

## **A Foreign Game – Fun times with “Burken”**

Jan Zheng [zhengj1@umbc.edu](mailto:zhengj1@umbc.edu)

This day and age it becomes increasingly harder to find something fresh and unique. Ideas are more easily and more frequently passed around, borrowed, lent, and shared. It's hard to come across anything truly unique and intriguing. This applies to any creative outlet, such as creative writing, composing and song writing, movie making and storytelling. The same thing unfortunately applies to games. Many games that are played nowadays, whether in West or the East, are often similar and might even be variations of each other.

One children's game that resembles the game of tag is a Swedish children's game called “Burken,” which translates to “the Can.” Burken is could somewhat be described as a combination between tag and hide-and-seek. The game is most popular among kids in elementary and middle school, and is usually played outside during the day, often during recess, with about perhaps half a dozen to a dozen kids. The game is very active and social, much like tag, and allows the participants to be physically active. The game is most often played outside, in a setting which usually offers a lot of concealment and obstacles such as nooks, corners, and trees such as in a forest or a playground, where the players can easily hide or outrun each other.

The game itself is fairly simple to play, and is somewhat a combination of tag and hide-and-seek. One or two players are usually designated as “Han,” which translates to “Him,” or in tag terms “it” – the players designated to tag the other players, who try to avoid being tagged.

The game is unique from tag in that the players designate an object called “burken” – or “the can”, which is usually a door, tree, or other large object, which the tagger must touch in order to tag someone. When tagging another player, the tagger needs to yell out the player's name as well as where the player was last spotted (if not obvious), as in “dunk för Jimmy bakom eken,” or “tagging Jimmy behind the oak tree,” for that player to be tagged. When a player gets tagged, the player is taken out of the game. Similar to hide-and- seek, tagging can only occur if one of taggers sees another player. This encourages the taggers to search the area for players to tag, and encourages players to hide from the taggers. On the other hand, players can “escape” if they manage to touch “burken” before getting tagged and yelling “dunk för mig, ett, två, tre,” or “tagging myself, one, two, three.” Escaping takes the player out of the game and means the players can't get tagged anymore. The last person who is still in play who touches “burken” without getting tagged will “sparka burken,” or “kick the can,” which results in all the tagged players getting freed, and essentially restarting the round.

The goal of the game is for the taggers to protect “burken” while tagging as many of the other players as possible, while the goal of the other players is either to escape or to “kick the can.”

The game starts out with the taggers closing their eyes and counting to a number, usually a hundred, while the other players run and hide. The taggers can then search the area (while not straying too far away from “burken,” as not to let anyone escape), for players to tag. When the taggers finish

counting they must scream “här kommer jag,” or “here I come,” before they can start searching for players. When they discover someone, it often becomes a race to see who can reach “burken” first. When the last player is in play, the game becomes very exciting because the last player could kick the can and reset the entire game, thereby forcing the taggers to recapture everyone. If the last player is tagged, the game starts over with the person or people tagged the earliest as the new designated taggers. If all the players escaped, the original taggers will need to be stay as taggers.

There are no boundary rules in the game. However, after a few rounds of play it can become obvious that there are a few cheap tricks the players or the tagger could resort to for the game to become meaningless. For example, taggers could “mjölka,” which translates to “to milk,” the area where “burken” is and effectively “camp.” If this happens, usually to the chagrin of other players, players usually complain and in effect force the tagger(s) to extend farther from “burken.” Players could also stay close to the taggers while the taggers are counting, and immediately after they finish counting, the players could rush “burken” and escape. Since the taggers need to rattle off everyone’s names, they usually aren’t able to tag most of those who decide to rush. While there are no boundary rules, participants usually don’t abuse these tactics, and if they do, usually get kicked out of the game.

Instead of resorting to cheap tactics, players could work together to escape. They could use the fastest player to lure the attention of the tagger(s) while the other slower players could dash for “burken” first. This takes into the account that the taggers must announce the name of the players they tag in order to tag them. Players could also sneak around behind the taggers and escape unnoticed without getting into a chase. Taggers in return could stagger themselves, leaving some people closer to “burken” and some people farther to “patrol,” and if they see someone they could relay messages by yelling back to the ‘base.’

The game is in my opinion very meaningful for children, even more so than games such as tag, because the game not only allows the participants to be active, it also allows for some cunning, planning, stealth, and teamwork. Players who are good at sneaking, running fast, working together or by themselves to elude other players tend to do better in the game. The game offers the thrill of racing others for those who want to run, and also the thrill of cunning and stealth for those who choose to do so instead. When the participants reach “burken,” either if they managed to tag someone or free themselves, it usually gives them a boost of self-confidence in their abilities, as in “wow, I made it!” The game also offers a fair amount of excitement, especially towards the end of the game, where those who got tagged want the last surviving to “kick the can.”

The game teaches kids a lot of core values about working together for a common goal, and the importance of working together.