

(wind blowing)

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.

(upbeat music)

One of my least favorite parts about living

in the Midwest is the way that particularly spring weather

is so unsettled.

Some days it'll be a really nice balmy time

and temperature and other days it'll be downright chilly.

Today definitely falls into the downright chilly category.

In fact it is very cold and it's snowing

and I don't like that it's snowing in April.

So I say boo to the snow.

Not as not cold enough the snow is accumulating

as soon as it hits the ground.

It melts, but still... yuck.

And then I had a game experience yesterday

that I thought I would share

and talk about the subject that it's

made me think about today.

And so the title of this episode is Never Tell Me the Odds.

This is of course a Star Wars reference

in Han Solo and C3PO and the gang are making their way

through the asteroid belt C3PO tells Han Solo

that their odds of surviving navigation through

the asteroid belt are very low and Han Solo says

"never tell me the odds."

I'll say you had that yesterday or a couple days ago.

Not was yesterday.

My son and I were collaborating to play our Solo adventures

for our Frosthaven characters.

He's playing the Trapper and I'm playing the Pain conduit

and we have both of them have just reached their

eligibility for their Solo missions.

And so yesterday we played them both.

We had both played them once before and done poorly

but on the replays we did pretty well and succeeded.

So I wanna talk a little bit about that experience

so for him particularly,

his approach to the Solo adventure was meticulously planned.

Mine was a little bit more slip shot

but still pretty tactically careful.

There were a couple times where he was trying

to decide whether to do something or I was trying

to decide whether to do something.

I ended up looking at like what are the odds

that the bad guys will, that the monsters will do a thing

that would disrupt this plan.

There was one time where he wanted to do something

and it was a one in three chance

that the bad guy would disrupt the plan

and he said well Yolo and he went for it

and it worked out just fine.

So that's a fun twist.

I never, I did not examine things quite the same way.

I think I did at one time where I'm like

well is there any situation in which the guy can move five

or whatever was most of the time they could only move four

or something like that.

So in those instances we were trying to evaluate the odds

but it did get me thinking about the way

that often when I play games,

something being of low odds often does not deter me

from trying it.

I am an eternal optimist about the luck potential

of the dice and the willingness of the universe

to let me have a win even if I don't deserve it
or it would be ridiculous.

And so in that regard I thought I would talk a little bit
about some games where this sort of thing happens
and I fully acknowledge that it's not good strategy
to do it this way, but I often do it anyway.

Places where the game, the setup of the game is so fun
that I don't wanna know the odds
I just wanna do the thing.

So to start with Terraforming Mars.

I played Terraforming Mars many times,
quite a few times on the table and count way more times
on digital implementation,
particularly since it showed up on board game arena.

And I always like accumulating blue cards.

So if you haven't played before,
there are cards that let you build things
in on the ground.

There's cards that let events happen
and then there are cards that let you
add different kinds of bonuses and machinery
to your tableau.

And my experiences, the bonuses in the machinery

in the tableau need to be very carefully chosen because for the most part they are a time sink and a resource sink that they are less valuable than they appear to be or you would hope that they are going to be.

Generally if you have a choice between doing something that adds to the map and doing something that are your resource production or doing something gives you like a machine or an action, a special action that you can do.

Generally the machine or a special action is only gonna be useful if you do it really early in the game.

So you have plenty of time to run that machine.

The later you do it, the more likely it is to not be useful.

This isn't to say that they don't feed off each other and they can't be useful,

but they're just not as good as if you spent those same resources doing some of the other things that advance the end of the game and get you points directly.

The premier version of this, two cards that I almost always take when I get the chance and generally are not an effective use of resources or energy or effort, I mean not energy.

Would be the microbe card and the advanced research projects.

I think that's what the second one's called.

I might have the title wrong, but in the microbe,
the advanced research projects, you can activate it
to draw a card and then you can pay three
to keep that card if you want.

Or maybe two, I think it's three though.

So it's just like you got an extra card on the draw,
but I always like to have the option of more cards.

And then the other one, and this is the real ridiculous one,
would be the microbe card.

So this card works, you pay a certain amount to build it
and it's not a very extensive card.

And then every time you use the card, you pay one money
and you get the draw card.

And if it has a microbe tag on it, you add a microbe to the card
and each microbe on the card is worth one point.

Well, this is a terrible deal

because your odds of drawing a microbe card are terrible.

So you could spend oodles and oodles of money
and never draw a single microbe card.

So you never get a single point, which is a real bummer
when you look at how you might do with that money
that would get you points.

Now that's not to say you can't have success with it,
you can, but the odds are terrible.

But I almost always take that card if I come across it
because I love the thrill of drawing a card
and seeing if I get a microbe.

And then if I do get one or even two in the game,
that feels pretty good.

It feels like I got my money worth probably.

It's a really dumb thing to be excited about
and speaks to, I don't know, some element,
hope, hopefulness in my play that defies logic or skill
but is instead built around the idea of optimism in how I play.

So that is the microbe search from Terraforming Mars.

This is very similar to another kind of hope that I have
and this is looking for a match in a large card deck.

Whenever I have a game where you're gonna be drawing cards a lot,
I always overestimate the likelihood
of finding the card I need from the deck.

So in Ark Nova, this might mean building a strategy around
acquiring certain kinds of animals,
even if those animals are relatively hard to get
and I don't have very many of them to begin with.

In Everdell, it might mean building a strategy around

finding the dungeon or finding the ranger
and then I never find those cards
and my whole strategy is blown to heck
or even Skyjo, which is a game we've played quite a bit lately.

In that one, you can try to set yourself up
to get rid of a column by drawing a card you need
from the draw deck.

And if you fail on that, it's way worse
than just getting rid of those high cards to be in one.

But completing the column feels so good
that I often want to do that,
even if it turns out it's a dumb choice.

Finally, one of the big games of last,
the big party games of last year is Flip 7.

This is another game where I often,
just I like to push my luck.

If I get to the point where I have revealed five of the seven cards
and now I need two more,
oh, I almost always go for it.

Now if my whole deck, if my whole display is like 10s, 11s,
and 12, like 9, 11, and 12 or something,
then I often won't because the odds are terrible.

But if I feel like I have a reasonable hope

that the last card would be something I don't have,

I'll often go for it because I love pushing the odds.

This is certainly related to pushing your luck,

but it's almost more just like even in games

that don't have pushed your luck as a mechanism,

I will resort to that aspect of it sometimes.

In die rolling, that bad odds optimism,

manifest in a couple games, of course,

Perudo or Liars Dice is a classic

that would have this kind of choice in it.

Do I think the people around the table

have a specific number of dice or not?

I always think I can squeeze one more out of it

or hope for one more.

But I would say I would point to a bigger example

of this kind of effect would be Elder Sign.

Elder Sign I talked about recently

is a game where you're trying to complete

dice rolls to complete locations.

It's not a push your luck game because once you choose,

it's sort of like manage your luck,

once you choose a card you're gonna play,

then you continue till you either defeat the card

or you take the penalty.

There's no benefit to like quitting partway through,

either complete the card or you don't.

So it's not a push your luck game,

but it does often make you feel like

you should be able to win

because you're just looking for like one symbol

on three dice or something.

But the odds of rolling a single side of one of three dice

are comparatively low.

I don't know what they are precisely,

but it's not high.

Even if you get to roll those dice

and succeedingly smaller groups.

But when I play Elder Sign,

I'm often just intrigued by the possibility.

It feels like oh, it should be easy enough to do.

I get to roll five dice.

I only have three of them match the symbols I'm looking for.

It's a compelling blind spot in my brain

that I feel like makes for fun gameplay.

Even though it often means that I lose.

So I'm not sure how to describe that effect,

the idea that even if it means I'm gonna lose,
I have fun gambling with the odds of whether I win or not.
Because the correct role is so delightful.
It's such a satisfying experience
that sort of having it fail
isn't really that bad an element.
Two other places where I see this kind of thing come up
in Cascadia and it's tighter cousin Calico.
And both of these drafting games
you are taking something and hoping
that you will get what you need in a future draw.
Every time you take something,
you're reducing the possibility
that you will get what you need.
Far away is another one that works like this.
When you take cards early and play them,
you are hoping that you're going to have the symbols
you need to complete those cards later on.
And the mix of those two is the really interesting
and effective part of what's going on in the game,
finding that connection between the two different pieces.
The last game on point two that has that kind of gambling
on the future element is Seven Wonders.

This is of course a game where you're trying to get a mix of things that will give you the most points.

If you take some of the long-term development things, you're just hoping you're going to get something that pays off for them in the future.

Of course other games that have this sort of hope you can do it, even if the odds say you can't expect something like

Dungeons and Dragons of course is all about mitigating or managing your luck and trying to find just the right time to ask or pursue a particular kind of victory.

And co-op games often end up being about managing the luck at play in the system.

Trying to figure out, do I have the right combinations of things in order to succeed?

I think a game like Ghost Stories, which encourages you to imagine that you could use the dice to win the tasks.

And as long as you think you can use the dice to win the tasks, you will fail at task after task that having that enticement there is a great mislitter for how the game works.

And our odds are at contrast with our feeling

about what we should be able to do.

So what games do you find yourself wishing you didn't know the odds?

Or where you find yourself gambling against,
gambling against bad odds so that you can do well?

Head over to Board Game Geek, guild 3269

and share your thoughts about those.

You can reach out to me on Board Game Geek,
username, Wombat929, send me a message there if you like.

Thanks for joining me on my walk today.

I hope your next walk is as pleasant as mine was.

Bye-bye.

(upbeat music)

(upbeat music)

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Brought to you by Rattlebox Games.

(upbeat music)

(gentle music)