

Pick Up & Deliver 797: New to Me Games Roundup, part 1

Welcome to pick up 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, greetings listeners, it's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. The sky is a kind of, I don't want to say slate gray. It's not quite that gray, but it is delightful to be out in weather that's not gut wrenchingly cold. The thermometer said twenty nine degrees this morning, which means that it's a pleasant winter day. I'm recording this on December thirty first.

Several aborted attempts to try to get my new microphone working. I got a new audio recorder and that works great. It came with a lav mic. Really sensitive to wind. I put the little fuzzy windsock thing on it and it still was just getting overwhelmed by the wind. So it's not very windy today. And I've got my scarf kind of up around the microphone. So hopefully, hopefully that prevents the wind from blowing across the microphone too much, causing too much trouble. But there is always the possibility that it will slip and ruin yet another recording. Womp womp.

So yeah, this is my fourth attempt to record this episode. If this one doesn't work, I'm going to have to order a different lapel mic. Um, because I like the recorder. Great. But, you know, if I can't, if I can't record without getting a whole bunch of noise, then this doesn't work. And I don't want to hold the recorder in front of my face the whole time. I like to be able to use my hands and use a lapel mic. It's necessary. So that's kind of why the episodes haven't been. I actually had a plan to have all the episodes out by December thirty first today. Instead, we've got a couple more to go before the week is before the season is over. I'll get those out in early January, probably. We'll see. Either way, I'm going to record a greeting for you listeners.

So if this doesn't go well, we'll get a recording from my desk just to say Happy New Year. So happy New Year. This is December thirty first, and I thought that I would talk to you a little bit about games I've played.

So I was thinking the next, this episode, the next, and the one after that will get us through November. The board game espresso episodes I do. I usually am using the games from the previous month, so the challenge of getting up to the end of the year is that I played more episodes, or played more games than I built episodes about, so I have a fair amount to do left. So I thought what I would do today is I would go through games that I have played that I have not talked about at all in a kind of shotgun fashion, and I will talk about them for you.

Each one is going to get like a minute or two commentary, and that will, by the time I'm done, it will bring us up to the end of November. All the new games I've played through the end of November, I'm going to record this in one long walk and break it into two or three episodes, depending how long it ends up being.

And the way I'm going to do that is I'm going to now take a moment to right now record the end of the podcast and the beginning of the next one so that I can just stick it in wherever. So if the end of the podcast feels a little abrupt, or the beginning of the next one feels a little abrupt, it's because I'm recording it in one and breaking it up. There it is. Okay, let's get into it.

Starting in July, there are a few games that I played in July that I never got a chance to talk about here on the podcast, or I maybe mentioned obliquely, but I never did a board game espresso episode about. So to start with, we have Tacta. Tacta is a abstract puzzle or abstract pattern matching game. I got the two player demo from the OP, who published it as part of their, um, flip 7 contest. So they had a thing in the beginning of the summer where they said they were giving away flip seven. You could go to the website and click on a thing, and they would mail you a copy of flip seven. I don't know how many copies they gave away that way, But that's how I got a copy for our board game club. I went there, clicked it, and I was one of the ones who got it. Along with flip 7, they also gave away the two player version of Tacta, which, like I said, is an abstract strategy game where you have these cards with patterns on the back and symbols.

Each player gets a deck of cards and the symbols match our their symbol. So I maybe have a star and you have a moon. I don't remember exactly, but then when you go to play the cards on the table, you have to fit these little pattern icons or patterns on the table and you lay down your cards. What you're doing is you're covering up your opponent's symbols and trying to keep yours on the table. So at the end of the game, you

get points for having your symbols showing and your opponent gets points for their symbols. It was an interesting and simple game, but like if I'm going to play a two player game, it didn't rise to the level of of interesting enough. And I'm sure it's interesting at four as well. But there's no theme to it. It just is fine if you get a chance to play it, I'd recommend, but I probably wouldn't buy it first unless you watch a review and it's like, whoa, I love Puzzly pattern matching games. Okay. Maybe then. But that's Tacta.

I also got to try Skull King. Skull King is a trick taking game published by Grandpa Beck's games. It is a sort of more game early version of the game Oh hell. Which I actually got to play later, so I'm gonna talk about that in the August section. Skull King is interesting. It is a trick taking game, like I said. And in the game, you have to bet how many tricks you're going to take. And if you are correct, then you get points. If you're incorrect, you lose points. The game also has a whole bunch of special power cards that you can play whenever.

I mean, one of the things I like about Skull King is you are obligated to follow suit. Except with regard to the special cards. All the special cards can break. Follow suit rules whenever you want, which really makes the game spicy and variant. And the goal is to get as many points as you can by correctly guessing the number of tricks you'll take, or if you take tricks that have the special cards in them, you often get points for taking those special cards depending on how you took them. As I said, the guessing how many tricks element is pretty interesting and important for the game. There is a shoot the moon option where you can say you're not going to take any tricks, and then you get ten points for every trick you didn't take. If you take none. So if you bet, I'm not going to take any in the last hand. When there's ten tricks, you get one hundred points, which is pretty cool. The other thing is you get more cards per hand and you play ten hands. So you start with one card, and in the last hand you have ten cards. So it's pretty fun.

There's a ton of variability in it in which of the special cards you have in the deck. I liked it enough after the play that I bought the expansion at GenCon, so I have all those special cards as well. We haven't tried them yet, but they look fun. The challenge is, it's really a lot of fun with people who know trick taking games well. If you're playing with somebody who doesn't really know trick taking games, I can't imagine it would be that fun. I have played with a few people who haven't and they had a good time, but if you've played a lot of trick taking games, you have a built in sense of card counting and some other things that make it hard to play with people who haven't got that experience. That said, I find it less hard to play with people who don't have trick taking experience than something like the crew, which really depends on you being able to read the table based on plays. So that's skulking good time.

Next up, I got to play Lord of the Rings Fate of the fellowship. This is a pandemic system game themed around Lord of the rings. You are the fellowship of the ring, trying to take the ring to Mount Doom and destroy it. I had a good time with this. I played it a couple times on board Game Arena. I think it's interesting. I would want to play it on the table before I make a ruling about it. It feels very fiddly and though I had a good time, I had trouble tracking what was happening a lot. This is of course a problem with playing asynchronously with lots of different games. I had this trouble with daybreak as well, but the theme is pretty fun. I have seen people play it and the table looks a little crowded. I think it was a production mistake to make the board as small as they did. I think they should have made it the next bigger size board, so that you have room to move everything around and be able to see everything well. So that would be the one critique I have of it that I've seen so far. But again, I've only played it asynchronously on board game arena, so not a great chance to assess. I would definitely want to play a couple times on the table before I decided to pick it up at full price, if I found it at goodwill. Of course I'd grab it. That is Lord of the Rings Fate of the fellowship. I believe Matt Leacock is the designer.

Next up we have the Great Zimbabwe. This is the game I've only played online. I played it several times now it's probably in the top ten list of number of times I've played a game this year, because I just keep playing over and over again. I've started falling into the through the ages trap where I just want to win a couple times, and so I keep playing with somebody who's very experienced and there's a lot of nuance to it. It has. It's much closer to something like chess. It's not. It's not like chess. But there are, uh, very narrow, uh, perspectives of what you can get accomplished. That's not what I mean to say. There's lots of systems in place, and you have to be able to learn to read them. So it's taking me a long time to get better at it. I'm not sure I would like this game on the table. It's very crunchy, and as has often been remarked about splatter games, it's very easy to make a mistake that puts you on the back foot and you're never going to recover against a better player. So that part I'm not super keen on. It's an interesting, interesting game. I'm still playing it over on online

boardgamegeek.com, which seems to be the place where splatter has authorized people to make digital versions of their games. But yeah, I'm sort of mixed on it myself.

Next up are games I tried at the first day of GenCon, which was July thirty first. The first one is The Game. This is a game I got to try. It's been out for a long time. I think the designer is Wolfgang Warsch. It is relatively simple game. You have a couple stacks of cards, ones going up and ones going down. Your opponent has the same. On your turn, you're going to play two cards or you may be sharing one stack. I think your opponent. I think your opponent has their own. On your turn, you are going to be playing cards out of your hand. You have to play two cards, either on the going up stack or the going down stack. If your card is exactly ten in the wrong direction of the card that's played. So let's say on the going down stack, it says twenty five. If you have the thirty five card, you can play that and jump. Jump the numbers back up. So that's a that's a good thing to lean toward. But the goal is to not get stuck so that you can't play cards. There's a newer game from capstone called Up or Down?, which we got for the toggle gaming library at GenCon. Also, this game, I think, is it's very similar to the game, except that the mechanism by which you get cards and discard cards, I think is much more interesting. So given the choice between the game and up or down, I would pick up or down it. Also up or down also has a theme. It's elevators going up and down versus the game, which does not have a theme and has a terrible title. So that is The Game.

Finally, the last new game I tried in July that I haven't talked about on the pod yet is Qwirkle Flex. Qwirkle Flex is a new version of Qwirkle codesigned by Reiner Knizia. He came in there and put his stank on it. Um, not not in a bad way. It's just funny to me that this very successful game, Reiner Knizia has to get his fingers in there. Uh, what they did is they added a third scoring or a third scoring method. You have shapes and you have colors, and now you also have background. The tiles in traditional qwirkle are all black, but now there are tiles that are white, tiles that are black and tiles that are mixed. I think the mixed ones was a mistake. I think they should have made them grey. Instead they make them black and white with like a slash down the middle, but that black and white with the slash on middle just means they're black and white. They're not black, they're not white, they don't. They are a third color. So that's dumb. I think what happens is when you score, you also then examine the diagonal. One of the two diagonals or both maybe that your tile is on. And if there are matching tiles of the same hue, either black, white or mixed, then you get to score points for those as well. So there's a third level at which you're trying to find matches. That is Qwirkle Flex.

And the end of the games that I played in July. Next up we have the games I played in August. Most of these were tried or the first three anyway. Actually just the first two were tried at GenCon. Once again at GenCon, I was often working the booth and or hanging out with folks. I didn't often play games, so I have a couple I tried, but not a ton that I haven't talked about yet. I did talk about a bunch on the pod already. I did have a chance to try two other games that I haven't yet talked about the pod.

The first is the classic card game, Oh Hell. I think I described Skull King to somebody and they're like, well, that sounds like, oh hell. I'm like, I've never played oh hell. So they got it out and we played a game of oh hell. Essentially, oh hell is a trick taking game in which you like skulking. You have an escalating number of tricks in each hand. There aren't a whole bunch of special cards. Instead, there's just basic deck of cards. But the gimmick with hell is the escalating number of cards per hand and the bidding section. The way that oh hell works in bidding is that on your turn, you bid on how many tricks you're going to take. And at the end of the round where everyone has bid, the number of tricks bid cannot equal the number of tricks in the hand. So like when you start with one card and everyone's bidding, if one person. Let's say you're playing a three player game. If the person first person bids one and the second person bids zero, the third person has to bid one because the dealer has to make the number, not match the number of tricks if they can, or if if it does. If it matches already, they have to make it not match. They also can't bet in a way that it would match after their bid. So if like if it was a one card trick and the first two people bid zero, the third person also has to bid zero. So that's oh hell, I thought it was good. I liked Skull King a lot. It's got theme, it's got wacky scoring and weird special powers. So I would recommend Skull King if you get a chance. Um, but Oh hell is a classic that you could play as well.

At GenCon we also tried First Class Letters. We played this enough that I feel like I played it, but we barely played it. Like we played three or four rounds of it just to get enough for the feel of what the game is. And then we ran out of time and we had to go, uh, but first class letters is a roll and write where you are building words based on what you roll. And the theme is that you are a Postal Service worker driving a mail truck. Uh, the

gimmick is that you are trying to you have certain you draw a certain word and that provides letters down the side, and you have to build your words using those letters as well. There's a kind of crossword element to it, I believe. It's certainly a game that, as I recall, and I played it once in August. So pardon me for being a little loose on the memory here. It is a game that rewards a good vocabulary and flexibility with finding words. Certainly I did have fun doing that, but ultimately I thought it was just fine. Definitely falls in the category of a game I would happily play if someone got out. Not a game I'm going to seek out to buy. That is first class letters.

Next up we have Apollo thirteen. I got to play this at my game club when my friend Terry brought it. Hi, Terry. I don't think he listens, but if he does. Hi, Terry. Um, Terry brought it to our club the week that Jim Lovell passed away last year. Jim Lovell, of course, is the lead astronaut played by Tom Hanks in Apollo thirteen. In that game, you play both the astronauts on the mission and Houston trying to solve the problems that pop up during the ill fated mission to the moon. Your goal as you go through is to survive the five. There's like five stages, and if you get to the end of the fifth stage, then you win. We did not. So we were not as successful as NASA was. That's Apollo thirteen. Uh, interesting. Very. An interesting game. Very, uh, very difficult and very thematic. Like, really carefully created to reflect the science and the people on board and the events that happened and so on. So that is Apollo thirteen or I think it's published as Apollo xii. In case you're looking for it, you should look for the Roman numerals.

Uh, next up, we have a game I found at goodwill that we were that we played with my family. We played two of the three adventures at this point. This is Indiana Jones. Cryptic. I believe that cryptic was meant to be a series of puzzle style games from, I think, the now defunct design house, uh, that was purchased by Funko, Prospero Hall, uh, I believe this one was designed by Prospero Hall, but I don't know if they made any other cryptic games, but Indiana Jones Cryptic is a three part adventure story, sort of in the line of in the neighborhood of an escape room board game. In this game, you are enacting the plot of the three different the plots of the three different Indiana Jones movies that started the trilogy, you know, Indiana Jones and the Raiders of the Lost Ark, Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom, and Indiana Jones and the Last Crusade. We have not played The Last Crusade yet. When you play the game, there are a series of sort of relatively easy escape room puzzles so that, if you like, unlock or exit there kind of in the neighborhood, although they're much closer to like the escape the room ones like The Secret of Doctor Gravely Retreat or the Stargazer's Manor. But then there's also this unique puzzle style that is a drawing, a challenge.

What you do is you have a transparency, and you put it on this image of some event in the movie, like one of them was the Raiders of the Lost Ark. One of the things you're drawing was trying to get out of the Snake Temple. And so walking through a path where all the snakes are picking up torches and trying to get to the wall that you can break open in order to complete the puzzle. What you do is you put the transparency on the picture and you make a dot where you start. Then you move the transparency off the picture onto the table, and you're supposed to move it one marker away, so that it's a fair gap between the transparency and the picture. And then you have to freehand draw the path you would take through the obstacles by guesstimating how close you are to the stuff there. And then you take the drawing that you did. You flip the image over and on the back of the image you find a picture with like red zones and yellow zones, which are things you're not supposed to touch. And if you in fact touched them, then you, uh, take negative points. It's a cute game system. I mean, it's fun. Uh, not too hard, I think. Enjoyable enough. Which would be the the goal with something like that. I think we've like I said, we've played two of the three. We intend to play the third. I certainly would play these again if I found them at a moderate price. I probably I don't know how much the full price was. I wouldn't want to pay more than like fifteen for another set of say, if they made back to the future cryptic or uh, another game that had a similar style. I think fifteen or twenty is probably the most I'd want to pay. I suspect it was more than that. I bet it was based on the box size. I bet it was thirty, which feels like too much to me. Um, but that's Indiana Jones. Cryptic.

Next up, we have Go nuts for donuts. This is another game I found a copy of at goodwill. I've always thought it looked fun. I remember hearing a number of decent reviews about it, suggesting that it is, in fact, fun. Go nuts for donuts has a really nice visual aesthetic that puts us somewhere between like Dunkin Donuts, Dunkin Donuts marketing, and whatever. The place where Homer gets his donuts and The Simpsons is Donut King. Maybe the premise is pretty simple. It's a set collection game where you are trying to get different donut types and score points for fulfilling these donut recipes, I think. Or contracts it is a little bit competitive. It's not super easygoing. There's a bit of competition for it, but it's not brutal either. I thought this was fun. We played it a

couple times. I had a good time with it. It's not a game that I'm going to be striving to play. It's not a game. I think the theme is pretty forgettable, so I passed it along, but I was glad to get the opportunity to play it. That is, go nuts for donuts. Well, with that, we reached the end of the first part of my unplayed game roundup for twenty twenty five. Stay tuned for the next one.

Thanks for joining me on my walk today. I hope your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye! Brought to you by Rattlebox Games.