



StoneSong

Big Ideas on the Board

A SPARK & ANVIL STRATEGY BOOK

StoneSong – Big Ideas on the Board

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

Ages 9-14. Game: go.

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

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*Go looks simple – stones on a grid – and it holds more strategy than almost any game. The other StoneSong books teach the rules; this one teaches how to **play well**, through the cast you know. One big idea per chapter.*

Chapter 1 – Claim the Space

Wide Heron stands tall and looks at the *whole* board. New players think Go is about capturing stones. It is not. "The winner," said Wide Heron, "is the one who surrounds the most empty space – the most **territory**. Capturing is just one way to help."

So the first big idea is the biggest one: play toward **space**, not toward fights. Strong players open on the wide, empty parts of the board – corners first, then sides – sketching out large frameworks of territory. Rushing to poke at the opponent's stones usually just helps *them* get stronger.

Say it out loud: *Surround space, not stones – territory wins the game.*

Hungry Crane always wants to capture, and Sparring Tiger loves a fight – but the wise players let them fight only when the fight helps claim territory, not for its own sake.

Your turn: The "Big Points" workbook pages show an open board. Which move sketches the most territory – the wide point, or the little capture?

It feels strange to ignore a capture and play far away. That patience is the single biggest idea in Go.

Chapter 2 – Stay Connected

Weaver Ant knows the difference between strong stones and dead ones: **connection**. Linked stones share their liberties – their breathing room – and become almost impossible to kill. Stones that get **cut** apart are weak, and weak groups die.

"Two stones joined are strong," said Weaver Ant. "Two stones cut are two funerals."

So playing well means keeping your own groups connected, and looking for the **cutting point** in the opponent's shape – the spot where, if you play there, you split their stones into two weak groups. Half of Go is connect-your-own; the other half is cut-theirs.

Say it out loud: *Keep your stones joined; cut theirs apart.*

Your turn: The "Connect or Cut" pages show a shape with a gap. Find the move that joins your stones – or the cut that breaks theirs.

Seeing cutting points takes practice. Once you spot them, the whole board reads like a map of strong and weak groups.

Chapter 3 – Make Two Eyes

Two-Eyed Owl teaches the rule that decides life and death. A group of stones is **alive** – safe forever – only if it has **two eyes**: two separate empty points inside it that the opponent can never fill. One eye is not enough; the opponent fills the last outside liberty and captures. Two eyes, and the group can never be taken.

"One eye is a hope," said Two-Eyed Owl. "Two eyes is a home."

So when a group is under attack, the question is always: *can it make two eyes?* If yes, defend and live. If no, it may be time to let it go (Chapter 5). And when *attacking*, the goal is to stop the enemy group from ever making its second eye.

Say it out loud: *Two eyes lives forever – one eye dies.*

Your turn: The "Alive or Dead" pages show a surrounded group. Can it make two eyes? Find the move that gives it life – or the move that kills it.

Life and death is the sharpest skill in Go. Reading whether a group lives takes time to learn – and it is deeply satisfying when it clicks.

Chapter 4 – Good Shape

Nimble Cat gets the most work from the fewest stones. Some shapes are **efficient** – they make territory and stay connected with no wasted stones. Others are heavy and slow, or full of cutting points. "Do not clump your stones in a lump," said Nimble Cat. "Spread them into shapes that do two jobs at once."

Good shape means playing stones that both extend your territory *and* keep you connected, that make eyes easily and are hard to cut. Beginners play stones one-touching-the-next; strong players leave the right small gaps, so each stone reaches further.

Say it out loud: *Play light, efficient shapes – most work, fewest stones.*

Your turn: The "Good Shape" pages show two ways to answer a move – one heavy, one light. Which shape does more?

Shape is a feel that grows with every game. You start to sense when a move is "thick" and strong versus "clumsy" and slow.

Chapter 5 – Sacrifice the Small

Clever Gecko is willing to lose a little to win a lot. Sometimes a stone or two is doomed – trying to save it just makes a bigger weak group. The wise move is to **sacrifice** it: let the small stones go, and use the moves you save to take something far larger somewhere else.

"Do not cling to a dying stone," said Clever Gecko. "Let it go, and take the whole corner in return."

This is one of the hardest ideas for new players, who hate giving anything up. But a well-timed sacrifice – giving the opponent a few stones while you build a wall or claim a big area – is often the winning move.

Say it out loud: *Let small stones go to win big territory.*

Your turn: The "Let It Go" pages show a stone under attack. Is it worth saving – or is the sacrifice that takes the bigger prize the real winning move?

Sacrificing feels like losing at first. Learning when a loss is really a gain is a true mark of a strong player.

Chapter 6 – The Quiet Endgame

Tidy Mouse waits for the end, when the big frameworks are settled and only the edges remain. Now the game is decided by small moves – a point here, two points there, along the borders between territories. Patient Bamboo, who never rushed all game, wins these quiet exchanges by playing the **biggest edge move first**.

"The endgame looks small," said Tidy Mouse, "but close games are won and lost by a single point on the edge."

Playing well at the end means counting: which border move gains the most points, and which moves *must* be answered (they are "sente" – they keep the turn). Grab the big edge points in the right order, and a game that looked even tips your way.

Say it out loud: *Play the biggest edge move first – the endgame is won by points.*

Everything in this book meets here: you claimed space (Chapter 1), stayed connected (Chapter 2), kept your groups alive (Chapter 3), played good shape (Chapter 4), sacrificed wisely (Chapter 5) – and now you count the edges to the finish.

Your turn: The "Endgame" pages show a settled board. Which edge move is worth the most points? Which one keeps your turn?

Counting the endgame takes patience most beginners skip. Learning to close a game cleanly is exactly what getting good feels like.

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

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