

Pick Up & Deliver 849: Bury Me in the Rift; The Fox Experiment; Diplomacy: The Golden Blade; Sentinels of the Multiverse (revisited)

Transcript

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 to you while I stroll around. I'm Brendan Riley.

[Intro music]

Well, greetings listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. It rained last night, so it kind of broke the heat a little bit and took a lot of the particulates out of the air. So it's not quite so unpleasant lung wise, but, uh, yeah, and it's a nice day. It's probably going to be really warm today, but it is late July. So thinking a day might not be really warm is the fool's errand there.

The sun is up, some Blue jays are calling and I'm out for a stroll to talk to you about board games. Well, looking back, it's been a couple days since I talked about some new games. I thought I would talk about some new games. That's right. It's time for a Board Game Espresso Triple Shot. [Espresso noises] Order up!

The Board Game Espresso Triple Shot is an episode segment in which I talk about three games that I've tried recently for the first time and one game that I dusted off. So let's jump into it. This first game was a game I tried in June, and the next two are games I played in July.

So June, **Bury Me in the Rift**. This is a 2019 game self-published by Matthew Bishop, who is the designer and the artist. I got this in a trade at the no-ship math trade that I do twice a year, and it's a solo game designed around the premise of being a mech fighting other mechs. I'm not really sure what the rift is, but that's kind of the premise.

I played this while I was waiting for my car to be repaired. I brought it with me to the car dealership and just set up on a table there and learned it and played it in one go. I would like to return to it because I got I did get a whole play in, but it's the kind of game where the second play is going to really lock it in for you. And I did like it enough to go back and play again.

Broadly speaking, the premise is that you are flying some sort of mech think like BattleTech kind of, or MechWarrior kind of device, and you are in a ruined landscape and you're trying to get an objective. The game comes with several different objective cards. I was just playing the first one, which is, I believe, take hold of a location and kill two enemy mechs.

The game has a lot of interesting, like pretty readable iconography that's played on. It's played on a bunch of cards. The whole thing comes in a small deck box, so it's probably one hundred cards or less. And you are using. You have a combination of the mech and the mech pilot that gives you your stats, and then you are interacting with those, or you're using those to move your Mac around the map. The map is made up of a series of cards, which are kind of randomly distributed around and on the cards. There are waypoints and streets and different kinds of obstacles.

Everything is tracked with like little cubes that you put on things. So it's a very bump able game. Like if you bump to the table, that could really mess up your game, but it's also pretty easy to keep track of. Once I kind of figured out the system, it seemed like it worked pretty well. And I think the overall flow of the game fit the kind of thing I'd be looking for in a solo game on the table. I think if this is one that I played a few times, it would get pretty fast. Kind of how back when I was playing Friday regularly, I got to the point where I could set up and play Friday and put it away in fifteen minutes, and it was a nice little experience.

I think Bury Me in the Rift has that vibe to it, though it's a little more complicated. I wouldn't want to play this on an airplane seat table the way I have with Friday. That said, the rule book is not good at all. And really, to play it, you need to go online and download the digital rulebook, which is too big to fit in the box. I understand publishing a game from I think it's the Game crafter probably, uh, it feels self-published that way. Publishing a

game that way you have space limitations and it does come with a little bit of rule book, but the rule book it comes with is inadequate. You can't play the game from it. At least I couldn't.

So I went online and I did find the digital updated second rule book, which was much more thorough and much more thoughtful, but also definitely couldn't fit in that box. So you have to have a digital rulebook with you, and it needs to be easily legible on your phone, or you have to have a paper copy that doesn't fit in the box. So my biggest complaint would be learning to play the game and managing the play of the game. It's pretty difficult given the resources I had access to, so that part was not my favorite. I don't like that.

But the art has this cool sort of, um, I mean, it's graphic design art, for lack of a better phrase. There's I don't think there's illustration. The characters are, the people are illustrated, but the mechs and the buildings and everything are kind of drawn with shapes and interesting shading, but it's all stuff like you could, I could see somebody doing it in Photoshop, drawing it in Photoshop, rather than like using a more complex illustration thing. No, no shade on Matthew Bishop. It's way better than I could do. Certainly. Um, and it does have a unified look and feel, which I think works really well.

So this is an attractive little game and it's worth looking at if you get a chance to play it. I don't know that I would suggest going and buying it from the Game Crafter, but if you're somebody who's into like mechs and stuff and you want a fun little solo game, uh, definitely worth checking out. That's Bury Me in the Rift 2019 self-published game from Matthew Bishop.

Next up, we have **the Fox Experiment**. This is the 2023 game from Pandasaurus by designers Jeff Frazier and Elizabeth Hargrave, with art from Marco Ciari and Joe Shawcross. The Fox Experiment is a board game based on or inspired by a famous Russian genetics experiment done during the twentieth century. I don't know exactly the dates. I did look it up when I was playing, but then I kind of forgot. And basically the premise was the idea that the question of whether you could domesticate foxes and how how hard would that be to do? It's interesting.

The Soviet philosophy about, about, evolution was for a long time Lamarckian evolution, meaning that a creature's earned traits during its life could be passed on genetically to its children, which is not something that we've generally found to be true. But the way the Soviet orthodoxy worked, you really couldn't disagree with some. There were some hard line truths, and if you disagreed with them, you were seen to be sowing unrest or sowing disagreement with the Communist philosophy. Somehow there was an ideological connection between the idea of the learned traits and the genetic inheritance of the children. I don't really understand it, but somehow this, uh, experiment was meant to help ask that question or explore that issue.

If you look up the real world example of it, basically they just with each generation, the, um, experimenters selected for the more docile domesticated foxes. And over time what they got were more domesticated foxes or domesticated foxes. What's interesting is over time, those foxes slowly gained qualities of being dogs. They had droopy ears. They had tails that wagged. And I don't remember exactly the things, but like, essentially the process of domesticating foxes was selecting for traits that we recognize in dogs, which I think is interesting.

So the actual game, the Fox experiment, when you open it up, it's there's a ton of stuff there. It's a little overwhelming in terms of the amount of things actually was going to try to play it first with my in-laws. And I'm like, oh, give me a half hour to learn this and then we can play. And I opened up the box and I started looking through the rules and I'm like, oh, this is I can't learn this in a half an hour. I might have been able to, but I don't think my... I think it would have been a little too much for the audience I was working with there. Um, when my wife and I played it, we had a great time and I think it'll stay in the collection a while.

I've liked it more than the other Elizabeth Hargrave games that I've picked up since wingspan. I think I like it, I've only played it once, but I do think I like it better than Under Grove, which is another one I do have and have kept. I've kept Tussie Mussie. I like Tussie Mussie better than people I've played it with, so that one I've kept around hoping that I'll find the right person to play it with. And Mariposa Mariposas I thought was fun, but ultimately relatively forgettable for us and it. I traded it along.

I think the Fox experiment will stay around for a while. It's really. I love the theme. The graphic design is great. It does. It makes it look like you're on this sort of Arctic farm. And I love the choices they made about how to do the genetic experiment. So essentially, essentially the way it works is you have male foxes and female foxes, and you're breeding them. And each fox has a certain number of the traits that you want to get. And of

course, genetics don't always favor specific traits. So there's a die rolling. And the die rolling allows you is what shapes the offspring of those foxes. And then you get more dice. And the dice, basically, the dice are like your chance to have these favorable traits. So at the beginning you have foxes with very few of the traits. And over time, as those foxes have children, the children have more and more of the traits you're looking for, which I think it just works really well. It's a very clever mechanism.

But then they did this great thing where, uh, all of the cards have are the right material that you can write on them with a whiteboard or whiteboard markers. Then you get some dry erase markers. So the first round of foxes are all named already. They are the sort of starter foxes. And then when you have two foxes and they breed, then you draw a blank male or blank female card. It's random from the children, the pups deck, and then you roll dice to determine what stats those pups have. And then you get to name the pup. And it's so fun to name the pup. I don't it's a really silly thing, but it works really well.

The points come from breeding these foxes that do what you want, and then completing these experiments, which are basically contract fulfillment, in which you have foxes that meet different requirements. I had a really good time with this. It definitely is fun to play. Definitely worth the time and effort to learn it. It was a little complicated to learn on the first play, like reading the rulebook, but once I was done with that part, teaching it wasn't that hard and it wasn't that hard to play. It wasn't mechanically, it wasn't mechanically convoluted or anything. It was just a little on the complicated side.

This actually worked really well for us to play. We had a lot of fun with that. Yeah. Overall, I don't have much bad to say about it. I mean, it was a little complicated. There were maybe one too many scoring conditions, although you needed them to make the game interesting. But there was a lot of different. There were a lot of different things, and there are even. I think there was another deck of cards that were an optional module that we did not put in because there was just a lot going on.

I imagine we will put it in next time, but I did have a good time with this game. I thought it was really interesting the way that the genetics flowed from Fox to fox, as through generations, I thought was really clever and helped teach you a little bit about this real world thing, which is something Hargrave. Elizabeth Hargrave has done really well in her design experience. I don't know that I've played any other games from Jeff Fraiser. I may have, but I don't recognize the name. But overall, the Fox experiment was really fun and I'm glad I got to play it, and I'm looking forward to playing it some more.

I picked this one up at a thrift store, which I definitely recommend if you can get it for four or five dollars, which is what I got for sure. But like I think, I think even at a, even at a moderate discount, it's well worth it. And, uh, knowing what I know now, it might have been a, an early purchase on the new rack, definitely at the sort of modern at the current discounted prices. If you're not paying, I don't know what they're charging, what sixty, but you know, forty I think this game is, if that sounds interesting to you, is probably well worth it.

So that is the Fox experiment from 2023, designed by Jeff Fraser and Elizabeth Hargrave. So at Toggle Gaming a couple of weeks ago, I got a chance to play a game that I hadn't played in a while and was fun to try again. This was **Sentinels of the multiverse**. I got to play the Definitive Edition, which is 2022.

Sentinels is a game I've had an interesting experience with. I've played it twice. My design partner, Rob, played it once and didn't enjoy it at all, so it was interesting to kind of return to it after a long time. It had been more than six years since I played this, so really out of touch with it. Uh, my, my memory of it was that it was, there was a lot of tokens to keep track of, and it was a little more complicated than I intended or thought. And I think I went into it and having not fully digested the rules. And so there was a lot of like looking at the rulebook while we were playing and I remember not having a great time.

And then I know that the story I heard was of a play in which the person who was leading the game basically just told everybody what to do on their turn. And so it didn't really feel like a game where you had any choices. But I think that's a player problem more than a game problem though, this is definitely a hand, an open hands full co-op, which does have the potential problem of the quarterbacking experience.

So this time I played it was a full play of six people. If you don't know it, Sentinels of the multiverse is a cooperative, superhero themed game set in its own universe. It is a universe of comic books, and then the idea of each play of the game. You are playing an issue of the comics between where the superheroes are battling a super villain doing something. Each player. If you play a superhero, you get a little player board

thing, and then you get a deck of cards that goes for your superhero. And then, uh. So each player has a superhero with powers and different ways of interacting with the board. There are locations around the board where stuff happens, and then there is a supervillain who has their own thing that they do. The way the game is played, on your turn. You get to take.

You get to play your cards to do actions. As I recall, there is an energy element that allows you to accumulate, to play a certain number of cards and those. And that might have been my character like, but there's some sort of limitation. You're deciding how to spend your resources in order to play cards, and the cards let you do things like attack the bad guy, set up things for other people to do, maybe heal people. And the big thing the game does is it introduces conditions. So as you play, things will happen and your character will acquire different conditions, and those conditions then shape how you're affected by other things on the board.

And famously, the supervillains can put their own conditions on and the heroes can put their own conditions on. And there is a variety of different keywords that shape how you interact with those condition making events. You can be affected by these kinds of conditions you can't. And so on. When you attack or when there is a damage done, all the damage has a type, kind of like in Pokemon or something. And so different characters are vulnerable to different types of damage or invulnerable to different types of damage and so on. So the game is a lot about kind of keeping track of the condition of your character and how they interact with the other characters on paper.

That sounds really fun. And I think as a solo game, two or three handed, I bet I would have a great time. Six player at the table. I did not have a great time. It was fine. I like the theme of it. I like the people I was playing with, but one, when you're playing six player, every player gets to have a turn every round. So you're sitting through five other people's turns before you get to go.

And most of the time you can't really tell what's going on. They're like, "oh, I play my Sneasel Watzl and I get to do two damage to the villain." Okay. Right. So like, Then "I put in my whatever defense in place." Now, maybe there is a world in which you know the game really well, and that's exciting. Sure. But if you're new to the game, it's all just kind of disconnected nonsense. It says, you know, I do two damage. And so in order to keep the game moving, I found myself playing down the narrative rather than playing it up, which is what I'd want to do, a superhero game playing it down. So I'm just like, "uh, I do attack three attacks and I do two damage and I heal myself."

One, right? So I'm taking my turn really fast because I understand the game and most of what I'm experiencing is kind of boredom from waiting for other people's turns. And then, of course, you run into the thing which happens in all board games, but it's which is that some people didn't understand the game as well. So it took them longer to take their turns. And worse, it would get to their turn. And you realize they hadn't figured out what they were going to do.

So while everyone else was doing their turn, they're looking at their phone or they're chatting with people, which I. I don't mind a casual chat, but only if it doesn't slow the game down. And with a six person game, it's very easy to have a casual chat. And then it's like, oh, it's your turn. I'm like, oh, sorry, I was chatting. I didn't even look in my hand yet. Something I look in their hand and they gotta figure out what they're going to do. And so like a turn that should have taken a minute takes three minutes or five minutes. Three minutes probably, but still six players, three minutes of turn is eighteen minutes for one round. And you play a bunch of rounds until the bad guy is killed, or until I don't know if one player getting killed makes us lose or if I don't. I don't recall that part.

As I recall, we did win the game. I believe we had a successful routing of the villain and we won the game. So good on us. But ultimately it wasn't my favorite experience. I don't know that I'll never play Sentinels of the multiverse again, but it's certainly very close to being on my nah I'm good list. If I wait six years to play it again, that'll be fine. I can try it again in half a decade and see if I like it better. But it was fun to play games with the people I played with, and I had a nice time at the table, even if I didn't enjoy the game that much. So that is Sentinels of the multiverse. I played the Definitive Edition or dust it off.

Finally, we have **Diplomacy: the Golden Blade**, designed by Roscoe Schoch with Publisher Publishing by Renegade Game Studios. No artists credited. There's a graphic design firm credited and it's like a firm. So presumably they also did the art. It's unclear where the art came from. I don't know if that means it's AI or if it's like stock art, which is fine. I don't have a problem with games, especially this kind of game. The art is pretty

inconsequential. You just need it to understand what's going on in the cards. Nobody's buying this game for the art.

So diplomacy the Golden Blade is a small box game. It comes in a sort of Avalon size box or the resistance size box, and it's just a couple decks of cards. And the idea is it is sort of a pared down version of diplomacy. Each player plays one of the countries in diplomacy. I think it plays up to at least six, maybe eight. And you have, I think, nine different cards of eight or twelve. You have twelve different cards you can choose from. There's three different contexts that you can wield. There's like politics, there's economy and there's warfare. I think those are the three. And then you have three general actions which are like allegiance or something, I don't know, negotiation cards.

The idea is each player is trying to get one card in play on level three. Like if you're able to put a level three card into play, you win the game. Or maybe if you I don't I think it's one level three card. It's weird to me that they have a level three card. They don't just call it the winning card, but whatever. Maybe it's two level threes. I don't remember exactly. But I think also if you get a level three card into play, we finish the round and then we see who has the most or whatever. That's maybe that's what it was. But essentially this is an elaborate rock, paper, scissors. It's very complicated rock, paper scissors. But it comes down to Yomi trying to anticipate what your opponent is going to do and do it.

You sit in a you sit around the table when you play. And so you have defined neighbors and your neighbors shape who you can interact with and what you can do. So the cards that you play allow you to manipulate the board and or the. The cards you play allow you to manipulate your opponents to stymie them or to help them, the people on the sides of you. And essentially what you're trying to do is you have a bunch of level one cards, a bunch of level two cards, and then some level three cards. These are technologies, and they don't do anything for you per se except be technologies. So the blue cards are Navy. I think it's Army, Navy and politics. Maybe something economy, army, Navy, economy. That's what it is. And then the gold cards are politics, but they don't get played. But so you have Army. You have two spots for level one Army cards, three spots for level two Army cards and one spot for level three.

Each round you're going to be able to put down one more card so everybody slowly gains more automatically. If at any point someone puts down a third card, then the game is over. I can't remember if the game's over immediately or we finished the round, but the idea is you're building up toward those level three cards, and each round you're going to play an action card. So they have like resource cards, which are these level one, two, three, and then they have action cards. And the action cards are interactions you have with your neighbors. So I'm going to help you. I'm going to hurt you. I'm going to help my neighbor on my other side hurt you. There's a bunch of just stuff. And basically the idea is it gives you enough interactions that you can then try to negotiate with your neighbors to set up interesting interactions and or fights.

Because I think the big thing is this is one of the, you know, it is meant to be a sort of small box version of the big diplomacy game where you're making deals with people, and the game does allow you, I guess, to leave the table and go talk to each other if you decide you want to do that. So it's unclear to me if negotiation has to be in public or not. So it is sort of meant to be a distilled version of the main line diplomacy game, which I have not played. I will say not my favorite genre, right? You know, listener that I enjoy a game of Game of Thrones every now and again, but it's almost never the game I'll pick. Right. I don't mind a game where sometimes we interfere with each other, but I don't generally choose it.

So the broad strokes of I'm going to mess with you. You're going to mess with me. "Whoever does a better job wins" isn't usually my favorite kind of game. And tie that to negotiation. Really not my favorite kind of game. And that's what this diplomacy, the Golden blade is at its heart. I guess you should expect, if you're going to play a spin off of diplomacy, that it has the feelings of diplomacy. So I was not lied to by the box, but the gameplay of it wasn't great because two of the four people playing me and my wife aren't really into that kind of game. So it's not very likely that I'm gonna play a big betrayal, right? Or manipulate. And so it gets really hard to play well because we're not all into it. And I think as a result, it wasn't fun. I don't know that anyone had a lot of fun.

Definitely not my kind of game and probably not one I would recommend a lot. But you know, if that if diplomacy sounds like your kind of game, I would say it probably is something you want to get. I don't know

what the price was. We played someone else's copy, so I don't have a lot to say about it other than what I just said to you.

Well, that brings me to the end of my time. What have you been playing? Do your friend head over to BoardGameGeek Guild 3269 and share your recent plays? I'd love to know what you've gotten dusted off. I'd love to know what new games you've tried. I'd love to know how your gaming July is going. If you'd like to reach out to me, you can email me, brendan@rattleboxgames.com or send me a message on board. Game Geek wombat nine two nine is my username there. We do have a guild for this. This podcast, the Pick Up and deliver guild. It's boardgamegeek.com/3269.

Or if you don't want to try to remember a random four digit number, just head over to the show notes for the episode and I'll have a link to the guild there. I also play asynchronous games over on board game arena and yukata.de, so if you'd like to share your game some online gaming with me, I would love to do that with you. My username there is wombat nine two nine. 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.

[Exit music]

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