

Pick Up & Deliver 808: Carnival of Monsters; LotR: The Duel; Splendor Duel; *Mystic Vale* revisited

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 walk home. I'm Brendan Riley.

Greetings, listeners. It's a gloomy day here in suburban Chicago. The clouds are sort of dark gray, solid overcast. It's raining. It's been raining all day, but it's not raining right now, which is nice. And I am happy to be walking home and talking to you about games. Well, the last episode I did was not about specific games I've been playing, so it seems like it's time to do another of these. This is the board game espresso triple shot.

[Speaker makes espresso noises]

Order up! The Board Game Espresso Triple shot is a segment in which I talk about three games I've played for the first time recently, and one game that I have dusted off. A dusty game is, of course, one that I haven't played in a year. Let's jump right into it.

Carnival of Monsters

The first game I want to talk about is *Carnival of Monsters*. I got this from a board game publisher warehouse sale. They were going out of business. They were distributing this game and so the price was very economical. *Carnival of Monsters* is a 2019 Richard Garfield design with art from Loïc Billiau, Martin Hoffmann, Dennis Lohausen, Michael Menzel and three more people was published by Amigo.

This is a drafting game about finding monsters and bringing them back, to show off to the assembled rich toffs and scientists in a kind of Victorian era fantasy world. In the game you. It is a drafting game, so you have a hand of cards and you're passing them around, taking cards. When you take the cards are assembling them, and then you're going to play them all at the end of the round. When you play them, you can either put them into play or you can put them into reserve, and then you are going to score points based on the cards you have in play. One of the nice things about putting them in a reserve is that there's no penalty for doing so. Just keep them till later.

So because some of the cards are difficult to get into play, the way that the purchasing power works is that some of the cards in the deck are land creatures, and those lands have resource and the resources give you the credit or the income you need in order to play the animal, play the monster. So by playing cards with a certain number of the resource icons on them, then you would have play the monsters. The scoring conditions are built around the creatures that you play. There's also some scoring for creatures of having creatures of a certain type.

This is a pretty decent drafting game. It's of a lighter complexity than something like *7 Wonders*, and there's a little bit of nuance that's different than something like *Sushi Go*. I think it's pretty good. I'm looking forward to trying it some more. I'm definitely going to hold on. I will say it feels a bit plain. There's not it doesn't feel like there's a ton of depth as you are drafting. It's really about drafting the right combination of creatures. So there's a level of action efficiency there, but not a ton of feeling for me anyway, of really innovative game design.

The art is pretty good and although straightforward and I really like the choice you have to make as you're drafting where you have to decide, do I take creature or do I take the land? Knowing the land helps you, but it doesn't score you any points. There's also some cards and then there's some helpers that there's a mechanism. Also, when you take the creatures back to show them off, or some of them are violent and if you don't have enough security, keep them in place, then they cause trouble. Um, that part reminded me a little bit of *Dungeon Petz*. Some of the creatures will have anger issues, and if you don't have the way, restrain them. Anger issues. Having keeping in mind how much protection from your monster is a useful part of, it's going to stay in the collection for a bit. At least. I'll play it a few before we move, but I don't see it being stay in a collection unless it really captures somebody, because for me it's fine. That's *Carnival of Monsters*, 2019.

Next up we have *Splendor Duel*. *Splendor Duel* is a two player adaptation of splendor designed by Marc Andre and Bruno Cathala. Bruno Cathala seems to be the go to person to help design two player versions popular games, two player *7 Wonders Duel*, and I feel like he also helped with one of the other ones as well. It

feels like I see his name on the duel games surprisingly often. That said, uh, I like this one better than I liked *7 Wonders Duel*. I know there are a lot of people who really like *7 Wonders Duel*. In fact, they see it as better than the original *7 Wonders*. It has a higher rating on Boardgamegeek now, I believe.

I think for *Splendor*, I think *Splendor Duel* is a better game than regular *Splendor*. If you are familiar with *Splendor*, you know eighty five percent or ninety percent of the rules you need for *Splendor Duel*. In it, you are trying to accumulate gems which you use to buy gem mines, which give you permanent access to gems which you can use to buy better stuff and eventually bribe or build rich folks. *Splendor Duel* plays very similar. The originals you are getting resources working on developing into these engines.

The big difference in *Splendor Duel*: there is this grid in the middle of the board, like a five by five board. The spiral on it and on the board are a bunch of gems. When you go to take gem, you aren't taking them from stacks the way you do in regular splendor. Instead, you're taking them from this swirl, this spiral thing, and you can take either three in a row or any two. And then the gems still have the same collection rules as they had before. The difference is, there's a little bit more of a puzzle to trying to figure out which gems you have, which gems you're hoping to keep. Et cetera. Et cetera. Overall, *Splendor Duel* is a really interesting implementation of the *Splendor* model. I really like what's going on in the game. I like the overall flow of the pieces better than the similar version of *Splendor* that is.

Next up we have *Mystic Vale*. *Mystic Vale*. I've been playing on yukata with the same person over and over again, I don't recall. I think their username is Sunny Mama and I don't think I know their real life name, so. Hi sunny mama, if you're a listener, Yucata is the second. It's the less common online board gaming app, but I still use it a fair amount. There are a variety of games on there, a much smaller amount. And the interaction or the interface there is a little less fancy.

Mystic Vale is a card crafting game by John D. Clair. Card crafting means you have cards with sleeve in sleeves, and those sleeves represent the whole card. So when you have a deck, you have a deck of twenty sleeved cards, and then on your turn, you can buy these transparencies to add to the sleeves. So over time you are building up the card. And the card is divided into three sections a top, a middle, and a bottom. So when you buy one of these transparencies, it has to go in the top, middle or bottom of the card you put overlap. The mechanism is relatively straightforward. Many of these items have a silver dot, basically currency for buying cards. Some of them have various symbols, which are a different kind of currency for buying different kinds of cards, particularly the cards that give you points. There are little, uh, armor like Knight helmets that give you points. There are some cards that have special powers that react to the other cards in the field. So maybe you have one that says for every night helmet on this card, you gain an extra point and then that's in the middle. So then on the top and the bottom of that card, maybe you'll put maybe you'll purchase things that have knights on. And then finally there are green trees and red trees. The red tree icons are the negative ones. And this is the aside from purchasing things.

The mechanism in *Mystic Vale* is push your luck. In the game. You have two red trees. You can have three without busting, but you can't have four. And the way it works in Yucata, I don't know if this is how it works in the regular game, but the way it works in yukata is you can see what the next card that would come out is, and if it would cause you to bust, then you bust, but it isn't actually in your display. So you have this choice. Like do I add the current card to my display, reveal the next one, and possibly bust? Or do I stop with what I have? At least that's kind of. That's how it works on Yucata. I don't know if in real life that's how it works or if you just flip over card, but if you get three of the red trees in your field, you bust and the green trees, which are pretty rare, those counteract the runs. So if you have two red trees and one green one, you effectively have one red tree. I've played this several times online now. I really like it, but I am only slowly getting the feel for what the actual strategy at the beginning of the game. About half of your cards have no inserts in them at all, just come up blank, which means if you push your luck to them and have them there, then when you buy things, you can put them cards. About half the cards that do have things are just energy. And then about the other half of the cards are these red trees. So you can just have a thing where like the first two cards you draw are red tree, then you need to stop because a third red tree might bust you.

I've found that it's really counterproductive to push my luck sometimes later in the game I will, but most of the time the penalty for not being able to buy anything because I pushed my luck. You pushed your luck and bust then turn it over is far exceeded. Far exceeds any kind of benefit that I would get from just a minor, adding one more card to the field. So it's not really a push your luck game for me because I don't push my luck hardly

ever. The only time I do is if the yield in the field is very, very low. So all I'm going to do is buy one more energy card or something. Then I might push my luck to see what I can get. But generally, like I said, it's an interesting game. It is one I would enjoy playing on the table at some point.

I've eyed it at game stores before, but I feel like it's pretty. It seems like it's probably pretty fiddly. I would worry about the quality of the sleeves, but I haven't heard anything, and it is pretty popular. Maybe I'm being nervous for no reason.. That's *Mystic Vale*, a 2016 release from John D Clair publisher AEG, with art by a bunch of people. The first credited person is Ralph Isaac Stern Cook and Andrew Gaia and Catherine Guevarra, and five more people. So that is *Mystic Vale*.

Finally, I had an opportunity to play an oldie but a goodie. This is *Lord of the Rings The Duel*. This is a game from designer Peter Neugebauer, with art from John Howe, Anke Pohl, Thilo Rick, and published by Kosmos in their two player line.

In this game, you are reenacting the battle between Gandalf and the Balrog. In it, one of you is Gandalf, the other is Balrog. There's a bridge and you are doing, I think, five rounds or three to five rounds of duel. And in the duel, the person who wins in the card play gets to move their piece one notch up the bridge, and if the first person to get a certain distance on the bridge, or the person who gets the farthest on the bridge wins the card.

Play is really interesting because you have mostly most of the same cards, but they don't directly overlap. You have to sort of guess which cards your opponent has at a given point, and try to figure that out. It's a delightful two player duel game, but it's not very sustained. Like there's not a ton to it. I don't think it'd be the kind of game that would be fun to play over and over and over again, except that you would get to know what the other people have.

I was reminded a little bit of the game Mind Bug, which I've read about but have not played, which is a small dueling deck game where you build a deck of cards and you're attacking your opponent, but each person has one mind bug, which is a card that lets you take the other player's card. So when the other player plays something good, something bad for you, you can play your mind bug and you get that card and play it against your opponent instead. So there's always the possibility that your best card will get played against you. There are a couple elements like that, like that kind of Uno-reverse-philosophy in *Lord of the Rings The Duel*.

The table presence is also quite nice. The game comes with a little cardboard bridge and a couple figures that you put on the move over it. Like I said, I thought it was fine. Probably not a game you play all the time, but worth keeping around for the occasional play. And if you had somebody who really liked it, you could play it over and over again and develop, you know, a personal meta in the same way that you might with *Onitama* and *That time you killed me*. All in all, a good time. *Lord of the rings The Duel*.

Well, that's about it for me today. Just about home. So I'll take this opportunity to say thank you for my walk. Please do reach out on Boardgamegeek in our forums, Guild 3269, to let us know what you think of the episode and share your games that you've played. Have you played any of the games I talked about today? If not, what games have you played? Share it over on the forum.

So I'm just about home. That's about it for me. I'd love to hear what you've been playing and otherwise I hope that your next walk is pleasant as mine. Thanks for joining me. Bye bye.

[Closing Credits Music plays]

[out-take beep] [Editor's note: what follows is an out-take from the episode]

You are reenacting the battle between Gandalf and, um, the. The Baron. You know, the, um, over the the bridge on Khazad dum. The big dragon thing. I can't remember what it's called. The dwarves dug too deep and they let out. The big dragon thing with the fire mouth. Anyway, you are reenacting the Balrog. The Balrog? You are reenacting the battle between Gandalf and the Balrog.

[concluding out-take beep]

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