

Pick Up & Deliver 779:

Emptying the Dust Bin, May / June '25

Transcript

Welcome to Pickup 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. I am out for a stroll checking out the delightful weather here in late September. It is warm but not too warm. It's a little warmer than I would expect for past the halfway point in September. I'm wearing shorts and a tee shirt, and I'm probably still going to be pretty warm when I get home from my walk. But overall, pretty nice. Pretty nice.

So I thought I would reach out to see how you are doing and talk about some games. My production schedule has slowed down a little bit since school started. I'm working to get into the rhythm of my new schedule and recording when I have a chance, so apologies that we haven't been doing three episodes a week. Fortunately, I did get a little ahead of the curve. So I believe this is episode 779 or so, which means that I only have to do twenty one more by the end of December, so I'm in a good place to be able to take a few extra minutes. So that's what we're doing. Well, I was looking back and I realized it had been a little while since I did one of these episodes.

So this time it's time for *Emptying the Dustbin*. For those of you who haven't heard this version segment before, Emptying the Dustbin is meant to be a retrospective. Looking back at the games that I played out of the dust in the last couple of months, but didn't get a chance to talk about on the pod in a board game espresso episode. So I have a bunch of them. Generally over the course of a month, I'll cover about half of the games that I dust off, and the other half just fall by the wayside. So here we are emptying the dustbin.

This is May and June of 2025. So to start with, I did have a chance to dust off *A Study in Emerald*. This was two years, seven months and nineteen days dusty. This 2013 game from Martin Wallace was one of my first favorite games. I think if you go back and look at my top, my earliest top fifty that I have on boardgamegeek, *A Study in Emerald* is in the top five. I don't remember exactly where, but it's up there. I admire this game for its boldness of design choices, its wild swings, and I love the like the crazy art style. And just it is all of the nonsense that I think is really interesting in Martin Wallace's designs, when he is sort of running for the hills. That said, it's really uneven, and even though I often have a good time with it. The couple plays of it that we had this time weren't really that fun. So that is one of the challenges of this game. It is a mixed bag. If you're unfamiliar with it, it is a Cthulhu-themed game built around anarchists in the 1800s. The idea is that Cthulhu and the other Elder Gods have taken over the royal houses of Europe, and you are either loyalists loyal to them, trying to defend them, or revolutionaries trying to blow them up. The game mechanisms are a little strange, but it's a much easier teach now than it was when it came out in 2013. In 2013, it was nigh incomprehensible. It was very hard to teach. Game design has used so many of these ideas quite rigorously since then.

That's two cars that did not stop at stop signs. I have yet to see a car fully stop at a stop sign.

The game mechanisms have been integrated so thoroughly by other games since then that there's a lot of fun stuff going on in that flow. So, yeah, that's *A Study in Emerald* designed by Martin Wallace, published by Treefrog Games. This is the first edition. I have played the second edition, but not enough to be able to comment on it. There's a third edition coming out from C'MON, although I don't know when that's going to happen.

Next up, in May, I got a chance to play *Royals*. It had been five years, eleven months since I'd played this 2014 game. This was published by Arcane Wonders, at least the edition I've played, designed by Peter Hawes with art from Jason Engel and Michael Menzel. *Royals* is an area control game in which you are trying to build up your power in Europe and doing so through control of these royal houses. The gameplay is relatively simple. You're playing cards in order to try to gain influence in different areas. And when you gain influence, then you get to put your token down. And essentially you're trying to get area majorities in enough places that you're going to win enough points. The game is played over a series of rounds, and in early

rounds you're trying to get control of spaces. And then later in later rounds, you're trying to wrestle control of spaces from other people. There's a sort of sliding scale of points early on. You get points for being the first one to get into a space, and later on you're getting points for that area. Control Royals is a really tight, simple area control game. If you're looking to show someone like what is an area control game look like and you didn't have a copy of El Grande, I would say Royals is a good second option. I like El Grande better, I think. I think there's more to do in it and the choices are a little more interesting. But Royals is pretty good. This is one of the ones I got in the Chicago math trade, and I'll probably hang on to it for a bit because it's interesting. That's Royals.

Next up we have *Stick Stack*. This was two years one month and thirteen days dusty. It's a 2016 game designed by Forrest Pruzan creative, Brad Ross and Jim Winslow, published by Broadway Toys Limited. This is a dexterity game in which you are trying to balance things in the game. There is a vertical tower on which there is a little platform at the top, and then you have a bag of these long, thin sticks. They're sort of like coffee stirrers, only plastic. And they come in a couple of different colors. On your turn, you're going to pick a stick out of the bag or off the table and from the table in front of you, and you're going to balance it on top of the little tower. Now, what makes the game interesting is the bottom of the tower is attached to the heavy base on the table by a rigid spring, and as you balance things on top of it, the spring starts to tilt one way or another. So as you're going, you're balancing the sticks and there's rules about how the sticks get placed. But basically it's sort of a cousin of Jenga. Stick stack is pretty fun. It's an excellent little five or ten minute filler. Good end of the night game. I probably wouldn't go pay.,, I don't know what the retail for this was, twenty dollars? I probably wouldn't pay twenty for it, but certainly if I found a copy for three at goodwill, I would pick it up. So that's stick stack.

Next up is *Kingdomino*. This is another one I got in the Chicago math trade. Kingdomino is a classic. I haven't played it for six years, two months and five days, but it came out in 2016. Designed by Bruno Cathala. Published by Blue Orange. Kingdomino is basically just you're playing landscape tiles that are dominoes with different landscapes instead of different die faces. And the idea is you're building a kingdom of a sixteen by or a four by four kingdom of these tiles. You get points for how the tiles interconnect and there are scoring elements as well. I mean, there's not a lot more to say about it. It's a pretty simple entry weight game, but it's very good. In fact, I think it won the spiel to Chris when it came out as it, as it reasonably could have. I think it's a very good game. Really interesting, easy to play, well worth checking out if you get a chance. That's kingdomino.

Well, that's it for May. Let's hop into June. The other June Dusty games that I got a chance to play.

First up is *Smile* from designer Michael Schacht or Schacht artist Athena Kanani and publisher Z-Man games. It had been six years, five months and twenty six days since I played this game. It's a 2017 game. We have a copy that I got rid of, but then a friend happened to pick up a copy and they brought it over and we played it. So I got a chance to play it again, even though I had played it and decided I didn't need it anymore. But it's still a fun game. In this game, you are trying to collect these gems and you're trying to collect little forest creatures to score points. And the tricky part is that the little forest creatures that score points often don't score points with other little forest creatures, so you're trying to get a good set of them that doesn't discombobulate the other set. The function is sort of like no thanks, in that you are collecting the creatures and the gems that are on them, and you can put gems on them, uh, before you instead of collecting. And when you collect, you take the gems because often you are trying to get a set of them, but you're also trying not to get the ones that you don't want because they will mess up the scoring of your other pieces. Again, it's a pretty straightforward, simple card game. Well worth playing if you get a chance. Well worth picking up if you were to find it at goodwill or something similar. It's a cute game. Really nice art. The art has this sort of large, bright eyed big creatures, sort of like squishmallows. If they were drawn as mythical forest creatures and it's easy to play and teach. So that's Smile from Michael Schacht.

Next up we have *Maori*. This is a 2009 game from Gunther Bernhart with art by Harold Lasky and Michael Menzel, published by Hans im Glück and Rio Grande Games in the US. Maori is one of those games that I've never played in person, but I've played online many times. It's available on yukata and a number of the people that I hang out with play it somewhat regularly. In the game, you have a grid of tiles that you are building over the course of the round. I think it's a four by four grid, or maybe a six by six grid. There is a grid of tiles that you're taking the tiles from as well, and where you can take from on the market depends on how many shells

you're willing to spend. So you have these shells that are the currency of the game, and the more shells you spend, the more choices you have of which grid, which tile you're going to take. And then you put the tile into your player area where you are building islands and combos that are islands that include icons on them that will give you combos when they score. It's a pretty straightforward pattern building game that I am terrible at. I don't think I ever won a game of Maori, and I often do like half the points that other people do. I read the rules. I feel like I understand what's going on and then I just do very, very poorly. So Maori is not my favorite game, but it's amusing. I enjoy myself playing it and it's fun to play occasionally with other people. That said, it had been one year and two months and twenty days since I played it before, and that's probably why.

Next up we have *Century: Golem Edition*. Century is a top notch, uh, simple engine building game. When it came out, people called it the Splendor Killer. I think time has shown that that's not true. Splendor is still very popular, and century never took over for it. But it is a very, very good game. And I, if given the choice between playing splendor and Century, will usually pick century. Now I have the Golem edition because I don't care about trading spices, but I trading gems is fun and its interactions are pretty interesting. At its heart, it's a race game, and there's a crucial choice to be made between going for high scoring cards and maybe not getting as many, or just trying to get low scoring cards as fast as you can, and hopefully win points before the high scoring card people get their high scoring cards. There's a really interesting moment, like in Dominion, where you shift from engine building to point scoring and lots of thoughtful choices to be made. That said, sometimes you can just kind of get screwed by bad card draw. If the market of cards doesn't include a card that will help you get a particular kind of gem, and the market of rewards cards demands that gem, sometimes you could just kind of be out of luck for getting your engine going very well. But it's really fun and I'm glad to play it any time I get a chance. Century: Golem Edition, designed by Emerson Matsuuchi with art by Justin Chan and Chris Williams from plan B games in 2017.

Next up, I played *Game of Thrones: Westeros Intrigue*. It had been seven years, nine months and nineteen days since I played that. Honestly, I did not remember playing it. We played it. I went to log it. I saw that I had logged it once before, seven years ago, and I wouldn't be surprised if I play it again in five more years or six more years that I won't remember it because it is fine, but not particularly memorable in Game of Thrones. Westeros intrigue you are trying to gain points by collecting cards related to different regions of the Game of Thrones universe. This came from the time when Fantasy Flight had the license to the Game of Thrones books, and Reiner Knizia was working with Fantasy Flight regularly, so he came up with this little card game where you have a pyramid of cards similar to the pyramid that we would later see in Seven Wonders Duel, and in the game you're drafting from the your drafting cards as you're putting them, or you're adding cards to the pyramid. Adding cards. Yeah, you're adding cards to the pyramid and your goal is to empty your hand. The trick is that you can only add a card to the pyramid if one of the cards below it. The two cards below it is of the same clan. So your goal is to get rid of cards and hold them in a way that allow you to gain the control of the clan. There's also an element where where you place the card lets you have control of the clan, and there's some fight for that as well. All in all, this is a fine little puzzle game. It's exactly the sort of game that, again, is good to play at the end of the night. If you remember the rules, you could play a whole game of this in fifteen minutes. It's easy to teach, but the choices are reasonably interesting. Um, you played over three rounds, so you do get a little bit of a learning curve where you can play once, play one round and then, okay, now I understand I'll do better next round and you build your way up. Uh, that said, there's not a ton to it. It is interesting, but not amazing. Probably right now falls in the category of I'd buy it at goodwill, but I probably wouldn't buy it for retail. That is Game of Thrones Westeros intrigue designed by Reiner Knizia, published by Fantasy Flight Games. No artists to speak of because it's all graphic design, probably using the graphic design from the Game of Thrones board game. So they might not have had any they've had would have had a graphic designer who generally would not get artist credit in the way that they credit board games.

And finally, I had a chance to play *Welcome to the Moon* again. This is a 2021 design from Alexis Allard and Benoit Turpin, with art from Anne Heidsieck and published by Blue Cocker Games, as well as deep River games, I think are the publishers of the welcome two series. Welcome to the moon is probably the most robust and most interesting of the welcome two games. Now we have the regular welcome two game and we have played that a lot. I really enjoy it and we go back to it occasionally, although I bet at this point it's dusty. Welcome to the moon is actually ten separate games, very, uh, doing variants on the welcome two formula. You still have the cards you're flipping over, you still have the symbols that do things, but each game has a different sheet that you're playing on. And instead of using pads, it now comes with a set of laminated sort of

laminated sheets that you can use a whiteboard marker to write on so you're not running out of sheets. You just have to make sure you have markers that work. I played several rounds of this on Board Game Arena and enjoyed what happened so far. It seems like it's stalled out now that I think about it. I may have to nudge people to see if we can keep it going, but because I did not get through all ten but it was fun to return to. I do like this game. I don't think I like the *Welcome to* series enough to go beyond the base game that I have, which for which we bought several different maps, but I am interested in continuing to explore the mechanisms if I get a chance. So if somebody brings *Welcome to Las Vegas* or someone gets out, welcome to the moon, I'll happily play it. So yeah, that's a delightful system and it's fun to explore. That's welcome to from Blue Cocker games.

Well, thanks dear listener. I would love to hear what games you have gotten out of the dust lately, especially if you did not get a chance to share those with us on the top of the stack forums. Are there any games that you feel have gotten too dusty and you need to get them out again? Head over to BoardGameGeek. Guild 3269 and answer both of those questions and I will be in your debt. Or at least I'll enjoy hearing reading what you have to say. Okay, well, that's about it for me today. Thanks for joining me on my walk.

I hope that your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye.

Brought to you by Rattlebox Games.