“N3TW0RK” is a real-time cooperative game for 10-14 players designed to simulate a computer network. Each player takes the role of a host – an end user on a computer network. Each host starts with three packets of data, which they must deliver to other hosts as fast as they can. However, hosts cannot just hand their packets over. Each host is connected to three neighbors, and hosts can only exchange information to their neighbors. Together, all the hosts and all their connections form a network which they all participate in. The group collectively wins once all packets have been successfully delivered to the correct recipients.

N3TW0RK is designed to be an interactive lesson in basic networking. It’s easy for computers to connect with each other and transmit data – they can do it hundreds of times a second! Consequently, it’s easy to overlook all the engineering and design work that went behind creating the protocols and infrastructure behind the technological marvel that is networked communication. By putting humans in computers’ shoes (...err, cases?) players will be better able to understand how networks work.

The rules document also contains a glossary which maps game mechanics to their real-world definitions. Furthermore, several considerations were made to make this game accessible. The is playable with a standard 54-card playing deck, which is easily acquirable, and 28 role cards, which are included as part of the rules document. Additionally, an extend example is included in the rules to demonstrate step-by-step how computers talk with each other. Finally, it also includes variants for groups which find the game too easy or too hard, or groups with too many or too few players.

The instruction booklet is available for free online at bit.ly/N3TW0RK-game

Ben Burgh, the Designer™, has experience designing video and board games as the president of the Athens Georgia Game Developer Association (GGDA), and experience working with computers as an officer of UGA’s Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) club.