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Game Theory

McDonald

Cacho

CULTURE

Cacho is a game played primarily by adults in Bolivia at family gatherings, restaurants and bars. It is a social game, where the outcome is less important than the conversations and memories that are made as a result of play. I remember my aunts and uncles playing a lot when I was younger, particularly at family gatherings (holidays, birthdays, etc). It's played by friends seated around a table, with drinks in hand, and music playing in the background. I always wanted to play when I was younger, but since there is betting involved, the children were not allowed to play. By the time we got older and grew up a bit, our uncles and aunts played less and less, and now they don't really even play that much anymore. Consequently, I have never participated in a game of Cacho, but as a result of writing this paper, my family has gotten a renewed desire to play this fun, social game.

PLAY

Cacho can be played with as many people as can fit at a kitchen or dining room table, but at least two people. It can be played anywhere, but most usually, players sit around a table, and everyone is dealt a game board, or draws one on a sheet of paper (see score board below). 5 dice in a leather cup are passed around clockwise, as play progresses. The players tend to get really into game-play (in a positive way) and the longer it is played, and the more alcohol that is consumed, voices tend to elevate. By the end of the game everyone is shouting, laughing and joking back and forth with each other.

RULES

Cacho is played with five six-sided dice and a dice cup. Play is similar to Yahtzee. First to go is determined by casting lots, and play moves clockwise from there. Each turn consists of up to 3 rolls of the dice (the only exception is "Grande de Mano" which will be explained later. All five dice are rolled the first time. For the second and third roll, the player may pick up and reroll any number of dice, including all five, as he so chooses. His object is to make any of the scoring combinations as explained below. Dice not picked up after the first roll may be picked up after the second, if the player so chooses.

Scoring Combinations:

- 1) As many of the same kind as possible: One combination each for 1's, 2's, 3's, 4's, 5's, and 6's. The score is the sum of the pips on the dice that score. For example, three 3's count 9 points, or two 5's count 10 points. The remaining dice not matching a combination do not count in the score.
- 2) "Escalera," or a straight of five (like poker): There are only two possible straights: 1-2-3-4-5 and 2-3-4-5-6. Score for Escalera is 20 points. Escalera on the first roll (called "de mano") scores an additional five points, as explained under Scoring below.
- 3) "Un Full," or a full house (again, like poker): Score for "Un Full" is 30 points; 35 points if "de mano."
- 4) "Poker," or four of a kind: Score for Poker is 40 points; 45 points if "de mano."
- 5) "Grande" or five of a kind: Score for Grande is 50 points. A "Grande de mano" is an automatic win; the game is over!

Scoring is performed on a tic-tac-toe-style or ampersand grid, which is what makes the game so simple to learn and fun to play. Each player has a separate scoring grid, which is usually hand-drawn on paper, or even a cocktail napkin. The left column of the grid is for scoring 1's, 2's, and 3's, respectively, in the three cells (from top to bottom). The right column is for 4's, 5's, and 6's, respectively (from top to bottom). The center column from top to bottom holds places to score an "Escalera", "Un Full", and "Poker". Five of a kind is called "Grande" and counts 50 points.

Scoring marks in the center column are "O" for *making* the score (NOT the number of points- which can get confusing at first), "X" for *not* making the score, and "5" for making the score "de mano" (which translated, literally means out of hand, or on the first roll of your turn; which scores a five point bonus). The scoring mark for "Grande" is a "\$" placed just underneath the grid. A "Grande de mano" which is a 5 of a kind thrown on the first turn, ends the game immediately.

Scoring involves adding the scores in the left and right columns, and comparing with your opponents. At the same time, marks in the center column show where you are ahead or behind (since the dice combinations in the center column have much higher point values associated with them, it is easy to tell who is winning, by noting who has filled the most of these spaces). No running total is kept in terms of score, so each hand has a distinctive winner. A game of Cacho ends when a person has completely filled out their grid, or someone rolls a "Grande de Mano."

Note: betting is often associated with Cacho. Players will place friendly bets at the beginning of each game, similar to a buy-in in Poker. The winner of the game takes the pot. Games are often played for as little as only a couple dollars. It is not a high-stakes betting game like poker. It is merely meant to introduce a bit more excitement and reward into the game-play.

One final note on Cacho: a player can call "Bajo" on any roll of his dice, and count the bottoms of all dice instead of the tops. Typically "Bajo" is called as the dice are rolled out. Any player can call "Bajo" as many times in a game or turn as he likes. This variation was played occasionally by my family, but is rarely called in actual play.)

CRITIQUE

There is no real tactical advice to provide regarding Cacho game play. Dice are chaotic in terms of system complexity. Therefore, chance is the only variable in the game. Play is meaningful because there is a clear defined winner each time, There are a nearly unlimited

number of possible outcomes, and therefore it is always completely unpredictable who will win each game. It is a simple game, and is very easy to transport, which is why it is played in such a variety of conditions and environments. It is simply meant to be fun to play, and something to do as an addition to conversation and enjoyment of the company of friends and family. It is not meant to replace conversation. There aren't really any holes in the rules that I can see. It's a simple variation on Yahtzee, less complicated in my opinion, particularly regarding the equipment necessary to play.