

Flying Down to ... Rio?

Jet Set reviewed

Jet Set is the fourth game from Kris Gould and the Wattsalpoag team and I think it's the best so far (though I'm still a big fan of *Nomads of Arabia* and its moving board). It comes in the chunky square box that has become a trademark of Wattsalpoag. The board is square, too, and shows a map of Europe with major cities and airline links between them. Each link can be short (London-Paris) or long (Madrid-Rome), but it connects two cities. It also has a price: between 4 and 7, but usually 5.



Players have a set of neat little airliner pawns (okay, the proportions aren't quite right for a jumbo, but they're cute) and markers in their chosen colour. One use of the latter is to mark links when players buy control of them. When they do this, players also place their aircraft on the link – at a price. These are needed to claim the routes (one or more links) that are worth victory points at the end of the game and income during it.

This brings us to the other major component of the game: the route cards. Like links, routes are between two cities, but can be made up of any number of links. Short routes are either a single link (worth 1 point) or two in sequence (for 3 points). Long routes are worth 5 or 7 points. Note that this is only the shortest way to achieve a route. Players can go from London to Paris via Madrid if they want; it's just much more expensive to set up.

To claim a route, players trace a connection across links from one city to the other and remove one of their planes from each link. Players don't have to control the links, just have planes on them. When they claim a route, they also take the card and place some markers on it to show it's worth additional income. Each route card (regardless of its points value) is worth 2 income – 5 while it has markers on it, but a marker comes off every time you claim the income.

While players start the game with some cash, the only way they get more is to by using their route cards to generate income. Hence, in the early stages of the game, players want to claim lots of routes to ramp up their income. The easiest way of doing this is with 1-point routes, of course. At the end of the game, though, it's the value of their route cards that counts. There is thus a balance to be struck between

increasing your income and getting victory points. One of the keys to the game is knowing when to shift from income to points.

Each turn is usually very quick as you can only do one action and you have generally planned several ahead. There can be pauses, though, as players work out what they're going to do in the next few turns. Initially at least, the most important action is buying a link and placing a plane on it. The set-up for the game means that each player will be able to buy the links for two 1-point routes at the start. Then they will want to use a turn to claim each route. And then take their income – also an action/turn.

Later on, players will want to re-stock their links with planes. You can add as many planes as you like in one action, at a cost per plane plus a 'service' charge, depending on how many links you're re-stocking. The final possible action is to add planes to one link belonging to an opponent. This is expensive and the other player gets half the money. Sometimes it's necessary, though.

The final component of the game is the set of 'Final Flight' cards. These are, in effect, 10-point routes for a sequence of three cities that crosses Europe: London-Belgrade-Stockholm, for example. Each player draws two of these at the start of the game and keeps them secret. They provide a strategic element to the game. As well as grabbing short routes for income and points, you need to build your network with your final flights in mind. Having two gives you a choice, but you will only play one.

The Final Flights also trigger the end of the game. It ends either when all players have completed their final flights or five rounds after the first player claims theirs. However, players can only go for their final flight once two 'Vacation' cards have been played. These are shuffled into the two carefully organised decks of route cards: two in each deck. As route cards are drawn to replace those taken by players, the Vacation cards will appear. This is the other key moment of the game: anticipating when the second Vacation card will arrive. Get this right and be the first to claim your final flight and you're well placed to win.

Once you've played your final flight, you take no further part in the game. Each time your turn comes round, you place one of your planes on your final flight card, adding 2 points to your total. Get to five planes and the game's over, though it will end sooner if everybody completes their final flight. Everybody tots up the value of their routes (plus final flight and any planes on it) and the player with the most points wins.

Jet Set is a deceptively simple game as each turn is so quick. There is plenty of subtlety, though. I've already mentioned the two key parts of the game. The other thing to look out for is synergy between routes. For example, London-Amsterdam and London-Hamburg, which connects via Amsterdam (or Copenhagen). You should also bear your final flights in mind and look for opportunities to build towards these. (Completing your final flight is often where you have to pay someone else for the use of their link.)



The one thing *Jet Set* doesn't have is much interaction between the players. There is some competition for links and routes, but this isn't a large part of the game. Even if someone else buys the link you want, you can still put planes on it. It's just more expensive. For me, this is not an issue, I like this kind of game. You have to look for patterns, plan ahead and get your timing right. It plays briskly and completes in good time. This is excellent stuff.

Jet Set was designed by Kris Gould and is published by Wattsalpoag. It is a strategy board game for 2-6 players, aged 12+, and takes about 90 minutes to play.

It gets 9/10 on my highly subjective scale.

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