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. 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 Amsterdamse Historisch Museum. The Speelgoed-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 ‘enchanted things’ of LONG TAU.)

Jumping over pawns during a move is not allowed. Players alternate turns.

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 to happen, 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 besiege 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 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.
Dear Sirs,

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 line-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 /besiege
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

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 “LAMBIK” 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 Liège, 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 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 newspapers like Haagsche Post (‘Taalendig Prentenboek’) 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 Goor, Malmberg, Leopold, Kluiman, and Rosam.

He gained notoriety however for illustrating ‘De avonturen van Flits, de herder en Bull, de dog’ under the pseudonym Mathos. 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-snethe” gives some more information:

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

Died: April 23, 1971 (Leeftijd 81) — Maastricht

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

Married (2) to:
Hendrika Felicie Snethlage 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 TELEGRAAFF from April 29, 1971 indicated Marius died on April 23, 1971 and also noted his latest address.

Other newspapers reported his whereabouts and career:

DE AVONTUREN VAN FLITS de herder en Bul

DE NIEUWS VAN DEN DAG (July 22, 1909) Utrecht—July 9-12 (first group) has passed the “Gemeentelijke HBS 5-years-course”

DE TIJD December 9, 1911
Appointed 2 e Lieutenant in the Dutch Army—infantry >>
DE Tijd 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 Koninklijke Bibliothek 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)
Taalkundig Prentenboek (1932)
(Linguistic picture book)

De avonturen van Flit, de herder en Bull, de dog (1943)
(The adventures of Flash, the Shepherd and Bull, the dog)

Works of Marius J. G. Thomassen
(only illustrations FH)
Globetrotter in America (1932)
(GlobeTrotter in America)

Connie's strijd. Een leuk verhaal voor jonge meisjes (1940)
(Connie's fight. A fun story for young girls)

Een gelukkige zwerver (1940)
(A Happy Wanderer)

Het spookschip der Celebes-zee (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-ridders (1943)
(The Mulo-Knights)

Het onbewoonde eiland (1943)
(The Uninhabited Island)

Hopman Roel (1943)
(Hopman Roel)

Marijke's problemen (1943)
(Marijke's Problems)

Stormers in de branding (1943)
(Stormers in the Surf)

Other Known Works of Thomassen

Phil doet de hushouding
(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

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

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

Publiciteitskantoor „De Globe“.
 Dit reclamebureau beschikt thans over een t-tal knappe teekenaars, die onder leiding staan van Marius Thomassen, bekend en de in reclame-kringen algemeen geroemde werelddoezer „Current Eater“, die hij voor Philips ontwierp. Ook tekende hij het bekende „Taalkundig Prentenboek“ voor de „Rangshe Post“.

Zijn eigenlijke reclame-opleiding kreeg hij in Amerika, waar hij een 10-tal jaren werkzaam was als reclamebureau als Erickson, e.a.

DE INDISCHE COURANT
March 20, 1933

The article at left mentions Marius' involvement in a worldwide PHILLIPS-campaign “Current Eater” and the publishing of his book “Taalkundig Prentenboek” 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.

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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 booklet 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; Leonardstraat 3 (1 hoog); tel: 22234

I don't think there's a person reading this who didn't have a parent that said, "Don't play with your food!"

If that was one of the dictums of growing up, then how come so many games were made using food? Or made from food?