



DropTale

Big Ideas on the Board

A SPARK & ANVIL STRATEGY BOOK

DropTale – Big Ideas on the Board

A Spark & Anvil companion book – free to download and share.

Ages 9-14. Game: shogi.

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This volume teaches strategy through the app's cast – 6 big ideas, one per chapter.

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*The other DropTale books teach how each piece **moves**. This one teaches how to **play well** at shogi – the ideas above the moves – through the cast you know. Shogi has one idea no other board game shares, and it changes everything.*

Chapter 1 – Build the Castle

Crownfall Gyoku, the king, steps one square in any direction – and the whole game is about protecting that king. In shogi, protecting the king has a name: you **build a castle**. Goldguard Kin, the gold general, is the perfect castle brick – it guards six directions and never wanders off.

"Do not send me charging out," said Goldguard Kin. "Wall me around the king, and I am worth more than any attack."

Strong players spend their first moves tucking the king into a corner and stacking golds and silvers around it – a little fortress. Only *then* do they begin to attack. A king caught in the open middle of a shogi board falls fast, because in shogi the attacker can drop pieces right next to it (Chapter 2).

Say it out loud: *Castle first – wall the king in gold before you attack.*

Your turn: The "Safe Castle" workbook pages show two kings – one walled in, one in the open. Which one is easier to mate?

Building the castle is slow and quiet. It is the patience that lets you attack boldly later.

Chapter 2 – The Drop

Here is the idea that makes shogi unlike any other board game. When Dropcatch Dai captures an enemy piece, that piece does **not** leave the game – it joins Dropcatch Dai's own army, waiting in hand, ready to be **dropped** back onto any empty square as a full move.

"Nothing is ever really gone," Dropcatch Dai grinned. "Every piece I take is a piece I get to play again – on my side."

This changes how you think about trades. In chess, capturing a knight removes it forever. In shogi, capturing a knight *hands you a knight to drop* wherever you need one – often right next to the enemy king. The best players are always counting what is in their hand, because a drop can appear from nowhere.

Say it out loud: *Every piece I capture is a piece I can drop back – count my hand.*

Your turn: The "In Hand" pages show a captured piece ready to drop. Find the empty square where dropping it does the most damage.

The drop takes a while to get used to. Once it clicks, you start seeing the whole board as full of pieces waiting to appear.

Chapter 3 – The Reserve

Reserve Rin keeps the *komadai* – the little tray beside the board where your captured pieces wait in hand. Reserve Rin also knows the two rules every dropper must respect. You may not drop a pawn onto a file that already has one of your unpromoted pawns (that is *nifu*), and you may not deliver checkmate with a dropped pawn (that is *uchifuzume*).

"Know your reserve," said Reserve Rin, "and know the two things it may not do."

Playing well means **managing your hand** – holding a gold in reserve for defence when the enemy castle is coming, or saving a piece to drop at the exact winning moment instead of spending it early. A full hand is a full toolbox.

Say it out loud: *Save a piece in hand for the moment it wins – and mind the pawn-drop rules.*

Your turn: The "Reserve" pages ask which drop is legal and which breaks the pawn rule. Then: which saved piece finishes the attack?

Keeping a piece back instead of using it right away is a real skill. It feels like waiting – it is really planning.

Chapter 4 – The Promotion Zone

Promote Nari guards the last three ranks of the enemy's side – the **promotion zone**. A piece that moves into it (or out of it) may flip over to its stronger promoted side. A silver becomes a gold-mover; a rook or bishop becomes even more powerful.

"Reach my zone," said Promote Nari, "and your small pieces grow up."

Strong players push pieces toward the promotion zone on purpose – a promoted piece is worth far more, and a promoted rook near the enemy king is often the finishing blow. But there is a choice to make: sometimes a piece is better left unpromoted (a knight, say) so it can still drop or jump usefully.

Say it out loud: *Push toward the far three ranks – pieces grow stronger there.*

Your turn: The "Grow Up" pages show a piece one step from the zone. Should it promote – and what does it become?

Deciding whether to promote is a real judgement call. There is no single right answer every time, and learning to weigh it is the skill.

Chapter 5 – The Long Pieces

Rook Hisha sweeps whole files and ranks; Bishop Kaku slides the long diagonals. They are the two strongest pieces on the board, and – just like the chariot in xiangqi and the rook in chess – they want **open lines**.

"Give me a clear file," said Rook Hisha, "and I stare straight into their castle."

The best shogi players get their rook onto a file aimed at the enemy king's castle, then break that file open with pawns and drops. A rook plus a bishop, both promoted, both aimed at one castle, is an attack few defences survive. And the same big idea as every game returns here: a long piece that hits **two** targets at once forces a losing choice.

Say it out loud: *Point the rook and bishop at their castle, then break it open.*

Your turn: The "Long Lines" pages show a rook or bishop. Which file or diagonal, once opened, aims straight at the enemy king?

Aiming your big pieces before you attack is the quiet setup. The fireworks come after.

Chapter 6 – The Tsume Finish

Sensei Tsume is the puzzle master of the finish. A *tsume* is a forced checkmate – a sequence of checks the enemy king cannot escape, usually finished with a **drop**. Every check forces the king's reply, and the last move springs the net.

"I never give the king a rest," said Sensei Tsume. "Check, and check, and check – until there is nowhere left."

Because of drops, shogi mates are fierce: a piece can appear right beside the king from your hand. Playing well at the end means calculating a chain of forcing checks – thinking several moves ahead, asking each time, *what is the king forced to do, and what do I drop or play next?*

Say it out loud: *Finish with forcing checks – the last one from your hand.*

Everything in this book meets here: castle your own king (Chapter 1), gather pieces in hand (Chapters 2-3), promote and aim your long pieces (Chapters 4-5), then deliver the tsume.

Your turn: The "Tsume" pages are forced mates, most ending in a drop. Keep every move a check.

Reading a mate several moves deep is hard, and no one does it perfectly at first. Seeing one check further than yesterday is exactly how you improve.

Keep playing at spark-and-anvil.org – the trainer runs these ideas as live positions, with the cast beside you.

Keep playing

- Play every idea in this book as a live puzzle: <https://sparkanvil.org/play/droptale>
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