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# Chain Games: Powering Autonomous Threat Hunting

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# Introduction

**Threat hunting is a critical part of cyber defense, but the amount of data available to threat hunters is overwhelming.**

**To develop effective autonomous threat hunting techniques, we are developing Chain Games, a set of games in which threat hunting strategies can be evaluated and refined.**

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Chain Games: Powering Autonomous Threat Hunting

# Motivation and Approach

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# What is Threat Hunting?

## Intrusion Detection/Prevention

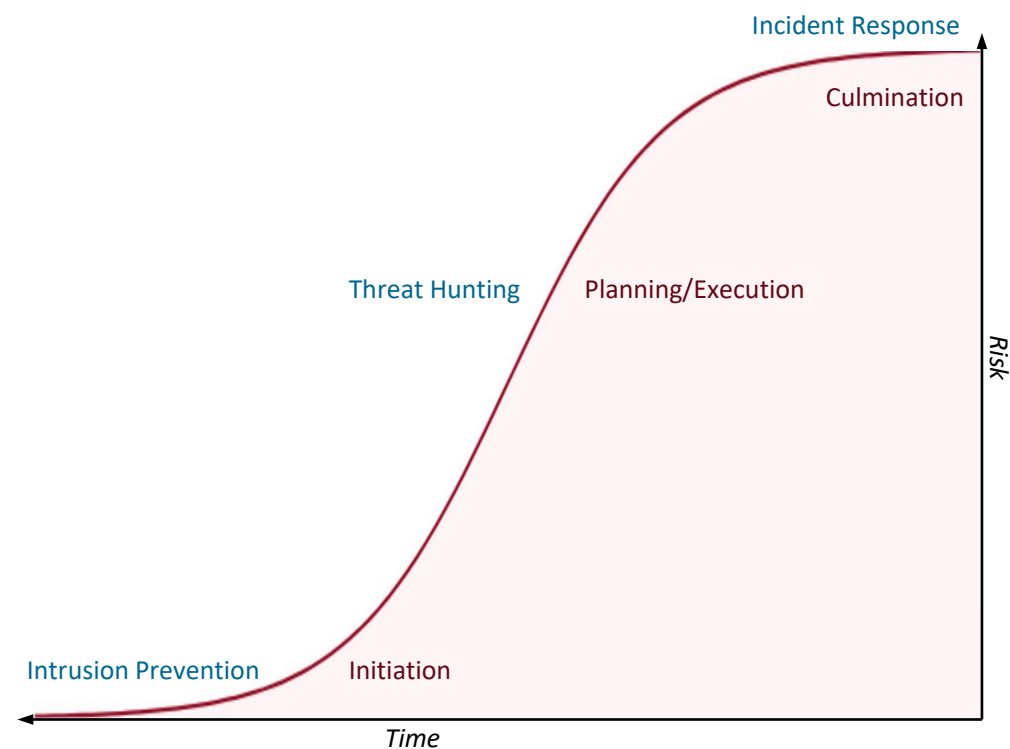
- How do we keep the attackers out?

## Incident Response

- How do we mitigate what the attackers did?

## Threat Hunting

- How do we find/remove the attackers who got in?



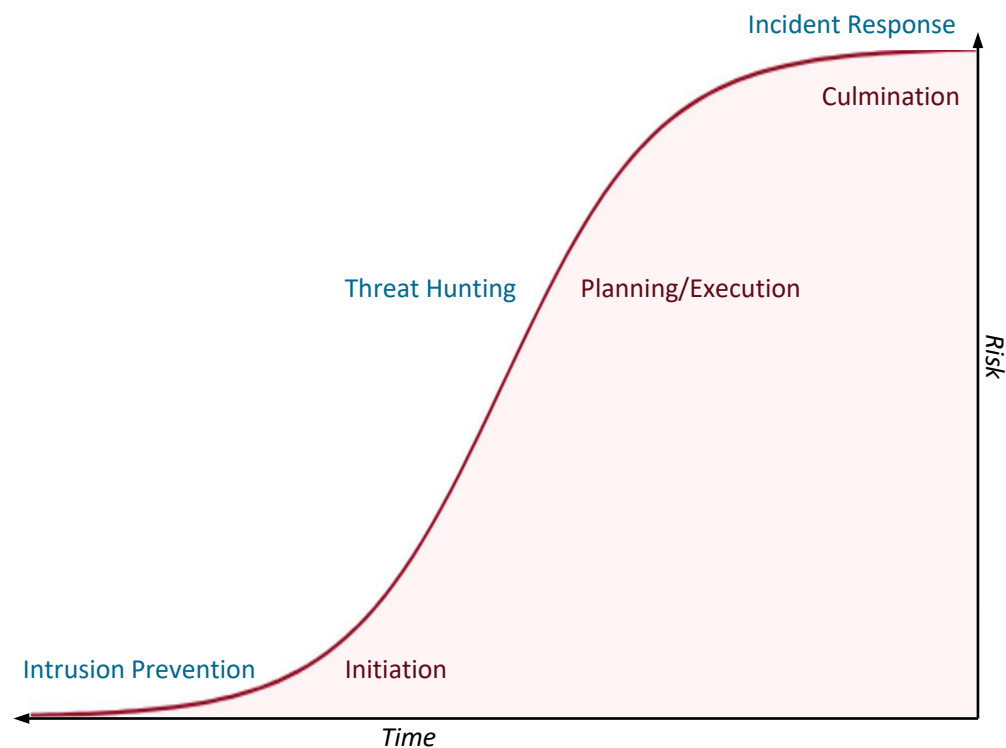
# Benefits of Autonomous Threat Hunting

Threat hunting takes time and skill.

Inexpensive, faster hunting could:

- Investigate more data sources
- Coordinate for coverage
- Help triage human threat hunts

The key to faster, less expensive threat hunting is autonomy.



Cyborg Security. *The Threat Hunter's Hypothesis*. <https://www.cyborgsecurity.com/library/guides/the-threat-hunters-hypothesis-2/>

# Approaches to Autonomy

## Long-term goal: autonomy

- Predication
- Investigation
- Conclusion

## Short-term goal: modeling

- Quantitatively evaluating and developing strategies
- Rapid strategic development
- Capturing the adversarial quality of threat hunting activity

# Cyber Deception Games (CDG) and Cyber Camouflage Games (CCG)

## 2018: Cyber Deception Games [1]

- Situates work in the Cyber Kill Chain
  - Focuses on reconnaissance
- Is a zero-sum game
- Defender is deceiver

## 2019: Cyber Camouflage [2]

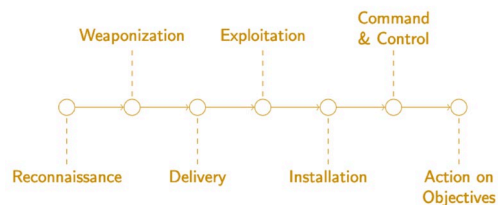
- Is extended to general-sum games
- Defender is still deceiver

Schlenker A, Thakoor O, Xu H, Fang F, Tambe M, Tran-Thanh L, Vayanos P, Vorobeychik Y, "Deceiving cyber adversaries: A game theoretic approach," in Proceedings of the 17th International Conference on Autonomous Agents and MultiAgent Systems, International Foundation for Autonomous Agents and Multiagent Systems, 2018, pp. 892-900.

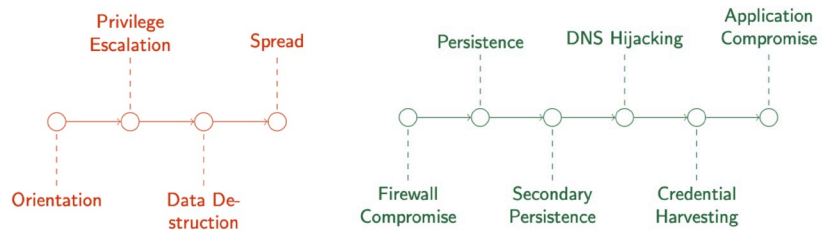
Thakoor O, Tambe M, Vayanos P, Xu H, Kiekintveld C, Fang F. "Cyber Camouflage Games for Strategic Deception," in Decision and Game Theory for Security, Springer International Publishing, 2019, pp. 525-541.



# Kill/Attack Chains



The Cyber Kill Chain



Ransomware (NotPetya)

APT Campaign (DriftingCloud)

Attack behavior is often conceptualized as chains.

- Decomposes attacks
- Categorizes attack behaviors

ISACA Now Blog. *Ransomware Analysis – Executions Flow and Kill Chain*. <https://www.isaca.org/resources/news-and-trends/isaca-now-blog/2017/ransomware-analysis-executions-flow-and-kill-chain>

Lockheed-Martin. *The Cyber Kill Chain*. <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/capabilities/cyber/cyber-kill-chain.html>

Volexity. *DriftingCloud: Zero-Day Sophos Firewall Exploitation and an Insidious Breach*. <https://www.volexity.com/blog/2022/06/15/driftingcloud-zero-day-sophos-firewall-exploitation-and-an-insidious-breach/>

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Chain Games: Powering Autonomous Threat Hunting

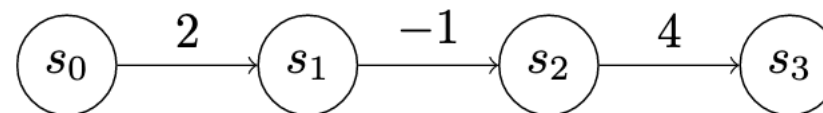
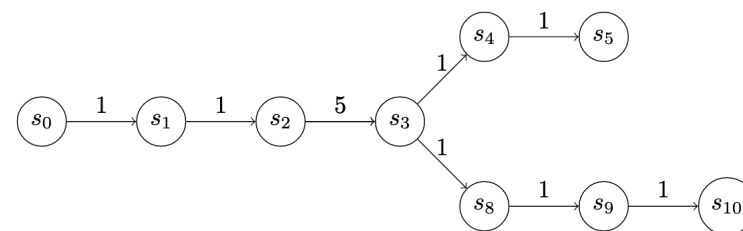
# Simple Chain Games

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# Chain Games –1

Chain Games are played on state chains.

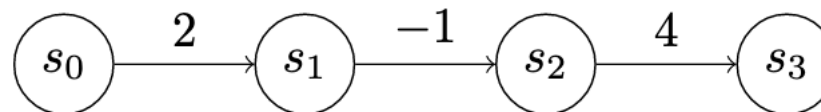
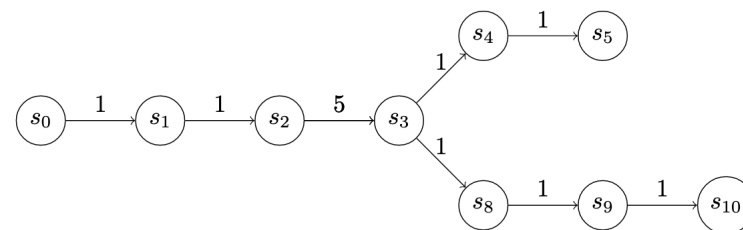
- States represent positions in the network conveying advantage (or disadvantage) to the attacker.
- The utility and cost of occupying a state can be quantified.
- Progress through the state chain motivates the attacker; stopping progress motivates the defender.



# Chain Games –2

## Rules

- Two players (**Attacker** and **Defender**)
- Fixed number of turns
- General-sum (with zero-sum components)
- Simultaneous action



# Chain Game Version 0: Actions and Payoffs

## Attacker Actions

- Advance  $A$  (Cost: 1)
  - Advances to next state in chain

## Defender Actions

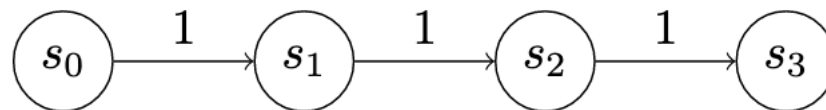
- Defend  $D$  (Cost: 1)
  - Negates attacker  $A$  action

## Common Action

- Wait  $W$  (Cost: 0)
  - No additional effect

## Payoffs

- Attacker gets positional payoff for each advance
- Defender gets negated positional payoff for each advance



Uniform-Value Chain

# Chain Game Version 0: Dominant Strategies

## Attacker

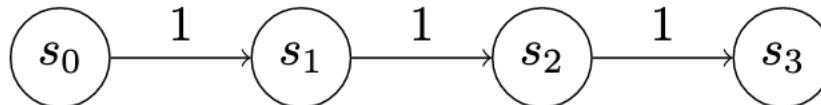
- Always **A**

## Defender

- Never **D** (i.e., always **W**)

## Takeaways

- The full value of a strategy is its utility across **all opponent strategies**
- Changes in costs/payoffs lead to different analytic outcomes



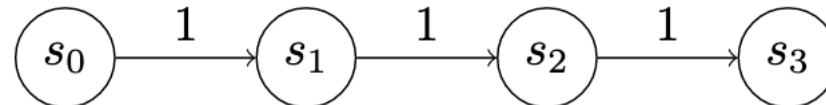
	<i>WW</i>	<i>AW</i>	<i>WA</i>	<i>AA</i>
<i>WW</i>	(0, 0)	(-2, 1)	(-2, 1)	(-4, 2)
<i>WD</i>	(-1, 0)	(-3, 1)	(-1, -1)	(0, -3)
<i>DW</i>	(-1, 0)	(-1, -1)	(-3, 1)	(-3, 0)
<i>DD</i>	(-2, 0)	(-2, -1)	(-2, -1)	(-2, -2)

Payout Matrix Over Two Turns,  
Uniform-Value Chain

# Introducing Camouflage

## Attacker Actions

- Noisy Advance **N**
- Camouflaged Advance **C**
- **C** more costly than **N**



## Defender Actions

- Weak Detect **L**(ow), Strong Detect **H**(igh)
- **L** only detects **N**
- **H** more costly than **L**

	WWW	WNW	WNC	WNB	WNS	WNC	WCB	WCM	WCC	NWW	NWN	NWC	NWB	NNS	NNC	NWB	NCM	NCC	OWW	OWN	OWC	OWN	OWN	OWC	OWB	OCW	OCN	CCC
WWW	0,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0	1,0
WNW	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
WNC	0,3	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3
WNB	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
WNS	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
WNC	0,3	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3
WCB	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
WCM	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
WCC	0,3	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3
NWW	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
NWN	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
NWC	0,3	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3
NWB	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
NNS	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
NNC	0,3	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3
NWB	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
NCM	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
NCC	0,3	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3
OWW	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
OWN	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
OWC	0,3	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3
OWN	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
OWN	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
OWC	0,3	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3
OWB	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
OCW	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
OCN	0,2	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	1,-1	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,2
CCC	0,3	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	1,1	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3	0,3

Payout Matrix Over Three Turns

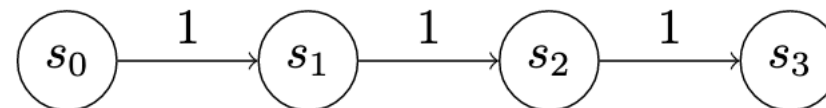
# Introducing Camouflage – Dominant Strategies

## Attacker

- Always **W**

## Defender

- **HLH**



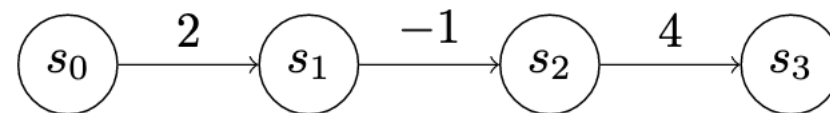
	WWW	WWN	WWC	...
WWW	(0, 0)	(-1, 0)	(-2, 0)	...
WWL	(-3, 2)	(-1, -1)	(-2, -1)	...
WWH	(-3, 1)	(-4, 1)	(-2, -2)	...
WLW	(-3, 2)	(-4, 2)	(-5, 2)	...
WLL	(-6, 4)	(-4, 1)	(-5, 1)	...
WLH	(-6, 3)	(-7, 3)	(-5, 0)	...
WHW	(-3, 1)	(-4, 1)	(-5, 1)	...
WHL	(-6, 3)	(-4, 0)	(-5, 0)	...
WHH	(-6, 2)	(-7, 2)	(-5, -1)	...
LWW	(-3, 2)	(-4, 2)	(-5, 2)	...
LWL	(-6, 4)	(-4, 1)	(-5, 1)	...
LWH	(-6, 3)	(-7, 3)	(-5, 0)	...
LLW	(-6, 4)	(-7, 4)	(-8, 4)	...
LLL	(-9, 6)	(-7, 3)	(-8, 3)	...
LLH	(-9, 5)	(-10, 5)	(-8, 2)	...
LHW	(-6, 3)	(-7, 3)	(-8, 3)	...
LHL	(-9, 5)	(-7, 2)	(-8, 2)	...
LHH	(-9, 4)	(-10, 4)	(-8, 1)	...
HWL	(-6, 3)	(-4, 0)	(-5, 0)	...
HWH	(-6, 2)	(-7, 2)	(-5, -1)	...
HLW	(-6, 3)	(-7, 3)	(-8, 3)	...
HLL	(-9, 5)	(-7, 2)	(-8, 2)	...
HLH	(-9, 4)	(-10, 4)	(-8, 1)	...
HHW	(-6, 2)	(-7, 2)	(-8, 2)	...
HHL	(-9, 4)	(-7, 1)	(-8, 1)	...
HHH	(-9, 3)	(-10, 3)	(-8, 0)	...

Payout Matrix Over Three Turns  
(detail)



# More Complex Chains

- There is no dominant pure strategy for attacker or defender.
- Non-uniform chains represent more realistic attack conditions.
- Initial infection is valuable.
- Some positions of advantage may have value that justifies taking on intermediate risk.



2: WWW	2: WWA	2: WAW	2: WAA	2: AWW	2: AWA	2: AAW	2: AAA
0	$\frac{1}{3}$	$\frac{1}{3}$	0	$\frac{1}{3}$	0	0	0

1: WWW	1: WWD	1: WDW	1: WDD	1: DWW	1: DWD	1: DDW	1: DDD
$\frac{3}{11}$	$\frac{1}{11}$	$\frac{1}{11}$	0	$\frac{1}{11}$	0	0	$\frac{7}{11}$

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Chain Games: Powering Autonomous Threat Hunting

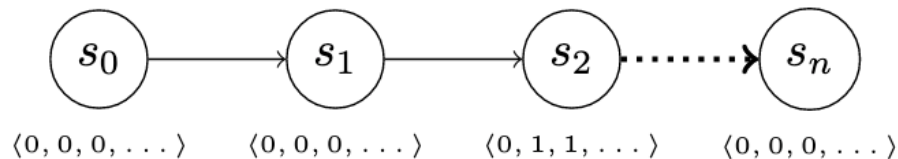
# Future Work

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# Enriching the Game Space

## Evidence

- The game is augmented with an **information vector (IV)**
  - Indicators of attacker activity
- Different kinds of attacker actions change different parts of the IV
- Defender actions collect evidence from IV
- New Defender **R**(emediate) actions stop attacker advances or evict the attacker



# Simulation

Simulation is a way to model activities that are difficult to analyze exhaustively.

Simulation can model behavior that violates assumptions of rationality.

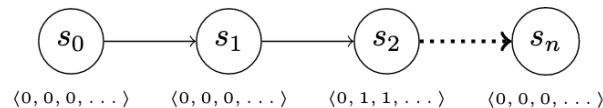
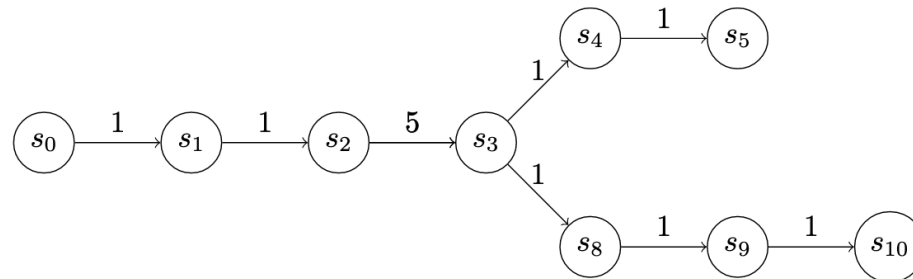
```
# Information common to all games of this type
_GAME_TYPE = pyspiel.GameType(
    short_name="chain_game_v0",
    long_name="chain game version 0",
    dynamics=pyspiel.GameType.Dynamics.SIMULTANEOUS,
    chance_mode=pyspiel.GameType.ChanceMode.DETERMINISTIC,
    information=pyspiel.GameType.Information.IMPERFECT_INFORMATION,
    utility=pyspiel.GameType.Utility.ZERO_SUM,
    # The other option here is REWARDS, which supports model-based
    # Markov decision processes. (See spiel.h)
    reward_model=pyspiel.GameType.RewardModel.TERMINAL,
    # Note again: num_players doesn't count Chance
    max_num_players=len(Players),
    min_num_players=len(Players),
    provides_information_state_string=False,
    provides_information_state_tensor=False,
    provides_observation_string=False,
    provides_observation_tensor=False,
    provides_factored_observation_string=False,
    # We can worry about parameters later
    parameter_specification={},
)
```

Game Specification with OpenSpiel [4]

[4] Deepmind. OpenSpiel: A Framework for Reinforcement Learning in Games. [https://github.com/deepmind/open\\_spiel](https://github.com/deepmind/open_spiel)

# Mapping to the Problem Domain

- Reflect patterns of adversary behavior in chains
  - Distribution of positional payoffs
  - Introduce attack graphs and attacker choice
- Reflect relationships between network activities (Attacker advances) and evidence in IV
- Evaluate real-world threat hunting strategies in simulation



RESEARCH REVIEW 2022

Chain Games: Powering Autonomous Threat Hunting

# Extra Slides

**Carnegie  
Mellon  
University**  
Software  
Engineering  
Institute

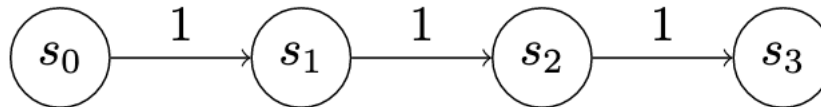
# Introducing Camouflage –2

## Attacker Actions

- Noisy Advance **N**
- Camouflaged Advance **C**
- **C** more costly than **N**

## Defender Actions

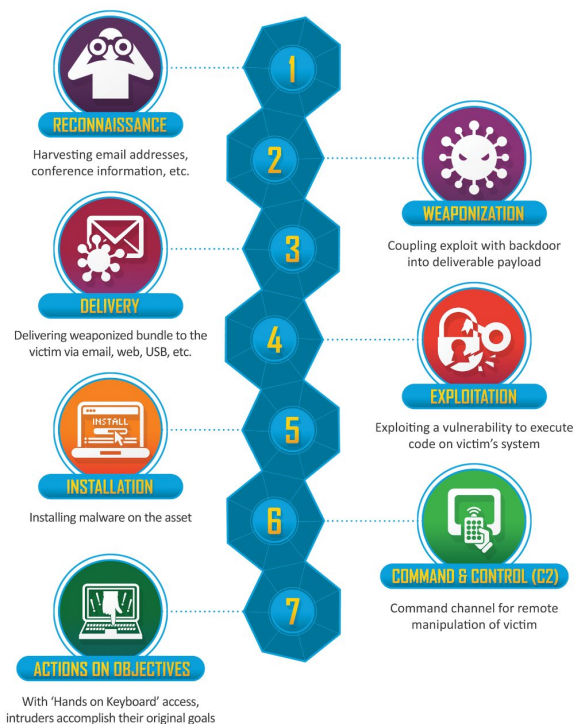
- Weak Detect **L**(ow), Strong Detect **H**(igh)
- **L** only detects **N**
- **H** more costly than **L**



	<b>WWW</b>	<b>WWN</b>	<b>WWC</b>	...
<b>WWW</b>	(0, 0)	(-1, 0)	(-2, 0)	...
<b>WWL</b>	(-3, 2)	(-1, -1)	(-2, -1)	...
<b>WWH</b>	(-3, 1)	(-4, 1)	(-2, -2)	...
<b>WLW</b>	(-3, 2)	(-4, 2)	(-5, 2)	...
<b>WLL</b>	(-6, 4)	(-4, 1)	(-5, 1)	...
<b>WLH</b>	(-6, 3)	(-7, 3)	(-5, 0)	...
<b>WHW</b>	(-3, 1)	(-4, 1)	(-5, 1)	...
<b>WHL</b>	(-6, 3)	(-4, 0)	(-5, 0)	...
<b>WHH</b>	(-6, 2)	(-7, 2)	(-5, -1)	...
<b>LWW</b>	(-3, 2)	(-4, 2)	(-5, 2)	...
<b>LWL</b>	(-6, 4)	(-4, 1)	(-5, 1)	...
<b>LWH</b>	(-6, 3)	(-7, 3)	(-5, 0)	...
<b>LLW</b>	(-6, 4)	(-7, 4)	(-8, 4)	...
<b>LLL</b>	(-9, 6)	(-7, 3)	(-8, 3)	...
<b>LLH</b>	(-9, 5)	(-10, 5)	(-8, 2)	...
<b>LHW</b>	(-6, 3)	(-7, 3)	(-8, 3)	...
<b>LHL</b>	(-9, 5)	(-7, 2)	(-8, 2)	...
<b>LHH</b>	(-9, 4)	(-10, 4)	(-8, 1)	...
<b>HWW</b>	(-3, 1)	(-4, 1)	(-5, 1)	...
<b>HWL</b>	(-6, 3)	(-4, 0)	(-5, 0)	...
<b>HWH</b>	(-6, 2)	(-7, 2)	(-5, -1)	...
<b>HLW</b>	(-6, 3)	(-7, 3)	(-8, 3)	...
<b>HLL</b>	(-9, 5)	(-7, 2)	(-8, 2)	...
<b>HLH</b>	(-9, 4)	(-10, 4)	(-8, 1)	...
<b>HHW</b>	(-6, 2)	(-7, 2)	(-8, 2)	...
<b>HHL</b>	(-9, 4)	(-7, 1)	(-8, 1)	...
<b>HHH</b>	(-9, 3)	(-10, 3)	(-8, 0)	...

## Payout Matrix Over Three Turns (detail)

# Kill/Attack Chains



Attack behavior is often conceptualized as chains.

- Decomposes attacks
- Categorizes attack behaviors

Attack graphs are a composition of attack chains.

The Cyber Kill Chain graphic is reused with permission from Lockheed Martin Corporation. [3]

[3] Lockheed-Martin. The Cyber Kill Chain. <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-us/capabilities/cyber/cyber-kill-chain.html>