LONG TAU
The Chinese DRAGON Game

by Fred Horn

In the late 1970s, I was asked to make an inventory of all games stored in the attic of the Jumbo headquarters in Amsterdam. One of my discoveries was a game Mr. Thomassen had sent to Jumbo in 1943. He had apparently queried about the possibilities of getting it published, but that did not materialize and Jumbo did not return the prototype. When I tried to find out more about the game and its author, privacy rules made it impossible (for me) to get access to the files. An individual requesting such information had to either be a family member or had to have a declaration from a University that scientific research was being done.

(N. B. See Addendum 1)

The prototype is now in the Amsterdamsch Historisch Museum. The Speeldiap Museum in Deventer also has a version of the game which could indicate that (probably in small numbers) the game had been published elsewhere.

The game rules presented here are translated in English from the original typed rules by Mr. Thomassen.

(N. B. See Addendum 2)

© M. J. G. Thomassen, Illustrator
May 29, 1943

LONG TAU is an old Chinese game in which a dragon, who has to sit in the middle of the gameboard on his golden chair, presses his mark. The Chinese believe a dragon cannot be killed, only tied, so the aim of the game is not to "capture" opponents' pawns, but to "besiege" or surround their pawns to make them harmless.

Around the Golden Chair there are four play areas connected by straight lines, each consisting of 22 squares. When LONG TAU is played with two people, only the two opposite areas are used—each player placing 22 pawns on their squares. The author notes each player has his own color.

Players draw lots to see who starts. The pawns can only move along the straight black lines, as far as possible, which means: till the end of the line or when meeting one's own pawn or an opponent's pawn. (This unusual movement rule of the pawns is one of the "enchanting things" of LONG TAU.) Jumping over pawns during a move is not allowed. Players alternate turns.

LONG TAU Dragao game from SPEEGODE Museum in Deventer

When a player succeeds in completely surrounding an opponent's pawn, on his next turn, that "besieged" pawn is removed from play, and the player moves one of his own pawns.

A pawn is besieged when it is completely surrounded by enemy pawns and cannot move. Sometimes a player needs 3 or 4 pawns for this enclosure, depending on the pawn's position on the board. If a pawn is surrounded by 3 opposing pawns and one's own, and one's own pawn can still move, then the siege is not complete and the pawn cannot be removed.

It is also possible to besiege a whole group of pawns. The one condition is that the surrounding is truly complete. In that case the complete group may be removed from the board.

If a player, during his turn, is able to occupy the 4 squares of the Golden Chair, then he, on his next turn, can remove 4 opponent's pawns situated the furthest from the Golden Chair.

If a player wanted to do this again he would first have to move one of his pawns from the squares around the Golden Chair, and then return back on his next move. However, this gives the opponent the opportunity to occupy this empty square and thus he can save his game.

The first player without pawns on the board, loses the game.

If LONG TAU is played with four people, each player starts in his area with 12 pawns, situated on the 12 squares nearest to the player's edge of the board. The two opposite players play against the other two players. The author notes that "partners" play with the same color pawns.

Four player version: 48 pawns, in two sets of 24 pieces, in two colors.

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On May 29, 1943, the date the author notes for the copyright, Mr. Thomassen sent a letter to Haasemans & Hotten in which he outlined a summary of the game’s rules. Unfortunately for the game inventor, Jumbo never answered his letter.

Dear Sir,
As a result of our conversation on the telephone, I summarize below in short the rules:
The game may be played by 2 or 4 persons, respectively with 22 or 12 pawns (the blue-up with 12 pawns is upon the squares at the back part of the board).
The game is based on the principle of removing pawns of the opposite party by:
1) enclosure: a capture
2) "making the Golden Chair (the inner Square)
A pawn is besieged when it is completely surrounded by enemy pawns and is unable to move.

Also more pawns (grouped together F. H.) may be besieged as a whole.

When the Golden Chair has been "made," 4 opponents pawns may be removed from the outside squares.

The movement of the pawns is along a straight line. A pawn must move up to the end of the line where this line changes direction, or up to the point where another pawn "blocks" further movement.

If you require further verbal explication, I will be with pleasure at your disposal. I do hope to hear from you in the near future, yours faithfully.

M. J. G. Thomassen

Addendum I

After a long while, I started inquiring about Mr. M. J. G. Thomassen again. Now, being able to search on the Internet I was able to find out more information about his personal and professional life. The website of the Comic-Books Shop "LAMBIERK" revealed the following information:

Marius J. G. Thomassen was a Dutch illustrator, who was known for his pro-German artwork during World War II. He was born in Utrecht, and initially studied medicine. He ended his studies after one year to enroll at the Academy of Fine Arts in Liege, Belgium. The mobilization of 1914 forced him to return to his home country, where he served as an officer in the Dutch Army for five years. He returned to the arts after World War I, and initially cooperated with illustrator Rob Graafland for a year. One of his best-known creations during this period was his drawing against Bolshevism for the Dutch government in 1919.

He subsequently worked for the newspaper Het Nieuws van den Dag in Amsterdam, and then headed for the United States. He found employment with the McClure Syndicate in New York, and remained there until his return to Holland in 1931. There, he worked for papers like Haagse Post ('Haagse Post'), and De Telegraaf, and was head of the art department of the advertising agency De Globe in Amsterdam.

Thomassen had been illustrating children's stories in the 1930s and early 1940s for publishers like Van Gooi, Malmberg, Leopold, Kluftman, and Roskam.

He gained notoriety however for illustrating ‘De avonturen van Flits, de herder en Bull, de dog’ under the pseudonym Mathoos. It was an anti-Semitic propaganda book aimed at primary schools, released by the Department of Information and Arts in 1943. The story portrayed Churchill as Bull the Dog, Hitler as Flits the German shepherd, and the Jewish people as rats. No work by or further whereabouts of Thomassen are known from after 1943.

The genealogy site “familie-nethlage” gives some more information:

**Marius Jacques Gérard Thomassen**
Born: August 7, 1889 — Utrecht

**Died:** April 23, 1971 (Leeflijf 81) — Maastricht

**Married (1) to:** Johanna Dorothea Bosch Born 1890?
No children.
Divorced probably before 1934.

**Married (2) to:** Hendrika Felicie Nethlage on March 23, 1934 in Soerabaja (Java)
Born 1890?
No children.
Divorced 10 February 1956 in Hagen, Westfalen, Germany

**Married (3) to:** Helge Emilie Louise Behle on April 7, 1956 in Dortmund, Germany
Born 1890?
No children.

The newspaper DE TELEGRAAF from April 29, 1971 indicated Marius died on April 23, 1971 and also noted his latest address.

Other newspapers reported his whereabouts and career:

**HET NIEUWS VAN DEN DAG**

Jule 9-12 (first group) has passed the "Gemeentelijke HBS 5-years-course"

**DE NH**
December 9, 1911
Appointed 2 e Lieutenant in the Dutch Army

**Infantry**
DE TLID and DE TELEGRAAF
December 1, 1915
Appointed 1st Lieutenant

LIMBURGS DAGBLAD and NIEUWE ROTTERDAMSE COURANT
July 10, 1925
Dismissed from Army as 1st Lieutenant

BATAAFSCH NIEUWSBLAD
December 16, 1932

In a column, this newspaper announces the coming arrival of the well-known artist Marius Thomassen. He is going to lead the art department of four designers for the publicity firm “DE GLOBE” in Batavia. Information about his former career is given as well as a photo and a nice caricature drawing of M. Thomassen by Dale Boronius:

The information presented is used by LAMBIJK for the story on their website.

HET NIEUWS VAN DE DAG voor NED INDIE January 25, 1933
Registered in the Civil Administration of Batavia: Mampongweg 16

The Koninklijke Bibliotheek in The Hague presents the following information on their website:

Marius J. G. Thomassen
Born: August 7, 1889 — Utrecht
Died: April 23, 1971 — Maastricht
Pseudonym(s)
Claudius, Matho

Works of Marius J. G. Thomassen
(own works FH)
Taalstudentenboek (1932)
(Linguistic picture book)
De avonturen van Flits, de herder en Bul, de dog (1943)
(The adventures of Flash, the Shepherd and Ball, the dog)

Works of Marius J. G. Thomassen
(only illustrations FH)
Globetrotter in America 1932
(Globe Trotter in America)
Connie’s strijd. Een lek verhaal voor jonge meisjes (1940)
(Connie’s fight. A fun story for young girls)
Een geïnjekte zaawer (1940)
(A Happy Wanderer)
Het spoorschip der Celebes-zeek (1941)
(The Ghost ship of the Celebes Sea)
Van zes uur ’s avonds tot twee uur ’s nachts (1941)
(From six o’clock in the evening until two hours at night)
De besten uit het nest (1943)
(The Best Ones from the Nest)
De Mulo-ridder (1943)

In 1941, Thomassen provided the cover and illustrations for this book.

In 1943, Thomassen also drew illustrations for the book:
De Paardenjongen van Schacht 3

DE INDISCHE COURANT
March 20, 1933

The article at left mentions Marius’ involvement in a worldwide PHILIPS-campaign “Current Eater” and the publishing of his book “Taalstudentenboek” from 1932.

There is no record of Marius Thomassen’s return to Holland, but at least from 1940 on he was working as an independent illustrator based in Amsterdam.
Addendum 2

In his first letter to ‘Jumbo’ (including the typed rules for the game), Marius Thomassen states the game is old and of Chinese origin.

Over the years I queried many people of Chinese ancestry if they knew anything about the game. I never got a YES response.

The same result occurred questioning people from the former Dutch East Indies (Indonesia) where Marius could have seen the game (if it truly was an existing game during the time of his stay there). They also had never seen the game nor heard of it.

In my opinion, Marius made up its past (history) to make the game all the more interesting, like others had done before with HALMA/Chinese Checkers (the old game from Greece/China!), and many more as well, like the TANGRAM puzzle.

On the game box in the Speelgoedmuseum in Deventer Marius had drawn a (kind of) Chinese Character:

Perhaps this is the character for the name LONG TAU, but what does it mean?

The best I can deduce is that LONG TAU is a game Marius invented himself.

Thus, at the beginning of this article, the authorship was given:
© M. J. G. Thomassen, Illustrator
May 29, 1943

Maybe this copyright does have some issues currently, because for the book et DE AVENTUREN VAN FLITS, the copyright is given as:

© 2010 dbnl/erven Marius J. G. Thomassen

But where do we find these heirs (erven)?

In 1943, Marius J. G. Thomassen lived in Amsterdam; Leonardostraat 3 (1 hoog);
tel: 22234