

Pick Up & Deliver 776: Clobberin' Games

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 on. I'm on my way home from an all day faculty event, which was fun, but got a little long, as they often do. I'm looking forward to talking with you a little bit about some games today.

I was thinking about two things recently. One, I have in the past three months or so, played fourteen games of the Great Zimbabwe on a new online gaming website that I've been invited to, called the Online Gamers or Online Board Gamers. It seems like they mostly just have permission to adapt Splotter Spiel games to internet play, and I was invited by somebody who's a fan of The Great Zimbabwe. And I played in several games of it with him and with a couple other people who either grasped the rules much better than I do, or have played it a lot more than I have. Or both. I have not won a game yet. I'm taking a little break now. I'm in still one of the group games, but I'm not in any of the two player games. I'm going to take a break for a little bit. Then I'll try it again.

But I was reminded of that when I was talking with a couple people at Game Club last night about playing games with people without, where you have played the game a lot before and they have not. And I was talking about how I don't know how fun it would be for me to introduce Res Arcana to other people who have never played before, unless I'm just going to teach and not play, because Res Arcana is a race game and the speed that you get it. So I was thinking about that.

And then I was remembering a third piece of this puzzle, which is the first time this friend played Dominion. They were taught the rules by this person who had Dominion, who then clobbered the whole table with their strong knowledge of the card combos and efficient play. And it made them really not enjoy Dominion and not want to try it again for a while, if I recall. They have come to recognize that it's a good game, but that first play was pretty souring because essentially what it felt like is, "hey, here's a new game I can clobber you at."

So I was thinking about clobbering games. What are games that I would be hesitant to teach people who are brand new, for fear that I would clobber them in a way that it wouldn't be fun to play. And then why is that? What is it that makes the game fun or not fun based on that?

To start with, I will say a big part of it is your attitude about winning and losing. I generally am relatively chill about winning and losing. So most games me getting clobbered doesn't dramatically affect my experience of the game. But of course, winning always helps. If you win a game, it always feels better than losing a game if you get. I like I personally feel like if I get really close, like within a couple points of each other, like, you know, I lose seventy to seventy two. I generally feel pretty okay about that because it was tight. It feels less good to lose forty to seventy, particularly if you're both brand new to the game or something that doesn't feel as good. Um, but a lot of times it depends on the feeling of the play. Did it feel like that other person was doing something that kept me from doing well? Did they interfere with my play in some way that I could have seen coming, or they saw something along those lines?

So I thought I would here introduce a couple games and the feelings about them that make me think they are or are not, "clobberin games." I thought I'd start with the two games that I feel sort of most clobbered at. And this is The Great Zimbabwe, this recent one I was talking about, and then through the ages as the other. So The Great Zimbabwe is a game--It's the first game by that company that I've played in which you are building networks of artisans trying to craft temples to the God that you in that you adhere to. Each player can take these specialty cards that get you special powers, and you can worship one God, which also gets you a special power. But every card that you take to get these special powers increases the threshold for you to win.

So the way the game works, everybody's got a victory threshold, and you earn victory points by doing a variety of things. And when one person crosses their victory threshold that triggers the end of the game. It's a really tight game. There is a significant auction component to it. The main currency in the game is cows, and you bid cows for turn order. And the way that you bid cows, some of the cows you bid, other people will get you get some of them too. But there's this element where you're giving other people currency in order to go first. But turn order is extremely important. There's also very complicated networking rules and rules about

how you raise your monuments. The monuments are the main thing that you get points from. And so understanding those rules and doing well with them is the key to doing well in the game. I will fully admit I'm it's difficult to grasp these rules, and that's exacerbated by the fact that I'm playing asynchronously. Right. So I would have to relearn the rules each time I make a move, unless I can just hold them in my head. And that's harder to do over a period of days. So it's taking me longer to get the feel for the game. Now I've gotten close. I've had a couple games where I was within five or ten points of the other person when they won. But I've also had games where I have like ten points and they cross their thirty point threshold or five points. So really dramatic differences. And this is a game where subtle nuances can result in big swings, which is I think, the milieu of this company. When I read about the games or hear about people reviewing these games, that is often what they talk about, that small choices have big outcomes in these games, and they're generally pretty deterministic. There's not much randomness in The Great Zimbabwe.

So why does it feel like a clobberin game? Well, for me it has to do with the array of cards, craftsperson's and choices and the way that experience teaches you things to look out for in other people's play. That as I've played, I've come to look out, for one thing or another to watch for certain kinds of dangers, etc. I'm starting to recognize strategies, but as I then try to employ those strategies. The other, more experienced players are able to counter them in ways that I haven't discovered yet. Now, this might be a just bad at games. I'm bad at this game, but part of me feels like its complexity means that there's a big skill curve, and players who've got a lot of experience with the game are going to do better than players who don't. This isn't to say that that's bad. There are plenty of games that I have, and I enjoy where the skill curve is real, and being the better player, or being the player with more experience probably means you're the better player. Not always. Probably so. The Great Zimbabwe, I would say to me is a clobberin' game.

Obviously Through the Ages is another one that I feel that way. You know, as I've mentioned many times in this podcast, I had one friend, Ray (hi Ray), whom I played nearly one hundred times before I won because through the age, well, one Ray is very good at games. I generally don't win very many games against Ray anyway. You know, Ray and Rich and I are a group that plays sort of ongoing games on board game arena. If we're playing a game, it's usually Ray wins three, rich wins three, I win one, so maybe one in seven plays is my guess about the ratio. I don't know, one hundred percent sure, but that feels about right. So I'm already probably not winning a lot of plays there.

But then Through the Ages, there's also a game that benefits heavily from the deck that comes out. If you've played a lot, you kind of know what to expect. What kind of cards are there, what effects the different cards have, how the flow of the game goes, the rhythm and all that comes with experience. But it means that an experienced player playing with a new player is probably going to have a huge advantage. It's very hard as a new player to come in and do very well against an experienced player in through the ages, so that's another game I think of as a clobbering game, and I've already mentioned Res Arcana as another one.

Um, one more game that I'm kind of inclined to put in this category, but I don't know if it's true yet. I haven't gone back and played it in person is Revive. I think revive is another game where the cascade of combos is significant enough that if you have played before, you can see paths toward doing really well that new players just won't see. I'm not one hundred percent sure about that. I haven't played nearly as many games of revive as I have of these other games I'm talking about, but it does feel that way to me. That said, I started playing that game with Eric. Hey Eric, I don't think he listens, and Eric regularly clobbered me at it or beat me with a significant margin, even though I think I played the game before him. I think I got one win before he surpassed me in skill, so I don't know if that makes it a clobbering game or not.

Maybe the lesson there is, it's not because I had more experience than he outstripped me pretty quickly in terms of understanding the game and doing well with it. There is another kind of game clobbering that's worse, and I would say that's intentional or bad.

Teach. The example that um, one friend gave was that he this is a different friend than the one I mentioned earlier, that he had played a game one time with somebody who had played the game a lot, and so they understood a lot of the meta reactions and and things. And they had they knew about a card that was in the game that could like turn the negative points. You could get into positive points. Maybe it's blood rage. He didn't mention Blood Rage, but that's an example. Like there are a few cards in Blood Rage that allow the losing player to get points in a battle. These are the Loki cards, and it emerged early on that inexperienced, inexperienced players might succumb to a more experienced player deploying the Loki strategy because

inexperienced players think, yeah, winning the battle is the best way to get points. There is a strategy where you can go all in on losing battles, and that's pretty hard to counteract if you don't know what's there. And I would say, like, as a teacher, if I'm teaching people to play Blood Rage, I would caution against that thing.

In a similar way, when I teach Nanty Narking, there is a there's a couple of cards in the deck, I think three in maybe four, maybe just two, where you can play the card against somebody and they have to give you five money. If they don't have five money, then that card gets stuck in front of them permanently and it reduces their hand size by one. Now, Nanty Narking is a game of relatively limited cards, but card draw is a big part of what makes you succeed or fail in that game, because it's so random and swingy that if you get stuck not being able to draw one more card because of this card, it can really feel bad. So generally when I'm teaching the game, I warn people, be cautious going under five money because if this card comes out and gets played on you, that can feel real bad. Now, sometimes people do it anyway and you know, whatever. If they're mature, they don't whine about it. But I do feel bad if I forget to mention it and then it comes out.

So I guess I'm pointing to a couple different situations in which a clobbering game emerges. One is a game that has a high skill ceiling Just by its very nature, new players will lose to experienced players. The second one is a game that has not necessarily high skill ceiling, but a lot of complexity buried. That isn't obvious for one reason or another. So if the game has a complex elements of like, you have to do a certain amount to, oh, there's sort of a game has hidden cards or things like that, then being able to know that those are coming makes a huge difference in your ability to play. And you can get clobbered just by not knowing what the game can do. And then the third way that a game would emerge would be, I would say, a bad teach, an intentional sabotage of the other players, or an attitude that it doesn't matter if the other players know what's possible, and then they can lose because they don't know what's possible or because you intentionally hid it, I should say.

So I'm curious, is the Clobberin game a thing you're concerned about, or is it something you've experienced before? Head over to BoardGameGeek guild 3269 and share your thoughts on games in which you get clobbered or games in which you clobber other people. What does it look like to get clobbered? I want to hear about all this stuff and you can share that ideas, those ideas over on BoardGameGeek

Well, that's about it for me today. I want to say thank you for joining me on my walk. If you want to send me a message, Brendan at Rattlebox games or send me a message on BoardGameGeek. Wombat nine two nine is my username there. I'd love to hear from you and I will talk to you next time. Thanks for joining me on my walk today. I hope your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye. Brought to you by Rattlebox Games.