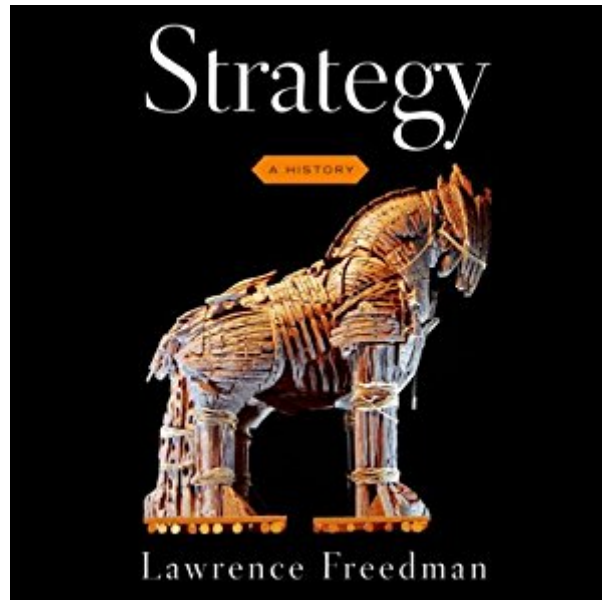




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Strategy: A History



Synopsis

In *Strategy: A History*, Sir Lawrence Freedman, one of the world's leading authorities on war and international politics, captures the vast history of strategic thinking, in a consistently engaging and insightful account of how strategy came to pervade every aspect of our lives. The range of Freedman's narrative is extraordinary, moving from the surprisingly advanced strategy practiced in primate groups, to the opposing strategies of Achilles and Odysseus in *The Iliad*, the strategic advice of Sun Tzu and Machiavelli, the great military innovations of Baron Henri de Jomini and Carl von Clausewitz, the grounding of revolutionary strategy in class struggles by Marx, the insights into corporate strategy found in Peter Drucker and Alfred Sloan, and the contributions of the leading social scientists working on strategy today. The core issue at the heart of strategy, the author notes, is whether it is possible to manipulate and shape our environment rather than simply become the victim of forces beyond one's control. Time and again, Freedman demonstrates that the inherent unpredictability of this environment - subject to chance events, the efforts of opponents, the missteps of friends - provides strategy with its challenge and its drama. Armies or corporations or nations rarely move from one predictable state of affairs to another, but instead feel their way through a series of states, each one not quite what was anticipated, requiring a reappraisal of the original strategy, including its ultimate objective. Thus the picture of strategy that emerges in this book is one that is fluid and flexible, governed by the starting point, not the end point. A brilliant overview of the most prominent strategic theories in history, from David's use of deception against Goliath, to the modern use of game theory in economics, this masterful volume sums up a lifetime of reflection on strategy.

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Customer Reviews

Five stars is a minimum to books like this. It's a masterpiece for whoever interested in history as a whole. And it's a masterpiece for whoever interested in reading a masterpiece as if it was for beginners. Strategy, by Lawrence Freedman took to me three weeks of reading although It's a long book (600 pages). Despite of it I was always submerged and concentrated in the reading, which talks very well about the author. So what is the topic of this book: this book is about the history and the evolution of strategy through the ages. To do that, Mr. Freedman invites you to a voyage of four thousand years to see how this method for solving problems was changing over time, and how, despite of the changes, kept its tenets until today. So the book is not only about war which is the strategy's most natural and common environment but also about politics, management, religion, bureaucracies, and so on. And that is so because strategy is a discipline that needs to be nurtured through other sciences and disciplines. Perhaps this is the most dependent of all disciplines and that's why it captures the attention and the dedication of scholars like Mr. Freedman. And of readers like myself. Or yourself. Some reviews say that this is not a book for amateurs, but who is an expert on strategy if it is so hard to define what strategy is. Maybe an expert in strategy is a general who has lost all his battles. Or the scholar who follows and studies him. I don't know, but I do know that strategy is about the facts of the world when the world poses questions with no definitive answers. So all that you have as a capital is a handful of solutions. Which one will you pick? As long as the complexity of a problem increases, less certain is the future even if you don't do nothing at all. And this is because to do nothing is a strategy too. And it has its costs. Sometimes to lose today is a way of winning tomorrow. Sometimes that excellent strategy won't work. And this is the point in Mr. Freedman's book: there is no prescription or recipe. And if this is so, what we can do? Strategy is one of the best approaches to the topic I've ever read. The strategy of the devil in Milton's Lost Paradise or the strategy of the nonviolence's promoters in the U.S. during the twentieth century, both share the same dilemmas and the same old conundrums that faced Julius Cesar and Napoleon. To link people, facts and ideas with a very elusive concept like strategy is a task that demands not only a good professor but a good writer also. Mr. Freedman exercises the art of writing with the same simplicity that Hemingway used to encourage. And this is no small. To talk about strategy is one thing; to write about it, is another. I highly recommend this book to whoever want to know about this topic which mingles science and art in strange and veiled proportions. Just as the

author says, this is not a book for those interested in being advised on how to win a "battle." This is a book for knowing what strategy is and how has changed over time to become what it is today.

This is a review of the CD audiobook version of this work. Any review of this book would have to start out by stating that this book is really of value to those with a very limited knowledge of strategy (four star value for those). For those with a more than novice level of knowledge of the topic, gained through undergraduate study in the fields of political science, international relations, economics, and business the book would not be of great value (two or three stars). The book is basically an introductory survey of strategy in these fields. Considering the topics that it does cover, however, it is no surprise that it is very, very long. Due to its length it does quite a good job at providing the novice a decent survey of the topic. The author, Lawrence Freedman, is a Professor in the field of international relations and this is where the book is at its strongest. In fields outside of this, however, the book is weaker. The author makes a few minor mistakes. For example, in the field of business, Dr. Freedman makes the statement that Japanese companies made use of *Just in time* inventory practices to reduce carrying costs associated with holding inventory. While this has been the reason it was used in the US (and is taught with this in mind in US business schools), in Japan the reason was that limited inventory stocks forced production to halt and thus enabled any bugs in the production process to be quickly (though not very cost effectively) to be found. This was a major factor contributing to the high quality manufacturing processes in many Japanese auto manufacturers as well as in other manufacturing industries in Japan. IN short, a very good book for those without a background in the subject but not of great value to those with such a background. One last comment, the audiobook is very well read by a David Sedaris sounding reader. It is never monotone and always interesting.

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