

Pick Up & Deliver 788:

Dark Gothic, Whale Riders, Vantage, Love Letter (revisited)

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 while I stroll around. I'm Brendan Riley.

Well, greetings listeners, it's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. I'm out for my afternoon constitutional to give me a little break from all that grading. So in that regard, let's jump into it.

I've been playing a lot of games lately. In fact, I've played a bunch of games and I haven't made as many episodes as I could have or should have. And so I'm doing another Board Game Espresso: Triple Shot. Board Game Espresso: Triple Shot is a segment or an episode in which I talk about three games I've played for the first time recently, and one game I dusted off. So let's jump into it now. The first one I want to talk about is A Touch of Evil: Dark Gothic.

So, as you know, A Touch of Evil is one of my favorite American games. It's very silly and fun and goofy. I also really like Last Night on Earth. Actually, last time I rated games I put Last Night on Earth above A Touch of Evil, but I think they're both just a hoot. That said, I have everything that's made for A Touch of Evil, and I have a friend who's got everything for Last Night on Earth, so I haven't put a lot of effort into acquiring more Last Night on Earth stuff, and I'm probably not going to. So instead, I decided it was time to get something else from Flying Frog, and that something else is Touch of Evil: Dark Gothic.

A Touch of Evil: Dark Gothic is a deck building game made by designed by Jason Hill, with art by Jack Scott Hill, and published by Flying Frog Productions in twenty fourteen. Dark Gothic is themed around the same theme as A Touch of Evil. In fact, it reuses a lot of the art and a lot of the theme elements. You are a colonial era investigator looking into supernatural disturbances in a New England colony or a New England town in a touch of evil, dark gothic you are. It is a cooperative game, and you are trying to work with the other players to defeat the big bad. There is a big bad monster. It's causing all kinds of trouble. And then the game uses the sort of Ascension-style river to bring cards into play and the game most recently that I've played that feels like that is, *Star Wars: the deckbuilding game*.

Star Wars Deck building game is a two player dueling game in which one player plays the Empire and one player plays the rebellion. Both players are trying to destroy the other by wiping out the cards from the middle, as well as their bases. So it's sort of similar to Star Realms and similar to Ascension? Well, a Touch of Evil deck building game is, of course, before either of those other games, and in this one, the minions are just in the deck row. And what you're trying to do is wipe out the minions and then wipe out the big bad before he causes too much trouble. If he causes too much trouble, that's when the players would lose.

In Dark Gothic, you are trying to acquire a deck of cards that are going to work together synergistically to create a situation where they will be able to play off each other. There are a lot of cards that give you amplification if you have other cards of similar types. There are cards that let you draw more cards, and cards that give you more currency to spend or more fight. And of course, it's the combination of those things that makes the deck building work. There are cards that will let you trash cards as well. So like a lot of deck builders, it's about building a set of combos that works really well together, building a set of currency that lets you buy the cards you need, and building the attack power that you need to defeat the minions and the big boss.

We found the game to be too easy. We played it twice so far and it was very easy. The difficulty level just didn't accelerate fast enough. It was very easy to keep the minions from causing trouble until we were, until we had enough power to take out the Big bad. And the big bad didn't trigger very often. Now, I'm told if you mix the expansion in which I did acquire the expansion as well, I'm told that that gives you a much better play experience, at least according to Board Game Geek. You get a much better play experience if you mix in the expansion as well, so I'm hoping we can do that next time we play. But I may need to go with one of the homebrew alternatives to amp up the effectiveness of the villains to make the game more difficult, because I think we did try one with the expansion mixed in, and it still did hardly anything in terms of it just wasn't very hard. So it might be that we aren't playing right or we got lucky. That's certainly a possibility, but generally it was too easy. So that's A Touch of Evil: Dark Gothic.

Next up we have the 2021 game *Whale Riders*, which is this recently been republished by Ape Games. It was originally published by Grail Games. This is designed by Reiner Knizia with art by Vincent Dutrait. *Whale Riders* is a classic, simple kanisha in the realm of something more like it's not even as complex as *raw*, something simpler than that. Like maybe on the level of *Indigo*. Really not difficult to learn, but there is some interesting spiciness in the game. Essentially what you're doing, you have a whale that you are riding, and you are going down the coast and then back up the coast. When you go down the coast, you are picking up different goods and things, and then when you come back up the coast, you're picking up different goods and things. And then when you get to the top, you're just claiming resources. The game goes until all of the resource tokens at the top have been claimed. So there is a timer. Once the first person gets to the top, if they're the only one there, they have, I think, four turns or something, and then the game is over. If someone else gets there, the game ends twice as quickly because they're both taking cards from the top, and the number of cards that are up there depends on how many players there are.

The way that you play is when you land at a location, you take one of the resource cards that's available, and I can't remember because we played it in August. I can't remember now whether you have to pay like *Small Wonder Style* to skip your way up the like. If you want to take the second one, you have to pay one and the third one you have to pay two. I don't think so. I think you can take just one of the ones on offer. At least there's a couple free ones maybe. Um, but what you're doing is you're taking these cards, and then those cards translate into goods, and then you can trade the goods in to fulfill contracts. There are a variety of different contracts available, and you have a couple in your hand. And you can draw more whenever you complete one, you can draw more. There's also a way that you can draw an additional contract when you want, and that's kind of it. So it's a time track game insofar as that, you decide how far ahead you want to go or it's not a time track game. It is a progression game where you're taking turns, but you can never go backwards. So or you can turn around once, I guess is the thing. You have to go down to the bottom and then turn around and come all the way back to the top.

So, an interesting element is deciding how fast to go down. If you see something really good that's a ways down, you could speed ahead, but then you miss all the stuff in between. And when you're down there, you're allowed to just take turns where you just sit in one spot. So there's an interesting element of deciding to stay where you are and sort of deciding how slow you want to go, with the acknowledgement that when other people get to the top, they are going to get a bonus that you won't be able to get if you aren't finished. Like I said, it's a relatively simple set collection and contract fulfillment game. It's easy to play, but there's interesting decisions and I'm looking forward to playing it some more. It's definitely a good filler game for the group that knows how to play. It probably takes in the neighborhood of half hour to forty five minutes once you know what you're doing. I think our first play with four took us an hour because we were just a little slower. Interesting, fun game. Well worth giving it a try if you can. That's *whale riders*.

Next up, I got a chance to dust off a game. I reached into the back of our small games drawer and I pulled out *Love Letter* for our trip. My wife and I took our daughter out to Washington State to go to college, and on our drive out there, I brought *love Letter* with and had it just in my pocket. And when we would go in to eat for dinner or whatever, I would take *love letter* with, we'd play a round or two of *love letter*. It had been one year and five months since I played this game. It's relatively it stays in rotation. There are a lot of games that are dustier in my collection, but this one is so simple to play.

You can play even though a game is a game takes like twenty minutes, one round takes like three and just one round is satisfying. It's fun just to do a little bit of bluffing in the game. So we have the *Tempest* version, which is the original edition. It's designed by Seiji Kanai and published by AEG. Originally, I don't know if they still have it or if they've sold it on. But the premise is pretty simple. There are eighteen cards in the deck, representing a variety of different figures, from cards all the way up to the Princess. And actually the King as well. But the princess is the highest card because that's who you're trying to get in contact with. You're trying to find her. If you find her, you win.

Essentially, the way the game goes is that you have one card in hand. You draw a card at the beginning of your turn, and then from the two cards you have, you play one of them. The card that you play indicates what you have to do. Some cards give you an action of some sort. The card card lets you guess what card another player has. There's a handmaid card that gives you protection. There are other cards that let you peek at cards or compare cards. There's a bunch of different ways that you interact between the two cards. If along

the way, you manage to oust another player with one of the different rules, they're out. So like with the guard card, if you guess the card another player is holding, they're out of the game.

There are a number of different cards that do this. If you have the princess and get caught with the princess, you also are out. Or it depends on how you get caught with the princess. Like there's a comparison card where two cards compare and the higher value one wins. If you compare and you have the princess. Now everybody knows you have the princess and it's really hard to get rid of the princess. Also, you're not allowed to discard the princess. This is the crucial thing. So if you have two cards you have or you can't play the princess, I guess there is a way that you can trade cards with somebody else. So you could use that to get rid of the princess, but you can't play it. So if someone else knows you have it, you're on a kind of ticking clock to find one of the cards that lets you get rid of it or eliminate the other players.

It's a very simple game, but really effective and really fun. If you haven't played Love Letter, you really should. It's an excellent game to spend time with friends and family. Our copy, I think I've mentioned before, is sleeved because we spilled water on it at a diner at one point, so the cards are all marked. So I sleeved them because it's fun to keep playing with that old copy. So that is one year, five months dusty love letter.

Finally, I got a chance to play a couple games of Vantage. This is the 2025 story game release from Jamey Stegmaier. This is sort of Jamie Stegmaier's answer to seventh Citadel and tales of the Arabian Nights. In this game, you represent an explorer on a fantasy planet or sci fi planet. Your ship has crashed, and each player deployed in an escape pod and landed in a different spot on the planet. On your turn, you take an exploration action of some sort to interact with the planet, and then it's the next player's turn. On your turn, the location you're at, you have a card that shows the scene that you're looking at, and there are six different action words in six different colors on the card. You can do any of those six.

The way the game works is really clever in that you never fail in an action. You just are expend more resources to accomplish it. So there's some action. Like every action will give you a test and a level. So it could be a level two blue test. And then if you have no blue tokens to spend or you don't want to spend blue tokens, then you roll two dice and the dice have different results on them, which result in different penalties for you unless you can place them, which some of the cards you have in your tableau will have these little placement tiles on them. And if you roll the right symbol, you could place it on the card and then you don't take any damage. Once all the dice have been used or placed on cards, then everything resets. The dice go back in the pool and you have back your spaces that let you mitigate the dice.

It's a fun game, an interesting idea. There's a complex storytelling element that is really interesting and neat. It is kind of finicky and I found the rules surprisingly difficult to grok. We kept I kept having to look stuff up, even though it should be pretty straightforward. Now I understand it. I think it is, but early on there were some challenges. The biggest thing is that often the words that describe the actions you're taking don't really seem to map very clearly to what you think might happen. So like, you could be at a you could be at a building and there's a monster coming and the card might say, run, that's you. Run and run means run and try to jump over the monster and it eats you instead of running away, because you don't get to pick what it means to do that verb, you just the game tells you what what you do when you do that verb.

So there's a little bit of that, which I think is also a thing that people complain about with tales from the Arabian Nights, but generally it's a really ambitious, interesting game that if you want a sort of choose your own adventure kind of story with a lot more depth in terms of choices you get to make, but ultimately, the feeling of exploring a strange space and hopefully finding fun things to do. Vantage is going to be your game. If any of those things sound like they're not good for you, I would try it before you buy it.

Well, that brings me to the end of the episode. I want to say thank you for joining me today. If you'd like to talk about these games, head over to BoardGameGeek Guild 3269 and share your thoughts there. Or you can send me a message on BoardGameGeek, wombat929 is my username there. I want to say 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.