

Pick Up & Deliver 853: Teaching Anachrony

Welcome to Pick Up and Deliver, the podcast, where I pick up my audio recorder as I step out for a walk and deliver an episode to you while I stroll home. I'm Brendan Riley.

[Intro music]

Good morning listeners. It's a lovely day here in suburban Chicago. I'm enjoying the cool weather before it heats up in the middle of the day. And the air is relatively particulate free, so I'm breathing easy. I was inspired today to think a little bit about teaching games.

I did a two part episode a couple episodes back about the board game class that I teach and how I'm thinking about teaching it in the fall, and I thought I would add to that based on a thread I saw on the board Game Geek forums today. So on the board Game Geek Forums user "Iamjfd" from the Philippines rights context. I don't think I have ever I'm I'm reading this exactly as it's written. No, I'm not throwing any shade at the writer. They're probably not writing in their first language. They're doing better than I would writing in any other language. So but I'm going to read it the way it's written, out of respect for what they wrote.

Context, quote, context. I don't think I have ever taught any euro to my cousin. So he doesn't have any mechanics or concepts of Euro though. We played Nemesis retaliation twice, which is quite complex on its own. My cousin will be staying for a few days so I can ease him with simpler games and mechanics first, like lost Ruins of Karnak with Lita's expansion. Before getting to this game, I have not learned the game but will read the entire rulebook plus watch playthroughs. So no problem there. I know this is a very complex game, so any advice on how to make this less overwhelming. Also, what mechanics outside worker placement does he need? Also, what factions are the simplest and good for two player?

I didn't tell you what game this is in the forums for **Anachrony**. Anachrony is a top fifty game for me. Maybe a top ten game for me. I think it is. Uh, this is a worker placement game from Mind Clash games with a really cool theme and world building. And I think an interesting play experience, very different from almost anything else I've seen. It came out in twenty seventeen. It's number sixty one overall, number forty eight in strategy. It's rated at medium heavy with a weight of four point zero out of five. Now, if you haven't played games and paid attention to their weight on board Game Geek a game, this four is considered heavy or medium heavy. I guess they call it medium heavy, but honestly, a game that's weight of four is pretty heavy. That's a tough learn and I generally wouldn't recommend it for new people.

So what I thought I would do is talk a little bit about my. If I ran into I am j f d in a game cafe and we were just going to talk what I would have to say. Now there are people. If you go read this thread, which I will link to in our show notes. If you read this thread, there are a bunch of people who already replied saying some of the things that I'm going to say here, maybe in less erudite ways, but I'm kidding. Uh, so some of this advice does reverberate with stuff that people have already said, but this is what I would it's kind of what I would say about it.

My first instinct is, no, don't teach someone who has quote, he doesn't have any mechanics or concepts of euros. Don't. I would say don't teach somebody who has no game concepts. Anachronism. One of the big things that's missing is he doesn't say. He says, doesn't have a game concepts and the. The subject line is how do I teach this to a new a newbie gamer? So the first question someone asks, and one I think is most important, is how enthusiastic is this person about playing this game? Like, have they heard about this idea? They think it sounds really neat. They're all in. They're like, hey, remember that game you told me about anacnrhony? I really want to try that when I come.

If I had a friend who hadn't played games much before and they really wanted to play Anachrony, I would have them play Anachrony. Absolutely. Because as someone points out, the most important thing in teaching somebody a game is buy in if they are interested in the game, keen to learn it. It's way easier to teach them a game if they're not really interested. Not really keen to learn it. A complicated game like this is just not going to work. So and he doesn't really say how interested his cousin or friend is cousin is in playing complicated games.

So that that part right there is the biggest question. He also doesn't say what he means by newbie gamer. Like, is this someone who hasn't played board games, but they've played a lot of other games? Have they played a lot of card games? Have they played like magic or something? Have they played a lot of video games, which sometimes will build some of these concepts? So knowing more about the background of the person would also shape you.

But generally I would say don't teach this level of game to a new person. It's overwhelming. It won't be fun for them. You'll do very well and beat them pretty badly. And that doesn't feel great either. Or you'll have to pull your punches so much or tell them what to do so much that they won't have fun because you're bossing them around. This is a game I would work up to. I generally wouldn't throw a new player into it unless they were really keen or knowing them well. I know that they have the chops for it. I do know I do know a couple new gamers who are relatively new to the hobby, but I've played a few games with them in varying levels of complexity, and I just I'm like, yeah, they'd be fine playing Anachrony. It's a lot of new stuff, but they would get it.

So a big part of it is just would they get it or not? The main reasons, if they're like, but why? Why do you think a new person wouldn't do it, especially someone who's played nemesis Lockdown? My first take was, well, is nemesis a strategic game or a tactical game, or is it strategic or thematic? Because I think a complicated thematic game, there are some people who could handle a complicated thematic game, and a complicated strategic game would be a totally different experience.

The main reason is, I think a complicated thematic game often can really be buoyed up by somebody, one person knowing the rules very well. So like for instance, last night on Earth, which is not nearly as complicated, these. I don't think it's as complicated as nemesis, but last night on earth, it's a game where you're fighting zombies, and there's a fair amount of complexity to it. But the broad remit is relatively simple. You're a character. You're in a zombie apocalypse movie. What does your character do? Do you want to try to find a weapon? Do you want to go meet up with the other people? Do you want to fight zombies? What do you want to do? You're like, oh, I want to find a weapon. Okay. So you need to go into one of the buildings, roll a die. We'll see if you find a weapon, right? Like you can teach them the game, give them the broad outlines, and then on their turn, you can help them do things without them having to remember all the rules in detail.

In Anachrony. You can do that to a degree. They're like, okay, if I want to build a building, I go here and then what do I do? Sure. But so much of the game is about planning ahead, about thinking about the way that the different experiences you're going to have in the game interact with things that are coming up later, that if you don't have all the stuff in your head about how it works, You can have a really crummy time because you're like, oh, I wanted to build this building, this turn. Oh, well, you don't have enough water. Well, how do I get water? You got to use one of your actions to go get water, but I don't have enough actions left to build a building. Sorry. You're not building a building this round, right? I mean, that's part of what makes the game interesting and hard. But it's especially hard if you don't remember all the rules to begin with.

I think strategic strategy game versus thematic game complexity can be a real killer in a strategy game. I do think the this original user lamJfd was right in thinking about what kind of scaffolding do I need to build into our game plays before that to get him ready to play Anachrony? I think that was a good idea. So in that regard, what I did is I for the rest of this episode, I printed out the mechanisms that are in in Anachrony, and I'll offer my advice about what games you might play to set them up for success with Anachrony.

Now it's really funny. One. Two. Three. Four. There are fifteen listed mechanisms for Anachrony. That's a lot. I would say half of them. It's important you think about in the context of teaching them to do a thing. The other half, not so much. So I'm going to work my way down. I put them in rough order of what I think is the most important mechanism for them to understand, coming into playing down to the least important one.

So starting with it's worker placement and as a second mechanism, worker placement, different worker types, Anachrony is at its heart a worker placement game. You have workers, you're deploying them on the board to do things. Now it does have different worker types as well. So I feel like one way, probably the best way to approach this is Lords of Waterdeep. It's funny, someone else recommended **Lords of Waterdeep** in the forums and this guy's like, I hate Lords of Waterdeep. I'm never playing that again, which I thought was really funny. Uh, but I think Lords of Waterdeep is an excellent way to teach people about worker placement. At beginning of the game you only have two workers. Eventually you get a third worker, so you don't have a ton

of that, but you have the you really come to quickly understand the idea of spots where you can put your worker. It lets you do a thing and then no one else can go there. Lords of Waterdeep does also teach a little bit of ancillary stuff. It teaches some resource management, like you get the cubes that represent adventurers and you have to manage them, how many you have and kind of plan ahead. It does have contract fulfillment, which is another contracts is another worker is another, um, mechanism in anachronism.

The contracts are generally you fulfill the contracts in order to build buildings. Uh, and end of game scoring involve some contract and the um, apocalypse scoring as well is a sort of big contract that you're working toward. So there's a couple different places where you have to get the right arrangement of things in order to take the action that lets you do the thing, and then you get the reward from it. The different worker, different worker types is not really a part of Lords of Waterdeep, but I feel like I don't feel like that is a I don't feel like that's one that you really need a whole separate game to learn.

Just the idea that there are a couple different worker types, and when you play them in different places, they do slightly different things. There's restrictions. I don't think that part's super hard. I think the harder part to learn is the exosuits visiting the shared spaces versus the solitary spaces on your own board. The idea of on your own board, you're building a bunch of spaces that allow you to do different things to accelerate your own engine versus on the shared player board. You aren't doing your competing for spaces, and the idea that you have workers that get tired and have to be revitalized, that part is tough as well. That said, I think all these mechanisms are really well explained narratively, so it makes it easier to remember, like after you use a worker, they come home and they need to rest.

So they go in the resting side where the little closed eyeball is. If you want to wake them up, you have to take the wake them up action. You can either take the mean one that lowers morale or the nice one that raises morale. Boom. Simple explained. So different worker types. Worker placement I think works is relatively easy to explain. And I think Lords of Waterdeep is your action there. And along those lines, turn order claim action has a similar thing, right? That in turn order you get to put your piece out and claim one of the spaces from the worker placement. So now that I think about the first three Listed what I feel like are the most important listed things are. Worker placement. Worker placement. Different worker types and turn. Order claim action set collection. We talked about our contracts. We talked a little bit. Set collection. We did not. Although again Lords of Waterdeep does introduce set collection by having. In order to fulfill the contracts you have to get different sets of resources and things.

Now there's an element too of like collecting Lords of Waterdeep doesn't have this, but often when you say set collection, you're like, you're trying to get one of each type of a thing. That is not really a huge part of anachronism. There are, I guess the biggest thing would be some of the end game scoring depends on having specific kinds of things, like when you do the evacuation, then your score is how many different characters do you have, or your score is how many different pairs of this resource and this worker, this kind of worker, do you have like those combinations together, I think are pretty interesting. So the set collection piece of it I think works really well. Now it does not have end game bonuses. So as I think about what is the game that you would play to teach people about end game bonuses, that one is harder.

I think another game I might choose that would teach them some of these things would be **Barenpark**. Um, Barron Park does have open drafting, which is one of the later elements. And it does have like sort of goal achievement. But again, it doesn't this goal achievement stuff is not related to end game bonuses. One option would be, I mean, I don't think the end game bonus thing is that hard to learn. I mean I think in terms of sushi go or something end game bonuses there. The whoever has the most pudding gets a point, but I'm not sure I would say you should play sushi. Go as part of preparing to play anachronism. One of the other skills that I think you would want to teach somebody who's trying to learn anachronism is the idea of reading the board and understanding what different spaces do that. There is a ton of icon reading and icon resolution in the game. One of the listed resources is dice die icon resolutions.

The idea that dice would have different symbols on them, and that you need to resolve what those symbols do. If you thought you had somebody who was going to have trouble with that a little bit, you could play something like Cthulhu Dice or Zombie Dice. It's a very simple game, takes just a few minutes, but it would allow you to kind of talk about, okay, this different die mean has a different face on it, and it means a different thing. You got to kind of associate the dice with different meanings. But the reality is the dice meaning part is a pretty minimal piece of anachronism. You have the different scientific achievements that become available.

That's a pretty small piece of what's going on potentially in the game. Oh my gosh. I just realized end game bonuses also come up in Lords of Waterdeep. Because Lords of Waterdeep, you have your personal goal and you get points at the end of the game based on how well you met that personal goal.

You also sometimes can have different contracts that you fulfill that will score you points based on things at the end of the game. Oh wild. I hadn't really thought about the idea that Lords of Waterdeep really is Anachrony Light, but it kind of is. So having worked this all out loud, I think what I would say to this guy is, I know you don't like Lords of Waterdeep, but Lords of Waterdeep will get you eighty percent of the way there. In terms of the basic mechanisms that you need for Anachrony. Now, the big one that's missing that isn't even referenced in the mechanisms is Anachrony, Unique Loan System. So part of it is in the board game Geek mechanisms list.

Loan is specifically defined as taking money from the bank, which I think is a weird, uh, limitation on, but maybe, maybe it's too hard to fit all the other ways you can borrow things in games if you let it be more than money in Anachrony. If you haven't played it, the the gimmick that's sort of most interesting from the telling people about the game thing is that it is a time travel narrative. It involves a whoa, very loud cardinal right above me. It involves a society that can has learned that in the future there's going to be an apocalypse. And so you're getting ready for the apocalypse for most of the game. Then the cataclysm happens and you have like one or two more turns to accomplish your goals. Then the game is over. At most, you get three more rounds. Rounds, not turns. So I think the game calls them turns, which is annoying, but there it is.

So in the game, each era, which is the beginning of the playing of your workers, you get to borrow up to two things from yourself in the future. And really, the way that works is you have a set of tokens that tell you what the different resources you can borrow are, and you get to pick up to two of them to borrow. You do that by putting your hand. You all reveal at the same time, because there is an element of competition and who borrowed the most stuff. So borrowing less makes you less vulnerable to some of the negatives in the game. But essentially what you do is you borrow these things and then it goes on this little track, and then later you invent time travel and you go back in time and pay yourself and give yourself those things.

So the idea is you're borrowing them from yourself in the future. And the way that the game invokes interest is that the longer you take to pay those things back, the more likely it is you'll cause a rupture or an anomaly that interferes with your game. So that's what the. Or a paradox. I don't remember the language they use, but there's this penalty that comes out that's like minus three points. So that part's probably the most complicated to explain and is not covered in any of the games I've suggested so far. But I can't think of any games where a loan is covered, where the game itself isn't super complicated also. So I guess maybe you just have to teach a loan as a standalone thing.

So those are my broad thoughts about how one might teach somebody Anachrony. I would be interested to your listener in learning what games you think, other than Lords of Waterdeep would be good for teaching somebody who'd never played modern board games before Anachrony. I'd also be interested to know what are some games that you think are a no go for a new player, or is theme? Is enthusiasm enough? If somebody is like, look, I really want to try this. I think I can handle it. I would say in defense of this person who posted this thread, they said they taught the brother of this player Lost Ruins of Arnak, and he thought it was relatively easy.

So now they did not say whether the brother was a gamer, how similar the two, the brother and the cousin are, so it's unclear what that has to do with it, except to say maybe their family does have a structure of things they do that provide the scaffolding for being a being a capable gamer, or picking up games quickly. I could see that as a possibility. That said, I don't. I generally wouldn't say like, oh, I taught somebody else this game and they thought it was relatively easy. Therefore, this other person could learn it. I don't don't find that to be true. I also find that I'm really surprised to teach lost ruins of R-nac to somebody, to have them call it pretty simple or pretty easy. I think Lost Ruins of NAC is really complicated.

I might even argue it's more complicated than Anachrony, because Anachrony has a central mechanism. The worker placement and everything that you do springs out of that mechanism. All of the actions you take, you do with worker placement, whereas lost ruins of NAC, it's got worker placement, it's got card play, and it's got track movement. That's three different kinds of interactions. It's also got a resource conversion system that is

way different than the one in Anachrony uses, and more complicated. So I think Lost Ruins of Arnak is lower on the complexity scale than Anachrony, but I'm not sure it should be.

Now, I don't know if the four point zero rating for Anachrony comes from the expansions as well, because if you if you throw in the fractured time expansion to Anachrony, you have a whole different ballgame on your hands. That is an entirely different game with an entirely different level of complexity that I would want you to think carefully about before showing to anybody, but just at its base level. I think I think Anachrony is pretty understandable to people who've played worker placement games before, but not something I would want to throw a newbie into.

Well, if you want something, if you want to share, head over to BoardGameGeek Guild 3269 and share your thoughts on teaching Anachrony there. Now don't go brigade the thread unless it's still active. I don't know whether it will be when this comes up, but you could go read the original thread and see what other people had to say. Whether I'm off my rocker or right in line with the general wisdom, if you want to reach out to me directly, send me a message.wombat929 is my username on board Game Geek, or my email is Brendan at rattlebox dot com. I want to say thanks for joining me on my walk today. I hope your next walk is as pleasant as mine was. Bye bye.

[Exit music]

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