

Wargaming Urban Conflict PhD

Nov 24

This is a quick summary of where I am in my work on a PhD in Wargaming Urban Conflict, which I'm doing under Dr John Curry at Bath Spa University. It highlights the main activities I've completed so far this year, and what I plan for the next few months. Any questions or comments please get in touch at david.burden21@bathspa.ac.uk.

2024 is a bit of a transition year. I've now done over 2 years of reading on urban warfare and wargaming, produced over half a dozen urban wargames, and am now at the point where I need to focus in on the synthesis and experimentation parts of the PhD – i.e. the bits where I have to do some actual work! As a lead-in to this I sat down and “wrote” my whole thesis in July, to get a better sense of how words need to be allocated and how to approach the missing sections. I had a very useful debrief with John and Cliff on this, so we've now all got a good idea as to what needs to happen next. The next 6 months or so is on synthesis and gap analysis, clarifying my thoughts on the characteristics of urban conflict and how well they are modelled by existing wargames. In parallel with that I'll continue to refine my core games, begin to get them out as print'n'play, and start to badger people for some proper evaluated plays (I trialled my evaluation methodology at COW and it seemed to work well). All the rest of 2025, and on into early 2026 will then be about evaluated plays, and by this time in 2026 I'll be deep into writing up, with the aim of submitting late 2026/early 2027. Time to roll my sleeves up!



Cityfight2024, my modernised version of the SPI classic double-blind, platoon-level urban wargame. Ran online at Wargame Developments (WD) VCOW, and physically at WD's Conference of Wargamers (COW).



Rubble Town – my solo, pl/coy level “beer and pretzels” card-based urban wargame. In this photo of the COW session two teams of 2 are each playing their own solo game – but it makes for nice competition!



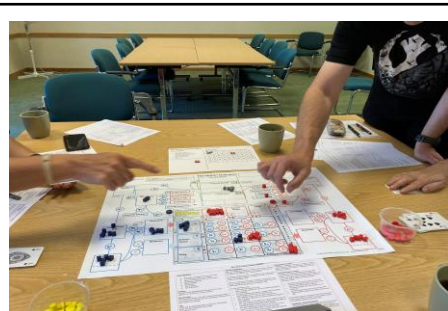
COBE – my coy level game, at DSET and COW. Was meant to be a simpler version of City & CEMA, which it was, but still not fast enough! Can be played 2D, or, as here, with 1/300th scale buildings and even miniatures.



City & CEMA, my Bde/Bn level game, ran this year at the NATO/KCL Wargaming Week at Bn level. It follows NATO's USECT urban doctrine and has capability cards for non-organic assets.



OPUC – Operational Level Urbanised Campaigning – a new Corps/Div level game, initially set in Estonia. Trying to make towns more than a +1 and looking at where all the civilians go.



The Urban Calculus (TUC), my strategic, socio/pol/mil abstract “playable systems model”. I've run it at DSET, COW and Connections UK this year. P'n'P available in Dec 24.

More information on all the games on my [wiki](#). If you'd be interested in playtesting/evaluating any of them – formally or informally then do get in touch.

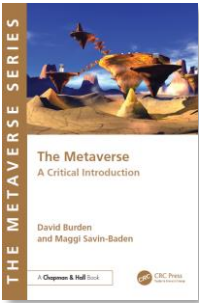
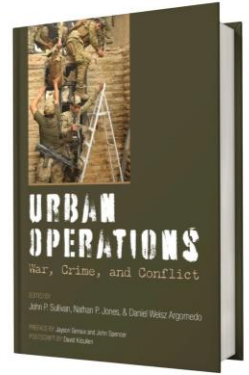
Over the winter I'm planning on merging much of COBE and City & CEMA together and further simplifying both so I have one “gritty” urban wargaming system. That still leaves 5 games, and I'll probably only cover 2-3 in the actual thesis.

Since 2022 I've been posting "first-bites" of my PhD chapters up onto the [Wiki](#). These now cover urbanisation, a history of urban warfare, a historiography of urban warfare and the evolution of urban doctrine.

My paper comparing the [Wargames of the Battle of Hue](#) was published in the Journal of Strategic Security in Sept 23, and was just republished in the book [Urban Operations](#). My second paper, on [Building an Urban Wargames Database](#), has been accepted by the MORS Journal of Wargaming and will hopefully be out by the end of 2024. The [database](#) itself now has 289 games!

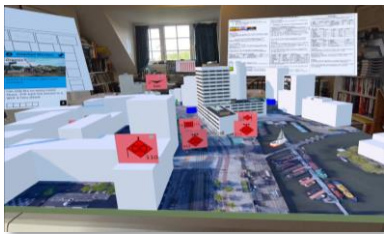
In early 2025, a chapter that I've written on [Wargaming and The Just War](#) should be published by Taylor & Francis in a new book on [Just War and Artificial Intelligence](#).

I've also delivered presentations at the Georgetown University Wargames Society (GUWS) and the Armchair Dragoons Connections Online – both linked to from my [wiki](#), and at the UK's Land Warfare Centre.



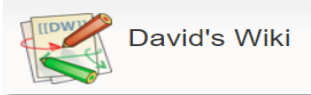
Not strictly part of the PhD, but some of the other things I've been up to may be of interest. In September Taylor & Francis published the first two books in their [Metaverse Series](#): [The Metaverse: A Critical Introduction](#), and [The Metaverse for Learning and Education](#). Both co-written by me and my co-author Prof. Maggi Savin-Baden, and we are also the series editors.

I've just delivered the manuscript for [The Military Metaverse](#) (co-authored with Andy Fawkes), the 3rd book in the series, which should be published in early 2025 – and which of course covers wargaming. Related to that I've been experimenting with wargaming spaces in Virtual Reality and Mixed Reality, and should hopefully have something to share in 2025. The picture at left is a "virtual" urban wargame laid out on my physical wargame table in my wargames room at home.



I've also been playing with ChatGPT and some of the other LLMs and GANs out there. As well as using them to help produce material for my wargames (images, city briefs etc) I've also been looking at them to run RPGs and, in something I've called a Matrix Game Simulation, to run a complete matrix game – both as the facilitator/umpire and all the players! My notes on this are up on [Substack](#), and I can see potential for something like MGS to be to manual/human matrix games what computer simulation is to manual/computerised rigid wargames. I've even used AI (NotebookLM) to turn the first chapter of my thesis into [Podcast!](#)

No-humans	Matrix Game Simulation	Simulation
Humans	Free Wargames	Rigid Wargames
	Free models	Rigid models



I'm keeping my [Wiki](#) up to date with draft material, game reports and other information. Please check it out. I also post regularly on Twitter as [@urbanwargamer](#).

My key goals for the rest of 2024 and early 2025 are to:

- Make TUC available as print'n'play by the end of 2024, with Rubble Town similarly available in early 2025.
- Finish the alpha development of OPUC and get it ready to take on the 2025 conference/demo circuit.
- Complete most of my consolidation and synthesis work on urban conflict characteristics so I can focus full-time on experimentation for the rest of 2025.
- Produce a journal paper on [Civilian Typology in Wargames](#), a working paper is up on [Substack](#), and I presented my work-in-progress at [ConnectionsOz](#) on 5 Nov 24 – check for a recording. Other papers I'd like to do in 2025 are one on Validation in Wargaming and another comparison paper, this time on the Battle of Fallujah.

Full details of the PhD are on my Wiki at: <http://taunoyen.com/wiki/doku.php?id=phd>

If you have any questions/comments/just want to chat then please contact me at david.burden21@bathspa.ac.uk.