

Pick Up & Deliver 854: Look Back, 1996-2000

Transcript

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.

[Intro music]

[Transcript editor's note – the first mention of each game name will be typo-corrected and **boldfaced**, but thereafter may not be.]

Well, greetings listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. Well, lovely maybe isn't the word. It is incredibly humid and it is a grey, pale slate. Overcast.

Maybe three or four times a year, I'm able to adequately say today's sky reflects the beginning of Neuromancer, which, as I recall, says, the sky was the color of a TV tuned to a dead channel, which doesn't mean anything anymore in a world where televisions just won't show anything if there's no signal. But in the old days, a TV tuned to a dead channel would show a sort of gray static. You youngsters can look it up.

You can also look up Neuromancer, for that matter, if you haven't read it. The William Gibson novel about the sort of. It didn't exactly start the cyberpunk movement, but close enough for government work. So thinking about that era, which is, uh, early eighties. So this is a little later, I was looking back and saying, what are some of the games of the past that I haven't played and should?

I was also reminded of this because there is currently a Kickstarter for **Tigris and Euphrates**, which is the latest Reiner Knizia updo from twenty fifth century games. Uh, they brought out this beautiful edition of **Ra** last year, and Tigris and Euphrates is, for many people, the preeminent Reiner Knizia game. And so it's been out of print for a while and hard to get. So it's nice that the 25th Century Games is bringing it back, and I'm sure it'll be a gorgeous production in line with the previous work they've done. So in that spirit, I thought to myself, what are some of the best games from that era?

The last time that I did a Look Back episode was at the beginning of this season, somewhere in the first ten episodes, and I looked at the games that were released between 2001 and 2004. So given that I am, the amount of games that I've played is is not getting bigger for those older games. I mean, a little bit, but not dramatically bigger. What I decided to do this time is go up to five years. So today I'm going to do looking back at the years 1996 to 2000 and what are the best games from that era?

My methodology is pretty simple. I go on board game geek. I use the advanced search. I search for games published earliest 1996. Latest year 2000. Then I sort by board game rank. Then I look through the top ten thousand games. I go until I find a game from that era that is ranked higher than ten thousand and I stop looking. I record all the games in there that I've played, as well as some other notables, and then I make the list. So here we are. It's.

First off, there are several games from the from that era that I want to play and have not. So if I were to go and somehow play all of those, maybe this list would change a little bit. Those games are

- **Tikal**
- **Bus,**
- **Taj Mahal,**
- **Roads and Boats,**
- **Gipf**
- **Liberte,**
- **Carolus Magnus**
- **Mississippi Queen.**

Now, three of those. Uh, Taj Mahal. Oh, sorry. Taj Mahal and Mississippi Queen are both Reiner Knizia games. Bus and roads and boats are both splatter Spielen games. And then the other three are games that I'm interested in because of the designer or stuff I've heard about them. Karolus Magnus, for example, gets mentioned a fair fairly often on. So very wrong about board games podcasts. They call it Chucky mags for some reason, and that is a game I'd like to try.

So of the remaining games from that era that I have played, here are my top five games as well as other categories. I will say normally I exclude games from the top. I exclude games from the top five if I have played them, if they are in my top fifty. Turns out this is the first time I believe this has not been an issue. I have zero games from this era in my top fifty, which is. I don't know if that's great or terrible. There are a couple games here that would, I think, reasonably be contenders Depending on my mood, but none are in there today. So.

So my top five games for this era starts with **Lost Cities**. 1999 Reiner Knizia Lost Cities is an excellent two player card game where you are collecting cards and playing them out sort of rummy style. You draw a card and you play a card. Actually, I believe it's the other way around. You play a card and draw a card, and you're not allowed to pick up the card you played. You're making runs of cards in one of the five or six different colors, depending which edition of the game you have, and the run is just going up in number.

Before you start the run, you are allowed to put down multipliers which double, triple, or quadruple the value of that run, and then you start putting down numbers. The lowest number is one, the highest number is ten. If you get however many you get at the end of the game, you're going to add the numbers up. You're going to subtract twenty. Then you apply your multiplier. So if you don't get enough cards let's say you put out the two and the three and the five, but you never find another card of that number. Now you have ten. Minus twenty is negative ten. If you had a multiplier on there then the multiplier applies and you have negative twenty or negative thirty whatever how many multipliers you put down.

So that part is every time you start a run in one of the colors, you are gambling that you're going to get enough cards that you will be able to get at least twenty points in that run. On top of that, the other player is also doing the same thing. There are six colors. You're both fighting for all six colors. You don't have to play runs in any of the colors if you don't want. So there's an element of choosing your battles. You can play the game really mean you can play it kind of nice. There is a zero sum element though. Like every time you put down a card that you know your opponent needs, you're helping them. And so there's an element too of like holding the cards that are most valuable for them, like the ten point cards. If you know your opponent is working in a color, you want to hold on to that ten point card until they can't play it. Or, you know, if you get that early, you're either giving it to them and hope that they will reciprocate or you hold it for the whole game, which is a bummer.

Or maybe you start your own run. If you got the ten and the seven and the six, well, that's more than twenty points. You could just plop all three down and then you have a run of three points, which isn't a lot, but it keeps your opponents from getting them and it gets them out of your hand. So. Lost cities is an excellent game. It is a little on the cutthroat side depending how you play, but it's really, really fun. That's my top game from the from this period that's Lost Cities by Reiner Knizia.

I hate to ring a. I hate to be. I hate to be repetitive, but my second choice is Ra from 1999 also. This is a Reiner Knizia game in which you are bidding in auctions. The auctions are basically. The game works is on your turn. You can add a tile to the auction by drawing a tile from the bag, or you can start the auction. If you add a tile, you draw the tile out of the bag and you add it to the auction. There's a bunch of different scoring mechanisms, and each tile participates in one of those in a various ways. I'm not going to explain them all here, but suffice to say some of them are set collections.

Some of them are just about how many you get. Some of them are about like you get, you need one important one, and then a bunch of minor ones, and then you score off each other. There's a bunch of different ways the scoring works, the auction, the part. The interesting part, though, is that the auction does not operate using money. It uses bidding tiles and you have there are several different bidding tiles in the game, and you get to use the ones you have each round. And when you bid. If you win the round. Your bidding tile is part of what people are bidding on in the next round. So you have this really interesting mechanism where the higher you bid, the better you are making the next auction for the people who are going for it.

So there's an element to the game goes until everybody has used all their bidding tiles, or until a certain number of auto generated auctions come out. So the game has these tiles that come out that will fill up the board and force an auction. So there is an element of push your luck in saying like, if you're the last one who could bid, you could say, yeah, I'll take another tile. But if an auction starts, then you have to bid on it and the game's over, the round's over or whatever.

So RA is really, really good. I've only played the twenty fifth Century Games Edition, the newest one, but it's really good. I don't own a copy because it would never get played at my house. My family doesn't generally like auction games, and we have a copy both at toggle and my friend Rob has a copy. Hey Rob. So if I really want to play raw, I can get a game of it played. It doesn't make sense for me to get a copy that's raw.

My third favorite game from this era is from 1996, I think, or 97. The board game Geek entry was wrong. It says twenty seventeen, but that's the edition that I have. If you go and look at the game itself, the page says, I think nineteen ninety seven, this is **Through the Desert**. Through the desert. I recently played with a friend who hadn't played it before and he called it, uh, Camel Go because it is a game of using pieces to block off sections of the board and then scoring based on the sections of the board that you own, You also get points for connecting to these little trees. Um, that's kind of it.

The big thing is you have like six different colors, and each turn you get to take a color and add it to the board next to your little, uh, leader person of the color. This is a very cutthroat game because all you're doing is trying to take area from other people. So you're trying to cut people off, trying to get as much of the side of the board as you can. Because if you make a contained wall around the side of the map, you get all the pieces of stuff that are in there, and overall, it works really well. It is pretty cutthroat, but it's really good. It's easy to explain. It's fun. So that is through the desert. A third Reiner Knizia game. Now, he does have more from this era, but those are the three that I'm going to point to as I think his top games for me from 1996 to 2000.

I do have two more games on my list. One of them is **Torres**. Torres is a spiel des Jahres winner designed by Kramer and Kiessling. It's again classic German games. Torres is a really interesting game in which you're building these little towers and your move. You have these little knights that are moving around on the towers. You get points based on how big the towers are, but you also get these cards that you can use that manipulate where your knights are, and they manipulate the towers in interesting ways. Torres used the system of action points. So there's a menu of things you can do on your turn, and you get a certain number of action points to do stuff. And so using your action points to do stuff makes for a really interesting decision space.

I like Torres a lot. I've only played it a few times. My wife doesn't really like it, but I've held on to my copy because I think it's really interesting. In fact, upon reflection, I think it's the fourth most interesting game from nineteen ninety six to two thousand. That's Torres.

And finally, number five. I'm not sure this really deserves to be as high as I'm putting it, but in terms of amount of times I've played it and amount of fun I've had playing it, **Guillotine** is my number five. This is a Paul Peterson game from nineteen ninety nine. I think it's published by Atlas Games. It might be Wizards of the coast, but I think it's Atlas in Guillotine.

You are a member of the guards at the guillotine in the French Revolution, and your goal is to cut off the heads of the most prestigious people you can. The game is pretty simple. On the table there are twelve nobles in a line and a guillotine at one end, and you have a hand of five action cards that let you do things like rearrange the line, manipulate other players, manipulate the heads other players have collected, and so on. Then at the end of your after you've played one card, then you get to chop off the head and you must chop off the head of the person at the front of the line, and you collect them into your score pile. The characters have different point values on them. A lot of them have special things that happen when you chop them off. There are some bad ones, like if you if you behead the innocent or the hero of the people, if you had any of those, then you get negative points. And all in all, it's a. It's a really fun, light game with a hilarious theme and really amusing art, and I really like it a lot.

I do agree, I read an interview with the designer Paul Peterson. He said the biggest mistake he made, there's a there's a card in the game called Callous Guards. And when you play it, if that card is in play, no one else can play any of the action cards. Uh. I hate that design because the fun part of the game is manipulating the line and playing the action cards. And if somebody plays callous guards, then nobody gets to do that for the

rest of the round until the end of the round. There are three rounds in the game and Paul Peterson reflected on the fun part of the game is using the cards. This card keeps you from doing the fun thing. So it's a bad card. So based on his advice, I took that copy out of my that card, out of my copy of the game, and I encourage other people not to play with it. That is guillotine from 1998, my fifth favorite game from this time period.

So I do have a few other categories to point to with some additional superlatives. First off, I have honorable mentions. Three games that I think are very good. That almost made my top five and on a different day might **Carcassonne** the granddaddy of all, uh, tile laying games. This is from, uh, I think it's Klaus-jürgen Reed and, uh, it is a game where you are building the landscape of medieval France and scoring points through a variety of ways. I really like it. It's deliciously competitive, but passively. So although you do get in each other's ways much more than view and other some other Euro games. Samurai is another Reiner Knizia area control game with really interesting mechanisms. I've only played it once, but I thought it was interesting and I look forward to playing it again at some point.

And **Bonanza** is the Rosenberg card game about raising beans. I like Bonanza a lot. I don't get to play it much because my family ruined it on vacation. They played it a whole bunch of times and then basically said, oh, I don't like Bonanza anymore. And I was driving. We were in a big camper, so the people in the back were around the table. I was up front, and so they all played the heck out of it while I was driving us around Alaska. And by the time we finished with the drive, they didn't want to play Bonanza anymore. I like that game a lot. Next up, I have I you know, I mentioned that Carcassonne was the granddaddy of Thailand games. There are three other grandparent games that I want to call out here.

First, **Lord of the rings**, the Reiner Knizia year two thousand game themed around the movement, the the plot of the Lord of the rings. It's a three board game where you do the fellowship, you do the two towers, you do the, uh, The return of the King, March on Sauron. It's very, very hard, but winnable and really good. This is the sort of the grandparent of cooperative games.

Also in nineteen ninety six, Wizards of the coast released the competitive collectible card game **Netrunner**, which would be rebooted in twenty twelve to be my favorite game of all time Android Netrunner. I played the original Netrunner a few times. It's got a lot of the same delicious sauce that Android Netrunner would have, although the card design is not surprisingly, feels twelve years older or thirteen fourteen years older than the twenty twelve, I guess sixteen years older than the twenty twelve release. I would say the design is better in the newer edition, and of course the game not being collectible is really key as well. So that is Netrunner.

Uh, finally **time's up**. Which is a little hokey to point to. Time's Up as the grandparent of anything, since it is a commercialization of a parlor game called like Popcorn Bowl or celebrity. There's a variety of ways people play it, where you write right guesses on slips of paper and put them into a bowl, and everybody tries to guess them over a series of rounds. Time's up is that game, but in a more commercialized form. More recently, the game monikers is also Time's Up. And so if you're looking to play that game, I would say monikers is your, your top choice. Although I really, really like Time's Up title recall, which is essentially monikers, except it's all titles of songs and movies and musicals and it's all titles. So I like that.

Those are my three grandparent games, meaning they're the granddaddy or grandmother of all the games that followed of that type. Oh, also on that list is **apples to Apples**, uh, the grandparent of the dumb judge game. I mean, it's amusing as a game, but I think it's also a dumb judge game. There's not a lot of creativity to it. Not a lot of not a lot of flexibility. So. I have one game on here as the game I played once and did most poorly at this was Tigris and Euphrates.

I'm really excited to play the new edition of that when it comes out, because I did so badly at it last time that it left a sour taste in my mouth, but I think it was partly because I got a very quick teach from somebody who's a very thorough teacher, but it didn't really lock in for me. And then I was playing with two very experienced other players. And so that was grim. But I would I am looking forward to Tigris and Euphrates. This is an era of excellent head to head games other than lost cities, which I already mentioned, this era brought around corridor in nineteen ninety seven.

Shotten Totten in nineteen ninety nine, which is another game from Reiner Knizia. It was republished in English as Battle Line. I haven't played Battle Line, but I have played Shot and Totten **mystery rummy Jack the Ripper**, which I mentioned just a couple of months ago on the pod. Or even last month, a **Kahuna**, which

is a two player area control game where you're putting out these little, I guess Catan rivers is the best. These little sticks and taking control of islands that way.

And **Hera and Zeus**, which is a really interesting game where you're laying out a grid of cards and trying. It's sort of like Stratego, where a pared down card game. You're trying to make your cards work well against your opponents cards. That might be a kinesia game as well. I think the point here isn't that Reiner Knizia designed a lot of games. There were a lot of other games coming out in this era as well. The point is his games are still around. So the one, the one and true doctor Knizia they say.

I do have three games on my no thanks list. These are games that I just would rather not play. I don't know if they would go so far as being on my not on good list, where I definitely won't play them, but they're close. These are **Metro**, which is a very aggressive tiling game where you are building train lines through a city. And like I said, it's very aggressive. Uh, the **Pokemon trading card game**, I just didn't enjoy that very much and **kill Doctor Lucky**, which is sort of the reverse of clue. It's pretty good, but kind of like **Munchkin**. It ends when everyone runs out of the cards that keep someone from winning, and then that person wins. It's not particularly satisfying. I love the idea of it. The execution, not so much.

And finally, there are several other games that I have played and enjoyed in various ways, from the era of nineteen ninety six to two thousand, starting with the **Princes of Florence**. This was a. This is a Euro game where you're building a sort of manor house. It works. It's really good. I enjoyed it a fair amount, but it falls into that category of like musty, dusty euro that I have a bunch of. And I didn't like it as much as some of those other ones. Like I played Princes of Florence and **Palaces of Carrara** right around the same time, and I've kept palaces of Carrara, and I traded away princes of Florence. Now I know they have a new edition of it, so I don't know if it's better than the edition I had, but, uh, it was one and done for me.

Uh, **for sale** is a auction game I've played once or twice and I liked, but I have not played it again since. It is a game I should play, I always get it confused with no thanks though, which is also an auction game, but a different kind. We have citadels, which is a game I think is pretty interesting, but can suffer from a little bit of a toxic environment at the table. In the game, you're choosing roles and then using those roles and then building buildings and the buildings will give you bonuses. And the person who builds the most buildings to a certain level wins.

Blokus is an excellent little abstract game where you're putting out tiles. This is a game I acquired at goodwill. I actually had to buy it twice because the copy I had was missing pieces. So I bought a second copy, and the second copy had all but two of the pieces that the first copy was missing, but was also missing two of the pieces. The first copy was missing. Fortunately, this is a game where you have these little plastic pieces that are made of hexes or squares. They're kind of in Tetris shapes or polyomino shapes. And so I just took a exacto knife, and with the second copy, I took a couple of pieces and I cut them so that I could use them in the first copy. And then I have one complete copy.

Stephenson's rocket is a really interesting train game from Martin Wallace. This is one of the first hobby games I ever bought. I bought it on my honeymoon in Seattle because I thought it looked cool. Uh, we played it once. My wife didn't really like it. Uh, and it sat on my shelf for a very long time. In fact, it sat on my shelf well into the beginning of my hobby era when I played it again. And I thought it was interesting, but a little more cutthroat than I like. I traded it away or sold it. I don't remember which, and I haven't looked back. This is definitely in the category of game like if someone got it out, say, hey, I got Stephenson's Rocket. Like, yeah, I haven't played that in a while. I'd love to try it again. Um, but I don't need to own it.

Uh, **take five** is the English version of six. Nimmt. I have only played the six Nimmt version, even though the cards I have are the take five cards. There are these secondary things on the cards that are kind of modules or rules you can turn on and off. We have not played with those, but that is what take five is.

I have **Buffy the Vampire Slayer, the game** from two thousand. This is a supposedly Rob Daviau design based on the TV show. It is. They came out between seasons three and four, so a lot of the later characters aren't there, and a lot of the plot points aren't. But essentially it is a roll and move game where you're going around the board doing Buffy related things. It's fun and silly. I almost have like, I mostly own it for the collectibility rather than for the game itself, but it is better than your average TV spin off game from that era.

And finally, the last game from this era I've played is **Quiddler**. This is a word game where you have a deck of cards, or you have a hand of cards, and you make words out of them, and you play rummy style. So you discard a card, or you draw a card and discard a card until you can use all eight letters in a word or a series of words, and then everybody else gets one more turn to lay down their words. And then you compare scores. You get scores for length of word. You get scores for the letters in the word.

And so it's a mix of those two that end up giving you your points for the game. Quiddler is really fun. I think it's a great word game. I've played a lot of other word games since that I think are not as good. I'd rather just play quiddler like paperback and hardback. They're fine, but like the whole deck building mechanism I find less interesting than just trying to make interesting words with your cards. So, um, yeah, so that is quiddler.

Well, that brings me to the end of my discussion of the games from nineteen ninety six to two thousand. I'd love to hear what you think of those games. Head over to BoardGameGeek. Guild 3269. Let me know which of those games I haven't played that I should play. Uh, as well as which games you think I missed that I that I didn't even mention that I want to play, that I should play from that era.

There's a lot of games If you want to reach out to me, you. Other than the Board Game Geek Guild, you could send me a message on BoardGameGeek. Wombat nine two nine is my username there. You could also reach out to me by email Brendan at rattlebox dot com. Finally, if you want to play an online game with me, I am on board game arena and yukata dot de. Both places. I am there as wombat nine two nine. So if you want to play a game with me in either of those places, we can do that by you reaching out to me. Well, that's about it for me today. I want to say thanks for joining me, and I hope your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye.

[Exit music]

Brought to you by Rattlebox games.