

antithetical to normal human behavior. Normally, we cannot stand the idea of closing the doors on our alternatives. Had most of us been in Xiang Yu's armor, in other words, we would have sent out part of our army to tend to the ships, just in case we needed them for retreat; and we would have asked others to cook meals, just in case the army needed to stay put for a few weeks. Still others would have been instructed to pound rice out into paper scrolls, just in case we needed parchment on which to sign the terms of the surrender of the mighty Qin (which was highly unlikely in the first place).

In the context of today's world, we work just as feverishly to keep all our options open. We buy the expandable computer system, just in case we need all those high-tech bells and whistles. We buy the insurance policies that are offered with the plasma high-definition television, just in case the big screen goes blank. We keep our children in every activity we can imagine—just in case one sparks their interest in gymnastics, piano, French, organic gardening, or tae kwon do. And we buy a luxury SUV, not because we really expect to drive off the highway, but because just in case we do, we want to have some clearance beneath our axles.

We might not always be aware of it, but in every case we give something up for those options. We end up with a computer that has more functions than we need, or a stereo with an unnecessarily expensive warranty. And in the case of our kids, we give up their time and ours—and the chance that they could become really good at one activity—in trying to give them some experience in a large range of activities. In running back and forth among the things that might be important, we forget to spend enough time on what really *is* important. It's a fool's game, and one that we are remarkably adept at playing.