

Pick Up & Deliver 829: The End (of the game)

Transcript

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.

[opening music]

Greetings, listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. The sun is out, the birds are chirping. The wind is blowing a light breeze. The temperature is in the low seventies or high 60s so it's cool but not cold. It's a perfect temperature for walking home. It's probably low sixties. Actually, it's a little chillier than I implied there, but it's still lovely.

Well, this is the last week of classes for the spring semester of 2026 at my school. So I have four more or three more class sessions, one of which is or two of which are the final session and one of which is the second, the penultimate session of the class. In it, we are going to be talking about how the courses went and sort of giving, getting a debrief on the course for the students. It's always an interesting and slightly bittersweet experience to talk about how the course went with students figuring out what worked and what didn't. Students are generally pretty loathe to be too critical to your face, which you know, okay, whatever. But I often am able to get them to say which things they didn't like or not. You know, I'll use a criticism sandwich kind of thing. I'll ask them for their favorite thing about the course and I'll say like, what should I change next time I teach it? That's a good way to get at what didn't you like without making them say, what didn't you like? It depends on the class. Some are more interested in saying that than others, but I find that it's a good way to engage with the experience and have them express their views of the class.

So thinking about that, I like to discuss the game when I am talking about games on the podcast, I like to talk about games in the context of what's going on with me. And so I feel like perhaps I'll talk about the end. This is the end of the semester. So let's talk about the end of a game. There's a lot of different things to think about when you're considering how you're going to create the end of a game, right?

There are some games with fixed lengths, like I have played Brian Boru a couple times this year. Uh, **Brian Boru: High King of Ireland**. You play a number of rounds equal to the number of players plus one. So in a three player game you're going to play four rounds. And essentially you play those rounds. And at the end of the fourth round you score points. I played **7 wonders** with some students today. Same thing. We place three eras. Then you score points, figure out who wins. So one way to end the game is just have a game timer, either a number of turns or number of rounds, something like that.

I think the second the second way to have a game end would be some sort of player-initiated action that when a player gets to a certain point, that triggers the end of the game, and then you can have the game end immediately, or you can have each player get one more turn. There's all sorts of different nuance there. Some games allow you to really manipulate the end of the game. I just finished a game of **Ark Nova** with a couple friends from toggle, and I had a really good run of points to score points. I scored, and I got to the point where I had an action I wanted to do, and if I did it, I would end the game. But I had a whole bunch more points available to me if I just had one more turn. So I did half the action to get myself really close to ending the game, but I didn't trigger the end of the game. Then I passed for two turns because I. What I wanted to do was trigger the end of the game with a huge action and I needed to have four. Of the little X things so that I could trigger the end of the game with a level nine association action and I started it with one. So I passed two times and got two X's. And then on my penultimate turn I had. The animals card was at level three and I saw that there was an animal I could play that would get me just four tickets and one X. And the way my thing was set up, if I got five or more tickets, I would trigger the end of the game, or if I got two green points, I would trigger the end of the game. So by getting four tickets, I got as close as I could to triggering the end of the game without doing it, and I got the X I needed each other player got one more turn. I don't know how I got so far ahead. They were both. Neither of them was probably. I mean, maybe if they had a couple really good turns, they were two or three turns away from triggering the end of the game at least. But they weren't close. And so then on my next turn, I was able to take a level nine association action, and I got four points for supporting an

association. Uh, two points for getting my third university. Plus, I had an end game scoring thing that got me another university. Plus, then I advanced my, uh, knowledge track enough that I got another universe. So I got I got eight points or eight of the green points on my last turn when I was already just at the point where they were touching. So it was a, a cavalcade of points. It was great. Okay, so that is talking about an end of the game where the player triggers the end of the game.

What I wanted to talk about today was what are some games that have the best ending? What does it mean when I say a game has a great ending? That example I just gave you of Ark Nova, that was a great ending for me, but I think Ark Nova doesn't always have a great ending. Sometimes I think Ark Nova is, if you're ahead, can be very satisfying. If you're behind can be really frustrating because someone I mean, ultimately, if you're good at Ark Nova, Ark Nova is a race you're racing to trigger the end of the game while the other players are flat footed and unready for ultimate scoring. So if you get to if you get to the point where you're about to trigger the end of the game well ahead of other people, then you can spend turns sort of building up the number of points you're going to get after the game is over. I think that's really important for doing well at Ark Nova, but I wouldn't put Ark Nova in the category of a game with a really great ending, because if you're not that player in the lead, it's often really unsatisfying. You didn't get to finish what you wanted to do, and it can be rough. So I put together a list of five games that I think have really compelling endings, and I'm going to explain why. From a game-design perspective and from a player perspective, these endings are particularly great.

So first off, **Skull King**. Skull King is a ladder climbing game or no, it's a trick taking game where you are trying to win a number of tricks. It is an adaptation of the game oh hell, which is a classic regular card game. The gimmick with Skull King is that you're going to play ten hands, and each hand you get one more card in the hand. So the first hand you play, you play with one card. By the tenth hand you're playing with ten cards. And each round before you start playing the cards, you bet on how many tricks you think you'll take if you take your trick bet. Exactly. You get a bunch of points. If you miss it at all, you lose points in the game. We're talking a lot of points, so you could do very well in the game by barely missing your bid a couple times and having very successful bids. Two or three hands would be probably enough to win the game. So why is Skull King so exciting because the last hand is ten tricks. There's a lot of points to be had around the table, and it's also pretty likely that a lot of the people around the table are going to have the special cards that screw around with the tricks about who's winning with who. So there's a ton of really great reveal that happens in that last hand. And because each hand has more tricks available than the previous hand, there are more points to be had. And thus, if you fall behind early, you can very easily catch up. There's also a lot of points to be lost if you do badly, and so you can have these wild swings of points which can make it feel a little uneven. But it also means that the ending is usually really dramatic. It scales in intensity as you go. So that is why I think Skull King is my number five best ending. Uh, that is from, uh, Grandpa Beck's games.

Number four, **Arkham Horror: The Card Game**. Arkham Horror the Card Game is a really compelling game because you are building a. You're constructing a deck before you play. To have your character go into what is likely to be a very bad scenario. I don't mean I don't mean poorly written. I mean terrible for your scenario, your character. You're facing unfathomable monsters, terrifying experiences. The characters are struggling to survive. The art is delightful. The game is claustrophobic and sometimes punishing, and you're always striving to get to the end of the game, even in the like the late game where you feel like you're getting ready to beat the big bad. Every turn where you feel like, okay, I got to take a turn to heal up, or I got to take a turn to equip some stuff. Every turn where you are not advancing the agenda feels terrible because every player is drawing one of the negative cards every turn, and you're just getting more and more negative stuff on the board, and the tension just rises and rises and rises. As you face the question of, can we find our way through to winning in the midst of this overwhelming cascade of bad stuff? So the end of the game is really compelling, the plot tense. It gets tighter and tighter with tension as you get closer to the ending question. Will you squeak across the line or not? Is really strong because you often have the ability to just squeak by if you're thoughtful and careful with your cards and a little lucky, but it also can swing the other way. So some games you just have a bad game, and that's kind of fun too. So Arkham Horror, the card game, really compelling set of concerns regarding whether you're going to win or not makes it my number four best ending.

Next up, we have **Monikers**. So monikers is a adaptation of the classic party game celebrity. I think in the original celebrity, I only really know it from TV. I never played the original celebrity, but you would just write names on slips of paper and you'd try to get people to say the names. And because you have contributed ten of the celebrities to the bowl, you know, ten of the celebrities. The commercial version that I know, more

familiar, that I'm more familiar with, that adapted celebrity is Time's Up. Time's up. It's the same way you have a shared deck of cards that everybody's familiar with, and you try to score points by getting people to say them. You play it multiple rounds. The first round, you're giving the whole a whole clue. The second round you get to give a one word clue and the third round you do charades. This is also the same in monikers, which is the kind of more recent latest version of this game to be popular. I think the moniker the The Charades round of this game is exceptionally fun, regardless of which version of it you're playing. When you get to the charades around, there's a really satisfying memory component where you remember the previous things. There's a satisfying intellectual component where someone makes a connection that makes you see the connection. Either they're just there giving you a vision of the thing, or they're giving you a vision of the previous clue that someone gave to help you remember the thing. It's, it's a really powerful piece of social game, and I like it a lot. So that for me is the number three ending of a game, monikers.

Number two ending of a game. This one's pretty simple. **Escape! Curse of the temple.** Escape! Curse of the temple is a real time game. You are rolling dice. You're running through this temple. You're trying to get out of the temple. It is very hard to get out of the temple. You are. There are three times in the game where the timer starts a more aggressive sound, and then you're trying to escape before the timer goes off. If you. Or you're trying to get either out of the temple or back to the central room. If you get back to the central room before the timer goes off, then you're fine. If you don't get back, you lose a die. So now not only are you hurrying, but you're down twenty percent on the first pass, twenty five more percent on the second pass, you're down and die. So it becomes harder and harder to do things. It takes a lot of cooperation, a lot of luck, a lot of coordination. It's a really fun, hilarious, chaotic game that I have a great time with. And the ending is really intense. There are times where you are rushing to the end. You're trying to get the dice right before it collapses, and sometimes you make it, sometimes you don't. But the tension of that real time experience is amazing. So I'm going to say my number two recommendation there is escape curse of the temple.

I want to call out three honorable mentions games that I think have really amazing endings sometime. **Res Arcana** If you're playing with another equally matched player, and it looks like you're both on your way to scoring the ten or thirteen points, depending if you're playing with the pearls or not in this in this round. It's really intense, but more often than not, one person is clearly winning and then the tension is not really there. So The **Adventurers: the Pyramid of Horus**, that one is really intense because every turn you're drawing these blocks that are slowly cutting off the passageway out of the temple, and it's a slow motion push your luck game. You're deciding, do I keep going? Do I try to get one more thing out of the temple before I get blocked in? And the blocked in part is wonderful. There's also this great greed element where the more stuff you collect, the slower you go. Those two things together are fantastic, and when you have like one person who's got a lot of stuff, but they're still getting out and every turn they're on their way out and other people are out ahead of them. So they're the last one in. And every turn you're drawing a block and hoping they'll get blocked in. That is intense and wondrous. So most games of the Adventures of Pyramid of Horus that I play, I would say are pretty great. On the other hand, sometimes you just get dumb draws and it's not intense at all. So that's why it's an honorable mention rather than a real thing. And finally, the last honorable mention I want to say is **QE quantitative easement**. This game is really interesting because you are bidding as much money as you want to try to win these auctions, and at the end of the game, you figure out who won, who got the most points. And if it's close, then if one of those people then also spent the most money. That's really fun. Now, sometimes it's not close and the person who spent the most money isn't in the running, and then it's not fun at all. So that's why it's an honorable mention. Some endings of that game are great. Other ones, hey, who cares?

All right, so this brings me to my final one. Now, if you've listened to this podcast, you probably know what game I'm going to say. I'm going to say **A Study in Emerald**. Now A Study in Emerald maybe should go in the honorable mentions. I've played games of this that are just a dud, where the ending is really not all that exciting or interesting, but many times I've played it, it has been a delight. So, as a reminder, in a study in Emerald, players on one of two teams earning points in opposite ways on the board, there are points to be had that everybody can have, and there are points that only some teams get and points that only other teams get. And before the end of the game, nobody knows who's getting which kind of points. So at the end of the game we reveal what team everybody's on and everybody's score is adjusted based on which team they're on. That part is exciting in itself. But then on top of it, whichever team has the last place player on it, the whole team loses. So the whole game is created in this context, where players are encouraged to help the player

who's in last place if they think that person is on their team. But if that person's not on their team and they help them pass someone else, they may have just given the other team the victory. And of course, it's not a team game in terms of victory. If the last place player is on the other team, you don't automatically win. You only win if you have the most points. So you're both trying to get the most points selfishly and trying to make sure that your team does not have the last place player selfishly. So it's a really interesting game. It's a it's pretty uneven, I will say, but delightfully so and wonderfully weird. So when I'm pointing to a game that has a really compelling ending, I'm going to say A study in Emerald.

Now the end of my semester is much more like the games that have a timer. We go fifteen weeks or sixteen weeks depending on the semester, and that's it. So with that in mind, my semester has ended and frankly, so has the show. I'm walking up to the house, so this gives me the perfect opportunity to say thanks for listening to me talk today. I'd love to know what you think about the endings of games, which games have the best endings and why? Post on Boardgamegeek in Guild #3269. There's been a lively conversation on the top of the stack thread this month. Thanks to everybody who's been chatting there. If you want to reach out to me directly, you can send me a message. Wombat929 is my username on Boardgamegeek or I have the email address brendan@rattleboxgames.com where you could also send an email. Well, thanks for joining me on my walk today. I hope your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye.

[closing music]

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