

Pick Up & Deliver 778:

Umbrella; High Rise; Stellarion; Lost Cities (revisited)

Transcript

Welcome to pick Up and Deliver, the podcast, where I pick up my audio recorder as I step out for a walk and deliver an episode to you while I stroll around. I'm Brendan Riley. Well, good morning listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago, and I'm happy to be talking to you about board games. It's been a little while since I've talked to you about new games I've played, so that means it's time to do so in an episode I'm calling board game Espresso Triple Shot. As I said, I always call it that. So I guess it's funny to say that I'm calling it because that's what I always call it.

Board game espresso Triple Shot is a regular segment in which I talk about three games I've played recently for the first time, so I'll also usually talk about one game I tried an expansion for, or that I dusted off. In all the cases though, these are games that I've played well for the three new ones. These are games I played just once or twice and so I'm giving you first impressions, not an in-depth review or even something you could even reasonably call a review. It's a mini review or a first first impressions response. So that's what I'm doing. Join me, won't you?

So this week I want to start by talking about umbrella. Umbrella is a game I got to play a couple times online, and then I played in person and then I've played again online. I'm happy to play it either way, although I gotta say, I really like it in person better than online. I'm not really sure what the theme of umbrella is. It is a pattern matching game with an interesting mechanism, and it feels like they couldn't come up with a good theme for it. Essentially, you are sliding colored circles in and out of your grid. The idea is it's a group of people in a rainstorm and they're all carrying umbrellas. And you get points by creating patterns of specific umbrellas in your grid. You have a four by four grid. You have a zone above your grid in the center of the board that you share with everyone. You have a zone below your grid, which is just yours, and you have zones to either side. On your turn, you're going to take one of the umbrellas from one of the zones around your board, and you are going to move it onto your board. If you take an umbrella from the zone above your board, you move it in from the top and push an umbrella out of the bottom into your personal zone. If you take one from the left, you're going to move it in from the left and push an umbrella out to the right. Hopefully that makes sense. So you're pushing umbrellas into your grid and also losing umbrellas to the different zones. What you're trying to do is match these patterns. You have four potential patterns that you're trying to match. And you get to pick what color. So there'll be a pattern of like four dots in the sixteen bit grid. And what you're trying to do is match one of those patterns such that you can score that pattern and you get points for scoring the pattern. But then you also get a you get to cover up one of the dots on your scoring space in the color that you scored the pattern with. And then basically, you're trying to get combinations of those patterns and score in a way that gives you extra points for completing tasks.

It is an abstract game, very strongly with a hint of a theme to it, but ultimately it is about pattern matching. A little bit about anticipating what your partners around the table are going to do, and about sort of tactics. My one game of it in person went really well. I enjoyed it a lot. My online games of it have not been as effective. I don't know if it's because playing it one move at a time over days is I lose track of what I'm trying to do. Maybe I've tried keeping notes, or maybe I just got really lucky in the rhythm that I found as I was making moves, um, to complete patterns on the table. Either way, I'm enjoying the game. I think it's really interesting. I'm looking forward to playing it on the regular, and I think you should play it if you get a chance. This is a 2024 game designed by Flavien Dauphin and Benoit Turpin. If Benoit Turpin sounds familiar as a name, it's because he designed Welcome To a game I have covered in no small depth here on this pod. Art is from Vincent Dutrait what Art there is. And the publisher is Lumberjack Studio in America. The publisher is Pandasaurus Games or distributors Pandasaurus games.

The next game I got to try, this is one I tried at GenCon. I think I told the story of acquiring my copy, but this is high rise from designer Gil Hova, published by his publishing company, Formal Ferret Games. And I'll play, uh, the art is from Heiko Guenther and Kwanchai Moriya. It's got a very particular kind of minimalist aesthetic in terms of how the graphics are laid out. Uh, and the I got the super fancy plastic edition that has all these big buildings that you get to put on the board that look really neat, and I'm excited to play those. High Rise is a

game about developing property in not New York, but New York. The idea is you are a corrupt property developer trying to build these big buildings, trying to do so with bribery and chicanery, as well as clever manipulation of the board. The gameplay loop in High Rise is pretty simple. It features a time track, so on your turn, the person whose or it's your turn when your piece is the furthest back in the track, and then you can move it forward as far as you like, but your opponents will get to take actions that you skip. So if you skip a bunch of actions, your opponents get to take a bunch of actions before you go again. But you go ahead. You get to do the thing on the space, and then you have the opportunity to build a building there in the area related to the space where you landed, when you build a building, you spend building resources. There are several different types in order to build a building of the right height, and then you get points based on building that building. And more importantly, at the end of the round, the person who has the tallest building in any section of the city gets extra points for having the tallest building in any section of the city. Now the round. The game is played over three rounds, and each round involves going making a circuit of the board, and that scoring happens when everyone reaches the starting point around the circuit.

It's a relatively simple game loop, but there's a wide variety of things going on. It has a scaling of combos and complexity. That's really interesting. When you take actions or land on different spaces, you get bonuses, and those bonuses often are powerful. If you save them for the right time, you can really jack up your ability to build tall buildings. Similarly, if people land on the space where your building is, you get a bonus as well. So building in a space connected to one of the better building spots is a key strategy as well. There are a number of ways that the game is randomized having to do with which bonuses are available and which spots. And then there is a expansion that came with it as well called like more tenants or something like that. I haven't played a full game of this yet. I played a two thirds demo game. Like I said, the game was played over three rounds. My prediction is that three round game with four players would probably take two hours. When we played, we played with four players. We played two rounds and had to teach and we were done in two hours. So if you added one more round, the last round is going to be the most complex because everybody's got bonuses and, uh, you're sort of getting more feisty. So it wouldn't surprise me to learn that a four player game is two hours. Once you've played a few times, it's probably faster or at a lower player count, though at a low player count it might not be dramatically faster because I think there's just as many spaces on the board. Although it's not.

It's a double sided board, and that you use the other side of the board with fewer spaces if you're playing two or three players. Like I said, the graphic design is pretty minimalist. It's got a sort of black and white aesthetic that's reminiscent of the networks, to be honest. But then the art style is really compelling. The artist is Kwanchai Moriya, and he's using the kind of building imagery that reminds me of his game Flip Ships. When he does sort of science fictional stuff. He has this sort of geometric, uh, catchiness that I think looks really cool and makes for an interesting looking game. I will say, if you're using the Standees, the game has a little bit less pizzazz because the Standees don't look as cool as these big plastic buildings, but the plastic buildings the game comes with are gray, and so they have a limitation of being grey. So I'm sort of considering how might I paint the buildings to have them look more interesting? I could do some sort of very quick. I could prime them and do a very quick speed washes. Uh, broadly speaking, to add some color, but I'm worried they would look bad. So I'm curious what other people have done. I'll see. But it's brand new, so I don't know that anyone else has had a chance yet. As far as gameplay goes, it's an interesting push and pull. It's not quite vicious enough to be like a knife fight in a phone booth kind of thing, but you are definitely playing against each other, racing for spots. Of course, the gameplay loop reminds me of raids, which is another time track game where you're going around in a circle that I enjoy. And as you know, I think it's really interesting. I like High Rise. I'm looking forward to playing it some more. Unfortunately, I've mentioned it a couple of times to my family, and my wife is like, I'm not interested in building buildings. I'm like, oh, okay, so that game's out at home, but hopefully I'll find some other opportunities to play it. That's high rise from designer Gil Hova, published by Formal Ferret Games in partnership with Allplay.

Next up, the next game that I got to try. Oh, I dusted off a game. I dusted off Lost Cities. Now this is a game that I have played many times over the years, but on a recent trip, my wife and I got to play it and we hadn't played it in quite a while, so it was fun to have an opportunity to break that one out. Lost cities is a Reiner Knizia classic, published in 1999 by Kosmos, and it is a line battler with cards sort of the premier or preeminent line battler with cards. It's a very simple concept. You have a deck that has cards one through ten, as well as three bonus cards. Deal cards. They're called in each color. On your turn, you have a hand of eight

cards, and on your turn, you pick up a card and discard a card you actually discard first and then pick up. When you discard, card you play first? No. Yeah. You play first and then pick up. And you're not allowed to pick up the card you played. So on your turn, you take one of the cards from your hand and you either add it to one of five or six different number lines. Six if you're using the quote unquote expansion, which just means to use the sixth color or not, but you add a card to that column, or you discard a card to the middle of the board into the discard pile for that color. So you could either play a red card or you discard a red card.

That sounds pretty easy, Brendan. Seems kind of dumb. AU contraire, my frere. The way that the game really shines is the fact that it isn't dumb. Um, the way it works is in order to play a card to a color, you have to play the lowest card. You have to play lower than any other card that's been played previously on your side of the board. So if you play the two in red, you can't play the one. You can play the four, but then you can't play the three. Later you play the nine, but then all you could play is the ten and you're done. I mentioned there were a couple of deal cards. The deal cards you can play to the colors as long as you play them before you play any numbers. So they are zeros essentially, and there's only one card of each number in the deck. So as you're playing, part of what you're doing is deciding, oh I have the nine green. I'm not going to play green. I haven't started playing green. My opponent is playing green. Do I hold on to the nine green to keep them from getting it? Or do I try to start collecting green so that I can play it, knowing that my opponent is already collecting and playing green? They probably already have one of the big cards in their hand. So you get this thing where your your hand is filling up with cards that you don't want to give your opponent because you know they'll be able to use them to great value.

So the way scoring works, and this is the Reiner Knizia genius of it. When you go to score for each color where you have started a line, the game calls them expeditions. For each color where you've started a line, you lose twenty points, and then you add on the number value of the cards that you have there. So if you have the eight and the seven and the six as your only three numbers cards in the thing, you lose twenty points and then you gain twenty one. And so you end up with one point. That doesn't sound like very many. Of course, if you have a lot of cards, then you get more points. Seven if you have seven or more cards. Six or more? Seven or more. I can't remember what the number is. Look in the rule book. Then you get a bonus twenty points. So you really want to hit that? I think it's seven cards. You really want to hit that number if you can, to get the bonus points. And then those deal cards that I mentioned. Each one of those that you have adds the value again of your score. So if your score is twenty let's say, and you have two of the deal cards, your score is now sixty. So the deal cards really make a big difference in amplifying your score. Of course, if you play two deal cards and then you only get, say, eight and eight on there, I don't know, that'd be a really bad strategy, but let's say you only get eight. Somehow the other player ends the game because when the deck runs out, the game ends. So you could have stuff you're planning to play, but the other player rushes the end. If you have a if you have two doublers and you have negative eight points, you lose twenty four points because you're are not doublers there. They add it again. So one of them is a doubler. Two of them you triple your score, three of them you quadruple your score. But that means you could end up with a multiplied negative.

What makes Lost Cities really interesting is it's a two player game and you could play really viciously, or you could play really generously. Or the line is to find somewhere in the middle where you're being generous enough that your opponent's being generous to you, but you want to be a little more crafty than they are. You want to pretend you're being generous without being too generous. And it's it's just a really fascinating, interesting game you play over three rounds, so if you get a bad draw, you're not totally screwed. If you get three, three bad decks, well, too bad for you, but it is a card game, so that's Lost Cities from Reiner Knizia. A gem, a very, very, very good game. If you haven't played it, you definitely should. I'm also a fan of Lost Cities, the board game, which plays up to four instead of Lost Cities. The card game, which is just called Lost Cities, which plays two. All right, finally, the last new game that I tried.

Oh my gosh, there's so much so many big trucks around.

The last new game that I tried that I wanted to talk about is Stellarion. This is from designer Shadi Torbey, artist Elise Plessis and published by Impatience Games. Now, this is another in the series of games that started with Honorum, and I also have played Nautilus and Arion as well as this one. Stellarion. I do not have. I don't have Nautilion, I have Castillian and Aerion. No Nautilion is the one I don't have.

But in this game it's a pattern matching game involving cards as well as a few other mechanisms. Your goal is to make constellations and you have this array of cards that are made in various patterns. Some of the cards have the pattern on them, some of them have the symbol on them. And what you're trying to do is play combinations of cards that allow you to score a constellation. Some of the cards let you reacquire other cards. Other cards let you draw specific cards or shuffle specific cards. But like Onirim and all of the other games, it's a game about carefully using the resources you have to try to accomplish the thing before your resources run out. And every time you do something, you're spending the resources that you need to accomplish that thing. It's a really, really good piece of design. I like Stellarion a lot. I don't know if I like it better than the other ones. I mean, Onirim is the best, but maybe it's the best because I played it the most. These other ones, they're all very good, I like them, I keep buying them because I think they're very good. When I see them on sale for a reasonable price, I grab them because I like them a lot. These are solo or two player games, but I don't like them at two player. They're basically solo games. If you haven't played any of them, I recommend recommend Onirim, but if you like them and you're if you like Onirim and you're interested in maybe checking out more, Stellarion is a solid entry in the series.

Well, that brings me to the end of my episode. I want to say thank you to everybody for joining me today. I hope that you are having fun listening and thinking about games. I want to hear what games you've been playing recently. Head over to BoardGameGeek Guild three two six nine and share your gameplays there and let me know what you think of these games. I want to say thanks for joining me, and I hope that your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye.

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