

Unnamed Pickup and Deliver

a game by Chevee Dodd

Intro:

I've not designed many board games. In fact, I've only really designed one that was ever finished that used an actual board. I have a few that use score sheets and one unfinished design... but I want to change all that. I decided to tackle one of my favorite mechanics (and arguably, one of the most difficult to design): pickup and deliver. This type of game is typically played on a board with areas that buy and sell goods. The goal is to pickup goods from a spot that sells and then transfer that good to another spot that buys... while trying to make the most profit obviously.

There are some versions of these games that are really a hybrid... mostly, these are the various Martin Wallace railways games that are more of a route building mechanic that includes delivery. I want to stay away from route building and dig into the core of *pickup* and *deliver*. One of my favorite games of this type is Hansa. It is an exceptionally elegant game with very few rules but intense game play that is entirely pickup and deliver. The game has restrictions built in through the use of planned paths between ports. You can only move one way around the board and due to this restriction, you must plan your deliveries accordingly to maximize profits. That's a great way of limiting players from exploiting direct links that are highly profitable... which is a necessary part of this type of game.

So, I want to un-restrict the players from moving in a predetermined fashion, but still prevent them from exploiting profitable links... enter my attempt at this genre.

Components:

I would like to restrict the game to the following components if at all possible.

- 1 Board
- 1 Deck of Town Buy cards (what the town is buying)
- 1 Deck of Town Sale cards (what they are selling)
- Goods (4 or 5 types)
- Player pawns
- Player boards that show their current goods

Theme:

The current theme is Europe during the middle ages... maybe even set around Sherwood. Players are merchants transporting their wares between cities and towns. The cities will allow them to purchase goods (and sell) while the towns will only purchase goods from the players. There will be one city per good so that there is only one spot on the board to buy each type.

Game Play:

My method to avoid exploitation is going to be variable purchases. Using the buy deck, each town/city will be dealt one face down card. The backs of the cards will show the type of good being purchased, but not the price that the town is willing to pay... thus, at the start of the game, no player will know the price the goods fetch at any given location. Once a player delivers goods of the proper type to a town, the card will be flipped and the player will have the option to sell their goods there. It is never required that the player sell, but this sale is a one-time deal. After the player chooses to sell (or not), the card is discarded and replaced with a new face-down card. The player that is currently selling will place this card and may look at the value on the front (because he talked to the townsfolk, he knows what they will be buying next and for how much.)

When a player moves their cart(s) they must pay taxes at each stop along the way by discarding one goods token. Because of diminishing returns, the players will most likely chose to take the shortest path possible.

The players will be moving about the board buying and selling goods for a fixed amount of time (which has yet to be determined.) At the conclusion of the game, the player with the most money will be the victor.

What's to do?

Well, everything. I have placed an order with The Game Crafter for a few micro decks of cards to help me visualize the buy deck. This will help me work on the board/map because I work better with physical components.

The structure for players buying new goods is currently up in the air. My current thought is that there is a sale deck which is nothing more than a numbers deck. Each town flips a card and gets that many goods of their own type. I've also considered making this deck determine the TYPE of good also, so that the places that players can buy goods is not static... I'm not sure if that would add too much randomness or not... I'll have to play with it. This could also be a simple die roll with a custom d6 or something. I'd like for there to always be about 4 goods available... so I could just sticker a d6 with 4, 4, 5, 5, 6, 6 or something.

I want the players carts to have a limited capacity. I'm starting at 10, but this may need adjusted later. My current thoughts are that a player MUST buy ALL of a good when purchasing. If their cart does not have the requisite space, they cannot buy that good until they have sold some of their wares... again, I need to play with all this. I'm also considering whether I want the players to have multiple carts or not... again... this has to be decided in testing. I like the idea, however, because as a player sells, they get to see the buy price of the next good and may move their other cart in to sell... it helps the players build a more profitable turn by doing things in order.