

Savvy Pirate

By Chris Riffey

Concept

It's the dawn of a new era, the 17th century. The civilized nations of Europe are taking part in the greatest land rush the world will ever see, doing everything they can to claim, colonize, and develop any corner of the world they can find, in their name. Ships are being built as fast as possible, sea-bound trades routes are everywhere, and the wealth of the world is flowing with the currents of the sea. It is a fantastic time to be a pirate.

Unlike anywhere else on earth, the Caribbean has become a major hub of activity in this new age. Endless island chains, calm seas, and a close proximity to the newly-discovered Americas have made it a gateway through which riches and resources travel between the nations of Europe and the fresh additions to their empires. It is here that the adventure takes place.

In this tale the player must assume the role of a young person ready to set out on their own adventure and make their own rules, to take the helm of their destiny and become a pirate captain. Only as a pirate captain can they hope to sail the seas the way they see fit, to have the freedom to choose where to go and when. They are free to choose who to attack, what to pillage, and how to spend their loot. They are the master of their world. Aye, but there's a catch.

Being a pirate captain isn't as simple as running around with a sword yelling "YARR!" Pirates have to eat, crews need to be paid, and ships don't repair and supply themselves. In order to survive a life of piracy on the open seas the player must learn the skills to keep the ship afloat, literally. Income and expenditures are the key factors to survival in this world and pirates are no exception. Players will need to learn how to manage the elements of their operation and ensure their income is well-spent if they are to climb to the top of the sea-faring food chain. Good pirates get famous, great pirates get rich and survive! In this adventure having the smarts to keep things running is as important as one's skill with a blade. If a player is to win, they must become a Savvy Pirate.

Specifications

- Single Player Educational Action/Strategy
- Most appropriate for children ages 13 and up
- PC Platform

Key Elements

- Player assumes the role of an up and coming pirate captain in the Caribbean circa 1615 A.D.
- Creativity and personal expression is encouraged by giving the player the ability to customize their ship(s), their character, and of course the flag they fly.
- After setting sail, the player is able to choose how they want to earn their money through activities such as pillaging small colonies, attacking merchant vessels, or hunting for buried treasure. They are free to choose one focus or do any mixture of activities that suits them.
- Success in player activities is determined through related mini-games. These include things like sword-play, sailing, and map-reading.
- Numerous ways to spend earned income in both necessary and frivolous ways are presented to the young pirate.
- Player is regularly challenged with problems such as repairing the ship, feeding the crew, and procuring supplies which can only be overcome by regular saving and proper spending of income.
- The young captain is given constant feedback from the crew and other characters to help guide them towards making sound financial choices.
- Dynamic difficulty system scales with the player's ability, decreasing the likelihood of the player becoming too adept at the game system. As they become more wealthy and notorious new challenges will await them such as Royal Navy hunting parties and rival pirates.
- As the player learns how to properly save and spend money they will gain access to better ships, crews, equipment, etc which will help them on their adventures. The more successful their adventures, the more they will gain Notoriety. The player will strive to become the most famous and wealthy pirate of the Caribbean.

Gameplay Breakdown

In order to win the game, *the player* must gain a certain amount of **Notoriety**. **Notoriety** is the measure of how famous they are as *the captain* in the Caribbean and **Notoriety** can be gained or lost with every activity *the captain* takes part in.

Just like all things in life, operating a crewed, sea-fairing vessel is not a magically cost-free venture. Every day that the ship is at sea supplies are used, the ship takes damage, and occasionally members of the crew are lost. While *the captain* will take part in activities that can offset these things, the real success is being able to properly manage money such that *the player* is able to sufficiently overcome the constant drain and still prosper.

Game Areas

After choosing the look of their character, their flag, and minor elements of their starter ship (little more than a skiff), *the player* then embarks on the game proper. Much of *the player's* time is spent in one of the following areas: **Captain's Quarters**, **On Deck**, **Below Deck**, **At Port**, or **The Hideout**.

Captain's Quarters

The **Captain's Quarters** is the area where *the player* will make decisions on what to do next. This area contains **The Map** which *the player* uses to choose where to send the ship and what activities to embark on. **The Map** is regularly updated and marked as **Reports** are gathered about opportunities and trade routes as well as new areas are discovered. This is also the area that contains **The Ledger** which is what *the player* uses to view their financial status and what they've spent money on. The **First Mate** is also available here to give suggestions on how *the player* might want to proceed.

On Deck

On Deck is where *the player* finds themselves when a decision must be made by *the captain* on how to proceed. The game will regularly generate chance events that will require *the captain's* attention and call for *the captain* to come **On Deck**. *The player* will then have to make one or several choices on how to handle the situation. The situations can be positive opportunities such as happening upon a wealthy merchant ship to pillage or discovering a new island that may contain hidden riches. The situations can also be negative pitfalls such as a key component of the ship breaking or being chased by a Royal Navy warship.

Below Deck

Below Deck is the area where *the player* can go to check on the status of the ship, the crew, and the supplies. This area is where **The Quartermaster** can be found who can show the captain what the ship has and what it needs. He can also make comments on *the player's* spending habits and make recommendations on future purchases.

At Port

In order to keep their ship repaired, stocked, and crewed *the player* will need to regularly dock, at which point they will find themselves **At Port**. While **At Port** *the player* has the ability to purchase supplies, to change or upgrade the crew, to change or repair/upgrade the ship, to purchase vanity items or services, and to gather **Reports** about opportunities they may want to embark on to make more money. Different

things will be available to *the player* based on the amount of **Notoriety** they have gained. At a certain point *the player* will also be able to pay for a little **Insurance Policy** with the locals **At Port** in case something should go horribly wrong.

The Hideout

No successful pirate keeps all their wealth aboard their ship where it could be lost at sea, pillaged by other pirates, or impounded by the Royal Navy. Even though they live a semi-nomadic life, good pirates must establish a sort of home area where they keep excess wealth, supplies, and items of value. This area is known as **The Hideout**. After their first few days at sea, *the player* is given the ability to select an island that is to contain their hideout. Once they have established their Hideout, *the player* may return at any time to deposit wealth for safe keeping or withdraw wealth for use in their adventures.

Action/Mini-games

While the different areas of the game are the places where *the player* makes the decisions on how to run their life as a pirate, the primary action of the game takes place during the activities *the player* chooses to embark on to make money or prevent its loss. The majority of the activities are initiated by *the player* while using **The Map** in the **Captain's Quarters**. However, some activities will be initiated by the system at various times. All activities have associated mini-games that *the player* plays to determine the success or failure of the activity they have embarked on.

Player-Initiated Activities

Pillage Colony – While **At Port**, *the player* may come across a **Report** of a new colony being established somewhere in the Caribbean. Once this happens the colony's location is marked on **The Map** in the **Captain's Quarters** and *the player* may then choose to **Pillage that colony**. Choosing to **Pillage a colony** will begin the **Colony Swordplay mini-game**. In this mini-game *the player* must defeat the colony guards at a duel of swords using a combination of well-timed attacks, combos, and blocks. Winning the game means a **gain of money, supplies, and Notoriety** for *the captain*, losing means a **loss of crew and Notoriety**.

Pillage Ship – As with colonies, *the player* may also receive Reports of trade routes that are marked on **The Map** in the **Captain's Quarters**. Once discovered, *the captain* may choose to **Pillage Ships** in a trade route. Choosing to **Pillage Ships** in a trade route will begin the **Ship Pursuit mini-game**. In this mini-game *the player* must steer the ship towards the target merchant vessel keeping it in the wind and give the order to fire the cannons at the appropriate time. Winning the game means a **gain of money and Notoriety** for *the captain*, losing means a **loss of supplies and Notoriety**.

Hunt for Treasure – Occasionally, *the player* will come into contact with a map that leads to a rival pirate's Hideout, often from being victorious during a **Rival Attack**(see below). If this happens the island

location of the Hideout is marked on **The Map** in the **Captain's Quarters**. *The captain* may then choose to **Hunt for Treasure** at this location. Choosing to **Hunt for Treasure** at one of these locations will begin the **Hunt for Treasure mini-game**. In this mini-game *the player* must solve visual map-reading puzzles of increasing difficulty to make progress towards finding the treasure. Winning the game means **a large amount of money** for *the captain*, losing means **a loss of supplies**.

System-Initiated Activities

Sea Storm – Occasionally, the player may be called up **On Deck** if the system initiates a Sea Storm. When this happens it begins the **Storm Survival mini-game**. In this mini-game *the player* must battle strong winds and massive waves while trying to keep the ship on course. If the game is won, the ship escapes the storm unscathed. If the game is lost, **a large amount of damage is incurred, and some supplies and crew are lost**.

Rival Attack – Occasionally, *the player* may be called up **On Deck** if the system initiates a **Rival Attack**. *The player* is then asked to choose between running and fighting the rival pirate. If running is chosen, this begins the **Enemy Pursuit mini-game** in which *the captain* must steer the ship and use the wind to outrun their attackers. Winning this mini-game means that *the captain* and all their assets are safe and **a small amount of Notoriety is awarded**. If the game is lost or *the player* had chosen to fight the rival pirates initially it begins the **Cannon mini-game**. In this mini-game *the player* must give orders to the crew manning the cannons in order to try and disable the rival pirate ship. Winning this mini-game means **a gain in Notoriety** for *the captain* and the option of running without penalty or continuing the fight. If the mini-game is lost or *the player* then chooses to continue the fight this begins the **Repel Boarders mini-game**. As with the **Colony Swordplay mini-game**, *the captain* must duel with swords to fight for control of the situation. Winning this mini-game means **a large gain in Notoriety, money, supplies, and a map**. Losing this mini-game means **a large loss of crew, supplies, money, and Notoriety**.

Royal Navy Pursuit – After a certain amount of **Notoriety** is gained, *the player* may occasionally be called up **On Deck** if the system initiates a **Royal Navy Pursuit**. As fighting the Royal Navy directly is not something a pirate chooses, this begins the **Enemy Pursuit mini-game** in which *the captain* must steer the ship and use the wind to outrun their attackers. Winning this mini-game means that *the captain* and all their assets escape and **a small amount of Notoriety is awarded**. Losing the mini-game begins the **Cannon mini-game**. In this mini-game *the player* must give orders to the crew manning the cannons in order to try and disable the Royal Navy ship. Winning this mini-game means **a gain in Notoriety** for *the captain* and that they escape without further penalty. If the mini-game is lost this begins the **Repel Boarders mini-game**. As with the **Colony Swordplay mini-game**, *the captain* must duel with swords to fight for control of the situation. Winning this mini-game means **a large gain in Notoriety and supplies**. Losing this mini-game means **a total loss of crew, supplies, money, the current ship and a large loss of Notoriety**. If *the player* does not have an **Insurance Policy** active the game is over.

Note: Anytime the **Cannon mini-game** is played the ship takes damage that must be repaired **At Port** regardless of the outcome of the mini-game.

Upgrades/Money Sinks

As the game progresses, the player will be given the option to spend their money on many things. Some will be useful upgrades that will help them become even more successful at various activities whereas others will be more inconsequential in nature and will simply use the income of the player for some sort of vanity or personal satisfaction.

Gameplay-Altering Upgrades

Ship – As a captain grows in wealth and **Notoriety**, so too should his vessel. Ship upgrades will allow for more days at sea with more supplies and crew as well as more firepower for ship encounters.

Sails – Any sailor worth their salt will tell you that the sails make all the difference. Better sails mean better speed and less time and resources lost while at sea.

Reinforcements – A sturdy ship isn't just build from good wood. Putting reinforcements of wood and metal in strategic places can make a great difference in how much damage a ship might take.

Cannons – Like pirate captains, not all cannons are created equal. Good pirates buy better cannons. Better cannons mean more success in cannon-related activities.

Arms – Sword-fighting is an art as much as a skill. However, the better a pirate's blade, the further a pirate's skill goes.

Inconsequential Purchases

Hat – Not every pirate captain needs a hat, but for those that do there are a wide variety of kinds available that get increasingly more ornate.

Pet – What pirate doesn't have a trusty pet on their shoulder? But what kind do they have and how exotic is it? A seagull might perch for free, the rest will cost.

Clothing – Clothing makes the pirate, isn't that what they say? For being the most notorious pirate of the Caribbean one must dress the part. It won't do to have one's rivals confusing them for deck hands. All manner of dress and accessories are available, for a price.

Figurehead – On the sea, the bow of a pirate's ship is the first thing their victims see. Notorious pirates make a good impression with some sort of creature or goddess pointing the way towards the ships destiny. That's why all manner of upgraded figureheads are available in multiple shapes, sizes, and forms.

Custom Sails – They might cost something extra, but they give the captain the ability to really spell out their style to all who gaze upon the ship. Multiple colors and styles are available.

Ship Trimmings – There are many ways to show how great or wealthy of a pirate you are. Upgrading the trimming and details both outside the ship and inside the **Captain's Quarters** is a good way to do just that. Anything from a fancy map holder to silver deck trim is available, at a price.

End Game

As *the player* learns to save money and spend wisely, their wealth will grow. The smarter their purchases early on, the more opportunities to purchase the things they desire will open to them as time goes on. As they continue to be successful on the high seas their **Notoriety** will grow. Eventually, they will reach the **Notoriety** cap and be proclaimed by the system as the most famous and wealthy pirate in all the Caribbean! At this point the game will be over and they will have won. The system will give them the ability to save, print, or email an image of *the captain* and their ship in certificate-style layout outlining their achievement.

Summary

Savvy Pirate is a game about living the idealized life of a pirate captain at the height of Caribbean Piracy. It offers adventure and intrigue but most importantly, lessons about the proper management of finances to get ahead in the world. While the idea is highly stylized, it is founded in parallels to the real world systems and limitations that we as adults face. It could be an excellent educational opportunity for children and warrants your consideration.