

Welcome to Pick Up and Deliver, the podcast where I pick up my audio recorder as I step off the train and deliver an episode to you while I walk home.

I'm Brendan Riley.

Well, good afternoon listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. It's partly cloudy, so the sun is up in the sky and we've got puffs of clouds. That are thick enough, they're gray on the bottom, but you can still see around them, so they've got little rings of white along the cottony edges, and you can see plenty of blue sky as well.

It's very windy though, apologies if the microphone's picking up some wind. I do have the little fuzz ball on it, so it shouldn't get too much wind, but sometimes you still get a little bit of it.

On my way home today I went and looked, and it's been a little while since I've done a Look Back at a year episode, so I thought I would give one of those a try. First one of season eight.

I mean, if you don't count the best games of 2023, which I don't count, because that's the thing I do every year. So for those of you new to a Look Back episode, the idea of these is that I am looking back at a year of gaming from before I was doing the podcast and naming my top five games and some superlatives from that year.

Now, as I get further and further back in time, there are fewer and fewer games that I've played that make it worth considering. Pretty soon I'm going to have to start doing like two or even three years at a time in order to have a big enough pool that it makes it worthwhile to do a top five. You know, if I've only played eight games doing a top five feels a little silly, but it turns out 2009 was either a robust year for the board game industry, or it somehow been a robust year for old games to cross my transom. But either way, I have played a fair number of games from 2009 enough that I feel comfortable doing a top five.

So in that regard, let's jump in.

First I will say, of course, normally I don't allow games that are in my top 50 to be considered. And there is one game that is not currently in my top 50 that has been before, but I am allowing it because it's not currently in my top 30 and that is Shipyard.

Shipyard is of course Vladimir Suchy's first sort of big complicated design. The previous to that he had published a game called The League of Six, which is pretty interesting.

And after that he published 20th Century and a game called Klondike, like 1836 or something, I haven't played that one and it's not well reviewed, so I'm not striving to find it and then Last Will after that.

The Shipyard was 2009 kind of burst onto the scene and made big waves. I haven't played the new edition that he brought out last year, published with his new Delicious Games company.

The people on So Very Wrong About Games did not, they were not glowing about it, but I don't know that they were glowing about Shipyard to begin with. And I think that they don't like the sort of chaotic puzzliness of some of his games. They really like Pulsar 2849, which I feel is kind of an outlier for him compared to some of the other designs.

But so my number one game from 2009 is Shipyard. I brought that one up first because it had been in my top 50, so that one is my number one, now I'm going to go 5-4-3-2.

So my number five game from 2009 is a Vlada Chvaatil, so another CGE game and this is Dungeon Lords. Dungeon Lords is a game of simultaneous action bidding and resource management followed by a sort of cascade of challenges. So the way the game works, you play an evil monster of some sort who owns a dungeon and you are trying to build the dungeon to be a place where you and your monsters can hang out and enjoy yourselves. But of course those pesky adventurers keep coming in and wrecking all your stuff.

So your goal is to build a dungeon that is going to earn you points mostly by defeating the adventurers when they come in. You can make these traps and other things. You can kind of see the adventurers coming, you don't always know which one is going to come to get you.

The thing that makes the game really interesting is the action selection mechanism. So the way the game works, you have a bunch of different actions that you can take and you're going to pick which actions you want to send your minions to. And I'm trying to remember, I don't particularly remember the order in which, like if you pick which one you're going to first and that sort of thing, but you have to plan it out ahead of time.

Yeah, that sort of is, you pick which ones you're going to win and you plan it out ahead of time. And then when you send your workers, they go in the first, second or third slot and each one pays off a little differently and gets to go a little bit differently.

So if you're like the first one to go there, you're going to get different results than if you're the second or third one to get there.

So the tricky part is trying to balance when your workers are going to go there and what order they are going to land in.

And that's what makes the game really interesting is this balance between those two things.

Dungeon Lords is a pretty interesting game. It's very finicky by today's standards. It's a little clunky, but it's pretty enjoyable. If you're interested in the early Vlada Chvaatil game design, you can't do much worse than Dungeon Lords. It's pretty fun... Er... you can't do much better than Dungeon Lords. It's pretty fun.

So my number four game from 2009 is Arctic Scavengers. Arctic Scavengers is a deck building game in the shadow of Dominion.

It works very much like Dominion did in that you have a market of cards that you can purchase from and you have a starting deck and you use the starting deck to buy the cards that you're purchasing.

The gimmick or the tricky part of the game, the thing that makes it most interesting is that the cards have a variety of different actions on them, not just one. So there's several different things you can do. And then on top of that, there is this thing called the skirmish. And this part, I think, is a pretty neat gimmick.

You have your five cards in your hand. And on your turn, you can play as many of them as you like to do things. But any that you don't play, then go into your skirmish pile, then go into your skirmish pile. The round is over and everyone has played their cards. Then there is a skirmish and everyone reveals the people they've sent to the skirmish. And the player who sent the strongest group to the skirmish wins the card off of the skirmish deck, which is not something you can buy. Generally, it's really good. It's a really good person or equipment.

In addition, the first player each round, which rotates, got to peek at the skirmish deck. So they know how good the skirmish card is or whether it will fit their design or not. In terms of game flow, it is very much in the style of Dominion. You are trying to gain points through having lots of people in your deck, which is like a community and a sort of post-apocalyptic frozen landscape.

The tricky part is that you have to choose when to start going for more and more people, but that will clog your deck up and you won't be able to be efficient. All in all, Arctic Scavengers just is really good.

I think it's very good once you add in the expansions, which did come after 2009, but I'm kind of counting them in my consideration of the game. And thus, it is my number four game of 2009, Arctic Scavengers.

My number three game of 2009 is Small World. Small World is a reimagining of an older game called Vinci. And it is an area control game with a very clever theme of having to retire your forces. So the idea is you have a civilization and you get to take over stuff on the board and you get points for the land you hold. And at some point on your turn, instead of trying to take over more land, you can choose to retire your civilization.

And then they go into decline and then you take a new group instead.

The new group then has sort of robust new team energy and you still score points for your previous group until they are wiped off the board. So there is this really nice mechanism by which you want to, and the game has attrition built in, so it is very hard to just keep using the same group. Like they are going to get weaker as time goes by.

And so what you really want to do is have a burst of effective energy, get as many points as you can in a round or two, and then retire and bring out the next one at the opportune moment to get the next points.

The gimmick of the game is that the civilizations that are available are not set. They are tactically decided. So there is a deck of races and a deck of powers. And each group that comes out goes into this river from which you can buy from that has the combines a race with the power.

And so each game you have to kind of evaluate is this race with this power, a good combination or is it a bad combination.

And when you go to select a new one, you have to pay to take it. If you take the bottom one, it is free.

Which additional one that you go up the river, you have to pay a point to take. So there is this element of spending victory points in order to take a better one. But also later if someone then takes that one, it has got victory points on it. That is the crux of small world. And then it is like fantasy races. It is a really good game.

If you haven't played it, it is definitely worth checking out. There is a reason it is still in print. It is a classic Small World.

All right, my number two game from 2009 is the best social deduction game they have made as far as I am concerned. This is The Resistance.

The Resistance is essentially the answer to how do we make a social deduction game like Werewolf, but fun. The Resistance is the answer. So my problems with Werewolf are twofold. One, generally you are operating from zero information. In Werewolf, you don't know anything if you are not a Werewolf. And when the game became a published and evolved thing, there started to be these roles that did have information. But still significant portions of the people in the game did not have any information at all.

And the second part is that people get kicked out of the game. Sometimes like one round in, you haven't gotten to do hardly anything in your out of the game. That is not fun. So the solution to that is The Resistance where there is always just five rounds. There are some people that have roles and some people that don't. But as the game goes along, you have this information that emerges in how people vote for things.

There are also some cards that come with it if you want to play with these bonus cards. Those aren't part of the original game. But I think they add a lot to adding, complicated and sometimes reliable, but sometimes difficult to rock information to the flow of the game.

I really like The Resistance. I think it's an amazing game. It holds up over time. I haven't played it in a while, but every time I do play it, it's really good. I think it is best of breed. I think it is much better than Secret Hitler. I think it is much better than some of the other ones that are still fun. Like Donner Dinner Party is fun, but I like The Resistance better. So top notch, The Resistance. Definitely great to play if you get a chance.

The Resistance: Avalon is just as good. It's got a slightly tweaked rules, but also very, very good. But The Resistance is my number two game.

My number one game from 2009, as I said, is Shipyard. Like I said, Shipyard is this complex debut from Vladimir Suchy. You are building these big ships and then running them on shakedown cruises in these canals. And you get points for the variety of different additions that you made to the ship, the variety of different features that you added to it, and the people who are interested in buying those features and additions.

It's a game with these really complex and interesting rondels. It's sort of like the design, like Vladimir Suchy said, oh you like rondels, huh? Here's a game with rondels on rondels. And from that perspective, really cool. Not a lot more to say about it.

I have talked about Shipyard in the past. It is an excellent game.

The old rule of it being the top 50 gets delayed a little bit there because it has been in my top 50. I'm a little divided about whether I should have included it or not, but it did. And it is my number one game from 2009. That Shipyard from Vladimir Suchy currently published by Delicious Games in a shiny new edition. I have the CGE edition and it's really fun. So that comes the end of the top five games from 2009.

Now I want to offer a couple superlatives and talk a little bit about the things that are missing here.

So start with the things that are missing. The way that I found that made this list is that I went on board game geek. I did an advanced search. I put in year published 2009 to 2009. So I just got the games from 2009. And then I had it list them in order of boardgamegeek rank.

Then I scrolled through.

At the beginning I was reading every title. Once I got maybe, once I got to game like rank 3000 or so, then I started just looking for games that I had logged plays of. And I went until I was at game rank 25,000, which was about two and a half pages of entries. So I looked through the top 25,000 games on board game geek, but filtered out everything except the games from 2009. So it was like 250 games I looked through. And from that I found a list of about 20 or 25 games that I played. But I did pick out six games that I haven't played that I would like to.

Two of them are on my shelf of opportunity. This is Steam and Last Train to Wensleydale. These are both Martin Wallace games. Both about trains, he must have been in a train mood at that time. And both games that I would like to play.

I also have four games from that era that are not on my shelf of opportunity, but I would like to play as well. We have automobile, also Martin Wallace. We have Tales of Arabian Nights, which I think they're either they just kickstarted or they are about to kickstart a new edition

of, which is a game that seems like it'd be really fun as a storytelling game. And I would definitely like to try that when the new edition comes out. It may even go on my purchase list, but we'll see.

Then Cyclades, which is a game from Madagot, it's part of their area control trilogy that includes Kemet and Inis. I haven't played any of these games, but I always hear good things. And Hansa Tutonica, which is supposed to be very, very good. I don't really know much about it, except it's dusty and musty and it's supposed to be very, very good.

And they recently released a big box version of it, which I was tempted to buy just because of the reputation of the game, but I did not, but I am interested in trying it. That's Hansa Tutonica.

All right, we've got a couple superlative games. These are games from 2009 that I've played. They did not make my top five, but I want to give them a congratulatory title anyway. So the best two-player game from 2009 is Jaipur. Jaipur is an excellent little two-player back in tug of war game. There's a market of cards and you take cards out of it and your goal is to get a certain number of cards of the same type, which you can then trade in to get chips. And the chips are worth different points.

And at the end of the game, the person with the most points wins. It's a really clever game. There's some really good back and forth in it.

There's some interesting push-your-luck elements where you hold on to cards so that you can try to get better cards.

Sometimes that pays off, sometimes it doesn't. But it is a real top-notch game. It's all worth exploring if you haven't. That's Jaipur. Next up, the coolest game from 2009 is Claustrophobia. This was originally published as a fantasy flight game and it is the one that I played.

Although they did publish a, I think, 10th anniversary edition or something like that from C'MON Games and it was, they gave it a year, so it was like Claustrophobia 1689 or something. The premise is that there's a gateway to hell that's been opened up and some warrior monks are taking some condemned prisoners in to fight demons who are trying to escape. One player plays the humans, the other player plays the demons and the game has a really fascinating action selection system where you roll dice and then those dice go into your action tray.

And you can take actions for your player, your character is based on the results you rolled in the dice, but you also just have a certain number of actions you could take. So there's this interesting back and forth.

As you get injured, if I recall, you lose health, but there are ways to either get more dice or lose some dice and that's really interesting too. I mean, at its heart, it is a kind of dice-chucking battle, but there is some area control or some miniature movement and it's just a really neat looking game and it was really fun to play when I played it.

So if you haven't gotten a chance to play Claustrophobia or it's new sibling, I encourage you to do so because it's a really neat idea and a really good execute. It's Claustrophobia the coolest game of 2009.

The best family game from 2009 is Castle Panic. Oh man, we had so many great games of Castle Panic with my kids. This is a cooperative game where you are, it's a tower defense game. You have a tower in the middle, you're defending it against all these monsters that are coming in.

We found the game was fine by itself, but if you add the Wizard's Tower expansion and the Dragon expansion or whatever it is, that it gets just great. The enemies are hard, but not undefeatable. The Wizard powers are really good. You have to manage your stuff really well so you can get as many Wizard powers as you can. You have to work together and talk it out. But there's interesting decisions to be made that just along the lines of "Can I get lucky?" It's a great game. They have released a shiny new edition of it that I encourage you to check out. It looks beautiful and I know there's an edition that's got all these miniatures and everything instead of little tiles.

I probably would just want the tile version because it's much easier to get onto the table. Although the miniatures version would then make a playset for kids, I think, that would be pretty fun. Yeah, so Fireside Games has a real winner with Castle Panic. It's an excellent game.

Well worth checking out if you get a chance and a real winner for a family game. In fact, I'd say the best family game from 2009. That's Castle Panic.

Two more.

I have the weirdest game. 2009's weirdest game is Bunny Bunny Moose Moose. This is another CGE production from Vlada Chvaatil. It is a game of putting your hands in funny positions in real time as you try to anticipate what the shot-caller is going to say.

You're moving your hands back and forth and trying to get the best score you can based on the display on the table. When the shot-caller fires the gun, "bang." Everyone freezes. New score points based on where your hands are. They're making moose antlers or bunny ears in a particular arrangement and it's hilarious.

It's really dumb, really fun. It depends on everybody being able-bodied because you have to hold your arms up and move your hands around in a way. But assuming that's your group is a real fun goofy time. That's Bunny Bunny Moose Moose. The weirdest game of 2009.

Finally, the game with the best table presence from 2009 is the Adventurers, the Temple of Chac. This is the first Adventurers game. They made another one called the Pyramid of Horus. It's equally good or better, but Pyramid of Chac is pretty great. Basically it's Indiana Jones.

Think of the first, the opening of Indiana Jones in the Rages of the Lost Ark where he's running through this temple. That's what you're doing. At one point you're being chased by a big boulder. You're going through these obstacles. You're trying to find treasure without getting killed and it's a delight. It's a real weird game. Very fun.

The art is pretty sexist. I think the art was done by some French folks and it looks pretty sexist. There are characters that are sort of these, the women are drawn in ways that generally we wouldn't like to see these days just because it's a very exploitative style. Other than that, the game is really fun. It's real weird and it looks awesome on the table. That is the Adventurers, the Temple of Chac. The last thing I would like to do is just read to you the other games from 2009 that I had played but did not make any of my lists just so you can get a sense of what games were under consideration.

I'm just going to buzz through this list of games that I considered but did not play or but did not award.

Telestrations.

Egizia.

Finca.

Stronghold.

String Railway.

Nemo's War.

FunGLISH, and Flip Out.

I guess of the games I played I gave either top five or superlatives to about half of them. This might just be on the border of maybe you didn't play enough 2009 games. The thing is sometimes I have a list of 15 to 20 games that I played and not many of them are good.

This one I was actually literally debating about which ones I think are worth getting the award. I feel pretty confident and happy in the selections I made and I'm happy to talk about them with you.

The best place to do that is over on boardgamegeek and guild 3269 where you can post about this list and argue with me about what's good about it. We also could have a discussion by boardgamegeek message. Wombat929 is my username there or by email Brendan at rattleboxgames.com.

I hope that you enjoyed this discussion of 2009 games and I'd love to hear your thoughts on it.

Thanks for joining me. I hope your next walk is as pleasant as mine was.

Bye bye.

[Music]

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(soft piano music)