

Pick Up & Deliver 791: Look Back at 2005-2006

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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, listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. I'm on my way home from the train, happy to be talking with you about board games. I was looking back at the old pod, and I realized I had not done a look back episode for a while, so I thought, it's time to do one.

If this is your first time with this format, welcome. I'm glad that you've joined the podcast in the last like four months or something. Glad to have you aboard. Um, the look back format comes out of the fact that I've only been doing this podcast for seven years. Um, I guess eight years, I guess I'm in my eighth year of doing this podcast, but the what I do at the end of each year, or actually, the first episode of the new year is a look back at the best games of two years ago. So this coming January, when I start the pod up again after my hiatus, I will be doing an episode about 2024, the best games of 2024, because it always takes me a little while to catch up with the games that were really popular.

I never get enough played of the current year to really make a reasonable estimation of the games from this year. So I always do. I always wait a year, and then even then, I still there's still games that I've missed or haven't played that I think I probably should play, but that's kind of the that's kind of the arc I follow. And I've been doing that for several years. Like I had best of episodes from like twenty eighteen on, but there are plenty of great games from before twenty eighteen.

So what I've been doing is every few months I will do an episode called Look Back with the year, and I go back and I look at the games from a previous year and talk about which games I think are best from that year. And I've been working my way backwards in the calendar, and I discovered in two thousand and nine that I was running out of. I wasn't getting a big enough pool. Generally, I like to have a fairly large pool of games to have played in order to make my rulings. For instance, on the list this year, I have twenty six different games I've played from the years in question, but in two thousand and nine it was getting a little slim.

And it's hard to have like a best five games out of ten or something. I mean, you can do it, but I feel like it's subpar. So after the 2009 year, then I started doing a thing where I do two years at a time. So the last episode of the lookback I did was the best games of two thousand and seven two thousand and eight. And that means right now I'm doing the best games of 2006-2007, so let's jump into it.

I've played twenty six different games from that time period, and what I'm going to do is talk to you a little bit about the five that I think are the best and why I think that. And then I'll talk a little bit about a couple more superlatives, meaning games that have some other crucial thing that they do best out of the games I haven't played that will encompass the entirety of my time, I'm sure.

I always do like to start with the games that I feel like I should have played or want to play from that period. It could very well make it, make it make their way into the list if I had played them. So I actually have several that I would like to have played. And here they are in just the order that I encountered them on the board Game geek list. Oh, and so the way that I do the scan is I search for board Game Geek, I use the advanced search, and I filter for only games published in 2005, 2006. And then I have the game. I have the BG display, arranged them in rank order, so the highest ranked game is at the top of the list. And then I go through the list and I stop when I get to the game ranked ten thousand. I found if I go past ten thousand, there's generally not much there that becomes fodder for play. Maybe I've played one or two games that are ranked between ten thousand and twenty thousand. So there's one or two more games that I could consider, but very rarely are they going to make my top five. So I generally stop around ten thousand.

Now, I did notice that from 2005 & 2006, there are a bunch of games that I feel like I should play that I've heard are good or I've heard about. And I, you know, they are definitely on the list of like, oh, I'd like to try that if I have an opportunity. And they are Twilight struggle, Caylus, Railways of the world. I'm really interested in that one because it's such a highly regarded Martin Wallace joint. Neuroshima hex, pillars of the Earth, Imperial (that's a Matt Gertz game, which I actually have a copy of, but I haven't played), Funny Friends. That's a Friedemann Friesse game, which I have a copy of and haven't played.

Mr. Jack, Lord of the Rings The Confrontation, Blue Moon City, that's a Reiner Knizia one, Vegas showdown, which I don't have yet, but I am obtaining in the upcoming Chicago fall math trade. That's very exciting. And fjords. Fjords is the last one.

So lots of opportunity there for other games that could make their way into my play. So let's start with first off we'll start with the games that I eliminated because I've played them too much and I already like them too much. So the other tradition with the lookback games is if a game is in my top fifty currently, I remove it from contention because it would be at the top of the list, and in some of the years it would be. Two or three of my top five are just from my top fifty, and that's silly. So Glory to Rome was published in 2005 or 2006. I don't have the years in front of me. Apologies, but it was published in that time period, so I'm removing it because it is in my top fifty. All right.

So I'm going to talk about and this is in no particular order, but I have five games that I've played from this time period that I think are really great. And I want to point to the first one is Ticket to Ride Marklin. Now, I do enjoy Ticket to Ride. It's one of my favorite lighter games. If you have a group of people who are interested in playing games and haven't played a lot of them, I think Ticket to Ride is an enduring classic for a reason. I think it's really fun. I prefer Ticket to Ride Europe over Ticket to Ride base game, because Ticket to Ride Europe has the little train stations, and I like the slightly reduced conflict that those bring, as opposed to regular ticket to ride. You can get locked out of cities in ways that's really, I think, not fun. In addition, there is a version of Ticket to Ride called Ticket to Ride Marklin, and in that one you have these little passengers, and it is themed around a series of brand of toy made in Germany. Marklin is a toy manufacturer that makes trains, so it's themed around these model trains. And when you're playing Ticket to Ride Marklin, you have a little passenger and you can have them ride around on your train lines and you get points for every station that they go to. It provides a second layer of interesting mechanisms on top of the usual ticket to ride, and I think it's fascinating and really fun. So Ticket to Ride Marklin is my one of my top five. Like I said, I didn't have a chance to put these in order. I'm just giving you five that I encountered.

Second one. This is a game that I like, uh, but I don't like enough to keep. And this is Nexus Ops. Nexus ops is a, uh, uh, creatures on the map game, where you have monsters fighting other monsters, and you're fighting for control of these spaces. You're trying to get a certain number of victory points, and if you get enough victory points, then you win the game. You are constantly destroying and being destroyed. Uh, other people's monsters. It's a pretty tight game. I have heard Neuroshima hex described as a knife fight in a phone booth. I think, um, Nexus Ops is pretty similar. The creatures in it are amusingly sculpted. It is sort of decadently about predatory capitalism. You are three rival companies trying to mine the heck out of this planet, and you've installed remote control devices on the creatures that live on the planet, so you can use them as military forces in your quest to mine the planet. It's pretty sick, kind of, but it's an it's a fun game. It's really very fighty it's not a game you should go into unless you're expecting to attack and be attacked, but it's fun. That's Nexus ops. I used to own this game. I gave it away just because it's not a game I'm going to play very often, and my the toggle gaming does have a copy of it, so if I want to play it, I can always borrow that copy or play it there. It's the game. I'll play happily if other people want to, but I'm probably never going to suggest it myself. Unless that's Nexus Ops.

The third game I'm going to suggest is a party game. This is one of my top party games. I don't know if it would be in my top five, it would definitely be in my top ten. And this is Wits and Wagers. Wits and Wagers by Dominic Crush. Uh, it was the game that founded North Star Games. It is a trivia game with a very simple conceit. You don't have to be good at trivia to be good at wits and wagers. The premise is there's these questions and there's hundreds of them in the box. Actually, I have hundreds and hundreds because I have wits and wagers party. I have wits and wagers, have wits and wagers. Vegas and have wits and wagers family. And they're all crammed into one box. So I have tons of different question sets.

When you play, there's a question with a number as the answer, and you are putting the number on a little whiteboard slate, and then everybody turns those in and you reveal them and you put them in order from lowest to highest on this betting board. Then everyone gets two little betting chips, and you bet on which answer you think is correct. And the different spaces, the further away the spaces from the median answer, the more points you, the more the higher your value of your bet is. So if you bet one chip on the middle space, you get two chips back. If you bet one chip on one of the outer spaces, you get four or five chips back. And then once you have some betting, so you have two betting chips, which are always worth one, but then you

can never lose them. But once you've won some bets, then you start getting some currency and you can bet those along with your betting chips to get even higher payouts, and those higher payouts only work if you are successful. If you fail, all of those extra chips that you bet are lost, you get to keep your betting chip, but not the currency.

It's a fun game. I think it works really well for large groups. It's consistently amusing. It's short enough that if you don't really feel like playing it, it's over before you got too into it. I always like to get as much money as I can, as I can, and then bet all the money in the last round that paid off for me. This last one, I bet all the money and I got, I was correct. I think I split my my total winnings between two different bets and I was correct in one of them. So I got to pay off at four or four, four x or five x. And I won the game with. That was great. That's wits and wagers.

Next up we have Cleopatra and the Society of Architects. This is a fun Bruno Cathala game. It's really like area control, but it's got these ridiculous miniatures so that when you're playing you are building an ancient Egyptian temple. To Cleopatra There is a, like I said, an area control mechanism where you're trying to get points by building pieces of these different groups. And if you build one of the later pieces of the group, you get more points for it. There's also a corruption mechanism where you can accelerate your play by taking corruption. But at the end of the game, the person who has has taken the most corruption is out before we count score. So you want to be careful not to take too much. That alone, along with these sort of auction elements of the game, make for a really interesting play. The miniatures are kind of ridiculous. It was a Days of Wonder production, and it shows they always used to make a good game. They did republish another version of it later, which I did the Kickstarter and came out and I never heard anyone talk about it. So I think that some people bought it. Certainly it funded well, but I didn't see a lot of people talking about that game after it delivered. So I'm happy to have my two thousand and five copy, which I think I got in a math trade, actually. Uh, and it's a delight. That's Cleopatra and the Society of Architects.

Uh, and then finally the fifth one that I will point to, and maybe the best game of two thousand and five for my money after. Glory to Rome, of course, is mission Red planet. Mission Red planet is another Bruno Cathala Ludovic Montblanc game, I believe. And in it you are sending people to Mars by putting them on these ships and the ships fly up there and then you, whenever you have somebody on the ship, you get to use them to do an area control game on Mars, where you try to collect points and control areas. The tricky thing is, when you are preparing your people to go up, you play one of nine role cards, and those nine role cards screw around with the ships that you're loading up. They may launch early. They change their destinations. Some of them will blow up on the launch pad. It's delightfully cutthroat. The I have the second edition. The art on it is really cute. I believe the first edition was published in two thousand and five. It's a really solid game, easy and easy enough to teach, pretty fun to go after each other and, uh, a delight. So that is mission red planet from Fantasy Flight Games is the copy that I have.

So there are a variety of other games from that era that I'd like to point out with some superlatives. So here come those. Best abstract game from two thousand and five is Qwirkle. Qwirkle is an excellent little tile matching game that is incredibly successful. They just released a new version of it called Qwirkle Flex, where they add a third scoring condition in which I think works pretty well. But uh, the graphic design on it is irritating. So Qwirkle is a game that I really like and you should play if you get a chance.

Another game that I will put there innovative is gloom. Gloom is a game that was published on the see through cards. They published gloom. They published like a couple spin off versions of it, like Cthulhu Gloom and then no one used those see through cards for a decade. Then John D Clair started using them in games like Mystic Vale. These see through cards are pretty interesting. They allow you to pile things on top of each other and it works really well in gloom. You have a sad family. You're trying to have them have a terrible life and then they die. It's pretty silly and pretty fun, and it makes for good storytelling. That's gloom. Published by Atlas Games. I don't remember who the designer is on that one.

And finally, I will say the genre genre definer is Shadows over Camelot. This is the first semi-cooperative game or game with a hidden traitor that I have played, uh, in Shadows Over Camelot. You play Arthur's Court trying to solve a variety of problems facing Avalon, but somebody working with Mordred, they're causing all kinds of trouble. Looking pretty evil, being dastardly in various ways. So, shadows over Camelot. If you get a chance to play that, you should.

Uh, so a number of other games that I played in that I have played that did not make my list. Arkham horror second edition, Twilight Imperium three. Ticket to Ride Europe descent second edition. Runebound second edition. Sorrow. Fury of Dracula second edition. Animal upon animal. Cash and guns on the underground. Bananagrams. Pentago. Sheer panic. Drakon. Beowulf. Mesopotamia and Zeus on the loose. Many of these are interesting. Some of them are fun. Some of them I still have in my collection. But ultimately, you should check them out if you can.

I think there's a lot to be found in the games from two thousand and five and two thousand and six, particularly among Glory to Rome, Ticket to Ride, Marklin, Nexus Ops, Cleopatra and the Society of Architects, mission Red Planet, and Wits and Wagers. Well, that's about it for me today.

I want to say thanks for joining me on my walk, and I hope that your next walk is as pleasant as mine was.

Bye bye.

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