomb,¹ the Empress Kiova perceived that the Knights of Weston guarding the map were inactive and did not occupy the space of the map; she flew among them and seized control of the map before they were able to react.

¹ A Master Game adaptation of a scenario presented for the Basic Game.

Victory was easy to see, and not at the acme of excellence, yet nonetheless it was victory.

9. *Neither is it the acme of excellence if you fight and conquer and the whole Empire says, "Well done!"*

It is not the acme of excellence, yet it is of this kind of victory that ballads are written; it is these battles that are studied, and it is these heroes who are most publicly honored.

10. *To lift an autumn hair is no sign of great strength; to see the sun and moon is no sign of sharp sight; to hear the noise of thunder is no sign of a quick ear:*

In the same way, it is no sign of cleverness to defeat an all-melée army with heavy ranged units, nor to defend a castle against the Warriors of Ashra.

11. *What the ancients called a clever fighter is one who not only wins, but excels in winning with ease.*

It is these clever fighters, and the battles they have fought, that must be closely studied: what advantages did they possess over their opponents? What mistakes did their opponents make that allowed the master-stroke of victory?

12. *Hence his victories bring him neither reputation for wisdom nor credit for courage.*

Yet are they victories.

They bring no reputation for wisdom nor credit for courage for, after battle has been joined, even fools can see the victory in his hands. "Of course you won!" they tell him; "once your opponent placed all of his ranged units on that side of the battlefield, all you had to do was get your Deathstalkers past the hills! You hardly had to move up your samurai!"

But by whom were these forces selected for this battle, and by whom were they directed upon this field? In the movement of the Samurai, he placed himself beyond the possibility of defeat; in the movement of the Deathstalkers, he seized upon the victory.

For the fools are correct in this: it is not courage to face an enemy we do not fear; it is not wisdom to defeat an enemy already weak.

What the fools fail to see are the true enemies. We do not fear the enemy upon the battlefield because we have already defeated our own timidity. We claim victory upon the battlefield because we have already conquered our own foolishness.

13. He wins his battles by making no mistakes. Making no mistakes is what establishes the certainty of victory, for it means conquering an enemy that is already defeated.

It is in our error that the enemy sees her victory; it is in her error that we see ours.

There is a balance here that is hard to maintain: we must not allow ourselves to be distracted from the battle, and at the same time, we must be aware of everything that may influence it.

14. Hence the skillful fighter puts himself into a position which makes defeat impossible, and does not miss the moment for defeating the enemy.

It is also true that we may make no mistakes and yet appear to be mistaken. Thus, we permit the enemy to attack where we are already prepared for her, as the honored Sun Tzu has said: "hold out baits to entice the enemy." The moment for defeating the enemy may be the moment of our choosing, as her error is to perceive an error on our part where none has occurred. At all points, make defeat impossible.

15. Thus it is that in war the victorious strategist only seeks battle after the victory has been won, whereas he who is destined to defeat first fights and afterwards looks for victory.

It is often the case that the victory is won before the first die has been cast. The victorious strategist has determined from the beginning, and determines anew with each beginning within the battle the course that victory will take. Even a loss upon the battlefield itself may yet yield a greater victory, if the loss is accomplished with grace and amity.

16. The consummate leader cultivates the moral law, and strictly adheres to method and discipline; thus it is in his power to control success.

We control success by making no mistakes, and by taking advantage of mistakes made by the enemy. Thus, we cannot allow ourselves to be distracted from the battle, while at the same time, we must be aware of all of the factors that impinge upon it.

To cultivate the Moral Law is to cultivate certainty in perception. When we cultivate the Moral Law, we remove from ourselves all distraction; we discharge our responsibilities, and we place ourselves apart from desire. We perceive all things around us in their harmony with our purpose.

To strictly adhere to method and discipline is to make no mistakes: when the enemy moves or fails to move, and in this we see victory, we must be in a position to act upon it.

It should also be known that strict adherence to Method and Discipline does not imply rigidity either of thought or of action, for the general who adheres to a strategy after it has ceased to be useful has become distracted from the battle by his own desires, and has thus lost the Moral Law. Rather, we adhere to method and discipline in our reliability, that when a certain maneuver must be executed, we may execute it swiftly and without error.

17. In respect of military method, we have, firstly, Measurement; secondly, Estimation of quantity; thirdly, Calculation; fourthly, Balancing of chances; fifthly, Victory.

Measurement is an understanding at a quantitative level of the physical, measurable factors involved in the battle: the size of the battlefield, the width of its passages, the number and height of its obstructions, and so on.

Estimation of quantity is an estimation of those things which cannot be directly measured, but are implied by measurements, such as the speed with which our opponent's force will move across the battlefield, and the speed of our own, thus, the point upon the battlefield at which they will meet.

Calculation is the factoring of the measurements and estimates.

Balancing of chances is the outcome of calculation, with an understanding of the harmony of the battle; it is in this that we call strategy.

Victory is a matter of the successful outcome of the balancing of chances.

18. Measurement owes its existence to Earth; Estimation of quantity to Measurement; Calculation to Estimation of quantity; Balancing of chances to Calculation; and Victory to Balancing of chances.

Thus, Victory is a consequence of Measurement. But we must be cautious in two matters: first, that we do not take too long in measurement, and cede the victory through our own failure to act; and second that we do not measure matters that are irrelevant to the battle.

The difference between a victorious general and a defeated one is that the victorious general knows those factors that are relevant to the battle.

19. A victorious army opposed to a routed one, is as a pound's weight placed in the scale against a single grain.

20. *The onrush of a conquering force is like the bursting of pent-up waters into a chasm a thousand fathoms deep.*

Thus the enemy is defeated in the realization of his defeat; his acceptance of defeat the chasm, and our conquest the force of the waters.

Yet we must remember always to be gracious in victory, lest our opponent lose heart for the battles to come.

When we and our opponent are both consummate leaders, the waters may remain pent up, while each seeks the weakness in the other's dam. This may lead to drawn-out battles.

In such a case, let both generals re-consider the nature of victory. For while we struggle in battle for our lives, we game upon the tabletop for our entertainment and edification; the greater victory between two greatly skilled is more often found in their friendship than in their enmity.