**Podcast #92: Matt’s Crap Trams**

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## Intro [00:00:00]

[funky intro]

**Quinns**: Hallo everybody, and welcome to the 92nd Shut Up & Sit Down podcast! My name’s Quintin Smith, and I’m here to be your sherpa up a mountain of board games.

**Matt**: Sherbet?! I love it!

**Quinns**: And I am joined by my -- as always -- irreverent and hit-and-miss colleague. It’s Matthew Lees.

**Matt** [laughing]: It’s the Reverend of Irreverence: Me.

**Quinns**: It’s a British spring day outside, which is to say, it’s dark, it’s wet. But Matt and I are indoors, we’re in a well-lit room, we’ve got a little cup of roo-bi-bose tea.

**Matt**: Recording in my little home studio slash spare bedroom, in which some of the sound foam to make the podcast sound nice have fell on you and woke you up in the night.

**Quinns**: It’s true. It was hilarious. The thing is, when we talk about your baffling foam falling on me on the night, people need to understand, this isn’t a small bit of foam. This is something the size of a six-year-old.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: That fell bodily on me in the middle of the night, leading me to think that I was under attack.

**Matt**: Yeah. I mean, this room is *so* echoey that even with all of these huge chunks of foam, it’s still quite echoey. It did remind me, it’s not as bad- When I was younger, I attached a number of picture frames to my wall via a kind of network, a webbed network, of duct tape.

**Quinns** [laughing]: Okay?

**Matt**: I kind of realized, “Hey, this duct tape is so strong I can stick pictures to the wall.” But then, because it was all webbed together, it meant that-

**Quinns** [horrified]: Oh no!

**Matt**: -inevitably, one night, while I was asleep, all of these pictures fell down in one big chunk...

**Quinns**: As you can tell from this-

**Matt**: ...on top of me.

**Quinns**: -Matt and I struggle with life, and that’s why we find solace in board games.

**Matt**: It was one of the stupidest things I’ve ever done. Anyway, let’s carry on.

**Quinns**: Well, we’ll talk about your Tramways experience later.

**Matt**: Oh gosh. [laughing]

**Quinns**: In this podcast, we’re gonna be talking about New Frontiers, the Race for the Galaxy board game. It’s big, it’s expensive, I’ve got mixed feelings about it. We’re gonna be talking about some expansions for Kemet?

**Matt**: Yeah, and Altiplano.

**Quinns**: And for Altiplano. And we’re gonna be talking about El Dorado, a game of Dorados, and…

**Matt**: The Els…

**Quinns and Matt together**: ...who love them?

**Quinns**: And we’re gonna be talking about Tramways. If you haven’t heard of any of these board games, that’s fine. Matt and I are gonna tell you what’s up.

**Matt** [singing to the tune of Flash by Queen, or possibly Dayman from It’s Always Sunny In Philadelphia]: Tramways! Aaahhhh!

**Quinns**: But also, excitedly, Matt has to get his blood tested!

**Matt**: Yeah!

**Quinns**: For board game.

**Matt**: They’ve got to check there aren’t any components in my blood, because I’ve been eating so many of them over the years that they’re worried it might have bled in.

**Quinns**: We do feed Matt all the bad games.

**Matt**: Mmmm.

**Quinns**: That’s some Shut Up & Sit Down trivia for you.

## New Frontiers [00:02:35]

**Quinns**: We’re gonna rush through these, and I’m gonna start by perhaps doing it a disservice and rushing through a box that is maybe the biggest box we’ve looked at this year.

**Matt**: Right.

**Quinns**: It’s New Frontiers, the Race for the Galaxy board game.

**Matt**: Right!

**Quinns**: Now, we have stuff we’re excited about on this podcast, so I won’t be talking about it for very long, but what happened here is: Once upon a time, there was -- and still is -- a beloved, curious card game called Race for the Galaxy, one of the rare masterpieces of board game design. This game is really just a deck, and a bunch of chits. Every card in the deck is a different corner of the galaxy, so maybe a card might represent some galactic trendsetters, who are having a cool futuristic laserdisco. It might be a planet of lizards. It might be a space marine encampment. Whatever. The important thing is that every card is unique and players will play these cards from their hand into what’s called their tableau, so maybe you own the space marines, but I’ve got the rebel stronghold in my little corner of the galaxy. But the twist in Race for the Galaxy was always, you paid for these cards by playing other cards from your hand. So you had to choose what you wanted, but then throw options away. There’s a lot going on in that board game, but that’s the basics. Now since then, people have made other games within the Race for the Galaxy universe, which is definitely not… We get really confusing if I use that naming convention.

**Matt**: It’s not even exactly… They’re often almost the same idea for the game, but with a different mechanic, or different conceit, so it’s almost like remaking a comic as a film.

**Quinns**: It’s some of the same DNA, but a different game. So a few years ago, we had something called Roll for the Galaxy, which I quite liked. When it eventually came out, after being dogged by production difficulties for a while, we were really impressed. It’s a lovely dice game where you can acquire new dice, you roll your dice in a big plastic cup, the dice are beautiful, and it turns Race for the Galaxy, which is this very high-skill-level card game, into something a bit peppier, a bit zanier, a bit dicier. I felt like that game definitely- There’s reasons for it to exist. You might be able to see where I’m going with this.

**Matt**: Yeah. Yeah.

**Quinns**: Because if you want a dice game, Roll for the Galaxy is a lovely game in its own right. If you want a tactical card game, Race for the Galaxy is phenomenal. Now, we have New Frontiers, the Race for the Balaxy board game, which comes in an enormous ninety pounds dollar box.

[Matt laughing]

**Quinns**: What’s happening?

**Matt**: The first bit, I was like, “That’s fine.” But you said, “Race for the Balaxy” [Quinns laughing] and “An enormous ninety pounds dollar box.” I was like, “Have you turned into Steve Brule?” [Quinns laughing] Because I hope so! Because I love Steve Brule.

**Quinns**: I meant pounds- It costs ninety dollars in America, ninety pounds! I was abbreviating!

**Matt**: Ninety pound dollar box.

**Quinns**: Ninety pound dollar box!

**Matt**: After all of our joking around and pretending to do Tim & Eric sketches, we are turning into a Tim & Eric sketch. Which is great!

**Quinns**: I for one am looking forward to becoming senile [Matt laughing], and the Shut Up & Sit Down thousandth podcast being one long run-on sentence from me.

**Matt**: That you say to yourself looking out of a window.

**Quinns** [laughing]: The mic isn’t on.

**Matt** [laughing]: No microphones.

**Quinns**: Yup, okay! Oh goodness. New Frontiers offers the Race for the Galaxy experience of playing planets and developments, and putting them in front of you, and every planet and development makes you better at certain things, like you’ve got a trading planet that makes you better at trading, all this stuff. However, where in Race for the Galaxy planets were cards, now they’re enormous circular discs. Where in Race for the Galaxy developments were cards, now they’re large rectangular tokens. In Race for the Galaxy where trade goods were cards, now they’re enormous plastic trade goods. So everything that Race for the Galaxy, by sleight of hand, turned into cards, and meant the entire game was just cards- Which also -- and this is really important -- meant the game was *cheap*. Now it’s all been replaced by an enormous physical component.

**Matt**: This is more like Race for the Universe, right?

**Quinns**: Ehh, it’s kind of like…

**Matt**: Because universes are bigger than…

**Quinns**: I might call it… *Walk* for the Galaxy?

**Matt**: [pained noise over that burn]

**Quinns**: I don’t know! Look, if this was the first game in the series, I’d be like, “Wow.” And actually, this is a weird one, because we’re not gonna review it, we’re not gonna cover it, because the only coverage I would give it is like, “Buy Race for the Galaxy! It’s cheaper AND I think it’s better.” Which is just a death knell for this box.

**Matt**: Yeah, I guess it’s like that thing of like whenever, for example, Interpol, a musical band, releases a new album, it just reminds me how good the first album is.

**Quinns**: Yes.

**Matt**: And it’s not to say that the new albums are bad, it’s just, the first one was amazing.

**Quinns**: Well this is why I feel bad! Because New Frontiers, the Race for the Galaxy board game… If I played this first, the top of my head would be taken off! It’s lovely! It’s got so much color. Every token and card in the game has art. What an experience!

**Matt**: But the bigness doesn’t add anything.

**Quinns**: No. And the fact that it comes *after* the card game… It’s almost like we’re going through time backwards. What would have made way more sense is if this board game had been first, and then the designer had gone, “You know what? I could collapse all of this into a card game!”

**Matt**: Could make it more elegant.

**Quinns**: But instead they’ve taken a card game and made it sprawling and wobbly.

**Matt**: Here’s a question, though. Is it that this game, which is sprawling and massive and bigger… Is it effectively the same game? Is it something that fans of Race for the Galaxy who really want a big box expensive thing can have a little treat with it?

**Quinns**: Uhhhhhhhh OOOOoooo!

**Matt**: Or is it that the game itself is different, and maybe just not as good?

**Quinns**: It’s a little from column A, and a little from column B. It’s a great question though. I would say that it’s similar enough that if I was teaching it to people who’d played Race for the Galaxy the card game, I would be able to teach it by going, “Okay, here’s how this game is different.”

**Matt**: Okay.

**Quinns**: And I could probably cut the rules explanation in half. So it shares that much DNA. But in terms of it being a deluxe experience? [sucks teeth] It’s interesting, and if you… Well here’s the other thing. If you like Race for the Galaxy, and you want something that’s different, well, my first answer is obviously, definitely buy Roll for the Galaxy, the big colorful clattery dice game! I can’t imagine a human being who loves Race for the Galaxy, and then wants something a bit special, so they bought Roll for the Galaxy, and is buying the expansions for Roll for the Galaxy, but what they really want Matthew? Is another, more expensive version of the same game that’s even less fun.

**Matt**: You know, an interesting thing is that often we find that when you do start chucking gigantic components into games, it has an effect, and the effect is one which is often one that might be unexpected. Like in Container, for example, these massive resin ships, I found the joy of chugging them around actually added something to the game. And there’s no way they intended that, is the thing. They might pretend they did, but you can’t *know* until you fiddle with it, in a way. And in the same way, Rising Sun! They probably didn’t realize the fact that these miniatures were so bloody big meant the fact that when you bought it, you’re like, “Is this all it does? This massive thing I’ve just bought?” So the effects of aesthetics of components, of when you hold them, when you pick them up, and how they feel to move around… If you’re playtesting with standard materials, you can know that. You can know how it feels to play this size of card, or this print quality of card to a table.

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: But when you’re making these custom big things, unless you’re gonna do a specific final early print run to playtest, you kinda don’t know what you’re gonna get! And you might end up having gigantic big expensive components that -- best case scenario -- don’t really add anything to the game, or -- worst case scenario -- somehow make it worse!

**Quinns**: Yeah! I’m gonna follow your thread there. I think I’m gonna end talking about this by just picking one example from the game, which is an “improvement” that would sound great on paper, but in practice, is just funny. So, in Race for the Galaxy, all of the planets you might colonize are cards, right? In New Frontiers, you now have an *enormous* bag, where every single planet is its own unique, quite large, circular token. So when players explore planets, you reach into the bag -- *rummage rummage rummage* -- and pull out a bunch of planets, and then pick which planet you want to go to. That *sounds* more tactile, more interesting, more luxurious than just thumbing through some cards.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: In *practice*, when you actually play New Frontiers, drafting and passing around these planets- Passing six large tokens around the table: That’s awkward. And also, funny thing, while having tokens instead of cards sounds good, the art assets that they’ve taken from the cards and now put on the tokens, because a token doesn’t have as large a surface area as a card, the art is actually shrunk. So while you’ve got a more luxurious components, the art, where all the theme is coming from, is now a little smaller? And a little less detailed? So all kinds of tricky stuff like that. If you’re for some reason super interested in New Frontiers, the Race for the Galaxy board game, then by all means google it, decide for yourself whether you want to experiment. To everyone else: I think you can probably ignore this one.

**Matt**: Okay!

**Quinns**: But we’ve got some lovely stuff moving on.

**Matt**: Mmm.

## Kemet [00:11:10]

**Quinns**: Matthew Lees, you’ve been going expansion wild.

**Matt**: Yes, Expansionanuary extends all the way to the beginning of March this year, for me.

**Quinns**: That is a joke that I did years ago that I wish I’d brought back this year.

**Matt**: Yeah, Expansionanuary.

**Quinns**: Which is my January where I review loads of expansions.

**Matt**: Expansions, yeah, but obviously because of climate change [Quinns laughing] it now goes on until March. So effectively, I’ve been going back. I had a realization last year where I suddenly went, “My gosh! Kemet! It’s great!”

**Quinns** [laughing]: Yup.

**Matt**: And I thought, “Well look, let’s just jump back and play through these.” We got to play the most recent expansion a little bit earlier at the Gathering of Friends, and I thought, “Look, let’s just go and do the whole hog.” So I went back and I played the Ta-Seti expansion, and then after that played the Seth expansion.

**Quinns**: So do you want to give-

**Matt**: Why have they both got “set” in it? Ta-Seti. Seth.

**Quinns**: I don’t know man.

**Matt**: Just come up with a new Egyptian god, no one will know, they all have made up names. [Quinns laughing] I swear, no one will notice. I’m joking, don’t do that.

**Quinns**: You’re probably not going to offend people who still worship Ra, or whatever.

**Matt**: I mean, I probably will, but that’s fine.

**Quinns**: Do you want to give the top line to what is Kemet?

**Matt**: So Kemet is a big, dumb wargame. And it doesn’t really play like a wargame, but it *feels* like one, and that’s what I think is the core of it. I’ve got down to the brass tacks of why Kemet is wonderful. You have this board, which is in ancient Egypt, you have pyramids in your little cities, and you go off and you fight each other and you try and take over temples and hold temples. And really it is a game where you’ve to just get to ten victory points.

**Quinns**: Yup.

**Matt**: And the ways you get to ten victory points don’t often involve fighting. But it’s one of these games where you look at it, and you’re like, “This is a coooool, big desert, and we’ve got all these little cool colorful miniatures of all of the armies,” and you look at it and you think, “This looks like a game where we’re gonna go out into the desert and fight each other.” And it is! [Quinns laughing] And it’s one of these games that perfectly actually gives you the experience that it looks like you’re gonna have, because you’ve got these colorful miniatures on a board, you’ve got these cool little pyramids, which are basically just D4 triangular-

**Quinns**: Dice.

**Matt**: -dice, which you can flip to level up your pyramids. Lovely. And then you have a shared shop of things where you can buy things from the shop, and you have a little booklet we call the wine list, where you go through and you go, “Oh, what do I want?” And then quickly, your plans for all the things you’re gonna buy from the shop evaporate as everyone else buys the things you were gonna buy, and you’re scrambling around, and you’re fighting, and you’re looking for points. And the game ends really quickly!

**Quinns**: It’s got a very unusual structure, doesn’t it, where to begin with it’s just a really straightforward wargame. Except sitting to the side are about sixty tokens of game-breaking powers. Everyone starts getting powers which are just absurd over the course of the game, and then just as players are practically demigods, [snap] the game’s over.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s over in about an hour. It’s very quick. And also the fact that within this shop you’ve got these -- again, like we were talking earlier, with scale -- you have these cool big miniatures that you can be like, [nonchalant] “I’m gonna buy a giant scorpion who’s going to wander around the desert with me.” And unlike in Rising Sun, when you’ve got a giant scorpion roaming the desert with you, it strikes fear into people, and it strikes joy into you. [Quinns laughing] So it’s one of these things where it really does deliver on the promise of what it appears to be. And I love it, and especially playing Inis more and more, it’s like, yeah Kemet has a place as well. I want a quick, colorful, bitey game which is exciting and doesn’t out-stay its welcome.

## Kemet: Seth [00:14:32]

**Matt**: So the expansions are interesting.

**Quinns**: Okay?

**Matt**: So, I need to go back and play some more of Seth, which is the more recent one and the more exciting one. It brings in the conceit of- Because it’s already a game which is basically based on Stargate, the intellectual property that most people who are not 35 or older have never heard of anymore, because it wasn’t that good, was it? Let’s be real. [Quinns laughing] But it was fun and interesting. In which like, “Aaah, there’s a bad alien who is in ancient Egypt.” And it’s like, “What if ancient Egypt actually *was* made by aliens, and they were bad? And what if people accidentally go through a warpgate through time and have to fight them? And what if… what’s his name? The guy who’s Madmartigan, who’s a good actor, I like him?” [Ed: Val Kilmer?] Anyway. [inhales] What a film. [Quinns laughing]

**Quinns**: But we’re not quite doing aliens, right?

**Matt**: No, we’re not quite doing aliens. But basically, the general gist is that there are one group of people who are ostensibly also Egyptians, but they’re really tall and dangerous-looking, and they’re being controlled by somebody who is just more powerful and they’re in charge of the desert.

**Quinns**: So it turns it into an all vs. one player game.

**Matt**: All vs. one! Which means all of the other people, with their armies, have to collude, and make plans, and buy powers collectively, because then they can move their pieces around the map. Basically trying to make their armies as diverse as possible, so that when you go on the offensive, you get the powers of three or four or five people when fighting against the big bad, who is just nasty and more powerful and has access to all sorts of weird tricks. It’s one of these things where turning a game like this, which is a free-for-all, into an all v. one, is interesting. And it’s a joy to teach the new rules for it, because so many of them are things that you just say, “Oh, you’ve gotta do this now.” And all the players go, [scared and upset] “Whaa! Whyyy?” [Quinns laughing] The fact that one of the first things you have to do is go, “Oh, you all need to give me one of your colored chips.” And they go, “Okay, right,” and they give you one of their colored chips. And they’re like, “Oh, but doesn’t that mean I’ve got one less action in the game?” And you’re like, “Yes.”

**Quinns**: Ohhhhh.

**Matt**: And they go, “Well, why have you taken it away?” It’s like, “Oh, because I can use them to do bad things to you.” And they’re like, [distraught] “Whaaat?” [Quinns laughing] So it really does have a set of rules which really amplify this idea of: You are the big bad. Basically, it creates a game mode where they need to then build these temples in the desert, and then by doing that they’ll get permanent buffs, and then if they can finish a temple and pull off a ritual then they can then travel through the Stargate and fight you in your base. It’s not called a Stargate in the manual, but let’s be real, it’s a Stargate. It’s such a cool idea, and we’ve talked a lot in the past about like, it’s really exciting to see people not just adding additional stuff, but actually adding things which take a game you love and turn it into a different game. And I kind of agree with that sentiment, but I also am increasingly starting to see that sometimes that’s just a very tricky proposition.

**Quinns**: Yeah, I’ve always been a fan of expansions which offer something that helps you to see the base game in a different light? That’s the gold standard for me, where if an expansion is exciting to play with, but then you go, “Ah, but I love the simplicity of the base game.” Then you play the base game and you go, “Ah, but I love the messiness of the expansion.”

**Matt** [tentatively]: Yeah...

**Quinns**: You seem to have a bad version of that where it’s just making you like the base game more.

**Matt**: I mean, I think, on paper, I love the idea of this enjoying the messiness versus the simplicity, but it’s very rare, I think, that you manage that. I think actually, one of the few times I’ve seen that would be a video game, which was the sequel to- In a way, actually, the first modern XCOM game was kind of like, “Oh this is just really neat, really tight.” And then the second was like, “This is a bit messy.” And then the DLC for the second XCOM game just went full on, [big raspberry]. And I really enjoy all elements of that, and in the same way, it makes me re-enjoy the more simple basics. But in this, it makes the game more complicated for some people, basically. The game for the collaborators, basically.

**Quinns**: You’re talking about Kemet: Seth.

**Matt**: Yeah, Kemet: Seth. When they’re trying to work together, it makes their game more complicated, because they need to work out what powers they’re gonna buy for themselves, but they need to talk to other people and work out how they’re gonna collaborate, both in terms of what powers they should buy but also where they’re gonna move and how they’re gonna move on the map. And it creates a puzzle which is quite complex, actually, and is a little bit Pandemic-y, but maybe more so, of just trying to work out how you can physically move and physically unlock all these things, and move your armies around in an optimal way. And it’s so abstract that I think it makes it probably very prone to back-seat driving. But also- And this is what I found actually, with both the expansions, and I do think that Seth may have more potential and I’d like to play it again on a slow afternoon, because all of the expansions just make the game a lot longer. They just expand the length of it. But with the first expansion, particularly, it just adds a new shop. And I think what both of these expansions did-

**Quinns**: And the first expansion is called Ta-Seti?

## Kemet: Ta-Seti and general [00:19:36]

**Matt**: Ta-Seti. So Ta-Seti adds a whole new range of tiles. So you have blue tiles, red tiles, white tiles, and now black tiles. So you have four different shops you can go in, technically. But in a way, all that really did when I was playing with it was it highlighted the fact that the wonderful thing about Kemet is, this initial bounty of options so quickly filters down to being like, “Well, what’s left?”

**Quinns**: It’s another way that players actually interact, isn’t it?

**Matt**: Yeah, it is.

**Quinns**: People buy things and you go, [clipped] “No!” because you wanted that.

**Matt**: And also, it helps keep the game pacey, because it means at the point in the game where suddenly decisions are more important, your decisions are actually being limited, because there’s just less stuff to buy, which means you’re spending less time looking at the little manual. So by having this window closed, and having it being more time, the game just goes on and on. And the same thing was true with Seth, of it being like, this is an interesting idea, of what happens if you can combine armies, and the movement being picking up and dropping units as you go to merge them all together. But it creates a puzzle that kind of just slows the game down, and isn’t actually… It’s interesting, but it doesn’t really get to the heart of what Kemet is. So the interesting thing for me is, playing both of these expansions, it’s kind of reminded me, and highlighted for me, the things that make Kemet amazing.

**Quinns**: I think this is going to be- Because you’ve actually decided, we’re going to do something unusual and just do a video review on the expansions, right?

**Matt**: Yeah, I think so.

**Quinns**: Because I did a video review of Kemet yonks ago.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: Six metric yonks. But now… [exasperated sigh] When I used to work as a video game critic, we always said that expansion reviews are really boring, because it’s often like, “Well if you like this kind of thing, there’s more of it.” Whereas expansions for board games are often… I’m starting to find reviewing expansions fascinating.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s odd, but I think it’s interesting. And the fact that these expansions really have made me see Kemet in a different light, and it’s made me realize that, as a game, it still has a lot of value today.

**Quinns**: I think this is why we often get cynical when Kickstarters release expansions at the same time as the base game. I mean, you need that game to be released, and you need players to react to it, to find out-

**Matt**: Yeah, you need to work out what it needs.

**Quinns**: Yeah, exactly! And the idea of like, “Oh, our game is coming out, and we’ve got two expansions out of the gate,” that’s not gonna be solid. There’s no way.

**Matt**: No. It’s also that thing of being like, if you give people too many options, it’s like, “Well, what way am I supposed to play this?” If you get a game and it comes with three expansions, like, “What’s… how do I do this?”

## Altiplano: The Traveler [00:21:50]

**Quinns**: And very briefly, you’ve been poking an expansion for Altiplano, haven’t you?

**Matt**: Yes I have. Altiplano expansion I really like a lot. The Traveler involves effectively adding another cardboard board to the collection of boards that sits on your table.

**Quinns**: Weird sort of archipelago of boards.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s like a circle of locations that you then travel around, and this adds another one that sits in the middle of it. And I’ve got to tell you, those big bits of cardboard- This is a big table game.

**Quinns**: Really?

**Matt**: Yeah, when you’ve got the Traveler expansion, all the bits- You forget, you’ve got *two* player boards in front of you that are both quite large [Quinns laughing], and then cards. It’s a real beast! But the Traveler really does ramp up Altiplano and make it much more exciting. I really like Altiplano, but I can completely understand why lots of people are like, “It’s fine.” Because it is kind of just fine, but there’s something about it that I find very pleasing in terms of the theming and the pace.

**Quinns**: You’re traveling around the Andes, picking up alpacas and carpets and putting them in your bag!

**Matt**: You are. You’re like, “I’m gonna make some glass,” or “I’m gonna make some wood. I’m gonna make some boats. I’m gonna make some houses.” It kind of tickles the same itch for me as Uwe Rosenberg’s stuff, like A Feast for Odin, just being like, “I’m kind of doing some stuff and having a nice time. Maybe I’ll get loads of points and win. I don’t care.” But the Traveler is cool, because basically it adds a little character who moves around between locations, and if you are in the same location as this person, then you can use a special thing. You can trade with him for things. You can do extra things. And then also you can buy these other special powers, from him, effectively. It basically added more of an element of real interaction between players, because you also have this shared market, whereby you can sell him stuff, and then the objects you sell then sit in this middle market, and you can’t buy the stuff that you sold, but any other player can.

**Quinns** [intrigued]: Oooohh!

**Matt**: So it means you’re actually removing things from your bag. Being like, “Oh, I’m gonna get rid of this piece of silver,” or whatever. And then it means like, “Hey, that’s not in my bag anymore!” It’s completely out of the game, but it means someone else can have it. And it means that basically you’re constantly looking at it like a hawk, and if somebody else sells something, you think, “I really want that bit of wood.” Especially later in the game where there’s no more wood, and you’re like, [dying from lack of wood] “I need a piece of wood so badly.” [Quinns laughing] You are actually watching what other people are doing more like a hawk, and also where the man travels to next is based on him moving around the circle, but to where there isn’t anyone, so you can kind of -- if you’re late in the go -- you can kind of choose where he goes. It also adds the adaptiveness. You can be like, “Well, I wasn’t going to go to this location, but because he’s there, what can I do?” It makes the game more dynamic. It makes the game definitely feel like… Because the problem I have with Altiplano is, there didn’t feel like -- in the base game -- there was any good reason for you not to take your go’s simultaneously. The only reason that you wouldn’t do that is because there are some locations where you can buy a card, and you can choose whichever card you want.

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: So if we both want to do that, it’s like, “Hey! You got that canoe! I wanted that canoe.” And technically it was your go first, so you *have* to play in order. But *ninety percent of the time*, there’s no reason for it. It could be way faster if it’s just like, “Go. Everyone go. Everyone go. Everyone go.” And you could houserule that! Anytime you’re buying a card, you need to say, “I’m buying a card,” and then you work out the turn order.

**Quinns**: That sounds good to me! If players can play simultaneously, that speeds up the game dramatically, right?

**Matt**: Yeah, but that’s the problem. In the base game, you couldn’t *quite* do that. They hadn’t designed it so you could play simultaneously. And if they had done, I think I’d like it a lot more. What the Traveler does is it actually makes it seem reasonable [Quinns laughing] that you take it in turns.

**Quinns**: Okay, okay, okay.

**Matt**: Because there’s enough interaction that it makes sense.

## The Quest for El Dorado [00:25:26]

[funky sting]

**Quinns**: At the time of this podcast coming out, I will have released a new video review on a new Reiner Knizia game called El Dorado.

**Matt** [singing to the tune of Desperado by the Eagles]: El Dorado!

**Quinns**: And Matt, you’ve been watching me play this via the Shut Up & Sit Down Instagram.

**Matt**: Yeah, and I’ve been like, “What’s this El Dorado game Quinns keeps talking about?”

**Quinns**: It’s really good! So, it’s also super simple. And, most importantly, Shut Up & Sit Down now has another racing game we can recommend that isn’t Flamme Rouge.

**Matt**: Wow.

**Quinns**: So El Dorado is a game about expeditions rushing towards…

**Matt**: Bicycles.

**Quinns**: God. I can’t joke about El Dorado too much, but the golden-

**Matt**: The city of gold!

**Quinns**: -the mythical golden city of El Dorado. And I’ll say right now, if there’s one board game on this podcast that you go out and order, it maybe should be El Dorado.

**Matt**: Oh yeah?

**Quinns**: So this is an expedition game, where everyone has a little wooden piece on a map of large hexagons that contain smaller hexagons. So one hex might be, oh it’s a forest with a river running through it! And the next hex is a winding mountain path. The next hex might be full of villages. But all these hexes, this big sprawling map that you create before the game begins, is your path. It’s like your race. It’s like a big wild marathon through the jungles. But what you’re actually playing is a deckbuilding game, and that’s a mechanic -- that’s an idea in board games -- where everyone has their own deck, and to begin with it might just have some adventurers who have a piddly one-machete value, which means they can move you through a bit of forest. You might have some travelers, who have a bit of money. But what you really want is, you know, the trailblazer cards, who will blast you through four machete hexes.

**Matt**: Whoa.

**Quinns**: Or the millionaires, who will help you to just pay your way through hex after hex after hex of encampments, by going, “Have some money, don’t kill me, have some money, don’t kill me.” Or have some gold, I guess. But here’s the catch, and the way the game works. Let’s say, Matt, it’s your turn. You draw a hand of cards, and it’s machete, machete, coin, coin, on your rubbish starting deck of cards.

**Matt**: Okay.

**Quinns**: You could use that to go through a machete hex, which is a jungle hex. Go through a jungle, go through a jungle, go through a village, go through a village. Except because of how the board’s set up, you probably can’t do exactly that. You probably can’t use all your cards, because it might be like, jungle, jungle, then a river. And you don’t have a little oar card, so you can’t row across the river. So any cards you don’t use on your turn, though, for movement, you can instead spend as money to then buy another card that goes into your deck.

**Matt**: Ah, I really like it already.

**Quinns** [laughing]: You know it’s funny.

**Matt**: I can see it in my head, and I want to play it now.

**Quinns**: It’s a little bit like Flamme Rouge, in that you’ve got a deck that you’re managing over the course of the race. But unlike Flamme Rouge where your deck gets thinner and thinner and thinner, in El Dorado, it gets bigger and bigger and bigger. So an example of how the game works is- Because also there are camp spaces, where the cost of entering a camp space is you pick any card from your hand and remove it from the game.

**Matt**: Ahhhh.

**Quinns**: Which is good, right? Because it means if you go to a camp and enter the camp, you can take one of the crap cards from your hand and remove it from the game, and as you’re buying new and bigger and better cards like cartographers and scientists and native guides, you don’t want those crap cards like the little adventurers and travelers.

**Matt**: They’re gone!

**Quinns**: But here’s the catch, Matt. The camps which let you remove cards are often not on the racing line through the board.

**Matt**: Ahhh. Pit stops!

**Quinns**: Yeah, exactly, that’s how I called it in my review. They’re pit stops. And I put in a little *vvvvvv* noise of, you know, the drill being removed from a wheel? As someone removes a card from their…

**Matt**: Nice. Nice.

**Quinns**: Yeah. So the game is very much like… Often because of the board you’re like, “Ugh, I could go through the jungle, or I could take that river route.” But because when you buy cards they go into the discard, so they take multiple turns to cycle round and give you even a chance of drawing them? You need to be building your deck based on what’s ahead of you in the journey. So if you want to go down that river way down the line, you have to start buying sea captains early? But then, honestly, funny thing, my favorite thing about the game and what makes it sing, is that players can’t move through each other. So if someone’s pawn is in a hex, it’s not just that you can’t stop on that hex, you cannot move through them! Which means -- and this is like, goodness me it’s Reiner Knizia game design magic -- you desperately want to be first.

**Matt**: Yeah.

**Quinns**: Because if you’re first, it means you can always move to whatever hex you want to. If you’re second, or god forbid you’re stuck between two players, a lot of the time, let’s say you draw your hand of cards, and Matt…

**Matt**: Perfect.

**Quinns**: ...the trailblazer who gives you like six machete, that’s great. But! The only jungle hex you could move into, your friend’s on it. But! While it’s great to be first, and that means, to begin with, right, that’s sensible, you just play whatever cards you have to to be in first place. What that means though, is the players who, out of the gate, *don’t* move, and just start upgrading their deck? Yes you’re in first place, but those players who didn’t move have a way better deck than you, and suddenly they’re moving real fast! It’s just rock solid. You sounded like you were gonna make a noise.

**Matt**: No, it just sounds great. I can see that there’s some strange similarities to other race games, like Flamme Rouge, even the fact of not wanting to get stuck behind someone, effectively.

**Quinns**: Yeah, yeah. It’s just so good. We won’t talk about it now, because I have just done the video, but if you search for Shut Up & Sit Down El Dorado on our site or in Google or Youtube, you’ll find my review, which is also a review of the first expansion, Heroes & Hexes, which adds fun curses like blank cards to your deck, and heroes like Christopher Dundee and Gertrude Everdeen. You see, because they’re references to famous people. I’m not wild about that, but you can hear me complaining about that in my video review.

## Tramways [00:31:02]

**Quinns**: So finally, let’s do a little talk about what might be the most interesting game we talk about on this podcast. Let’s talk about Tramways.

**Matt** [singing to the tune of Crazy Little Thing Called Love]: Crazy little thing called Tramways.

**Quinns**: This is a game which I will leave Matt to describe in a second, but despite people on the periphery talking about it, it had never entered the mainstream. And last night, we found out… why that is.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s a really strange, esoteric, odd little game, where ostensibly what you have to do is build tramways around a city, which has people in it, and different types of building, like leisure places, industry zones, commercial residences…

**Quinns** [titillated]: Ooh!

**Matt**: And… what’s the other one?

**Quinns**: Residential.

**Matt**: Residential. Places where people live.

**Quinns**: Normal house.

**Matt**: And you build tramways, and then you can use the cards in your hand as well to also act as tram tickets to take people to locations. To be like, “Swipe there, and then this person is going to travel to a residential zone.” Every time a person travels along one of your tramways, depending on where their destination is, you’ll get some sort of bonus. You’ll then get net happiness, because people, of course, *love trams!* [Quinns laughing] And then at the end of the game, the person with the most happiness, in terms of how happy their customers are, wins, but then also you’ve got stress! So sometimes when you do things, you’re gonna increase the stress of the people riding on your trams, and that will lose you points in the game.

**Quinns**: It’s the stupid thing of, if you send a little person in the city to work, you tend to get money and rewards, but your people get very stressed by your tram. They associate your tramways with, [disgusted commuter voice] “Ugh, that’s that awful tram that takes me to *work* every day!”

**Matt**: Take them home, and they’ll love you. They’ll love you forever.

**Quinns**: Take them home and it lowers the stress associated with your trainline?

**Matt**: Also, strangely, after anyone rides a tram, they disappear. Forever. Which means you basically have a board, to begin with, that’s full of lots of little wooden meeples, who then go home or go to work, and are never seen again. [Quinns laughing] And then eventually more people will appear in the board, but often it becomes this bizarre- It’s one of the most interactive things I’ve played in a while, in the fact that you are all drawing from the same pool of potential customers that will disappear after they’ve ridden *one tram*, [Quinns laughing] and then you’re also all building tramways, not just for yourself but for everyone else. And anyone can use anyone’s tramways, but every time you use tramways, you’ll get a combination of happiness points and money, based on factors we don’t need to go into. But also it means that if you can build the really good tramway that other people will use begrudgingly, then you’ll just be racking up points and money throughout the whole game just because you built a great rail line.

**Quinns**: It was so stupid. About two thirds of the way through our game, we were looking at Clark, and we’re like, “Clark, why do you have so many victory points?” And it turned out he owned two tiny curves in the middle of town, which none of us had noticed, but anytime any of us delivered anything, we used Clark’s goddamn curve.

**Matt**: Yeah, you’re just like, “Oh, we’ll go there,” because you had to. It was just a little network of tiny, tiny railways, which just was making him huge amounts of points, and a decent amount of bank. Whereas I made the mistake, very early in the game, of looking at the board and not really knowing what it was. And looking at our initial plots we’d been allocated, a little bit similar to Lords of Vegas, of being like, “These are the bits of land you own that you can develop into buildings later.” And I built some railway tracks that basically were just intended to try and get in people’s way? To be like, [mischievous voice] “That’ll be annoying. People won’t be able to get out there!” I made these weird curvy railways, it was like, [mischievous voice] “Ah, because of the way I’ve curved these railways, you can’t cross over it, which means nobody can go on these spaces apart from me!” [Quinns laughing] So I was kind of being this Victorian baron villain, really, of being like, [Victorian baron villain voice] “Aha! My railways are the most annoying in all of England!” [Quinns laughing] And then the problem with that was, nobody actually wanted to use these railways apart from me, and even I was kind of going out of my way to use them.

[Quinns and Matt laughing]

**Quinns**: I mean you built the most annoying tramways, and then-

**Matt**: -and then weirdly no one wanted to use them.

**Quinns**: Not even you!

**Matt**: Not even me. And that’s kind of the main reason why I could see why this is an independent game rather than a published game, because I just couldn’t read what it was.

**Quinns**: I was using that as shorthand last night, but we should clarify, it’s published by a designer who’s had a lot of success making it. There are loads of expansions for it. So it is published, we just were talking about how a publisher with a stable of games, it would make sense they would not go near this.

**Matt**: Yeah, or it’s the sort of thing where you’d end up smoothing a lot of the edges off of it. This is not a criticism, it’s just an interesting nature of it, the fact that I looked at it and thought, “Oh, I think it’s like this,” and it’s like, “No it isn’t. And actually because you didn’t get what it was in the first turn, you’re now in an awful lot of trouble.”

**Quinns**: It was the hardest thing to teach I’ve taught in a long long time. Partially because so much of your assumptions about it are just wrong. I’ve never -- teaching a game -- had so many people go, “Oh, and then with this you need to play this card?” and I’m like, “No.” “With this, is this space connected to this?” “No.” The auction! Every round begins with an auction, which allows everyone to get a new card for their hand, and it also determines player order. The auction is like nothing I’ve ever played.

**Matt**: Yeah, very strange.

**Quinns**: It’s this bonkers thing where you put your pip on your vote, and no one else can make their vote the same as anything to the left of them? But when it circles back round, the first person can still bid what other players bid? So your turn order from the previous round determines how easy the auction is for you next round?

**Matt**: Yeah? And also it’s one of those games whereby… A lot of the time we play games where the first game is a wash. You’re learning to play the game, and then you play again. But my gosh, this game starts with you being handed four cards and being like, “Hey, pick one of these to put in your hand?” And you’re like, “Hnnng I don’t know what’s good!” Like you literally don’t have any idea. And then it being like, “Right, after that, right into an auction.” [Quinns laughing] Not only look at these cards and decide which one you want, but decide a monetary value of how much it’s worth! And the fact that it’s a game where you have this deck of cards which you cycle through, and once your discard is full and you can’t draw you then shuffle that up, and then add cards to that. It means that you’re building a machine, basically, and if your machine doesn’t work, you’re just in a lot of trouble.

**Quinns**: I mean, there are so many traps. I don’t want to generalize, but in literally every board game ever where you can build railways *and* buildings, those things are equally valuable. Whereas in Tramways, because you build tramways but then you can build yourself your own little parcels of residential or industrial zone, we just assumed that was a sensible thing to do. Geez, it takes up *half the table*, all the components you need to build stuff.

**Matt**: I was like, “Building stuff must be good.”

**Quinns**: It was only when we finished [Matt laughing] a four-hour game of Tramways that I was like, “Hang on, building stuff is *awful!*” The only reason to do it- Because it only gets you one victory point, and then it gives you basically that type of building -- if you build industrial -- gives you essentially a blank card. Not blank, but extremely specific, that’s gonna be tying you up for the rest of the game. So the more buildings you build, yeah you’re putting more passengers on the board, but also A) everyone can use those passengers, and B) you’re clogging up your deck with garbage.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s an odd one. I’m really interested to check it out again with the more advanced board, where we suspect that maybe there’ll be less cities and less location, so it would be more on the players to be inventing an economic ecosystem for people to use.

**Quinns**: Yeah, and I’m curious just to browse all of the expansions, because he’s put out, so far, four different ones for each color of buildings? So there’s the red, green, blue, and yellow expansions? All of which have three modules to add things like conductors, or central train stations, or literally a dozen other things you can put into your game?

**Matt**: Gosh. I mean, I found it really interesting and enjoyable, but especially for somebody who’s fairly seasoned at playing games and understanding games, I fell down every stair in the book! It was this thing of being like, “Oh, hang on, no, these railway workers that I need to build railway lines don’t regenerate and I’ve used the card that I would have had to have still in my hand at the end to get one back,” and then being like, “Oh, but it’s fine, because I can get another one of those cards by going to one of the blue centers,” but then, “Oh no, I need a blue symbol to go to a blue center. Do I not have *any* of them in my hand? [Quinns laughing] No I don’t have any of them. Also don’t have any of the red symbols. Oh I assumed that they were all… Oh no there’s no way I can get either of those things, I should have been bidding for them in the first few rounds.” I got halfway through and I think everybody thought I was having a brain moment, because I kept saying to Quinns, “I don’t think there’s anything I can do!”

**Quinns**: And I was saying, “Come on Matt, you’ve misunderstood a rule.”

**Matt**: You were like, “Oh no, come on, yeah, there must be something.” And in the end I just showed you my hand and you were like, “Oh my gosh.”

**Quinns**: Yeeahhhh.

**Matt**: I just had played the game really badly. All I’d say about it is it’s one of these things where you have these cards that do different things, and then you have to tactically think about what you’re gonna do with those cards at the start of the round, and you’re only ever allowed a maximum of three things you can do in each round anyway, so even if you’ve got eight, nine cards in hand, it’s not going to make a huge difference. But it reminded me a lot of original Brass, of having this hand of cards that you then have to make a concrete, airtight plan with, that then gets messed up by other people doing things in the same spaces that you wanted to.

**Quinns**: Yeah.

**Matt**: But then it’s *that*, combined with Tigris & Euphrates, of having this complex grid game whereby one tiny power play of like, Clark putting that tiny bit of rail between those two buildings, just made him so many points.

**Quinns**: I mean, it was ridiculous! You and I got whomped by two people who are not as au fait with resource management economic games.

**Matt**: My mate Laurie said, “Oh, I can’t really do numbers.” [Quinns laughing] And he just absolutely destroyed us.

**Quinns**: Yeah but what was ridiculous, you were trying to wall people off, or I’m thinking…

**Matt**: I went into buildings, and upgrading buildings. I was looking at what felt like a traditional end-game point scorer, and Laurie just made a brilliant tram.

**Quinns**: And I was thinking about like, “Well let’s make loads of money.” Meanwhile Laurie’s like, “Well the game’s called Tramways, right? What happens if I just build a really long, long tramway through the middle of the board.” And then demolished everyone’s scores.

**Matt**: I kind of think we went into it being like, “Maybe it’s like Food Chain Magnate.” Maybe it isn’t! Maybe we were approaching it being too complicated, and we should have just made a big fun railway. I have no idea! [laughing]

**Quinns**: But also if it’s a game about making big fun railways, I didn’t fully enjoy our game of Tramways because I’m sat there telling everyone, “You can’t do that. You can’t do that. Here’s the answer to your question. Stop that, that’s illegal.” And despite all of that! Despite me reading the manual *twice* on the day we played it before we played it! I still got two rules wrong. I still forgot that whoever wins the first player auction also gets stressed, and something else to do with traveling.

**Matt**: Yeah, it’s very bitty. It’s one of those games again, though, like we often find with these mad, sometimes frustratingly bitty rules-y things like War for the Ring-

**Quinns**: War for the Ring.

**Matt**: -and, I guess, Pipeline, I did wake up this morning being like, “I’d kinda like to play that again.” But it’s so tricky. When you have these games where you literally have to play them once and then next time you play them you’ll have a good time, I find it so hard to justify those when it’s not an experience which is really unique or magical. Like for War for the Ring, I get that. There’s nothing like it.

**Quinns**: Exactly, yeah.

**Matt**: It gives you an experience where you’re going to have to work for this, but [urgent whisper] there’s nothing like this!

**Quinns**: Yeah, whereas Tramways, like you say, it’s a bit Brass, it’s a bit Tigris & Euphrates, it’s a bit Food Chain Magnate, and yet I would probably rather play… I don’t know, I don’t know! There’s magic here! The fact that we both woke up this morning being like, “Still thinking about it, wanted to play it again.” If you’re curious about Tramways, I would definitely give it a google, because I don’t think it’s a last time you’ll hear about it on Shut Up & Sit Down.

**Matt**: Yeah, I definitely want to go back and play some more of it. Especially flipping the board. It gave me almost a Railroad Ink thing of wanting to try all of the expansions, of being like, “I want to flip this and play with more rivers and mountains!”

**Quinns**: I want to flip it and make it harder to build trams so that individual rail placement is important. I’m also really interested in the expansions, and I also know that it’s got a Kickstarter for a massive expansion. Check this out. It’s got an expansion called Dystopia, which will be hitting on Kickstarter later this year, that takes the game… to the moon!

**Matt**: What!

**Quinns**: Trams on the moon, Matthew Lees!

**Matt**: I can’t believe it! I refuse to believe it.

**Quinns**: Yeah, so that’s Tramways. We’re definitely gonna be playing it some more and talking about it and trying to figure out what the hell it is.

**Matt**: Mmmm.

## Outro [00:42:42]

**Quinns**: It’s time for you to get your blood tested, am I right?

**Matt**: Yeah, I gotta go and I’m gonna have an adrenaline test, I think.

**Quinns**: Is that where they just see how rad you are?

**Matt**: I think so, yeah. They’ve told me I have to try and be as rad as I can, and then they’re gonna check it on the rad-ometer. They don’t think anything’s wrong with my adrenal system, but they’re like, “Hey, let’s check it out!” Why not?

**Quinns**: Thanks as always for listening to the Shut Up & Sit Down podcast. We’ll be back in another couple of weeks with some more board and card games, and thanks, as always, to Mr. Steve Davit for providing that funky sax that so colors this podcast.

**Matt**: Thank you very much Steven. Play that funky sax, dear Steven.

**Matt and Quinns together**: Goodbye.

[funky theme]