Australian Government
Department of Defence
Defence Science and Technology Group

Saga: Analytical Wargaming For Sub-Threshold Conflict

Peter Williams
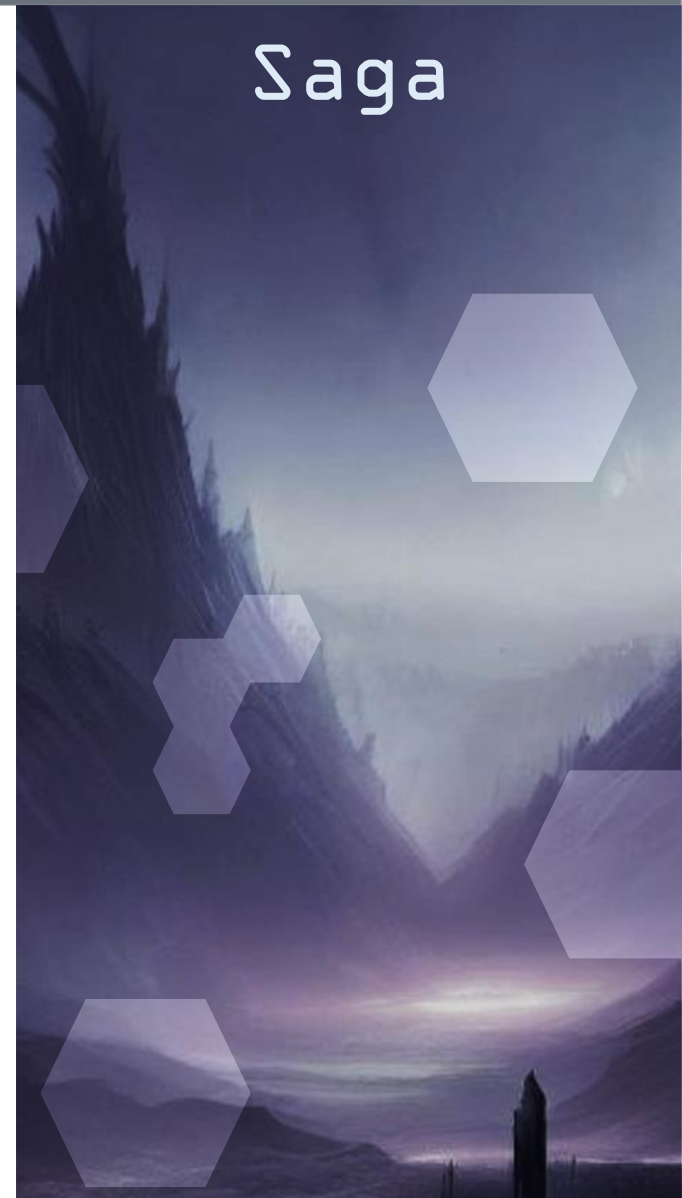
Human And Decision Sciences Division

Defence Science and Technology Group

Defending Australia and its National Interests
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Saga

Caveat

This is a teaser presentation.
To see the full details, come along to the Game Fair.

(Or find me around somewhere.)

The Blurb

Saga is a wargame which allows you to play through any type of narrative-driven sub-threshold scenario and it combines most of the strengths of unstructured gaming

(minimal set-up, freedom of player actions, intuitive/heuristic adjudication)

along with many of the strengths of structured gaming

(quantitative analysis, repeatability, identification of cause-and-effect, data collection)

without any (?) of the weaknesses of either.

Applications

Saga is applicable to Defence, and Whole-of-Government, problems relating to capability acquisition, concepts development and organisational structuring.

For example, a wargame could underpin a decision to invest in the research and development of an exquisite EW or cyber capability. It could investigate how to compete in a grey conflict space against adversaries who are not bound by our same level of strategic rules of engagement. It could explore the trade-offs between centralising cross-domain roles, permissions and authorities versus adopting a more decentralised posture.

Wargame System

Saga is a wargame system; not a wargame.

BYO scenario, teams, effects...

Design Principles

See the *Influence Wargaming Handbook* !

- Information is non-binary — Challenge 6, 8 & 15
- Asymmetric competitors — Challenge 1, 2 & 6
- Timings vary by vast orders of magnitude — Challenge 16
- Focus is on competition, rather than conflict — Challenge 3 & 4
- Effects are not necessarily proportionate to actions — Challenge 11 & 12
- Effects propagate chaotically across dimensions — Challenge 13 & 14
    ... and many more

Design Principles

Thus, *Saga* creates a sense of great uncertainty and misinformation and disinformation where you need to operate across the entire information environment.

Design Principles

On the surface, *Saga* looks and operates similar to a seminar or matrix wargame but . .

Planning is opaque
Need to fight for information
Automated data collection
Arguments and adjudication are structured

A Few
Highlights

(1)

Modelling 'the world' poses some unique challenges:

- The terrain can by anything – and often multiple distinct dimensions.
- Entities can 'be' in any of those dimensions; often in multiple at once.
- Terrain is telescopic: you need to zoom from a macro lens to a micro lens at will.
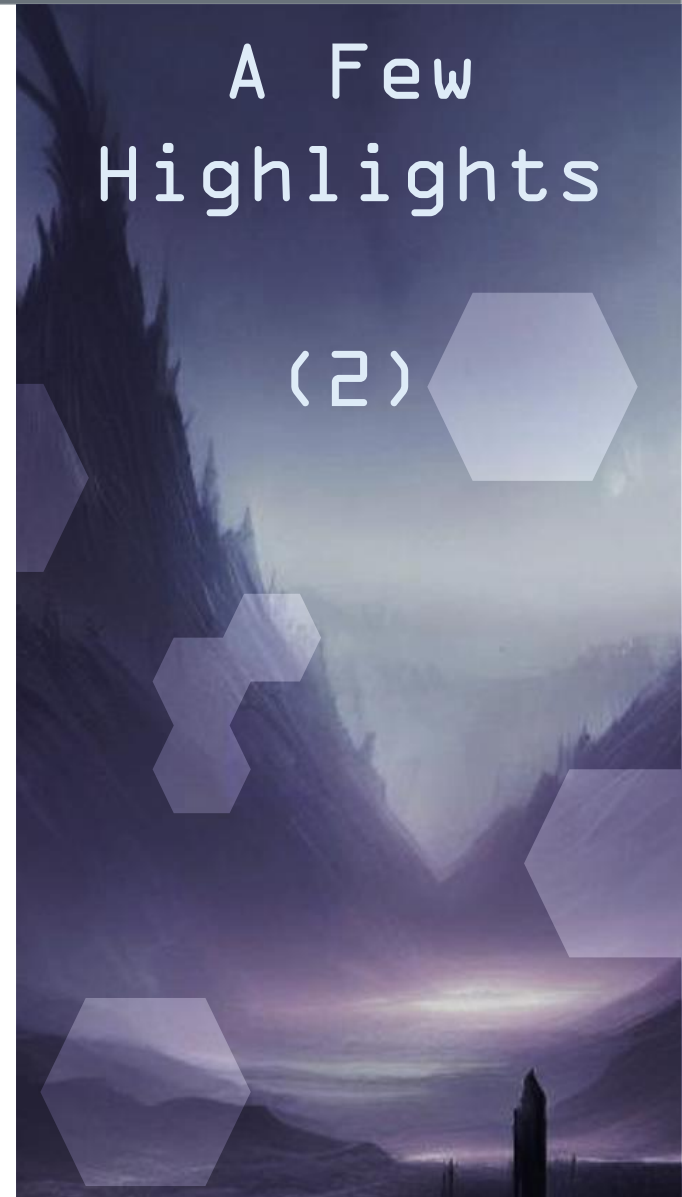
A Few Highlights (2)

Time is similarly non-linear:

- Sub-threshold conflict consists of windows of chaos scattered between epochs of relative inactivity.
- Regular game Turns don't work.
- Any given timestep will annoy about half of the players.
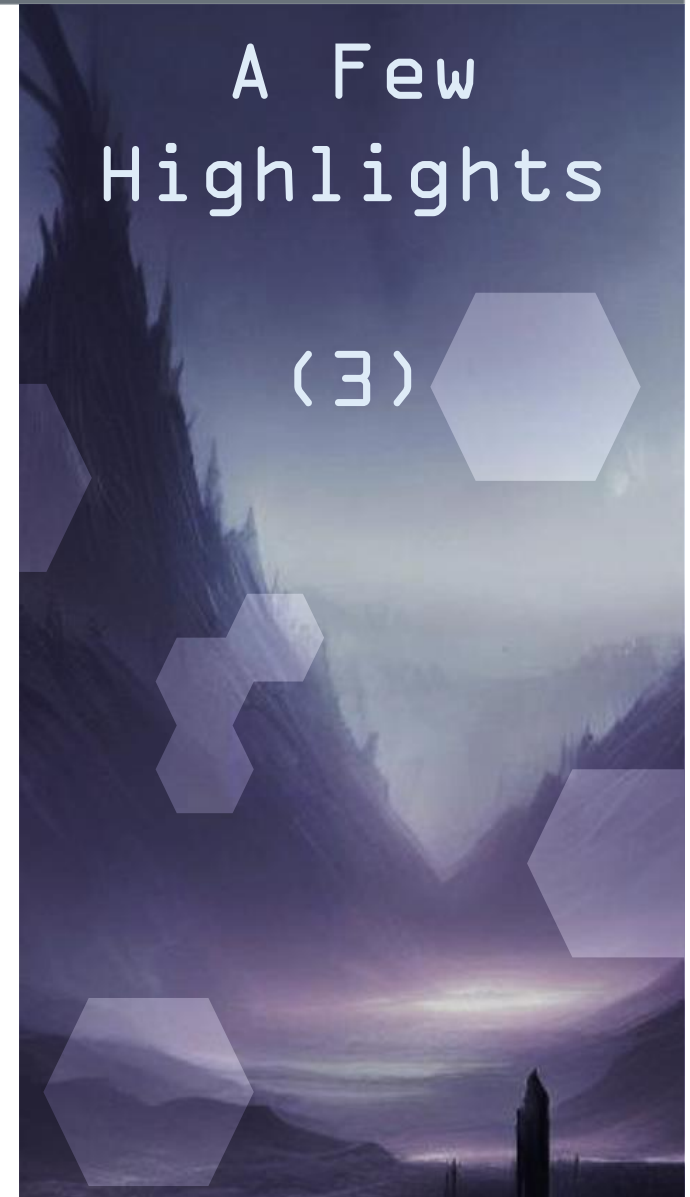
A Few Highlights (3)

The world is defined by biases and perspectives:

- What is 'ground truth'?
- Misinformation and Disinformation are becoming powerful tools.
- Each team (or even player) needs to have their own bespoke version of reality.

The Cost

Saga comes with a significant footprint:

~15 – 30 Players
3 – 10 EXCON
Days – Week to play
Saga software

Note: Saga can be run distributed spatially and temporally!

Want To See More?

Games Fair Exhibitions

Not a proper game!
~45 min deep dive presentation
Demo of interfaces and game mechanics

Find me around Connections or at the Premier Inn over dinner.

Saga

For when the journey is more important than the destination.

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