

PRACTICAL TECH GUIDE

The 36 Stratagems For Software Teams

Ancient Strategy Patterns for Engineering,
Product, Security, and Delivery



胜战计 | 敌战计 | 攻战计 | 混战计 | 并战计 | 败战计

The 36 Stratagems for Software Teams

Ancient Strategy Patterns for Engineering,
Product, Security, and Delivery

Blue J. Lion
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Table of Contents

Introduction

Part I — 胜战计

Stratagem 1. 瞒天过海 — Cross the Sea Without the Heavens Knowing

Stratagem 2. 围魏救赵 — Besiege Wei to Rescue Zhao

Stratagem 3. 借刀杀人 — Use Borrowed Strength

Stratagem 4. 以逸待劳 — Wait at Ease for the Exhausted Enemy

Stratagem 5. 趁火打劫 — Use the Crisis Window

Stratagem 6. 声东击西 — Make Noise in the East, Strike in the West

Part II — 敌战计

Stratagem 7. 无中生有 — Create Something from Nothing

Stratagem 8. 暗渡陈仓 — Secretly Cross at Chencang

Stratagem 9. 隔岸观火 — Watch the Fire from the Opposite Shore

Stratagem 10. 笑里藏刀 — Hide a Dagger Behind a Smile

Stratagem 11. 李代桃僵 — Sacrifice the Plum Tree to Preserve the Peach Tree

Stratagem 12. 顺手牵羊 — Lead Away the Goat in Passing

Part III — 攻战计

Stratagem 13. 打草惊蛇 — Stir the Grass to Startle the Snake

Stratagem 14. 借尸还魂 — Borrow a Corpse to Resurrect the Soul

Stratagem 15. 调虎离山 — Lure the Tiger Down the Mountain

Stratagem 16. 欲擒故纵 — Let Go in Order to Capture

Stratagem 17. 抛砖引玉 — Throw a Brick to Attract Jade

Stratagem 18. 擒贼擒王 — Capture the Ringleader First

Part IV — 混战计

Stratagem 19. 釜底抽薪 — Remove the Firewood from Under the Cauldron

Stratagem 20. 混水摸鱼 — Catch Fish in Muddy Water

Stratagem 21. 金蝉脱壳 — The Cicada Sheds Its Shell

Stratagem 22. 关门捉贼 — Shut the Door to Catch the Thief

Stratagem 23. 远交近攻 — Befriend the Distant, Attack the Nearby

Stratagem 24. 假道伐虢 — Borrow a Road to Attack Guo

Part V — 并战计

Stratagem 25. 偷梁换柱 — Steal the Beams and Replace the Pillars

Stratagem 26. 指桑骂槐 — Point at the Mulberry While Scolding the Locust

Stratagem 27. 假痴不癫 — Feign Foolishness Without Losing Balance

Stratagem 28. 上屋抽梯 — Remove the Ladder After the Enemy Climbs Up

Stratagem 29. 树上开花 — Make a Tree Bloom

Stratagem 30. 反客为主 — Turn from Guest into Host

Part VI — 败战计

Stratagem 31. 美人计 — The Allure Trap

Stratagem 32. 空城计 — The Empty Fort Strategy

Stratagem 33. 反间计 — Turn the Spy Against the Enemy

Stratagem 34. 苦肉计 — Chosen Pain

Stratagem 35. 连环计 — Chain Stratagems

Stratagem 36. 走为上计 — Retreat Is the Best Strategy

Closing Note

Introduction

Book Positioning

This book looks at software development from a slightly sideways angle.

For readers who have never run into them before, the 36 Stratagems are a classic Chinese set of short tactical patterns. They are not a software framework, not a management method, and definitely not a reason to start acting like you are leading cavalry through a sprint review.

What they do well is give messy situations a shape. Each stratagem is a compact move, or at least a way of noticing a move: delay here, pressure there, hide this, simplify that, leave now, wait longer. Once you stop reading them as ancient drama and start reading them as patterns, they become surprisingly useful company.

Software teams rarely get neat textbook problems. They get migrations that should not alarm finance, incidents where the facts show up late, vendor demos with suspiciously good lighting, and roadmaps shaped by both code and the usual human complications.

The 36 stratagems are useful here not because software teams should act like generals, but because teams still run into the same kinds of moves:

1. timing
2. indirection
3. pressure
4. clarity
5. sequencing
6. retreat

This book translates each stratagem into a software-team pattern in plain language. The point is not manipulation. It is better instincts.

What Makes This Book Different

This volume is a little looser and a little more visual than some others in the series.

Instead of following one companion project from weak to strong, this book works more like a pocket set of angles. Each chapter stands on its own and can be read as a pattern, a nudge, or a useful way to reframe a messy situation.

The aim is not to overwork each stratagem. It is to let each one land quickly, linger a little, and leave behind one useful thought.

Most chapters keep to a simple pattern:

1. the classic idea in plain language
2. a short modern angle on it
3. a realistic team situation
4. guidance on when the pattern helps
5. a warning about misuse

Recurring Lenses

Across the book, the same four practical lenses keep coming up:

1. architecture and migration
2. delivery and release strategy
3. operations, resilience, and security
4. leadership, communication, and coordination

Ethical Framing

One thing is worth saying up front: the original stratagem titles can sound dramatic, but the software-team version should lean toward clarity, safety, responsibility, and better decisions.

Use the patterns to:

1. reduce unnecessary risk

2. improve timing
3. expose hidden assumptions
4. make change easier to absorb
5. recover from bad situations with less damage

Do not use them to:

1. hide harmful intent
2. mislead customers
3. exploit teammates
4. bypass approvals that exist for safety or compliance

Intended Audience

This book is for readers who:

1. work in or around software delivery
2. can recognize architecture, release, and incident tradeoffs
3. want a better vocabulary for messy technical decisions
4. prefer practical judgment over abstract management slogans

Working Setting For Examples

To keep the examples grounded, most chapters draw from the same fictional company: Bridgecairn.

Bridgecairn is a mid-sized SaaS company with:

1. a legacy billing monolith
2. several newer services
3. a small platform team
4. a growing security program
5. a mobile app

6. a data pipeline used by operations and finance

That gives the book room for examples about migrations, incidents, vendor choices, platform standards, and the usual organizational friction around them.

If the same billing monolith, platform team, security group, or AI support prototype shows up more than once, that is intentional. The book is not trying to tell one big continuous story, but a little continuity helps the patterns feel more grounded and less abstract.

Part I — 胜战计

Stratagems for Advantage



These are the quieter moves. They work best while there is still enough time to think before everything gets dramatic.

About the Author

Blue J. Lion has over 20+ years of experience in software development, with a focus on programming, data security, and privacy. He has worked across engineering and product environments, building practical solutions and tools.

Beyond software, he enjoys creating simple, thoughtful products—ranging from books and visual tools to creative projects that explore the intersection of technology and everyday life.

In his free time, he enjoys running, swimming, and working on new ideas.

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Author Portfolio

