

Pick Up & Deliver 868: Night at the Zoo; The Emerald Flame; Elder Sign: Omens of the Pharaoh (expansion)

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]

Well, greetings listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. The sun is out. The temperatures are nice. I'm wearing a t shirt as I walk home. Even though it's almost October, what a beautiful day for a walk. It's been a minute since I talked about new games I was. I've tried. So I thought, it's time for some new games I've tried. That's right. It's a Board Game Espresso Triple Shot. [Espresso noises] Order up! The Board Game Espresso Triple Shot is a mini review segment in which I talk about my first impressions of three games I've tried recently, and one game I dusted off or played an expansion for. Join me, won't you?

So the first game I want to talk about is one I picked up at GenCon and played for the first time in mid August. This was **Night at the Zoo**. It's a 2026 release from Capstone Games, published by Thomas Holey is the designer with art from Theresa Kondova. It plays two to four players. In night at the zoo a bunch of animals have escaped from the zoo and they went out on the town, and now they're trying to get back in the zoo before things open up. You are trying to help them get back.

The way the game is played you pick three different animal types. The game comes with six that you can choose from, and each player gets four of each animal. You have twelve animals that you could escape into the zoo and you set them up around your board. Your board is a grid of, I think, five by five spaces, square spaces of different colors and symbols, and the animals sort of start in. There's three different spots on each side of the board that animals start, and when you start the game, you get a card that tells you where each animal should go.

The primary play of the game is that you're going to draw a tile, or you're going to draft a tile from a market, and you're going to play that tile onto your board and then do the thing that the tile causes. The tiles have two qualities color and symbol. And the color determines one kind of thing, and the symbol determines another kind of thing. I'm not going to explain all the details here, except to say that as you draw tiles and play them, you're moving the animals. And part of the goal is to maximize the progress you make in moving the animals onto the board and getting them to the zoo, which is where you score your points.

This is a puzzle game. It's full of relatively complex interactions that emerge from relatively simple operations. It's cute. It gives you a variety of different ways to score points. Each animal scores in a different way, and you. There's also personal goals that you can get. I will say from a theme perspective, this game is subpar. The animals are cute and some of them move in an interesting way. But as soon as you start playing, the idea of the animals getting to the zoo is completely lost. And this is just an interesting puzzle game.

I'm reminded a little, I'm reminded a little bit of some of the Rosenberg tile placement games, where the theme of what you're doing completely vanishes in the context of trying to coordinate the way that you're playing the different pieces. The same thing is happening here as you're trying to coordinate how you're playing the different pieces, you are trying to maximize your points, and the animal and zoo theme largely vanishes, which is kind of a bummer because I really like the theme. I think it's cute and the art is cute. But yeah, this is an abstract with a tiny theme pasted on. It's maybe enough. Seem wise, but barely.

The most interesting piece of the game comes from the fact that the three different. That the six different animals all move and score in different ways. So the complexity of the game comes from the emergent properties of the three different animals together. You have to sort of decide which animals you want to lean into scoring, and then try to maximize your points on those. There are also some bonuses for a set collection element. Some of the tiles have little fruits and vegetables, little food icons on them. And if you do well in picking one of those food icons, that also helps you earn points. It works pretty well.

I think it's entertaining and fun. I'm definitely going to keep it in my collection for a while. But thematically it's a bit of a disappointment. I love the art style. It's got this sort of dark color scheme that works pretty well, and it's

pretty easy to understand, although some of the people I've taught it to really had a hard time getting it to click in their brain, but ultimately it's not. It's definitely light to medium weight puzzle game that is right at the zoo from designer Thomas Holick and Capstone Games.

Next up we have **the Emerald Flame**. The Emerald Flame is a game from designer Rita Orlov from the publisher Post Curious, who publish elite puzzle games. This is an escape room style game in which you play three sessions of probably ninety minutes to two hours each, maybe a little longer. The puzzles are complex, but doable. They are interesting. They have fun, strange mechanisms and the game comes with really nice components.

If you were to buy the Emerald Flame, it comes with one refill kit, which allows you to reset the game to be playable a second time pretty easily. And you can throw away a bunch of the components if you play a little carefully like we did, where whenever we're going to write on something, we photocopied it first and wrote on the copy. You actually could reset it a number of times. There are a couple components that are a little challenging. If you are somebody who's interested in this, I'm happy to share with you the way we got around to buying the official refill kit for the second refill. I don't want to share too much about it, except that it is a campaign style puzzle game with three sessions in each session. There are like four to five really interesting, complicated puzzles.

This is definitely a game where you could spend a half an hour kind of monkeying around with it, and then you see something and you solve one of the steps. But they also have a robust hint system that's divided into many, many steps. So you can always go and look at the hint and see, okay, yeah, we got this step already. What's the next step? Okay, we got that. Oh, here's the thing we were missing. We did use hints a couple times. I don't think we did any of the sessions with zero hints, although my daughter and her boyfriend said they did. So I guess if you're smarter than I am, which they are, that would.

I don't have a lot else to say about this because I don't want to spoil it except to say this. This is a top tier mystery game experience. You know, unlike as much as I really like the unlock games and the exit games, they are pretty samey. They have different puzzles that are interesting and varied. But when I sit down to play an unlocked game, it's going to be the same kind of thing each time. That is also true of the Emerald Flame, but this is just another a slightly higher tier quality in both the puzzle creation and the components. So that is the Emerald Flame. Uh, three session one play mystery game that I highly recommend from Post Curious is the publisher.

Next up, we have a game I dusted off. Actually, I always do a game I dusted off, or an expansion I tried and this is an expansion I tried. This is **Elder Sign: Omens of the Pharaoh**. This is an expansion I've had for quite a while. I picked it up on sale at a board game store, and mostly because I had most of the other ones, I was like, oh, I should get this. I'm, you know, continue the collection because Elder Sign is one of those games that I only play a couple times a year, if that, but I, I think it is a genuinely fun, if difficult game. You really, it is very dice dependent. So if you just have some bad rolls, well, too bad for you. But ultimately it is really fun and I love. With each expansion the game gets a little more interesting.

They stopped making it a while ago though, so it is not in print anymore. So the expansions are not purchasable anymore. So the ones I have are the ones I have. I think finding any of them used at this point is pretty difficult. That so. That said, I feel dumb. I did certainly have an opportunity at various times to buy **omens of the deep**, which is the ocean themed one, which is the one expansion I do not have. And I did not buy it. And I wish now that I had because it is the only one I'm missing. I have all the other expansions and I would like to have that one too. Oh well.

So this is omens of the Pharaoh. It is an Egyptian themed expansion to elder sign. The way it works is that all of the locations and the, um, mythos deck are themed around doing investigations in Egypt. They introduce a new mechanism where there are two different location decks. There is the Giza deck, and then like the Cheops or one of the other cities where Egyptian artifacts are. And you can spend an action to move from one city to the other. That's the only way that you get cards from the other city into the game.

The way the game is divided up, a lot of the locations that are in Giza or Cairo, maybe it's Cairo, have items and spellbooks and other clues so that as you complete these locations, you're building up your stockpile of stuff that helps you win the game. But almost none of them have elder signs as rewards, which means you aren't making progress toward winning, which is you have to score elder signs. Inevitably, whatever enemy

you're facing, you have to score elder signs. The other location, let's say it's Cheops. I'm pretty sure it's not. But for the sake of conversation's sake in that location, they do have a bunch of elder signs as the prizes, but you don't get any. Hardly anything else or the rewards are not nearly so useful in terms of building up your supplies. So there's an element of going back and forth, but you have to use a turn to go back and forth. So it is hard.

Overall, we found this pretty fun. We inadvertently played with, I think, the hardest monster or the hardest elder god. So we did not do well. I don't even think we got halfway to defeating it before it woke up, and then it quickly killed us all. So, um, which is usually what happens. I can't, I can't remember how many times I've won against the elder God. Once it wakes up, it's very, very, very few because it's meant to be very hard. Nonetheless, it was a delight to get a few more investigators, a few more elder gods, and another location in which to play. So that was a design from Dane Beltrami for fantasy flight games. Elder sign omens of the Pharaoh expansion.

Well, the last game I want to talk about today is one of those ones that's sort of the latest hotness. This is, I believe it's pronounced **dnup**. It's a curvy font written d n u p. And it's written in a way that if you. It's an Ambigram if you were to rotate the entire four letter thing one hundred and eighty degrees, it would still say done up. This is a card game, I believe, from the designer of **Scout**, K Kajino, uh, published by Asmodee.

And this is a, uh, ladder climbing game where you are trying to get rid of your cards. But the gimmick is the cards are double sided, as in Scout, and you're not allowed to flip the individual cards. You have to flip them all together. And so on your turn. Instead of playing, you can rotate your hand. And when you do that, you're obviously slowing yourself down. The goal is to get rid of the cards in your hand, but sometimes that's necessary. I honestly don't remember the nuances of the ladder climbing part. It is a sort of pair matching, very similar to Scout or other games of that ilk, where you are matching or defeating different combinations of cards that have been put on the table, with the goal of getting rid of all your cards first.

It's a pretty straightforward game. The gimmick is rotating those cards, and it's easy to teach. I thought it was fun. I am not super driven to get it. I find that as much as I do enjoy trick taking games, I really only have a chance to play them when other people who play trick taking games bring them out that I don't have anywhere in my life, really. A group of people who play trick taking games where it would make sense for me to get those cards out that other people that I will look at toggle gaming. There are a few people I will play trick taking games with, but they have the trick taking games, so there's not much need for me to go buy them.

I do have **the crew** if I feel like it, and I've tried it with my family and it didn't go over well, they're like trick taking, that's fine. So it probably won't be super common for me to buy trick taking games myself, but I'm happy to play them. I do like that mechanism a lot and I think it's fun. And even the ladder climbing trick taking are not the same. They are related and I think dnup fits that category very well.

Well, we're just about at the end of September, so I'd love to hear how your month has gone. Do you feel like you're making your way toward a finishing off an excellent gaming month, or are you regretting your decisions and ruing the day that you didn't play that game you should have played? You can tell me that. And anything else you want to share over on BoardGameGeek in Guild 3269. You could send me a message on board game geek wombat929 is my username there. I'd also happily get an email from you, Brendan at rattlebox games dot com is my email address. And I'd even enjoy having a message from you on board game arena or yukata dot de. In both places, my username is wombat929, and I would enjoy playing a game with you, so I hope I hear from you soon.

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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