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Game Analysis: Buccaneer

In the late 1940s and the early 1950s, my father played a board game that his uncle, a World War II veteran had brought back with him from England. The game was an almost maniacal yet fanciful game that revolved around plundering the open sea and laying waste to those who stood in your way. This game was Buccaneer, a game by the British Game company Waddington's and was produced, in some form or another, from the 1930s to 1980s. This makes the original Waddington's game roughly 78 years old, and is seldom seen played currently. The game, as played by my father, was played from around 1948 to 1954 in the Appalachian Mountains of West Virginia. He lived in a small, isolated, poor coal mining community, and as such, had few such luxuries to enjoy, but Buccaneer was one of his favorites. Though my father was only a child when he played it, he described to me that he played it not only with his cousins and siblings who were around the same age as him, but he also used to play it with his Grandmother whenever he visited her. So, although the game was marketed towards small children, it was enjoyable by a much broader audience. Throughout its history, Buccaneer has been produced not only by the British Waddington's company, but was also released by Parker Brothers in the United States under the name "Trade Winds" and was also released in a Norwegian version under the name "Pirat". My father, however, played the original British version of the game, and the rules that will be discussed here, although they didn't change much from version to version, will be from that original game.

The game Buccaneer was a game for between two and six players, who would be arranged with equal spacing around the playing surface, although this configuration was most easily attained with four players, as the game's playing surface (a four-sided cloth, which will be discussed later in the equipment portion of this paper) was four sided. Many emotions played into the game, because it had many levels of implicit rules that were highly important to the overall flow of the game. Players could experience

anything from joy, accomplishment, strategic thought, anticipation and power to fear, anxiety, angst, anger, greed, and dishonesty. These experiences weren't intended to bring about outright conflict between players because the game was marketed towards children and families, which included Grandparents in this time period.

Buccaneer had a very specific list of equipment that was essential to game play. These pieces of equipment include the game board (made of cloth in the original incarnation of the game), game cards (which include Crew Cards and Treasure Cards), small plastic ships which could and, indeed, must hold any Treasure you find, and simulated Treasure (which took the form of gold bars, barrels of rum, pearls, and gems, all made from plastic). The game also usually required a table or other such playing space to be played on because of the nature of the game board, but this was not entirely necessary; any flat, level surface would suffice. To properly understand the rules, a few things need to be defined. Crew Cards, in the game, were cards with a number between one and three that was the same on both sides, and the total of all of your Crew Cards was how far you could move your ship in one turn. Because the numbers were printed on both sides, anyone could see how fast you could move in a given turn, however, on one side of the card, the number would be either red or black, and it was this side of the card that you should hide from other players, because the difference of the two colors in your hand determined your combat abilities. Chance Cards in the game are similar to those used in other games; they had text written on them that could be good or bad, depending on the card that was drawn. In the center of the game board was a space for what was known as Treasure Island, which was the place that the Chance Cards were kept. Treasure was a major factor in the game, as the goal was to accrue five of the same types of Treasure. Each piece of Treasure (gold bars, barrels of rum, pearls, diamonds, etc.) had a value associated with it. Some later versions of the game require the player to accrue a total value of 20 in order to win, instead of having five pieces of the same kind of treasure.

The game play itself is fairly simple. At the beginning of the game, each player chooses a home port and a ship of matching color, and is then dealt Crew Cards. The game board included not only ports for each player in the game, but an equal number of neutral ports that the player could sail to as well. Movement in the game could be either orthogonally over the squares that made up the board, or diagonally across them, and you could move in any direction you wish. You can sail to the center of the board to Treasure Island for Chance Cards which can give you a chance at getting loot. You can also sail to the neutral ports to trade, where there are a number of Crew and Chance Cards. You can also attack other players, the outcome of which was determined by the combat power of each player, which was in turn determined by the player's Crew Cards. There were also a number of islands and coves that the player could visit, or could potentially be directed to, if the player drew the right (or wrong) Chance card. There were even rules for drifting at sea, which was a result of losing all of your Crew cards.

Boundary Rules in the game were fairly scarce, in inverse proportion to the number of "cheap wins". Players could, if they so chose, gang up on other players and force one player to lose by the simple fact that they cannot compete against two to five other players on their own. There were no safeguards stating that this was against the rules, but it was generally considered unsportsmanlike. The game also featured an interesting theme; cheating. Cheating was considered the Pirate way, and wasn't necessarily encouraged or enforced, but a good cheater could very significantly enhance his chances of winning the game. The only boundary rule against this was that other players could figure out that their opponent was cheating, and call him out on it. There were no written rules about the effects of being caught cheating. Generally players would agree to what the punishment should be for someone caught cheating.

The overall rules of the game are sound and make for intriguing, interactive, and engaging game play, but there are a number of holes in the boundary rules that are hard to overlook. As has been stated above, both ganging up on other players and cheating were common occurrences because the

game had no formal way of discouraging this. This means that the game could very easily be swung in one player's favor, in a very short amount of time, with little or nothing to stop it. Some of the effective strategies in the game, because of this, revolve around the use of these tactics. The obviously effective tactic of cheating was one that had a very big draw because it was seen as more in keeping with the spirit of the game to act like a pirate and cheat your way through it. This was dangerous, however, because it was fairly easy to be caught doing so. Another effective strategy for the game was to cover your movement cards, or obscure them somehow, so that other players cannot easily see your movement speed and have a much harder time guessing your combat power and speed. Another effective strategy was to take a direct route to the treasure. Meaningful play is very obvious in Buccaneer, as anything the player does has absolute and immediate effect. All actions in the game are also integrated into the game itself, as they have direct and indirect impact on the game itself, the player, and their opponents. For instance, taking a Crew Card has a number of direct outcomes. For one, the game now has one less Crew Card for other players to take. It also gives the owning player between one and three more movement spaces per turn. It also gives the owning player either a gain or loss in combat power, which affects all other players. Almost every system within the game is like this, and the game contains many levels of meaningful play.

Buccaneer created a feeling of fantasy and unreality for those who played it. It was meant to allow players to really feel like the romanticized swash-buckling pirates of another time, and it was very successful at this. It gave the winning players the joy of accomplishment and the satisfaction of knowing that you had the most treasure and were master of the seas, but at the same time, it gave the players who were behind more to strive for, and encouraged them to act more like a pirate and try to win by any means necessary. Overall, from talking with my father about the game, it seemed like a highly entertaining, enjoyable game from start to finish, despite its few setbacks.