

*Rogue State* is an exceptional and impressive design--exceptional because its complexity creates a commitment on the part of the player to deal with decisions as well as dice. The game also amply demonstrates that simulations of State leadership should be about confronting ailments and opportunities and often failing at both because you made the wrong choice or found yourself overwhelmed by what you needed to do.

By placing the player in the position of the Supreme Leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), the challenge is finding ways of staving off regime change, either from within or without, often both. Simply put, the methodology for the player is mistake management. And because this is a game with a whole host of moving parts--strategic, political, economic, and social--and one that is at its base psychological--few decisions are straightforward. How high would you like to try to raise regional tensions and heighten confrontation with the United States? Are incentives enough to keep your political allies in line, or is intimidation the way to control your comrades in the leadership? Is infrastructure and development the path to walk, or is nuclear development and attending to the needs of the DPRK military the best avenue? Does society desire subsistence, or does patriotism satisfy the masses? The answers to all of these questions rests on how comfortable you as the player feel in making someone or something represented in the game (and always yourself) uncomfortable. It is difficult to think of another solitaire game where trade-offs and tensions are so starkly revealed, and in such a comprehensive and satisfying way.

This game can be a lengthy exercise, but the designer does himself a bit of a disservice when he notes that a good deal is based on luck. Yes, there are die rolls, but they do not undermine decisions so much as enhance their impact. Unlike some solitaire games, given the lengthy time scale here, choices made early can be reversed later, and strategies adjusted. Because so many dynamics are packed into the design and everything seems to affect everything else, there are moments when a player may seem overwhelmed--which makes a demanding game a terrifically good simulation of decisions far more than simply an exercise in die rolls. Because this is a game where nearly everything the player does matters (or seems to), *Rogue State* is a tightrope of political navigation, exercising the brain as much as the wrist.

Indeed, *Rogue State* is such an outstanding and unique game that it should compel players to consider optional rules and scenarios. Since the game occurs in eras, perhaps different victory conditions should be applied to each of them, allowing players to advance only if they meet certain levels. Grouping China and Russia together makes sense from a gaming standpoint, but Pyongyang's relationship with Beijing has been fraught with difficulties in recent years; it might be worthwhile to have some rules or conditions which change when the third and final era is reached, something to do with diplomacy perhaps (a more skilled Foreign Minister is required or rapid nuclear development undermines the alliance with China).

The components are generally solid and very colorful. The cards in particular are excellent, though having a historical reference in the rulebook to what it all means might be of assistance to players unfamiliar with some of the nuances. A reprint at some point with a mounted board, additional play aids, and larger counters would give the game the graphic presentation that this tremendously impressive and insightful design deserves.

By making the player work (and sweat) problems across areas, *Rogue State* not only fills a gap in gaming by focusing on the DPRK; it adds to our understanding of how to design a better solitaire experience.

Anyone planning to do a solitaire simulation of political decisions would do well to examine this game with great care, for there is everything to be admired about *Rogue State* and much to be emulated.