

A Guest Lecture

In the voice of Sübe'etei Ba'atur · composed from *The Secret History of the Mongols* (293 passages) and *Subotai the Valiant* (186) · every claim sourced, notes at the foot

You want to know about the gap. Everyone asks about the gap. They ask as though it were a trick, and a trick is a thing you can borrow. It is not a trick. It is the last step of a method, and if you take the last step without the ones before it you will only have made a hole in your own line.

I · The gap

When the enemy was strong and ready to die where he stood, we opened our ranks.¹ He saw daylight. He thought: there. And he stopped being an army and became men running in one direction. Then we killed him in a place we had already chosen.

Understand what I am telling you. The gap did not break him. **He was already broken when he decided the gap was better than the fight.** Our work was finished before the opening was made. All that remained was arithmetic.

A cornered man fights with everything. A man with somewhere to go fights with nothing.

And understand the cost of it. You may do this to a people once. After that, every opening you offer is read correctly, and you will have to pay in blood for ground you could have had for nothing. We did not care. We were not coming back to negotiate.

II · Why we hunted before we fought

Each winter the whole army went out for the **nerge**.² We formed a line eighty miles wide and walked for three months. The wings came forward slowly until the line bent into a half-circle, and the circle closed, and everything alive inside it was driven to the centre.

We were not hunting. We were learning the only thing that matters: **that you do not chase the animal, you decide where it will be.** A man who has spent three months closing a circle does not need to be told where to leave the opening. He has felt the shape of it in his legs.

This is the part nobody copies, because it is boring and it takes all winter.

III · On pursuit, and on what my Khan told me

He sent me after the Merkit sons, and he said:

*If they grow wings and fly up into the sky, will you not, Sübe'etei, turn into a gerfalcon and fly up after them? If they become marmots, burrowing into the earth, will you not become an iron rod to strike the ground and search them out? If they become fish and swim into the ocean, will you not become a net, scooping and netting them up?*³

That is the famous half. Here is the half they leave out, from the same breath:

*Spare your soldiers' mounts lest they become too lean, husband your provisions lest they are used up. You will encounter many wild beasts along the way. Think ahead as you go. Do not let your soldiers gallop in pursuit of them.*³

He gave me the poetry and the logistics in one speech, and the logistics were the longer part. Do not chase the deer you pass on the way to the war. Every man who rides off after something easy is a man not present when the circle closes.

IV • What you have, and what you do not

I am told you ask whether this can be done now, against the ones who trouble you. I have looked at your situation as I would have looked at a map.

You do not have the circle. Your enemy has roads you do not hold and buyers you do not control. A gap you did not make is not a gap. It is just the open country, and it was always there.

Your enemy is not gathered. You cannot herd what is already scattered. Scattering is what I did to an army; your enemy began that way.

And your enemy does not want to live. He wants to continue. These are different appetites, and only the first one can be baited. A man who gains standing from being struck will not take your opening, because taking it costs him the thing he is actually accumulating.

V • The part you should find unpleasant

Look again at who is leaving the opening.

He strikes you small — always small, always just beneath the size that would make you come with everything. And he leaves you an exit that looks like wisdom: answer in proportion, do not commit, remain. You take it. You take it every time, because on the day it is cheap and it looks like restraint.

That is my method with the ending removed. I opened a gap to finish a thing quickly. He opens one to keep a thing going forever. He has no killing ground and does not want one — the walking through is the weapon. You are not being destroyed. You are being *kept*.

I herded men to a place. He herds you to a duration.

VI • Three things to carry

- **The opening is the last step, never the first.** If you have not closed the circle, you are not offering an escape route — you are leaving a door open and calling it strategy.
- **Spend the winter on the hunt.** The method is boring, it is practised when nothing is happening, and it is the entire reason the clever part works.
- **Count who is choosing the exit.** In every situation you described to me, it was not you.

1. "[12] Open-the-End Tactics — If the enemy was very strong and ready to fight to the death, the Mongols would leave a gap in their ranks. In this way, the enemy might think they could see an escape route, scatter, and start to run. At that precise moment, the Mongols would fix upon a suitable place to kill the fleeing enemy." *The Secret History of the Mongols*, Appendix, tactic 12 of 13 (p. 294).

2. The nerge: "the great animal hunt held at the beginning of each winter... lasted for three months, and involved the entire army assembled in full battle dress. The army was assembled along a line almost eighty miles long... the wings of the army gradually extended out to form a semicircle... the circle was closed, and contracted tighter and tighter, driving the game toward the center." *Subotai the Valiant* (p. 51).

3. Chinggis Qahan to Sübe'etei, both halves from the same address, *The Secret History of the Mongols* (p. 190).

4. The feigned retreat at Liegnitz, 1241 — "the old Mongol trick... designed to separate the enemy cavalry from its infantry and to loosen the enemy's packed formations during the chase." *Subotai the Valiant* (Battle of Liegnitz, p. 114).

5. On concentration of effort — "Though your army will divide beyond the great rivers, all must continue in pursuit of one goal. Though mountain ranges separate your men from each other, think of nothing else but this task." *Subotai the Valiant*.

6. Section IV and V are argument, not source. Sübe'etei said nothing about 2026. The Mongol claims are quoted; the modern reading is the lesson's, and is deliberately falsifiable. Companion analysis: *Open-the-End — the five preconditions and the 2026 test*.