

Pick Up & Deliver 789: Libra Gamers (Astrology Files)

October 31, 2025

[Editor's note: this transcript was auto-generated and has been lightly proofread. Apologies for typos. Game titles will be capitalized and italicized (in the pdf version) the first time they are spoken.]

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.

Greetings listener. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. I'm rolling home in the five o'clock hour with the sun to the west, not setting yet. I've still got an hour and a half of light or so, but it's a nice late afternoon shadow walking by all the cool Halloween decorations and talking to you about board games. I was looking back at the last few months, and it looks like the last time that I did a board game astrology episode was June. So perhaps it's time to do another one of these. I think if I do one a quarter, that'll get us through the, uh, through the zodiac in, well, I guess one a quarter would take three years, but I've been doing slightly more than that, so maybe two years anyway. Doing one in October means that at least on October sixteenth, which is today, means that we're talking about Libra. So today for the astrology files, we'll talk about Libra gamers.

If this is the first time you're hearing one of these episodes, I've been slowly looking at different astrology signs, reading a little bit about what they mean or what they say about your personality, I guess. And talking about games that have to do with those traits. I will admit, I don't really put a lot of stock in astrology as a practice, and I am not a practitioner of it, so apologies if this feels a bit light hearted or unserious. It is and my apologies if this if, uh, I'm making light of something you believe strongly in. If so, best to pick another episode.

All right, so Libra--according to the allure.com discussion of the twelve different signs and what they mean--is about balance, harmony and justice. The symbol of Libra, the symbol of Libra, are the scales. And what you're looking for is symmetry. What people who are Libras value is symmetry. The summary did point out that the scales for Libra are the only non-living symbol in the traditional zodiac, the Greek zodiac. So that's kind of fun. So anyway, between the ideas of balance, harmony, equilibrium, and then the idea of scales, I thought it would be interesting to talk about those four features and some games that go with them.

So to start with balance: now in the discussion here, I'm pretty sure that the prognosticators and the sign readers mean metaphorical balance. But of course, the metaphor of balance comes from physical balance particularly particularly scales, where two things that weigh the same amount make a level balance. It's on the scale. Well, what better opportunity to do that than think about games where balance is part of what you're doing? So I thought about games that I've played that have balance and that require additional balance.

So the obvious first one, the one that many of us played, maybe if we are hanging out with non-gamers or before we were gamers, is *Jenga*. This is a tower where you're pushing little blocks out and trying to maintain the balance of the tower. Of course, this is a game about not upsetting balance rather than creating balance because the tower exists and you are removing things from it and trying not to knock it over. I've always wanted to use the Jenga tower in A Game of *Dread*, which is a one shot role playing game where characters are experiencing some sort of horror scenario. And when you have a challenge, the GM tells you to remove blocks from a Jenga tower. Eventually, you fail at removing a block and knock the tower over, and then your character is destined to die. It's a neat system and one that I would enjoy trying.

Perhaps my favorite balancing game as I think about them. I don't have a ton to choose from, but perhaps my favorite is *Paku Paku*. This is a speed dice rolling game from Antoine Bauza, and depending on what you roll, there are for some reason there's dishes. The premise is: you're pandas doing dishes somehow and you're rolling dice. And if you roll the green symbol, you get to pass the die along to another panda. If you roll one of the numbers, you just reroll it. And if you roll the red symbol, then you have to add a die. You have to add a plate, cup or bowl to the little pile of plates, cups and bowls that are in the middle of the table. And if you knock that pile over, you lose and take some points. The goal is to have as few points as possible when somebody gets a certain number of points. And that's how the game goes. It's a fun little game, very silly, but it does depend on this balance element of putting things carefully into this pile and maintaining the balance on the pile.

Another game that involves maintaining balance is *Stick Stack*. I talked about that in a board game espresso episode not too long ago, within the last ten or fifteen episodes for sure. So take a look back if you want to learn more about that. But that is another dexterity game that involves maintaining balance. And if you throw the balance off, things fall

down and then you have to start over. There are a couple balance games that I've always wanted to play that I've never had the opportunity.

One of these is *Junk Art*. This is a game from Space Cowboys, I believe from the same designers who made *Flick Em Up*. The original edition came with these big, chunky wooden pieces and involved making stacks of things in various configurations. Another game that demands balancing things that I haven't played that I'd like to is *Beasts of Balance*. This is an app assisted digital game where you are adding pieces to a tower, and the app can tell which kind of pieces you've added to the tower, and over time, you're trying not to knock things over. There's another game that I would have liked to try at some point called *Men at Work*. This one looked really interesting as a game where you are building a construction site and you have little meeples and little bits of different construction pieces, and you're trying to balance them so they don't fall over. I feel like there is a game that has like a balancing, like a teeter totter type deal, but I can't think of what that game is, so I can't say for sure. So that's it for balance games, games where you're trying to keep things from falling over.

Next up are games about harmony. And here I will say the most common. The two ways that I can think of harmony as being a thing. One is harmony in music and the other is harmony in the phrase in harmony with nature. And I have to say, I don't have any games about musical harmony, so I'm not going to work on that metaphor, but the metaphor of harmony with nature, I certainly do.

The top pick, of course, would be *Harmonies*. *Harmonies* is a game about building out a small set of different environmental situations in combination with animal cards such that forests, plains, water, mountains and towns can coexist and that the animals have room for them to live. The goal is to build this compact little terrain area that houses all these animals and gets you lots of points. It's a nice little game. The name is kind of nonsense. It could just be called like Animal Place. It has to be called something. I guess so, but it doesn't make me think of being in harmony with nature particularly strongly.

The other games that I thought of for this category are *Earth*, *Wingspan* and *Wild Serengeti*. Again, none of these really suggest being in harmony with nature. The two other games that I could think of that do maybe have a little more of that: *20th Century* is an interesting game where you're building your sort of nation state or your city. You have a set of cities that you're trying to promote make bigger, and a big part of the game is managing the waste that they produce such that you don't pollute too much. So the idea of maintaining harmony with nature is part of that game. I think that's just a mechanism to make it harder, but that is kind of there anyway.

And then maybe you could point to *Endangered*. The game *Endangered* from Grand Gamers Guild, in which you are cooperatively trying to rescue different animals that are facing all sorts of negative trouble from other animals, from pollution, from human intervention. And you're trying to do that through a variety of different means. That might be a game that's sort of about getting harmony with nature as well. But generally, it doesn't feel like this is a theme that I really can grab onto very strongly beyond the games that I've mentioned here. So maybe as a Libra, you don't find harmony part of game play.

Equilibrium, on the other hand, is absolutely part of play. I would say, and as such, the idea of trying to make a balanced outcome so that things are even is really one of the mainstays of interesting gaming. No. Not entirely. There's all sorts of different ways that people look for balance in games. Right balance meaning just like different. There isn't one part of the game that dramatically overwhelms the other, such that if you ignore it, you can't win or whatever. Some games do have that, some games don't. But generally, if there are games with multiple paths to victory, you don't want one of those paths to always be the winning path. Otherwise, people will call the game imbalanced. So from one perspective, looking for games that have really good balance is crucial. And I would say, you know, pure abstracts with total information are going to be the most balanced because you can see what everybody has and sort of approach them that way at the same time. I think there's something really interesting in using balance as a scoring mechanism.

I've heard people call this Reiner Knizia scoring because the two most well-known games that use this method are. Two of the big games that use this method for me are *Tigris and Euphrates*, and *Ingenious*.

In both *Tigris and Euphrates* and *Ingenious*, the score that you have at the end is based on.... There's several categories of thing that you can get, and your score is your score for the worst category. So in *Tigris and Euphrates* I think it's different color tiles if I recall. And in *Ingenious*, it's these different colored tokens. You have these different colored score tracks, and whichever score track is your worst of the different colors is the one that you win with. And this is a mechanism that's been borrowed by lots of different games. But I have a couple others in my collection that use it. The game *Evacuation* uses that in one way. I don't exactly remember how, but I know that part of what's going on in *Evacuation* is they look at which of a certain number of categories is the lowest, and that's your score there.

On the positive side, the science cards in *7 Wonders* encourage you to create a sort of balance, right? Because you get points for having a bunch of cards of the same type, but you also get points for having sets of cards. And so having a bunch of different cards of the same type, a bunch of cards of the same type doesn't do nearly as well for you as having a bunch of cards sort of spread out, because you get to score in two directions. I don't know where the overunder on that is. Like if you have just six cards, if you had six of the same card, you'd get thirty six points, whereas if you had two, two and two, you'd get four plus four plus four plus fourteen. So it'd be twelve plus fourteen, twenty. So it'd be better to get six cards of the same type, but they don't make six cards of the same type. And once you're going for science, having that mix is really useful. And often it does make sense to get one more of your lowest category rather than one more of your highest category, because often one or more of your highest category isn't seven more points. It can be, but it's not usually.

So that is how you would get equilibrium across categories in a positive way. But more often it is equilibrium across categories in a negative way, at least in terms of scoring your lowest thing. The two most dramatic versions of this that I want to point to Beyond Ingenious and Tigris and Euphrates are *Between Two Cities*. And I really like *Between Two Cities*. I haven't played *Between Two Castles of Mad King Ludwig*. I suspect I would like it maybe even better than between two cities, but I have the OG between two cities. I got it when Jamey Stegmaier did the Kickstarter for it oh so long ago. It's a numbered copy, and so, you know, I have hung on to it, partly out of nostalgia or some sort of collector's impulse, partly because I think the game is good enough as it is. I don't think I don't think I need to go buy the between two castles version, particularly because I have castles of Mad King Ludwig. Also, if I want to play that game, I can play that. My guess is if I didn't have either between Two Castles of Mad King Ludwig would satisfy the itch for both and I wouldn't need the other two.

But in that game, you are building two cities, one on either side, and you're doing it in partnership with the people to your right and to your left. And your goal is to have both cities be very successful, because the worst scoring city is your score for the game. So if you have one city that scores forty points and one city that scores twenty twenty is your score. Which is a really interesting challenge because you want to make both of them even and as high as possible so that your so you win. Yeah, it's pretty interesting. I like that balance. It plays fast. It's a really good game. I need to get it out again. It's a little dusty. If I had to guess, I'd say it's two years dusty. That's between two cities.

And then finally, my favorite of the equilibrium games is *Lords of Xidit*. It is another game where you're trying to maintain equilibrium because there are three categories of scoring in Lords of Xidit, and you have to do well in all of them. Well, maybe not exactly. In Lords of Xidit they have three categories of scoring. You score the first category, and then whoever has the worst score in the first category is out of the game. Then you score the second category. Whoever has the worst score in the second category is out of the game, and then you score the third category, and whoever has the best score in the third category wins the game. So there's this really interesting push and pull where you have to find the right balance between the three scoring objectives. If you neglect one too far, you could be out of the game before you get a chance to win. But if you don't put energy into the winning one, then you're out of the game because you didn't do well enough in that winning one. It's a really interesting game. It plays relatively smoothly, it's a little clunky when you get started, but overall it's a smooth and interesting game and it makes for great play.

So that is my take on games around the astrology sign of Libra. So I'm curious if your Libra, what do you think of these plays? Are there other games that you think fit your sign that I didn't mention here. If so, share them with us. You can do that over on BoardGameGeek in Guild three two six nine. We'd love to hear about them there. If you want to send me a message directly, you can email me Brendan at rattlebox games.com. And you can also send me a message on BoardGameGeek. My username there is wombat nine two nine. Well, hopefully this journey into the stars has gotten you excited to learn more about your own Astro sign and what games go best with them. And perhaps you can tell that to me. Tell me about that on our next walk. Here's hoping your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye. Brought to you by Rattlebox Games.