



Android: Netrunner — Game Review

Android: Netrunner is a highly asymmetric competitive card game in which two players take completely different roles. One player controls the Corporation, which attempts to advance and score agendas, while the other plays the Runner, who attempts to infiltrate the Corporation's servers and steal those agendas. Both players are ultimately competing to reach seven points, but the paths they take are dramatically different. This asymmetry is the foundation of the game's design and one of its greatest strengths.

Core Mechanics

Each player has a limited number of actions, called clicks, and a shared economy based on credits. The Runner receives four clicks per turn, while the Corporation receives three. Clicks can be spent on actions such as drawing cards, gaining credits, installing cards, or initiating runs. Because actions and money are limited, nearly every decision involves a tradeoff.

The Corporation builds servers and protects them with ICE, or defensive cards. Agendas are installed face-down and must generally be advanced before they can be scored. The Corporation can also install assets and upgrades that provide economic or strategic advantages. Because many Corporation cards remain hidden, the Runner does not know exactly what is being protected.

The Runner builds a rig consisting primarily of programs, hardware, and resources. The Runner then makes runs against the Corporation's servers. The major targets are the Corporation's hand (HQ), deck (R&D), discard pile (Archives), and remote servers. During a run, the Runner encounters ICE and must use the appropriate tools and resources to get through it. If the Runner reaches the server, cards may be accessed and agendas can potentially be stolen.

This creates the central interaction of the game: the Corporation is trying to protect information while the Runner is trying to discover and exploit it.

What the Game Does Well

Asymmetry

The strongest aspect of Netrunner is that the two sides genuinely feel different. The Corporation is focused on building defenses, managing servers, advancing agendas, and creating scoring opportunities. The Runner is focused on building a rig, managing resources, identifying weaknesses, and deciding when and where to attack.

This is much more than simply giving two players different decks. Each side has its own objectives, strategies, and decision-making process.

Hidden Information and Bluffing

The face-down Corporation cards create an excellent bluffing system. When the Corporation installs a card behind several pieces of ICE, the Runner has to decide whether it is worth attacking. It could be an important agenda—or it could be a harmless asset designed to waste the Runner's time and money.

This creates a constant psychological battle. The Corporation is trying to convince the Runner that certain servers are important, while the Runner is trying to determine where the real opportunities are.

Resource Management

Credits and clicks make the game's decisions meaningful. A Runner may have the correct breaker but not enough money to use it effectively. The Corporation may have an agenda ready to score but not enough resources to protect it.

Players therefore have to consider not only what they want to do, but whether they can afford to do it and what they will be unable to do afterward.

Risk and Reward

Runs are inherently risky. The Runner may spend significant resources breaking through a server only to discover that the cards accessed were worthless. However, avoiding that server might allow the Corporation to score an important agenda.

This creates meaningful uncertainty rather than simply presenting players with obvious optimal moves.

Multiple Ways to Win

Although scoring seven agenda points is the primary objective, the game provides alternative paths to victory. The Runner can win by forcing the Corporation to run out of cards, while the Corporation can potentially defeat the Runner through damage.

These alternate win conditions prevent the game from becoming a simple race for points and force players to consider what their opponent is actually trying to accomplish.

What Could Be Better

The biggest weakness of Netrunner is its learning curve. There are many interacting systems, including ICE, breakers, runs, traces, tags, damage, advancement, servers, credits, clicks, and card timing. A new

player can understand the basic rules while still having very little understanding of how to actually play well.

The game also relies heavily on card knowledge. Experienced players know what different factions and archetypes are capable of and can make educated decisions based on that knowledge. New players do not have that advantage, which can create a significant experience gap.

Netrunner can also be very punishing. A single bad decision can allow the opponent to score a critical agenda or create a devastating attack. This produces tremendous tension, but it can also make mistakes feel disproportionately costly.

Finally, the game's mechanical complexity can occasionally overshadow its theme. Although the cyberpunk hacking theme is strong, players must understand a substantial rules system before they can fully appreciate how the mechanics create that experience.

Overall

Android: *Netrunner* is an unusually deep card game because its mechanics work together so effectively. Asymmetry creates different roles; hidden information creates bluffing; resource management creates difficult choices; and runs create direct interaction between the two players.

Its greatest strength is that the mechanics actually make the player feel like they are performing the roles represented by the game. The Corporation builds layers of protection and attempts to deceive the Runner, while the Runner probes those defenses, manages risk, and searches for vulnerabilities.

Its greatest weakness is the same complexity that gives it depth. *Netrunner* requires considerable time to learn, and experience and card knowledge have a major impact on play.

From a game-design perspective, however, *Netrunner* is particularly valuable because it demonstrates how asymmetry, hidden information, bluffing, resource management, and direct player interaction can be combined into a single coherent system. It is not simply a card game with a hacking theme—the mechanics themselves are what create the feeling of hacking.