

# (TITLE SLIDE 1) Level Up or Lose: AI, Gaming, and the New Rules of Acquisition

## (SLIDE 2) “Game Over.”

I’ve seen those words flash across a screen more times than I can count—but I’ve never taken them literally.

Not at the arcade, when I shut down Springfield Mall playing *Terminator*. Not in *Call of Duty*—okay, it might have been just last year—when I logged over 1,200 hours.

Because to a gamer—especially an esports coach—Game Over doesn’t mean stop. It means reset. Refocus. Reload. It’s a chance to try again—with better strategy, better tools, and maybe this time, a better **loadout**—that perfect mix of gear and tactics.

Today we are staring at our own version of “Game Over” in defense acquisition. Today, when the mission shifts—we’re still stuck in planning mode. According to the 2024 GAO Weapon Systems Annual Assessment, major defense acquisition programs take an average of 11 years to deliver capability—three years longer than planned—and over half report delays due to supplier issues, software challenges, and quality problems.

We’re building solutions for yesterday’s problems— and by the time they arrive, the mission has already moved on.

That’s not readiness. That’s **regret**. That kind of timeline isn’t just inefficient- it’s dangerous.

But what if we could press “Start” again and play the game differently? What if we approached acquisition with the same mindset that gamers bring to their most challenging missions?

(SLIDE 3) In gaming, there’s a concept called “Prestige Master.” After you’ve mastered the basics of a game—completed all the standard levels—you can choose to Prestige. This doesn’t mean starting over from scratch. It means unlocking advanced capabilities and leveling up your performance. And that’s precisely where defense acquisition needs to be—not stuck replaying old strategies but ready to level up to Prestige.

Now I get it—I don’t look like your typical gamer. I’m a woman in my 50s. But maybe that’s exactly the point.

I’ve sat in meetings where we were told to play it safe, follow the checklist, and stick to what’s known. But after thousands of gaming hours, I learned differently:

The gamer’s mindset— (SLIDE 4) resilient, curious, relentless—isn’t about rebellion. It’s about readiness.

And if someone like me can press “*Start*” again and again...so can anyone in this room. Anyone in acquisition.

So how do we get the ultimate loadout in acquisition?

We combine smart strategy, agile requirements, and risk that’s managed like a mission—**And we team up with an AI partner who never asks for a break, never loses context, and always remembers the playbook.** That’s not science fiction. That’s a co-op strategy built for winning.

That’s how we achieve mission success. That’s how we unlock Prestige and That is how we get the Epic Win.

## Section 1: The Gamer Mindset- Adaptive Problem Solvers

(SLIDE 5) Today, we sit here wondering what the perfect conditions will be. We seek certainty, we follow procedures, and we avoid failure “at ALL costs”.

But what if we thought like gamers?

Gamers don't wait for perfect conditions. They adapt. They jump in, fail forward, and level up fast. That’s exactly the mindset we need—especially when the mission shifts midstream or our adversaries level up.

(SLIDE 6) Let’s revisit a moment in Season 4 when I was coaching Team Karma. We were well into the season and undefeated. AGAIN. We had not lost a single match in 3 seasons. And then BOOM!

A secret meeting. New rules. And TWO of my starters were suspended.

And “poof”... just like that the league tried to flash “Game Over” in our face.

The team could have folded. But they didn’t. They stayed up late grinding games that weren’t their normal. They coached each other, vented their frustration, and then rallied

No manuals. No playbook. Just GRIT, Teamwork and urgent optimism— that is gamer speak for the belief that we could figure it out, even when the odds were stacked against us.

(SLIDE 7) We finished the season and made it to the finals. We didn’t win that final match, but I did not see defeat. I saw pride, I saw growth.

I saw a team who adapted under pressure, unfair roadblocks, and showed up for NOT just for themselves— but for the mission.

(SLIDE 8) That is what Urgent Optimism epitomizes – the deep belief that even when the odds shift, you can still earn that epic win.

That is also what Blissful productivity looks like: it's not just putting in the work, but finding satisfaction in the challenge itself.

Urgent optimism fuels our resilience, allowing us to face setbacks with confidence. Curiosity drives us to explore new approaches, while relentlessness transforms work into blissful productivity—finding joy in persistent progress.

And THAT is what the gamer mindset looks like: Resilient, Curious, Relentless.

(SLIDE 9) Today, we avoid failure at all costs. Even though we're operating in a world of volatility, complexity, and constant change.

But what if failure wasn't something to fear—What if it was something we **expected, learned from, and used to level up to Prestige?**

That's the gamer mindset. And that's what acquisition needs now more than ever.

Imagine what's possible when that mindset is baked into how we work—When acquisition professionals are equipped not just to follow the rules, but to adapt in real time, even when the rules and the landscape change mid-mission.

Because in gaming, that's the difference between just surviving the level... and unlocking Prestige.

No gamer ever said, "Wait—let me read the manual first." They jump in, try, fail, and get better.

That's the energy we need now! and how AI can amplify this mindset.

And with generative AI—a partner that never sleeps, never forgets, and learns with us—we finally have the perfect environment to build and scale that mindset across the entire system.

## Section 2: Generative AI- The Ultimate CoOP partner

So what happens when the gamer mindset teams up with AI? First, a quick shout-out to the pockets of excellence already lighting up our map—policy leads ping **DAU Assistant** for instant guidance, data wizards mining **Advana** dashboards for real-time insight, and the **Task Force Lima** crew piloting secure GenAI playbooks for the whole department. Your early victories prove AI is already on the field.

What we're adding today is a gamer's tactical overlay: urgent optimism, blissful productivity, and failure-as-intel. Think of this talk as **\*\*DLC—“downloadable content,”** those bonus levels you bolt onto the base game—**\*\*not a full reboot.** Keep your upgrades, collect a few new power-ups, and let's co-op our way to Prestige together.

Now, picture how AI amplifies resilience by letting us fail fast in virtual space before real-world missions, fuels curiosity with ideas we'd never imagine, and powers relentlessness by off-loading the grind so humans can tackle the hard puzzles.

Picture this: AI amplifies resilience by simulating countless scenarios so we can fail fast in virtual space before succeeding in real missions. It fuels curiosity by generating alternatives we might never have imagined. And it enables relentlessness by handling routine tasks while we focus on creative problem-solving.

AI is not just a glorified Google search or a simple template filler—or worse, Skynet. (SLIDE 10) It's Acquisition's Collaborative Engine—our ACE—a partner that never asks for a break, never loses context, and ALWAYS remembers the playbook while generating an endless stream of ideas.

It's the teammate who makes you stronger and helps you level up. It's not a replacement and it doesn't play the mission for you— it helps you maximize your loadout!

That's been my experience.

AI doesn't just boost my output—it has rewired how I approach problems  
It is my brainstorming buddy, my speed-run toolkit, my creative mirror—reflecting back new angles I have yet to consider.

And I've seen that transformation in others, too.

And in defense acquisition, that same power showed up in a course redesign.

ACQ0900 needed a new scenario so I met with the subject matter expert.

The very next day, I handed him a full branching simulation—storyline, decision points, learning outcomes.

He looked at me like I had unlocked a cheat code. He was sold.

Not on the tool—but on the possibility. Curiosity isn't just helpful—it's crucial. It's what allows us to continuously explore what AI can do next, not just what it already does.

I showed him the AI prompts I used to create it.

We co-created everything: visuals, logic, feedback, even badges.

In days, not months. He said “**Game. Changer.**”

That's what AI can do—it doesn't just help you go faster. It helps you see what's *possible*. This is urgent optimism in action—leveraging AI to swiftly navigate uncertainty, confident that we can find innovative solutions, even when facing shifting demands.

This kind of AI collaboration is reshaping medicine, too.

(SLIDE 11) At **Harvard Medical School**, researchers recently developed an AI tool that can identify existing drugs that may treat **over 17,000 diseases**—many of which currently have *no approved treatments*.

Seventeen thousand. That's not just acceleration—it's **transformation**.

AI didn't invent new drugs, but it used relentless curiosity to reimagine existing solutions.

Let's take a look at what's already happening in some of our contractors.

Anduril Industries recently unveiled an AI-enabled battlefield system.

It ingests real-time sensor data, prioritizes threats, and helps warfighters make rapid, informed decisions.

It's not collecting data for a later report—it's collaborating in the moment.

What used to take minutes? Now happens in seconds.

It doesn't replace the warfighter. It partners with them.

That's not the future. That's happening right now.

That's what true partnership looks like. And that's the co-op model we need—not just in combat, but in acquisition planning and strategy too.

Meanwhile, over in China—

the PLA has already integrated AI across its acquisition pipeline—from requirements development to test and evaluation.

They don't wait for AI to be perfect. They deploy. They adapt. They improve at speed.

They're not asking "What if?" They're already on Level 3.

(Slide 12) So... what are we waiting for?

We don't just need new systems.

We need new vision—HOW we are going to get there.

New ways to look at what we already have—Use it better, faster, and more creatively.

Because when we treat AI as a true partner, we don't just speed things up—we change what's possible.

(SLIDE 13) AI doesn't just lighten our cognitive load—it expands our cognitive space.

It gives us room to test, to imagine, to iterate without fear. It doesn't replace creativity—it releases it.

AI is like your squadmate in a high-stakes mission: Watching your six. Handing you power-ups. Helping you level up and complete side quests you didn't even know you had.

You're still in control—but you're no longer carrying the whole mission alone.

(SLIDE 14) That's what happens when you put ACE—Acquisition's Collaborative Engine—in the hands of a team that thinks like gamers.

Suddenly, acquisition isn't just reactive. It's agile. Strategic. Mission-ready.

So yes—AI can write. Build. Accelerate. Amplify.

But here's the truth: Without people with the right mindset—it's just code.

Because even the smartest AI in the world still needs someone bold enough to ask: "What if we tried it a different way?" **How might we?**

And that—That is where real transformation begins.

## Section 3: The Strategic advantage

AI is powerful. But it's not the Epic Win alone.

### **The real game-changer? Is us. (SLIDE 15)**

Because even the best AI needs a teammate who knows how to think boldly, act decisively, and adapt when the mission shifts.

I've spent my career watching what happens when people are boxed in by process, paralyzed by the fear of getting it wrong, or buried under bureaucracy.

And I've also seen what happens when you give them room to try.

Room to experiment.

Room to fail forward—and come back stronger. Being relentless means recognizing setbacks as opportunities for learning, not stopping points. Relentlessness asks, "What's next?"

This approach isn't just effective—it creates blissful productivity, transforming the grind of routine into meaningful, satisfying challenges. That mindset—the gamer's mindset—is what truly unlocks AI's potential.

(SLIDE 16) In too many organizations, playing it safe is still rewarded. The most innovative idea? It dies the moment someone says, "That's not how we've done it before."

But what if we push back? What if we choose to play the game differently- not recklessly but with resiliency, curiosity, relentlessness?

Whether it was a skeptical subject matter expert, Harvard, or Andruil, what I have seen is that people who embrace AI as their partner light up when they realize something powerful:

(SLIDE 17) The most innovative solutions don't come from breaking the rules— but from being bold enough to bend the right ones. That boldness is a sweet spot: Not blind compliance, outright rebellion. But a mindset that says: I understand the constraints— and I choose to push them, on purpose, for impact. That is what gamers do every day. They study the system, test its limits, and find smarter ways to earn that Epic Win.

And that is exactly what we need in acquisition right now— not rule-breakers. Rule-benders with purpose who are resilient, curious, and relentless to meet the mission.

(SLIDE 18) Today, our fear of failure keeps us paralyzed. Our status quo systems slow progress. We lose talent. And (miss the target) of our mission.

Every day that we cling to “this is how we've always done it” is another day our adversaries gain ground. Every time we get stuck in process and make no progress we are not just missing the mark for the mission — we are handing them to our competitors.

Let that sink in.

In a world where our adversaries are evolving by the hour, our acquisition system has to be just as adaptive—people who see AI as a **mission partner**, not just a machine.

People who know that failure isn't the end—it's the intel. The process? It's not the enemy— it's the terrain. And the mission? It's not about checking boxes— it's about moving forward with purpose. (SLIDE 19)

**Global dominance in AI won't be won by code alone. It'll be won by people with the mindset to do something bold with it.**

## Closing:

I opened this talk with the words “Game Over.” But you already know that was never the point.

(SLIDE 20) To a gamer, “Game Over” is never the end. It is a checkpoint, a reset, a moment to change your loadout, rethink, and press Start again with a new perspective.

And right now— in defense acquisition— We're at the **mission briefing screen**—the moment before the first move.

Today, when the mission shifts—we're still stuck in planning mode.  
We wait years to deliver solutions to problems that need answers *now*.  
Requirements get bogged down while threats evolve.  
And by the time anything shows up—it's too late to make a difference.

But tomorrow can look different!

Picture this: (SLIDE 21)

By 2035, imagine acquisition professionals working side-by-side with AI mission partners—navigating complexity the way gamers tackle new maps:  
resilient, curious, relentless

Picture teams collaborating like online guilds—across government, industry, and academia—sharing strategies, building faster, solving smarter, adapting in real time.

That's not science fiction.

That's what happens when we combine the gamer's adaptive mindset with AI's analytical power. That's the power of ACE in action—an acquisition engine that doesn't just support the mission... it accelerates it. That's what happens when we level up.

(SLIDE 22) Two Worlds. Once Choice.

The controller represents resiliency, curiosity, and the relentless drive to level up to prestige.  
The binder represents our current system—built for a world that no longer exists.

Which one will YOU choose?

If YOU choose to achieve prestige level in acquisition, it won't come from doing the same things, just faster. (SLIDE 23) Take a minute and scan this QR code for later. It's a little game that I whipped up to help us all reach Prestige level Acquisition.

Our level-up will come From pairing bold human minds with AI-driven momentum.  
From leaders who say, 'We can't keep playing it safe.' From thinkers who act like gamers. From teams who treat AI as their co-op partner. And from professionals bold enough to bend the rules—without breaking the mission.

(SLIDE 24) Because sometimes, success doesn't look like a trophy— It looks like a team that never gave up. A team that kept pressing "Start". A team who wasn't afraid to play the game differently.

So I leave you with one question:

When you return to your desk tomorrow— (SLIDE 25)

Will you press "Continue" on a system where we're falling behind?

Or will you press "Start" on a future where America leads, innovation thrives, and every challenge is just another opportunity to level up to Prestige? Where acquisition professionals don't just complete the mission—they transform it?"

Our adversaries are watching.

Our warfighters are waiting.

The choice is yours.



(SLIDE 26) Game Over?

No. GAME ON.