

# Untitled - July 9, 2025

**Speaker** Welcome to Pickup and Delivery, the podcast where I pick up my audio recorder as I leave the library and deliver an episode to you while I walk home. I'm Brendan Riley. Well, it's not a good way to start building a rapport with your audience to lie to them right when you start off. So I didn't just leave the library. I left the hardware store across the street from the library. My apologies for fibbing. We've been having a great discussion over on the BGG forums. I think it started in response to, um, I'm not sure which. Maybe in response to my. Nah, I'm good post. Although that was a while ago. Uh, John co-host. Uh, apologies if I said your name wrong there. John posted a really interesting and heartbreaking story about being persuaded to sit down and play Catan, and it was a six person game of Catan and it took forever, apparently, and sounds pretty unfun. And then, uh, Gabriel Edge and I actually mostly Gabriel and John together. I chimed in a little bit, but we're talking about games that don't work and why some plays have been bad. And what what makes a first play bad. And there's some interesting conversation there. You can go check it out. The subject header for that forum is is Poison Chalice. I'll post a link in the show notes if you want some help finding it. But toward the end, Gabriel said, thinking about the opposite side, what do you think it is that makes for a great first play? And John posted a very thoughtful and thorough comment explaining why what he thought made for a good first play. And like the content vulture that I am, I said I'm going to post a podcast about this instead. So that's what this is. Apologies to you two folks who went there to have a conversation, and I sidelined it by coming on the show, but I thought it was interesting and wanted to bounce this conversation out to the wider community. I know that most of the listeners don't go over to board Game Geek forums. Guild number 3269 and share your thoughts on the episodes. That's a relatively small bunch, but maybe this one will inspire you to. This is a conversation happening right now in the Poisoned Chalice forum, and I'm sharing my version of it or my thoughts on it here on the podcast. So again, the question at hand is what makes for an amazing first play? John offered three ideas which I'm going to foreground here. So if what I say later sounds like it's overlapping or, you know, I read his response before I posted mine. So there's some influence there. Certainly. But so John wrote that his predisposition to like the game helps make it great. His on opposite, having the delight of surprise, finding a game that he didn't really think much was going to be there, and it turns out to be really good. That's fun too. And the atmosphere makes a huge difference. Like what is the context in which you are playing that? And I think a lot of John's comments are really spot on. They're very close to what I probably would have said, and you're going to see some overlap here, but I have three of my own, which I think are similar but slightly different. So the first one that I would say is a great teach, and this could be a great teach because I taught myself by reading the rule book, by looking at online videos, by just getting ready to play the game makes a huge difference in how much I'm going to enjoy it. Because if I feel like I understand the mechanisms going in, then I can really see how the game works and see what it does without having to spend a ton of mental energy trying to remember how the game works. This is especially important because a lot of times, the games that I'm most likely to find really satisfying are heavier, which means they take more effort to learn. And so not internalizing that structure as well can cause problems. That said, an example of a game where the first play of it was really good because the teach was really good, rather than

teaching myself. There's a couple of them that I'm thinking about, and I think the crucial piece of this here is the person doing the teaching needs to have thought through the question of what's the best way to learn how this game works? And on the heavier side, I really enjoyed my first play of the game, Nucleome, and I think it in part it was because the teach from my friend Eric was really thorough and thoughtful, but not so long that you started to lose the thread. And I will say he did ask us to watch a video beforehand, and I had done that. So I was sort of loosely familiar, but I didn't feel confident going in that I understood how the game worked. But his teach was very thorough and I think worked really well to set up how the game works. So that was an example of a great first play, springing off of a good teach or great teach the best teach of a game that I have in mind. And this is maybe a cheat because it is a simple game and a simple game. You can do a great. But it was so. It was just the perfect teach. This is, uh, Bruce from the party game. Uh, the party game cast, the game, the podcast, the party game podcast, the podcast about party games and gaming with people who love parties. Um, Bruce from that podcast, whose name is whose last name is eluding me right now. He was working for North Star Games for a while, and he was working their booth at origins. And he in 2017, he was teaching the game Happy Salmon, and he had the perfect teach for it. He had everyone gather in a circle and he just starts with high fives because everybody knows high fives. He's like, give me a high five, high five, high five. He goes around high fives for everybody. And then he's like, um, then he does the next one. It was high fistbumps. He does fistbumps around and then he does. Let's switch positions. And he makes everybody switch positions around the circle. So we've all done those three. And he says, okay, we're going to do happy salmon now. So he has them. He has us do the happy salmon, which is sort of like if you go to do a Roman handshake where you're going to clasp each other's forearms instead of your hands, but then you lightly slap the other person's forearm like you're like, it's a fishtail. That's a happy salmon. So he has us practice that, and he's like, do you not know how to play the game? And then he explains the rest of it in about 30s. And it was it was just the perfect teach. It was so carefully thought out like how do I keep everyone engaged, high energy? How do I communicate, how the game plays in as smooth and easy way? Boom! Totally awesome. Excellent. Teach. And the first play of it was great. I bought it from him as soon as we were done. I was like, this game is great. So that's an example I will offer up. Generally this I think this is the only my only negative example in the game, but I am going to offer up a negative example. The game Everdell far shore I think is an example of a failed teach. So in when we played Everdell Far Shore. I got the rules and I read them and I learned them. And then I, my wife and I sat down to play and I explained to her how the game worked. But because it's everdell, it's mostly the same. So I said, you know, here it's mostly the same. Here's the differences. And I kind of went through the differences. The thing is, there's these anchor cards and these end game scoring cards in Everdell far shore that are really significant point wise. They're much higher point difference than most of the like, end game scoring cards in other everdell pieces. And so having access to that higher tier or understanding that those cards are probably going to be pretty significant is a big part of doing well in the game. And I'll to be, to be honest, having read the rules and thought through, I didn't really get how significant that scoring aspect was going to be, so I didn't realize myself that those were super important. And so I explained them. But I didn't explain them with enough emphasis to really help my wife understand how it's going to be. As a result, I did go for them because I understood that they

were important, but I didn't understand how important. And so she didn't really go for them very much. And I did, and the scores were like, I doubled her score or something. It was a lot. So it was a really bad first play for her, because I would say it was not a good teach, because a key part of doing a good teach is really understanding the game and being able to explain to players not just how it works, but what they need to look out for. And I think in a first play, giving people a little bit of insight into like, what are some ways you can ruin your first play? As a side note, I played Netrunner last night and I was urged in my own thinking as I'm playing it with this first player to explain, like, money is really, really important in Netrunner. If you let yourself get too low on money, it's really easy to just have your game crater because you can't do what you want to do and you end up wasting turns just trying to get money. And that was the experience that we had. Both of us had at least one moment where we had let the money get too low and then we just couldn't do much. So that part is, uh, rough. But it wasn't bad because I had explained to the other person. Here's a thing to watch out for. Another good example of that kind of thing that I think makes for a better play in the game. Nanty Nanking. There's a card you can give somebody that reduces their hand size, and that game is all about hand size. A big part of it's hand size. Having enough cards. So reducing your hand size is a tough nut to swallow. In the game, there are cards that you can give someone where it says you have to pay five money, or put this card in front of you in your hand. Size is permanently reduced for the rest of the game. So if you ever let yourself go below five money, you're making yourself a target for that card. Because while the five money is nice, the reduction in hand size is such a brutal attack that most people can't resist doing it. So I always make sure to call that out as a thing that can happen so people are aware of it. So great first play. Uh, it involves a great teach. Second thing one is mood, life and mood and atmosphere. And this is pretty close to atmosphere that, John said. But my approach is a little different. Rather than being for John, it was sort of like the right confluence of people drawing you into the game. I think for me, it's the the moment in life that you're at, like, are you in a space where you can play a game for a couple of hours and not, and you don't have to worry about other things like it does it? Does it really give you an opportunity to escape the mundane, the everyday so that you can really focus on and enjoy the game? Having that availability is part of what makes I think plays really good for me. That's why a lot of my great first plays happen when I'm not at home, when I am traveling and playing games, I'm doing that in the context of like, I have set aside this time to play games. Either I'm at a con and I'm playing games, or I am on a trip, like a work trip, and I take the evening to go play games. In that context, I often can have a very great, very good first game because my mindset is like, ah, I'm just here to play games. I'm easygoing and enjoying it. And as a result, like Tiny Towns and Carpe Diem are both two games I really enjoy. They both two games I encountered for the first time at Labyrinth Games in DC when I was at a conference, and I took half a day to go play games that felt it was great. Similarly, last year when I was at a conference in Rhode Island and I went and played The Hunger and a couple other and Rats of Wistar at a game store in Connecticut like that, that was really great as well, because, again, I was in the sort of mindset of, I'm here to play games free and easy and casual. It was great. So having the atmosphere set up where you can enjoy your first play because you have the mental space to let it breathe and enjoy it, is a key part of enjoying the first play for me and I will say of those four games I mentioned Tiny Towns, Carpe Diem, Rats of Worcester and The Hunger. Three of those are games that I've purchased and

two of them are in my top 50. If not right now. They have been. I think they are both right now. Carpe diem might have fallen out. The hunger definitely is and has been in the past, and I think Tiny Towns has been in the past as well, although it is not right now. All right. The next one is mindset. And I did not see this in John's thing. Although his comment about predisposition sort of knowing ahead of time you're going to probably enjoy the game goes a long way. And I guess this is in a related way. But for me, the mindset is having an idea of what kind of game experience you're about to embark on makes a huge difference in me, for me, and whether I'll enjoy it or not. The biggest place where I struggle to enjoy game plays is in trying to figure out is in games where we're attacking each other. I like that less than almost any other mechanism, although there are some games that I that I really like where attacking each other is a crucial part of it, but that's only fun if I know going in, that's what it's going to be. And if the attacking feels earned or available, or else so random that nobody gets to earn it either of those feels pretty good to me. So something like Nanty Narking, which is a very spiky game where you're attacking each other, or even innovation, which is a very spiky game where you're attacking each other. I love those, but it's because going in, I know that's what they are and I engage with them actively. By contrast, if there's a game that seems like it doesn't do that and it has just a little bit of it, that's the version of that that I like the least often because I'm not in the mindset for it. So for example, the skunk card in Everdell, there's a skunk that you can play that like you play it in someone else's building spots and it eats up one of their buildings. I hate that card. I hate it because most of the rest of the game, the only place you're competing with one another is you're racing for the objectives, and you're trying to get cards out of the market before they do, and you're sending your workers to worker placement spots. So there's a bunch of different ways you're competing, but almost all of it is in racing to maneuver so that you can get the thing before they get the thing. You're never tearing down what they did or blocking them, um, in ways that they can't anticipate. And I guess I've played it enough now. I do anticipate the skunk as a possibility. But unlike most of the other things, like if you block my worker well, except in the final round, most rounds I have an opportunity to use to find another way to do that thing with the skunk. You just took one of my building spots. There's nothing I can do about it, unless I happen to get the one card that lets me kill a worker. And in order to do that, I have to take up another working spot with that. So having the right mindset so that I can enjoy the game because I'm ready for what the game will do, is a crucial part of me enjoying plays of a game. Uh, a great example. Then I just mentioned I got to play Netrunner again recently, and uh, Netrunner is pretty spiky. Obviously you're it's a one on one game. You're directly attacking one another. Uh, and often you're surprising one another with different kinds of difficulties. The person I was playing with knew everything that Netrunner was going to be, and as a result, had a great time. I think that's a game where if you're not really ready for what it could do, it might be too tense, too intense for you, or it might not have the right luck. So there's an example of Netrunner or of a of a way that mindset can really shape the experience you have playing a game. All right. In the last couple of minutes here, I want to talk about the three ways to make a great first play that John brought up predisposition, surprise and atmosphere. And we'll talk about three different plays I had that were great first plays that fit those categories, predisposition, knowing what a game is and kind of expecting it to be a thing you'll really enjoy, does go a long way for me. Sidereal confluence was that I heard about it. I watched the reviews. I heard some read some stuff. I thought, this is probably a game I'm

going to love. I bought it, I had it for a while before I got to play it, because it's kind of a big game to get out, and then I loved it when we got it out. Not surprising, I knew I was gonna my guess at like the the game. Um, stationfall is the game that I got used. It feels like it will have a similar effect, and I expect to enjoy it when I get a chance. Surprise! The other one. A game that you thought you you didn't think that much of, the game. I'll point to the game Free Radicals, which I played for the first time earlier this year. You've heard me talk about it a little bit. I really do like it. This is a game I, I was middling on. I was interested in trying it, sure, but the reasons I was middling one. Uh, Richard Ham was talking about how great it is, and I like Richard Ham a lot. I love the way that he talks about games, but him saying a game is great just means he likes it. And sometimes he likes a game for reasons that don't suit me. And so I'm always a little wary with what's going on in a game, particularly as he's drifted away from liking games that go over two hours. Um, and so I was wary of that. Also, the game is incredibly asymmetric, which I like in theory, but most asymmetric games I've played, I haven't enjoyed. So when I played that and we get about half an hour in, I'm like, oh, I really like this. Um, it was a delight to discover that I really like what's going on in the game. Free radicals. So there's a surprise. Great first play. Uh, and then we'll talk about atmosphere. This again goes to mindset, but also who you played with. I had two really great plays of games at origins 2017, Beyond the Happy Salmon that I talked about. The two that I'm thinking of here are I had to play of Orléans, which was not my first play, so this doesn't really count in that category. But I had a play of Barron Park that before the game was over, I'm like, where can I buy this game? Like, I liked it so much. And in both cases, the environment, having the time to play was really fun. It was on a trip with my daughter where we were playing lots of games. That was really fun, and I got to play with people who were in my podcast feed at the time. Patrick from blue Peg, pink Peg and Dan from the podcast of Nonsensical Gamers, which is where I got the term top of the stack. Both of those plays were with these people I arranged, I emailed them, it was really fun to meet them and see them play, and I just had a great time. So it was really exciting to get to play those games and with those people and enjoy them a lot. So I'd love to hear your criteria for first games. Great. first place. The best place to share this, as I said at the top was is in the Board Game Geek forums and Guild 3269. The the um thread is called the Poison Chalice because it started off being about bad plays, but shifted into a conversation about great first plays. So I hope that you will join us over there and contribute your stories and your factors. The things that make a game great. Well, that's about it for me today. I said it was a very nice day and it is, but boy, it was hot. I'm sweating now. So glad to be home. Well, thanks for joining me on my walk today. I hope that your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye. Brought to you by Rattlebox Games.