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Game Report: One-and-Thirty, and Bone-Ace

Class: Cards

Type: Stops

Number of Players: up to 7 or 8

Reconstructed mainly from primary source

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Redactor: Justin du Coeur

Sources: [Francis Willughby's *Volume of Plaies*](#), c1665. Early attestations of One-and-Thirty to 1550's; first attestation of Bone-Ace is Florio, 1611 (Singman). Also, Cotton's *Compleat Gamester*, London, 1674.

Reconstruction -- One-and-Thirty

This old game can be thought of as an early predecessor to Blackjack; the games are quite similar in flavor. The objective is to get a combination of cards as close to 31 as possible without going over. It is quite easy and quick to teach, largely a gambling game with just a bit of skill involved. For a very slightly more complex variant, see Bone-Ace, below.

Equipment

A standard French-suited deck of 52 cards.

Deal

Before beginning, agree upon a stake to play to. You always will lose at most a double stake in this game, never more.

Willughby does not address who deals; Cotton says that you lift for deal, with the lowest card getting the deal. Note that being dealer is at best a mixed advantage.

Deal three cards from the top of the deck, face-down, to each player from the top of the deck.

Play

The dealer goes around to each player, starting with eldest and ending with himself, and asks whether they want to "stick" or "have it". If the player wishes to stick, the dealer goes to the next; if they will have it, they get another card. They may continue to get more cards until they decide to stick, or they go over 31, in which case they are out. Note that Willughby explicitly states that these cards are dealt from the bottom of the deck.

Scoring

Pip cards are worth their number of points; coat cards are worth ten. Neither Willughby nor Cotton states the value of the Ace; based on the statement about pip cards, I take the Ace to be worth 1. (There is no reason to believe that the Ace is switchable between 1 and 11 as in modern Blackjack.)

If all players have gone out (that is, gone over 31) before the dealer gets to himself, he immediately wins.

First player to reach exactly 31 wins immediately. Willughby says that hitting 31 exactly is worth a double stake, but it is not clear whether this is the usual case or what he believes should happen. I agree that it should happen, so I tentatively recommend it.

If no one reaches 31 exactly, and more than one player is left at the end, the player closest to 31 wins the pot. (A single stake from each other player.) Neither Willughby nor Cotton addresses ties; since Cotton says that ties go to the elder in Bone-Ace (below), I would recommend that here.

Reconstruction -- Bone-Ace

This game is a slightly later variation of One-and-Thirty (see other side). You may draw your own judgement about whether 1611 is early enough to be considered "period".

This variation is a bit more random than One-and-Thirty, with a pure lottery element, but also a shade more skilled, in that you have a little more information about your opponents' hands.

The following description is just the differences between Bone-Ace and One-and-Thirty.

Deal

Deal three cards to each player, as in One-and-Thirty, but deal the last card face up.

Bone-Ace

Before play, figure out the best face-up card. Order of counting is usual; suits apparently do not matter, except that the Ace of Hearts is called the "Bone-Ace", and wins over all other cards. (Cotton says that the Ace of Diamonds is the Bone-Ace, but is otherwise similar.) Willughby does not address ties, but Cotton says that in this case, the eldest wins.

All other players pay a single stake to the holder of the highest card. Cotton says rather that this person gets half the stake, but this is simply another way of saying essentially the same thing.

Play

Play and Scoring are identical to One-and-Thirty.