

Pick Up & Deliver 784: Dice Game Extravaganza

NOTE: lightly edited for readability, and to make me seem slightly more eloquent than I am.

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, greetings listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago and I'm walking home from work. It is very warm. It is too warm to be the end of September, but it is what it is. And so I'm overly hot but still enjoying my walk. I was looking over the podcast record, trying to figure out what is the right thing to talk about here today, and I was reminded of a recent game night my wife and I had with our friends Matt and Katie.

Matt and Katie both enjoy a variety of different games. When we play with them, we tend to play games that are on the medium light to light end of things just because of time, and because of that and a conversation that we had with Matt. Matt said, "I really like dice games." And he and I had played a couple dice games together. And it got me thinking.

I've talked about a lot of dice games. As I look at my list in front of me, I don't think there's a game on here I haven't talked about before on the pod. So if you're looking for new, spicy new content, this isn't the time. But I did want to approach the concept of dice games--talk a little bit about different kinds of dice games, different ways that people use dice in games, and some games that I like in each of those different forms. So that's what I'm talking about today. Dice games.

To start with, I want to talk about what I'm going to call "pure dice games." These are games where dice are the majority component. And other than maybe a score sheet, the only component. Also for this category, I'm talking about games that do not use the "roll three times" mechanism from Yahtzee. So with those two caveats, the first kind of dice games are pure dice games, where dice is the majority main thing that you're playing with. And I have four that I want to point to as really interesting games in that category.

To start with, there's *Liar's Dice*. Liar's Dice--or Perudo is the way that I know it--is a classic game in which players roll dice into under a cup on a table, and then you're making a bet about how many dice around the table match the numbers of dice under your cup. So there's an element of trying to bluff the other players and figure out how many dice are available. It's a really good classic game that involves some interesting bidding mechanisms depending which version you play, and is easy to play with dice. It is a delightful dice game and you lose your dice as you do badly. So as the game goes along, you have fewer and fewer options, and it becomes really interesting from that perspective.

The next game I want to talk about that I would consider a pure dice game is *Qwixx*. Now there is a score sheet on in this game. So perhaps it's not quite so pure in that there are. There is one other component that you need in the score sheet. But *quicks* is a dice game. You're rolling dice, you're deciding what to do with those dice. You have a few options when it's your turn, but you have one option when it's not your turn. So there is an element of getting to do something when it's not your turn. It also works really well for developing conversations: it's a really good casual game night game, because once you understand how it works, it takes a little bit of attention, but not a ton, and it only takes a lot of attention when it's your turn. So *Qwixx* is a really good one.

Las Vegas is another very good pure dice game. The copy that we have comes with the stuff to play five, but I think it plays six just fine. So we added one other color of dice and one other player marker to play six. In the game, you are rolling dice and you're putting out your dice on these little platforms. The clever question comes from your roll. You roll the dice you have, and then you divide them up by what value is on the die. So if you have one three, the three is by itself. If you have three fours, the fours are by themselves or the fours are together. And then you pick one group of dice that have the same value and you put them on the casino of that number. So if I have three fours, I could take those three fours and put them on the four casino at the end of the game or at the end of the round once everyone has placed all their dice.

And then I'm going to reroll my dice next round. So the fact that I rolled a single three this time doesn't matter if I if I don't place it this time you only get to place one value, then the next round you reroll the dice that remain and you place another value and you go like that until everybody is out of dice. Then you look at each

casino and say, who has the most dice there? That person gets the highest value money card that's at that casino and so on down the line.

The sticky bit is if you're ever tied with someone else for number of dice in that casino, neither of you get anything. Any tied amounts of dice are eliminated, which is a great twist because it really results in some interesting push your luck mechanisms. That's Las Vegas. Rüdiger Dorn is the designer there, another pure dice game.

Next up is the classic dice mechanism of "roll three times." This is probably best known. I actually consider this the "Yahtzee mechanism." If you've ever played *Yahtzee*, you have your dice, you roll them, and then you pick, pick some of them up and reroll the ones that you want to. You don't have to reroll them all. There are a few games that force you to reroll all your dice, but most games do not. And then once you've rolled the third time, then you have to stop. And whatever value you have when you stop is the value that you use, and then you use it to fill out a score sheet and you score points. As you go along, your options get narrower and narrower because your score sheet is filling up, and you can only use each scoring category once.

Now, if you like that dice rolling mechanism, but you want something a little more interactive and a little more competitive, *Dice Throne* uses the same thing. You're rolling your dice. You're looking for combinations of dice not too dissimilar from Yahtzee, actually. But then you have these player powers, and the player powers are aligned to like, superheroes or kind of like competitors, and you're fighting the other competitors to win. It's a combat game, kind of like an arena combat game using special skills.

And these fancy dice! The production value is really high on this game. It's a well-made, interesting game. It's fun. It's very competitive, and there's a lot of luck to it. You know, if you get some bad rolls, it doesn't really matter, how good your strategy was. But it makes for really interesting gameplay. That's *Dice Throne*.

I'll also point to *Cromlech*, the first game that Rob and I published under Rattlebox games, is a dice game where you are laying out a grid of cards and your rolling dice and attacking the other player's grid of cards using combinations of the dice that you roll.

And then I'll also point to *Elder Sign*, which does use rerolling, but it does not use the Yahtzee three rolls and Elder sign. You get to roll one time, and then you have to place one of the dice that you rolled onto the task that you're trying to complete. There are some rerolling mechanisms, but not a ton of them. And then if you place one die and then you reroll the rest, and each roll you're placing another die, and you have to go until you placed enough dice to complete the task or you run out of placements. If you ever can't place a die, you discard a die and then roll the rest so it gets harder and harder to successfully complete the different lines of the task. You're actually placing more than one dice, usually, so that's *Elder Sign*, another dice game that involves lots of dice rerolling.

While I like those two kinds of dice games as lighter play experiences. My preferred... my favorite kind of dice game is actually one that uses dice in different ways. In particular, games that use dice selection or dice drafting are my real jam. I have several to point to here.

To start with: *Dice Miner*, the game that inspired this conversation, is a dice drafting game, where you have all these dice on a little mountain and you draft them and your scoring points based on the dice you draft. If you have a beer, you're going to roll it to somebody else. I think I talked about it recently on the pod. But it is a delight. It's really well made. It's fun to play. You play over a series of rounds and it has escalating scoring. That's delightful. But I like dice drafting. This idea of trying to figure out which combination of dice to take are going to be the best.

Another game that I really like that involves dice drafting is *Coimbra*. Coimbra is a eurogame in the classic sense. You are trying to, I don't know, gain the most influence in Portugal by collecting influence with a certain number of fancy people, and traveling around and getting influence at a bunch of monasteries. The clever grit of the game, the dice drafting part that's just amazing is the beginning. The round. There's a whole bunch of dice of different colors that are rolled, and you take turns drafting those dice. And when you draft the dice, you put them onto a bidding location. And that bidding location allows you to get the cards. But the thing is, you have to pay for the cards with one of the three resources. So you have to have those three resources in order to pay two resources. And so when you're taking the die, you're paying attention to its value so that you can bid with it in order to maybe get some of the cards you want simultaneously.

There also is another card or another thing you're doing with the dice each. There are four different colors of dice. And when you take a die, the value matters for the bidding, but the color matters for your income. There are two kinds of income that you can use when you're bidding on cards, but there are four colors of dice that allow you to gain different kinds of benefits after you've bid on cards. So the dice that you take will trigger different kinds of income, two of which are those income use for cards and the other two which are other things. When you take a die, you're struggling with both paying attention to the color and the value, because the color does one thing and the value does another. It's very clever and I really enjoy it. It's a neat game that I have fun with every time I play, and I would like to play more. That's Coimbra.

Next up we have *Pulsar 2849*. This is another game where the dice drafting is really interesting. This one, there's an array of dice. They're rolled and they're laid out in value order from lowest to highest. And there's this little divider that's placed at the median of this array of dice. When you take dice, if you take them from above the median, then you're ranking on one of these two tracks goes down. If you take them from below the median, you're ranking on one of these two tracks goes up. But of course, the value of the dice, the higher value dice you can use to do more stuff, the lower value dice are less effective that way. It's an interesting mechanism that I think makes for delicious choices every time you play. And then there's a whole bunch of different stuff you can do with the dice. So that's Pulsar 2849.

One other dice drafting game that I'll point to is *Castle Dice*. This one's interesting because everybody at the beginning of each round selects which dice they want to take based on the round that it is. Everybody takes a certain set of dice, and then you get some choice, and then all those dice are rolled into a big pool, and then you draft from that pool. So you might not get the dice that you drafted, or sometimes only one or two people draft the gold dice, but they come up really nice and so someone else takes one, even though they didn't draft one. It's a delightfully vicious cycle that I really enjoy. That's Castle Dice.

Then finally, *Euphoria* is an interesting dice worker placement game where the value of the worker indicates how smart they are, and they're more productive when they're smarter. But they also are more likely to run away from your dystopia. So I like that mix as well.

And then finally, I did want to give a nod toward games where you're throwing or flicking dice as part of playing them. I've never played *Tumbling Dice*, but I'd really like to. The game *Hunted* and the game *The Final Flicktier*. Both involve flicking the dice. In *Hunted*, you are throwing the dice into this box, or the alien hunt it. Anyway, in *The Final Flicktier*, you are flicking the dice like they're spaceships. Both of those are pretty entertaining ways to move the dice around. And then I'll also remind you of *Strike*, the classic dice game, where you're throwing dice into a bowl, and when the dice hit each other, then, if they ever match, you get to take them back out and if they don't match, you have to leave them in. And so there's this escalating problem of not having enough dice, because your goal is to stay in the game as long as you can by having dice. So that's *Strike*.

Well, that was a quick review of different kinds of dice games. Hopefully you found that edifying and entertaining. I love sharing those ideas with you, and I'd love to hear what dice games you enjoy. Head over to BoardGameGeek guild 2369 and let it fly there. Which dice games do you like best and why?

Well, that's about it for me. Today. I want to say thank you for joining me on my walk. I hope that your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye.

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