

(soft music)

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.

(upbeat music)

Well good afternoon listeners, it's a cloudy,
somewhat gloomy but moderately fun day here in suburban Chicago.
I'm walking home and the weather is reasonably nice.

It's not too cold.

I've got a toque and some gloves on
but I'm not feeling super cold.

I probably could survive without the gloves
but I like to be cozy.

It is cloudy though, not sunny at all.

It's plenty bright though.

So all in all, pretty nice day.

Well I was looking at some games,
looking at my games, thinking about what games have I played
recently and we hung out with some friends
and they were talking about how they liked Res Arcana
and I've been playing a little bit of Res Arcana lately

on board game arena.

So I was thinking about that.

A couple different groups were playing Res Arcana
at my board game club this week.

So I've got it in my head and I was looking
and I realized I actually have logged.

That is the second or third most played game
that I've logged in my BG stats app.

My most played game is Netrunner
with something like 394 plays.

My second most played game is Through the Ages
with something like 244 plays

and my third most played game is Res Arcana
with I think 98 plays, something like that.

Maybe it was 120 or something, I'll have to look.

But it's a lot and it's my third most played.

So I looked through my I Search Res Arcana
in my podcast archive or the search function on the website
and I found only two episodes
where I mentioned Res Arcana in the title.

This was Res Arcana and Roam, a board game.

Well at the time it was shooting from the hip episode
in which I talked about having played Res Arcana

for the first time.

And then I mentioned it again as the subject of an episode,

maybe 200 episodes ago in a duel with Mottainai.

So thinking about Res Arcana and Mottainai

in relationship to one another.

So having those two things in order,

yet Rezarkana deserves a little love.

So I thought I would do a message from the deep

about Res Arcana.

The title of the episode is Things I Like

about Res Arcana.

To start off, for those of you who are unfamiliar with it,

Res Arcana is an engine building game

from Tom Layman, King of the Engine Building Games.

Tom Layman created Race for the Galaxy,

role for the Galaxy along with someone else.

He created Dice Realms, which is not a game I've played,

but does have an engine building component.

He created The City, which is a game I enjoy,

I do it, it's a very fast engine builder.

He later republished that one as Jump Drive,

I think it's called, which is a race

for the Galaxy themed version, very quick.

Generally he is very good at making games
where your goal is to find an interesting combo
and kind of go quickly.

And that's what Res Arcana is.

In Res Arcana, you have a mage
and you have a deck of eight cards.

You shuffle up those cards and you draw three of them.

And then on your turn, you have a number
of different things you can do to play the card,
to do with the cards.

And then at the end of the round, when you pass,
you get to draw one card.

Now there is an element where there are also
these magic items, artifacts that are called.

And you get one artifact to use for the round.

And then when you pass, you have to put it back
and take a different one.

And then the third big thing is there are these tiles
that go in the middle of the board.

They're called places of power.

And these are cards that you could buy
that can give you special actions.

The goal of the game is to get 10 points

or if you're playing with the Pearl expansion, 13 points.

You get points, oh, there's also these cards called monuments.

I think that's it.

So on your turn, you can, oh, there's five different resources.

They come in sort of the four main elemental colors,

black, green, blue, and red.

They have, I don't remember exactly what the names of them are.

It's death, life, the blue one is elan

and the red one is fire, I think.

That's elan: e-l-a-n, not Elon, like Elon Musk.

And then the yellow one is gold.

So those four main elements and sometimes gold,

you can use to pay for cards in your hand

and put them into your tableau.

And once a card in your hand has been put into your tableau,

it is now something that you can use each turn

to do magical stuff, to do things.

And essentially, what you're trying to do

is you're trying to build up an engine

that will earn you points in some way.

Some cards come with points.

There are a bunch of dragons and a bunch of other cards

that have points.

Most of them don't though.

And then there are cards that will generate points.

Usually, that's what the places of power are.

The places of power can generate points usually
by converting a certain number of resources into points.

And so your goal is to build an engine
with the combination of cards that you have
to create, to get a bunch of resources, which you can then
convert into points.

Now, aside from the places of power
converting resources directly to points,
another way you can get points is to end playing cards
that have points on them.

The third way is there are these monument cards
and each monument costs four gold resources to buy.

And the monuments have between one and three points on them.

The monuments that only have one point generally will have
a really good power as well.

The monuments that cost two points, the power is a little less.

The monuments that cost three points,

I think there's only one actually, the cost three points.

And it does not have power at all.

It's just where three points.

So you play your cards and those cards
then have powers on them that can give you resources.
And often it's convert resources from one type into another.
And the combination of these conversion powers
gives you your engine.

You can also discard cards for--
if you discard a card, you can get one gold or two
resources of your choice for discarding your card.
And then, like I said, all the cards have different powers
on them.

So what do I like about this game?
That was a very tortured explanation
that I don't think did justice to what the game is,
but hopefully gives you some idea about how it works.
So the first thing I liked about this game is the drafting.
Res Arcana, once you've played a couple times
or even they recommend your second play,
you start doing this.

On your first play, there are generic sets that everybody gets.
You have four cards that you get automatically.
And then you get four dealt to you.
And that's your deck.

There is no trading cards or whatever.

In the full game, instead, what you do is you play a draft.

Everybody's dealt four cards.

You pick one, add it to your deck, pass the three
to the next player, pick one from the new group, pass it,
pick one, pass it, take one.

So at the end of the first draft, you have four cards.

Then everybody gets four new cards,
and you do the same thing again.

The idea is that you now have seen most of the cards
that have come into play, and you have had a chance
to try to build a set of cards that are going to work
well together.

I like this because it rewards thoughtful play.

It reduces the chance that somebody is going to win
because they got dealt a couple good cards that combo together.

They have to choose and to take those.

Now you still could have that situation, right?

If you get dealt a hand of four cards,
and there's two equally good cards in it,
you could take one and pass the hand to the next player
who maybe just took a card that combos well
with the other good card, and now you hand them a good card.

That's the way it is.

Drafting games are always a little uneven that way.

But I really like the opportunity to try to build

towards something.

When you're doing this building, you can see the places of power

that are in play in the game.

So being able to tell what's coming up, really,

I think makes a difference in terms of trying to anticipate

and plan, and then you also get two mages

and you can pick which of the mages you want to play with.

So the mix of different options in the game

I think really creates a nice possibility for complex play.

In that regard, it reminds you a little bit of something

like 7 Wonders, which also makes great use of drafting

and It's a Wonderful World, which I think it's a wonderful world.

It shares a lot of DNA with Res Arcana

because of the idea that you discard cards to get resources

or you build them and that helps your engine.

Next up, we have the emergent complexity.

One of the things I really like about Res Arcana is

almost every given card is relatively simple.

When you look at a card, you can usually tell what it's supposed

to do.

There's maybe a dozen different icon types

that you might encounter.

So once you've learned those icons,
then it's pretty easy to figure out what a card is supposed
to do and the way that you use any individual card.
The implications of it might not always be strong,
but you can understand how it works most of the time.
When you combine that with the fact that all of the cards
have interesting things on them,
and they often interact in interesting ways,
what you can end up with is a really satisfying set of cards
and powers that when they interact,
result in very robust complex actions.
If I watch the high level Res Arcana players
on recorded streams or whatever,
some of the things they can do with these cards is just wild.
And so far exceeds what I'm able to do
that it's really very remarkable.
This is one of the things I like best about interesting games
is the way that you can master the rules relatively quickly,
but the depth at which complexity emerges
or the possibility of complexity that emerges
from the interaction of these relatively simple rules
is really amazing.

As I said, Res Arcana is the top,
is among the top options for me in terms of emergent complexity.
You know, something like chess, of course, has a lot of that,
but thinking about games in the modern sphere
that have that kind of interplay,
I have trouble thinking of another one as robust as Res Arcana
that also has as light a rule set,
'cause it's certainly not light,
but the rule set is very approachable,
as opposed to even something like Race for the Galaxy,
the rule set gets pretty complicated pretty quick.
You have to understand all these symbols.
Symbols are much more obtuse.
I guess probably The City would be one example.
I'm not super keen to set that up
with another Tom Lehmann game,
but I am, you know, here's another one.
You can think of Fantasy Realms or Forest Shuffle,
but forest shuffle particularly is a game where I think
the rule set is relatively light.
Fantasy realms, I think the rules you use
to get your cards are relatively light,
but the scoring rules are very complicated.

And so that is one of the challenges of that game,
is I think the complexity with which you have to wrestle
in order to figure out your score is very high.

Now that's true in Res Arcana too,
in terms of you have to struggle with how are you gonna make
your engine get you the 10 points before anybody else does.

And then just, I don't think I shared the end game.

Like I said, you're going for 10 points or 13 if the pearls
are in the game.

And the way that you assess that is at the end of each round
after everyone has passed,
then you check to see does anybody have 10 points.

If anyone has 10 points, the end of the game is triggered,
and you check how many people have,
like who's got the most points?

So somebody having 10 points can trigger the end,
but they might not win.

And indeed, it's not uncommon if people have there
are a couple cards that you can play
where after the end game is triggered,
then they do one more thing.

And sometimes they'll give somebody two or three extra points.

So, yeah, so emergent complexity is crucial there.

The third thing that I like about Res Arcana that I want to mention is small but critical interaction, or minimal but critical interaction.

Unlike a Carl Chudyk game like Innovation or Mottainai.

Res Arcana is not full of brutal backstabbing social interaction mechanisms, but it does have a couple really strong ones that are very compelling.

The dragon cards are often able to attack the other players and often it's a matter of everybody has to discard one resource of a certain type, and the rule is if you don't have the one of the type you have to do, then you have to do two.

And having to deal with that can be a real bummer.

If your engine is wound really tight, if the things you have to do to win points are very narrowly confined or very tightly tuned, having somebody take a resource or even two resources from you can be brutal in terms of the rhythm you've set up, especially if you're sprinting for an early finish.

That said, it's not a huge part of the game.

You have to be aware of it and you have to be ready for it, but I've often gone whole plays of the game where nobody

put into play cards that take other people's resources.

I like that it's there and the danger of it to be wary of,

but it's not so intense that that's the flavor of the game.

That's some minimal but critical interaction.

And finally, the last thing I want to mention is skill growth.

This is one of those games where over time I have gotten better at it.

I don't think I've gotten as good at it as I should

for the number of plays that I have,

but that's always been a problem for me.

I think I am a moderately good player of games,

but I'm not great.

And so it takes me a long time to get really good at a game.

I don't know that there are very many games I would claim I'm really good at.

Not many for certain.

That said, Res Arcana is a lot of fun.

And as you play it, you come to recognize some valuable combos.

You come to see some over the ways that you can be a more successful player.

And I really like the possibility of finding myself gaining skill

as I go along while I play these games.

So I don't have a lot of other games to point to.

I think a lot of the really complex games that I enjoy developing your skill

is a key part of playing and playing a game lots of times is how you do that.

But I think Res Arcana is one of the best to enable that possibility.

So, dear listener, what do you think of Res Arcana?

When have you played it?

How have you enjoyed it?

Head over to boardgamegeek guild 3269 and share your thoughts on playing Res Arcana.

You could also head over to board game arena.

Look for Wombat99 and start up a game of Res Arcana.

I'm always happy to play one.

We have several other guild members who like playing as well.

So we could get some larger group games going rather than just two players.

And I think that would be fun.

With that, I'll say thank you for joining me in my walk today.

I hope your next walk as this pleasant as mine was.

Bye bye.

[music]

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[Music]