

Pick Up & Deliver 872:

Action Selection (Mechanism Survey)

Transcript

Welcome to Pick Up and Deliver, the podcast where I pick up my audio recorder as I step off the train—finally!--and deliver an episode to you while I walk home. I'm Brendan Riley.

[intro music]

Well, greetings listeners. I have had a unpleasant amount of time on the train. I got done with my office hours and I caught the three hundred and five to come home. Normally that's a twenty minute twenty two twenty five minute train ride. I get off the train about three twenty five and I'm home about three forty five. Today. After the train started going for about ten minutes, we stopped. They announced, there's trouble ahead. We don't know when we'll start again. And we sat there for about an hour. I just got off the train. It is now four twenty five, so I spent an hour, an extra hour on the train. That was not my favorite.

But you know, it is my favorite talking board games. Talking board games with you, dear listener. I'm really happy to be off the train and ready to chat with you about board games. So I had plenty of time to think about board games, and I was contemplating a new game that I don't. I haven't played enough because it's digital, so I don't have as solid a hang on it. But a new game I played is **Electrify**. This is a John D Clair game. It's available on board game arena. And I believe that they just did a crowdfunding campaign for it.

Gabriel, regular listener, invited me to try it out and I'm really glad he did. It is a really interesting light engine building game that uses the **civilization. A new dawn**, I believe, is the game that innovated it. Action selection mechanism where you have a group of action cards and when you use one, It goes down to the bottom and pushes all the other ones up, and the sort of distance up that the card is determines its value. We also see this, of course, in **Ark Nova**, one of the highest rated games on board game geek at this time. I think it's maybe third place having passed Gloomhaven outrageously. I still think the the Gloomhaven fall from the number one slot is a travesty, and directly caused by the fact that board game geek lists Gloomhaven, jaws of the lion, Gloomhaven, and Frosthaven as different games. I think it's more reasonable to call them expansions, but whatever. Whatever. Who cares? Nobody. It's good to have the top game change occasionally.

So I was playing electrify online, which you should do too. You can go over to Board Game Arena and join the pickup and delivery guild there. Send me a message. Wombat929 is my username and we'll get you into a game. And I was thinking about games that use action selection, and I searched on the Pick Up and deliver website on Rattlebox games dot com. And I couldn't find anything where I talked about action selection directly as a mechanism. So I thought I'd talk about it a little.

Today I picked out five games that I think have interesting *action selection elements*, and I want to talk about how they work and what you do with them. I will take this moment to recall that the knitting game **Arch Rivals**, which is created by XYZ Game Labs, uses an action selection mechanism. The way our game works is that you have four actions you can do on any given turn, and on your turn, you're going to pick one of them and put your action selector on that space on your player board. And then the next turn, you have to take a different action. One of the other three, you can't repeat the action you've taken previously. It's not tremendously complex, but it's a beginner friendly game, so it's not meant to be. But I just wanted to highlight that.

So five action selection games that I think are interesting and engage with action selection in different ways, which maybe makes them, I don't know, worth talking about as we think about how this mechanism works. First up, I already mentioned Ark Nova. So let's talk about Ark Nova. In Ark

Nova, you have five action cards, and these action cards are double sided. They have a weak side and a strong side or a regular side and an upgraded side depending on how you want to articulate it. And on your turn, you're going to choose one of those actions to do. When you choose that action and do it, it activates at a level of power equal to a number. So the cards are arranged in order from left to right, low to high, and in the spot above them on your player board. There's a little number from one to five. When you activate a card, it activates at the power level equal to the number above the card. So the higher the number is, the more points or more power that number has.

So that's one piece of that's one piece of that. You also have the ability to upgrade those cards. And there's a clever bit of choice involved in that. You only can ever upgrade four of them. There's only four ways to upgrade a card. And there's one spot where you have to choose between upgrading card or maybe getting a second association worker earlier. And those are very powerful, especially early in the game. So you may sometimes choose an association worker and only upgrade three of your cards, which can be great. Or sometimes it could be a bummer.

But the gimmick of the thing though, idea is when you use the card after you're done, it slides down to the bottom and pushes all the other cards up. So anytime you want to do an action twice in a row, the second time you're going to do it, it's going to be very weak. This is an excellent set of things to think about. It really challenges you to think ahead, a few turns to consider what order it makes most sense to do actions in. How to best use your actions so that you get the most out of them. It really challenges you to be efficient. There's a reason people really like it now, I haven't played Civilization A New Dawn, which is the game that I heard about when Arc Nova came out. People are like, oh, this action selection mechanism, it's from civilization A new Dawn. So as far as I know, people weren't. This isn't a mechanism that we've seen a bunch of other places, but choosing a card as your first action, as the one of the types of action selection.

Next up, we have the choose and follow mechanism. The game I know this best from his **race for the galaxy**, although I. I think that San Juan used it earlier. Uh, and **Puerto Rico** also has that, uh, in Puerto Rico you choose a role from a market and when you use it, the other people around the table can also do that action. But they, you do it a little more powerfully than they do. Race for the Galaxy takes that idea and amplifies it a little bit. Each player has all five action choices, and simultaneously, you all secretly choose one of the five actions you're going to do, and you play it, and you get to do the more powerful version of that action. But everybody gets to do that action. Now the actions activate in order. So the real sweet sauce of race for the galaxy is picking the action that you want to do when you think other people don't want to do it. And ideally doing that at the same time that somebody else chooses, chooses an action that you wanted to do anyway. It's a clever mechanism that works really well.

It also happens in roll for the Galaxy has a similar mechanism. It's a little different because of the way the dice work, but ultimately, both these games involve this sort of anticipation of what other people are doing. Now, this mechanism is also used in terraforming Mars, the dice game, which I've only played the once. But basically I remember thinking like, oh, I don't know how often I'm going to want to play Terraforming Mars the dice game, because either I want to play terraforming Mars, or I can play race for the Galaxy. I don't really ever need to play both. But like I said, the neat thing about the race for the Galaxy action selection element is the yomi, the trying to choose the action that best suits you while being aware of what other players might be choosing, because you might choose an action that's slightly less good for you. If you have a strong anticipation that an opponent is going to choose the one you want, because then you get to do two things. So some variety there works pretty well. But like the cooperative game, just one. Sometimes you both choose the off thing, thinking the other person's going to choose the one that you want and neither of you get it. That's delightful as well. That's race for the galaxy.

I mentioned Puerto Rico having roll selection on choose and follow mechanism. This is used best in glory to Rome, I think in **Glory to Rome**. You have cards that are multi-use cards. You can use them for a variety of different things. One of the things you can use them for is to take one of the actions. When it's your turn on your turn, you pick one of the types of actions and declare that's what you want to do. And then all the other players, if they have a card of the same type, can play that card to follow the action that you have done. So again, like race for the Galaxy and Glory to Rome, a big part of the game is anticipating what roles your opponents are going to call out and being ready to take advantage of them when you can. It works really well.

In a related model, but slightly different is Alexander Pfister's **Broom service**. Now, broom service is apparently a re-implementation of an earlier game called Witches Brew, which has a very similar mechanism. But Broom service is the only one I've played. I've heard a couple cranky old grognards, including Chris Hanjy. Hi Chris, who have suggested that the original witches brew is the better version. That broom service is the lesser game. I like broom service a lot and I'm happy to play it. So I guess at some point I'll get to try Witches Brew and I can see which is better. Which is better? Haha. Anyway, the way these games work again, like race for the Galaxy, you have a bunch of roll cards that you can pick. Like for the race for the Galaxy, you're going to choose the roll cards you're going to use.

But broom service has a couple of differences. One, you have a bunch of roll cards you're going to pick. And in race for the Galaxy, you're going to pick a few of them like four or in room service, you're going to pick four or five of the nine that you're going to play that round. Maybe it's three, I don't remember exactly. You're going to pick up a small tranche of them that you're going to play. And then in turn, order players are going to declare which action they want to do. And here's the clever gimmick of this game. When you declare the action, you can declare that you're a cowardly witch or you're a brave witch. And the actions, there's like three different colors and there's a bunch of stuff. It involves gathering potions, delivering potions, a number of different things that you do to manipulate the points, the the gimmick.

The real heart of the game is these brave witch, cowardly witch business. So when you play the role that you want to play, let's say you were sitting at a table with four or five people around it. On my turn, I'm going to declare the role I want to play. I'm going to play a prairie witch, which is the sort of yellow witch card. And then I can say, do I want to be a cowardly witch or do I want to be a brave witch? If I want to be a cowardly witch? I take the lesser effect of the card immediately. If I want a brave witch. I'm going for the more aggressive result of the card. But I have to wait. So once I say cowardly or brave, then if I say cowardly, I take the result of the card right away. If I say brave, we wait and play moves to the person to my left, and they. All they do is look at their hand and say, do they have a prairie witch card in the small group of cards they pick to play this round? If the answer is no, they just pass. If the answer is yes, they have to play it. And here's the trick. If I picked brave and someone else around the table has that card, I don't get to do anything.

So if you're the first one playing it, you don't usually want to pick brave unless you're absolutely certain nobody else has that card, which you can almost never be certain of. I guess it is possible to be certain of that if you're the last one to play the card, but it's relatively rare. So you pick brave or cowardly. It goes around the table and each additional person who plays it gets to do the action. If they pick cowardly or if they pick brave, then anyone before them who picked brave can't do it until we get all the way around the table. Once we've gone all the way around the table. Once the last person to the person who did. The brave action gets to take control and lead the next card. If no one did the brave action, then the person who played the cowardly action takes control and does the next card. It's a really interesting mechanism, full of trying to anticipate what other people are doing, full of playing the table. It's fascinating, is unlike any other game that I've played, and the gimmick of trying to figure out what everybody else is doing works wonderfully. I really like room service. I don't

play it that often, maybe once a year. I don't think I keep it from getting dusty. I suspect most of the time I play it, it's gotten dusty, but I think it's really good. I love that mechanism. Every time I play it, I'm like, whoa, this is a lot of fun. So that's Broom service.

My third action selection option. All right. We've got two more that I want to talk about here. The first one is action. Action selection via hand management. This. I point to this as the Mac Gerts game. This is both **transatlantic** in its original form, and **Concordia** both use this idea. You have a hand of cards. Those cards that are in your hand do actions. On your turn, you're going to play one of those actions. At some point, that hand of cards is going to run out. And except you have one card that you can play that lets you pick up all the other cards as your action. So you're cycling your hand, you're managing it as you choose the different actions you can take. Some of the actions allow you to benefit from other people's actions. So a big part of it is anticipating what other players are going to do, and kind of playing yours in a way that maximizes your benefit and minimizes the negatives.

Some might call this hand management, but the action selection piece, the choosing. What you're going to do to play your cards is really compelling, I think, and worth considering in this context. It is not entirely dissimilar from the other examples we've used here, but the gimmick of being able to buy more cards so that you can spread out your plan longer is a really positive one, and I think makes these games very special. So that is the Concordia slash transatlantic option.

And finally, I will point to Vladimir Suchy, particularly Praga Caput Regni, which has an action selection mechanism that's based around this wheel or Pulsar 2849 which has a action selection mechanism based on this sort of dice, your dice drafting and the place you draft the dice from gets you actions. The action selection wheel in Praga in particular, feels like it fits this idea that you have a bunch of different choices you have available to you. When you take one, you move the tile to the end of the road. And much like Ark Nova, that that task is now less available for other people. Well, those are some action selection games that I have played and alternate versions of ways to manage how players are doing things.

I'd love to hear what your thoughts on these games is. Head over to BoardGameGeek Guild3269 and share your thoughts there. Well, that's about it for me today. I want to say thanks for taking a walk with me, and I hope your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye.

[exit music]

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