



Defence Academy  
of the United Kingdom



# Pitfalls & Dangers

Major Tom Mouat

# Disclaimer

This presentation represents the **personal** view of the author and is in no way representative of official UK MOD policy.

The UK MOD is small, but still bigger than one man can know.  
**He might have missed something.**

The author is a full-time reservist serving beyond mandatory retirement age and is therefore possibly **embittered** and **cynical** after 40 years service... :-)

# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

# The Boss



# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- **The Boss with a Mission.**
  - I want the game to prove we need more ships!
- **Game Objectives**
  - What are we trying to achieve?
  - Can this be achieved with a game?
  - Will it meet the objectives?
  - Will "playing to win" break the game, or is the game merely for "procedural training?"



# The Scenario

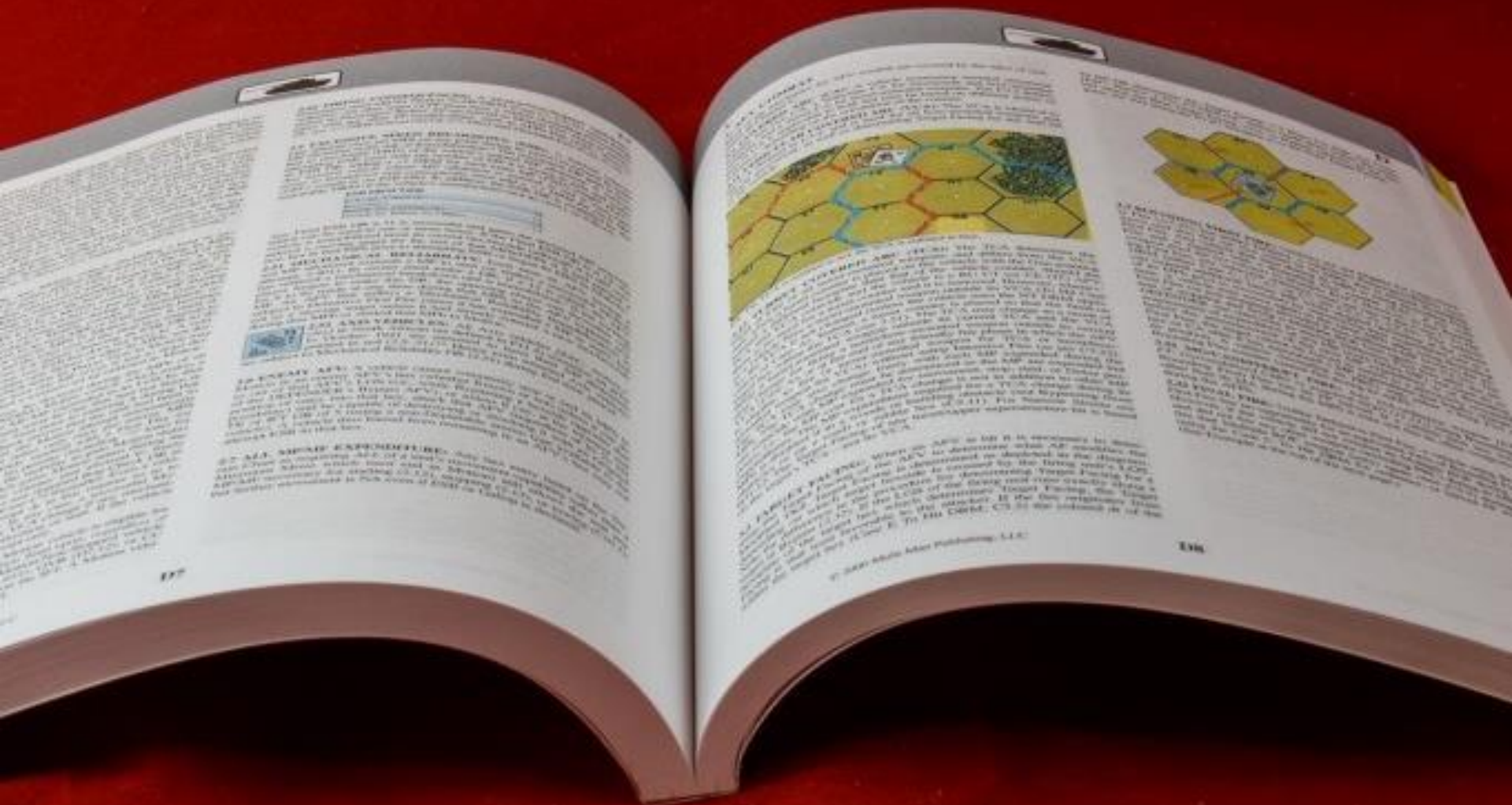


# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- **Scenario Design.**
  - "Don't fight the White"!
- **Problems with scenarios.**
  - Missing information that control can't make up.
  - Too much information, so decisions are obvious.
  - Too big to be covered adequately.
  - Too small, constraining actions.



# The Rules / Adjudication





# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- **Adjudication.**
  - "That just wouldn't happen."
- **Problems with Adjudication.**
  - Assumptions not understood.
  - "The rules" as opposed to "real life".
  - Taking too long to make a decision.
  - Black box decision making. "Why?".
  - Intimidation.

# The Facilities



# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- **Infrastructure and life support.**
  - "Lunch is important."
- **Problems with Infrastructure and life support.**
  - Facilities are inadequate.
  - Facilities are inappropriate.
  - Structure requires all participants, all the time.
  - "Breaking the bubble".

# The Players



# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- **Players.**
  - "I'm bored – I have better things to do."
- **Problems with Players.**
  - Bored players.
  - Inappropriate roles.
  - Unqualified for a role.
  - Players feel they aren't in control.
  - Alpha-players and cheats.
  - Preconceived notions.



# Control



# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- **Controllers.**
  - "I'll have to check with control on that."
- **Problems with Controllers.**
  - Who is in charge.
  - Not enough Controllers.
  - Controller experience (decision bubble).
  - Controllers distracted.
  - Controllers disagreeing.

# Observers



# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- **Observers.**
  - "Please fill in these forms, now."
- **Problems with Observers.**
  - Unqualified Observers.
  - Distracting players or controllers.
  - Inhibiting players (if Observers are senior).
  - Reducing immersion.

# Analysis





# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- **Analysis.**
  - "The game proves we need more missiles."
- **Problems with Analysis.**
  - Predetermined outcomes.
  - Undocumented Controller adjudication.
  - Rejection of inconvenient truths.
  - Sponsor impatience.
  - Analysis without player feedback.
  - Unqualified or unsuitable Analysts.

# Politics



# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- Culture and Politics.
  - "It is a NATO game, make the Turks look good."
- Problems with Culture and Politics.
  - What are we trying to achieve?
  - Cultural and political risk aversion.
  - Game design is compromised.
  - Game design ignores cultural norms.
  - Player bias and assumptions.



# NERD NIGHT

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# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- **Fragility.**
  - "Oh God, not another wargame".
- **Fragility Problems.**
  - Wargaming isn't well understood.
  - Wargamers are defensive.
  - Bad games threaten "Wargaming" itself.



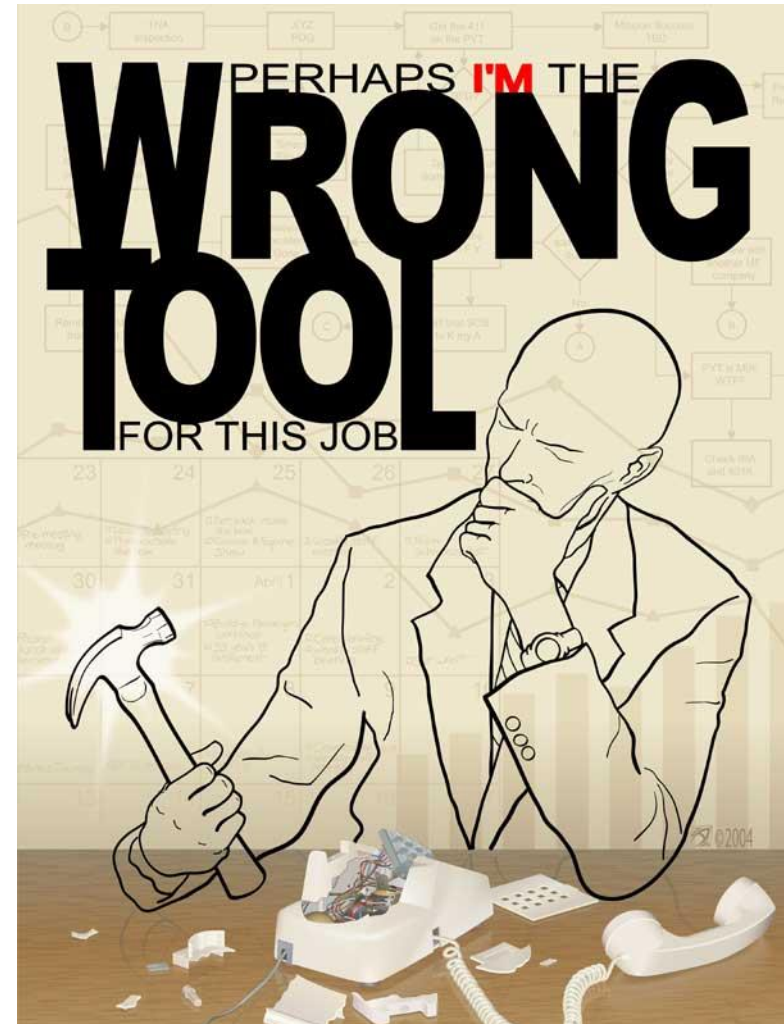
# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- Perceptions.
  - Language. D&D.
- Too gamey.
  - Cards, counters, meeples and game-boards.
- Too immersive.
  - $N = 1$ .
- Not immersive enough.
  - Players get bored.



# If all you have is a hammer...

- Just because you have a game that worked last time does not mean it will work under different circumstances.
- Wargamers(and everyone else) instinctively reach for the last thing that worked rather than take time to work out what may be best.
- Given the fact that Wargamers have to spend time defending their own existence, they can get defensive about what they do, and this can exacerbate the situation.



# Wargaming Pitfalls and Dangers

- A computer is more accurate.
  - No – it isn't. But explaining that, is complicated.
- The Wrong Game.
  - The game might be wonderful – but does it meet the aim? Cyber games...
- Too Big a Deal.
  - The game gets too large to generate insights.
  - Other stuff gets added onto the game.
- It isn't about the game.
  - What are we trying to achieve?



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