

Pick Up & Deliver 866: 5 Things I Like About Trickerion (Message from the Deep) Transcript

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.

[Intro Music]

Greetings, listeners. It's a lovely evening here in suburban Chicago. I'm walking home in the late... well, it's not late. It's like seven thirty, but it's fully dark because it's autumn now. But it's not cold enough yet that I'm chilly. It's perfect. Perfect temperature and a perfect chance to talk to you about a game I enjoy.

I was looking over the history of the pod and thinking about what gaps there are in my coverage of games I like, and conversations, and I looked back at a game I've mentioned many, many times here on the podcast. That is the Richard Amman, David Turczi,... who's the third guy? Oh, Ammand and and oh, no, I can't remember his name. And I didn't look it up. Uh, this is the first game from Mind Clash Games: **Trickerion**.

Now, Trickerion has been around for a while, but. And I've talked about it quite a few times on the podcast. I've done a couple episodes where I talk about Trickerion in the context of something else, but I haven't talked about it on its own. I have not done a message from the deep episode where I do a deep dive into the game and talk about why I like it so much, and the episodes where I have talked about it in more detail. We're a long time ago, so I thought this would be a good opportunity to return to this old favorite and talk about why I like it so much.

I did, over the summer, get a chance to play a game with all of the expansions except for the very newest stuff. So most of the expansions. So I have played the game in the last few months, and this gives me an opportunity to talk about what I like about it so much. So we're doing a Trickerion Message from the deep.

To start a short summary, Trickerion is a worker placement game in which players are sort of Victorian era magicians in a magical land where a guy named Dalgaard is the sort of lead magician of this city, and he is retiring. And so Dalgaard air is going to be named, and you get named by doing the best magic. The game sort of operates in this weird land where magic is sort of real. Dalgaard has these crystals, and when you get them, you can do better magic, but ultimately you are a stage performer. The game feels very much as if it were in the time of The Illusionist or The Prestige. These movies about magic at the turn of the century, from the nineteenth into the twentieth. And that's the theme of the game, broadly speaking, the way you play.

There are a limited number of rounds, and each round you have yourself and several workers who work for you. You plan where you're going to send your workers secretly, and then you use the workers to do things, which include learning new tricks, acquiring the supplies, the components to accomplish those tricks, scheduling yourself to perform in the various theatres where there are shows going on and earning points for doing those performances. The game is very tight, both in terms of very restricted number of actions, but also very restricted in terms of money. You have to pay your workers each round and the penalty is pretty devastating if you can't.

The game has a really interesting acceleration where the better tricks, you know, the more points and resources you're going to have to learn more tricks and then you can do better tricks still. So there's an acceleration element. There are a couple of really interesting expansions that give you machines that, if you turn them on, will give you bonuses. And there is an academy where you can teach up and coming magicians, but then you lose those tricks. And all of this doesn't come with more actions. Like it's still well, actually the Academy does because you have a you have an apprentice then or a is it an apprentice or a, um, mentee? That's not the word. A protege, you have a protege who you're showing the ropes.

So I thought I would talk about **five things I like about Trickerion**. How those compare to other games that I enjoy and go from there.

So the first thing, uh, that I like about it. It is tactical worker placement. There are many worker placement games where on your turn, you take a worker and you put it out onto the board. The classic Uwe Rosenberg

style, uh, where you get to respond to the other workers that have been put out. When it's your turn. Now, you do that sort of in Trickerion, but there is an additional element. So for each of your workers, there is a card slot, and you have a bunch of cards that allow you to send workers to different locations. You only have one card of each location except for the theater. And if you're using the Dark alley expansion, which you should be doing, you also have you also can get more cards that let you go to other places. This is important because as you get more workers, you sometimes want to be able to double up in specific locations and ignore others. And having the extra cards lets you do that.

So in secret, everybody puts cards under the workers that they want to deploy. And then once everyone is done, you reveal them and you can see who is sending which worker to which place. Now each worker has a different level of energy that they bring to the task that they perform. And the time that they arrive at that location also determines how much energy they have. There are bonuses where if you send. If you're the first person to send a work or to a location, you get bonus energy, which means you can do a better task or sometimes you can do the task. Some of the locations require three energy. So if you send somebody who has one energy and you're not putting them on the bonus space, you literally might not be able to do the task without using some resources to boost their energy.

So I call this tactical worker placement. This is a relatively narrow field. There aren't very many games I've played where this is a thing where you have to plan where you're going and then respond, um, in respond in order to the things that the other players have done. The best example of that that I could think of that's sort of similar is dungeon pets. In **Dungeon Petz**, you have a certain number of workers and you group them into up to six groups. And then the groups get deployed based on how big they are. And you can give them money, which increases their size. Quote unquote. And so you could have somebody who puts all their workers in two groups, and then they only get to take two worker actions, but they get to take them first where somebody else might spread their workers over six groups, and they don't get to go until third or fourth player, but then they get to put out a whole bunch of different workers and pick up stuff.

So there's an interesting balance there. The really fun tactical part is when you and another player have sort of very similar loadouts, and then you're trying to guess which space is your opponent going to go to and which space can you get to and in what order do you send them? And that's what happens in Trickerion, because you and I might both designate that somebody's going to go to the market and its turn order that determines who gets to go first. But if we both designate somebody for the market and somebody for the shop, then I have to really guess, like, what are you going to do at the market? What are you going to do at the shop? Can I afford to wait a turn and risk not getting that bonus? Or did I send a weak person there? And so then I have to send I have to go there first so that I can get that bonus. In which case then I miss out on the extra energy I was hoping for in another space. It's a delicious problem and really invigorating. And Dungeon Petz has a similar feeling to it, but Trickerion second to none in that calculation.

Next up. You all know that I like a game with a really tight economy. There's something delightfully restraining about having to think very carefully about how much money you have, and the satisfying experience of planning something so that you spend exactly the amount you have. You aren't wasting any money. Now, in Korean, the money does translate to points at the end, and I don't think it's one for one, but it's pretty close. It's pretty good, the money. But money's really tight. And the bigger deal is if you can't afford to pay your workers at the end of the round, the penalty is significant. So you really need to be able to do that.

Of course, this reminds me of one of my favorite games and one that I've played on the table a few times, but online many, many, many times. And this is **Agricola**. Agricola is really fun because of that brutal consideration at the beginning of how do I feed my people and players who aren't able to get the engine going end up spending way, way more actions than they would like over the course of the game, just gathering food for their families. Whereas if you get lucky or are careful and skilled and you're able to get a engine in place that generates food, then your turns in the later rounds are about improving your farm and getting more stuff, which gets you more efficiency. But there is a really compelling fight for those food tokens, and the penalty for being short on food tokens is dramatic. In a game where a good score is fifty, a very good score is fifty. If you miss one food token, you lose three points and it's pretty uncommon to just miss one. Often you're missing three or four and then you know you've taken a third of your score away or a quarter of your score away.

So Agricola is difficult because of that really tight boundary, and Trickerion feels that way too. Next up, I don't know what to call this design choice, but I'm thinking of calling it cascading resources and mechanisms. So

when you go to, let's say, okay, so you want to perform spells, or tricks. In order to do that, you have to have the trick prepared. In order to prepare the trick, you have to acquire the components that you need to prepare the trick. Then you need to send a worker to your workshop in order to prepare the trick. Then to perform it, you need to send someone to the theater who can then put your trick into different programs that are happening at the different theaters. Then you need to send well, you don't have to, because if you put your trick in a theater that someone else enacts, then your magician appears as like a side actor, a guest act during their show, like an opener or. And now my friend Brendan is coming on to do a trick and you, you come on and do a trick. And so there's an element where you put your tricks on theaters that other people are doing so that you can get benefit, but the other person is getting a little bit more benefit from that than you are. So the real, the real juice is to perform a show where it's all your tricks.

That's pretty hard to do, but in order to perform the tricks, you have to do all those things I mentioned, you have to learn the trick. You have to get all of the components for it. You have to do the prepare action. Then you have to send someone to the theater to put those tricks into the shows, and then you have to send your magician to the theater to perform them. It's. And then as soon as you've done that, all of those prepared trick tokens go away. And now to do it again, you have to prepare it again. You also have a limited amount of space that you can use to hold components. So sometimes you will discard a component. You can no longer prepare that trick. It's a great it's a really intense grind. That can be very frustrating, but it's very satisfying when you pull it off.

Now for me, the place, the games that I've played that feel the most like that are the Vital Lacerda games, particularly something like **on Mars**. When you want to do an action on Mars, you have to have a particular resource. And to get a particular resource, you have to do a particular thing. And there's a sort of cascade of steps you have to do to get to the point where you can do a thing. On top of that, if you have an efficiency builder, sometimes you need to go out of your way to do it twice in order to then be efficient.

We see a similar thing in **Ark Nova**. Like if you have here's a good example in Ark Nova. If you have an advanced or an upgraded animal card, then you get a knowledge and then you get a knowledge and can play two animals. If your animal card is at the top. But in order to do that, you need to have two animal cards. You need to have the enclosures that those animals can go in. You need to have enough money to pay for the animals. You need to meet all of the requirements, like, do you have an arrangement with that continent or do you? Is the enclosure that you've built next to the thing? And if you want to make the most of that animal card, you want to do two in a row, then you have to do that twice. You have to get all that stuff in place. But then when you do it and you trigger those things, it is really satisfying. So a cascading, interdependent actions I find very compelling.

Next up in Trickerion, I talked about this a little already, but a really cool theme integrated very well. While those cascading actions I talked about are complex and sometimes frustrating and definitely challenging. They're usually not hard to remember because the theme is so very well integrated. The totality of the game with the different characters that you can be, and the different spells and all the different things that go into the characters and the tricks being rendered works very, very well. And I super enjoy the mix of things that makes Trickerion work.

As I was thinking about games that do this well, I think the top tier thematic game that does this well is **Obsession**. Obsession is an excellent tile laying game with a relatively straightforward. I mean, it is still pretty complicated, but it's less complicated than a significant number of games. And it has a very compelling theme where you are doing things that advance the state of your home and generating resources and so on. It works, I think works really well. I already mentioned Ark Nova a little bit. Ark Nova feels very thematic for me as well, just because the things that you have to do to play the animals generally make sense to me. They don't feel disconnected. So that is really cool theme integrated throughout the game.

And the last thing I wanted to bring up and to carry on is sort of a return to some of the other things I've said earlier, but I wanted to frame it in particular in the light of the way that I said I like games, which is the just not quite enough feeling. So if you're a long time listener to the podcast, you know that my favorite feeling in playing complex board games is the feeling of not of trying to figure out how to do something when it seems like I have just not quite enough to do it. The idea is like, if you are doing a thing, the interdependent actions really connects strongly to this. So if I feel like what I really want to do is this is to learn this trick, you know, to learn this trick, I do this thing or to perform this trick. I do this thing and getting all the pieces into place and

figuring out how to like figuring out, figuring out that I'm like one thing short, and then coming up with a way to use the various systems the game gives me to eke out that one piece is super satisfying.

My favorite games that do that are the Vladimir Suchy games, which is why he is currently rivaling Martin Wallace as my favorite game designer. Martin Wallace, I think still has the edge because his designs are just a little more different. Like when I have several games that I like of his that are just very different from the other games I have. Whereas Vladimir Suchy's games, I really like them, but they all traffic in the same kinds of experiences, so there's less variety there, even if the themes are wildly different. And frankly, the mechanisms are pretty different too, like the gameplay, what you're doing to get that experience is pretty different. But still, there are a whole bunch of systems that interlock and trying to figure out how to eke out one more resource or Arrange your resources over the course of your limited turns in order to capitalize on the moment is really satisfying.

The experience I talked about with Messina 1347, where I misjudged something and then that cascade collapsed. That's also really interesting. I mean, it's what makes the success really fun when the when the failure is palpable. And I think Krikorian does that as well as any other game I've played. Um, as much as I like anachronism also, and I can't recall if I look at my top fifty from a year and a half ago, whether an acronym or carrion is higher on that list. But as of this very moment, I would probably suggest that Trickerion deserves that higher spot because it is better at fostering the frustrating side of that.

If I just had one more thing, which then leads to a real pleasurable moment of brain burn and success when you figure out how to do that. whereas an acronym is much more loosey goosey. So it's much more likely that you'll be able to do the thing you want. Like a really good example is in Korean, if you get outplayed in the strategic work replacement part, you just can't do some things in an acronym. The worker placement slots. There are two generic ones, which means that even after all of the spots are taken, you could still send your worker to one of the two generic spots and use the action that is no longer available. Now, there's a lot of other stuff going on in an acronym too, but Trickerion just does a slightly better job of really playing in that space of limitation.

And that's what I like about it so much. So those are five things I really like about the Victor Peter and Richard Ammann game. Haha. To carry on from mind games, one that I got to play this summer and I'm looking forward to next time I get to play it.

So what do you think of that game, folks? Have you played it? If not, are you interested in playing it? Are there other games that you think I should try based on what I said I like about this game? Head over to BoardGameGeek Guild 3269 and share your thoughts there. I look forward to hearing from you.

If you want to reach out to me directly. Wombat929 is my username there. You can send me a message. You can also email me, brendan@rattleboxgames.com or send me a message on board Game Arena where I play under the name wombat929. Thanks for joining me on my walk today. I hope your next walk is a pleasant day. Likewise. Bye bye.

[Exit music]

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