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Driftwood Trading à la Knizia



In YANGTZE, Reiner Knizia goes back to his roots and once more presents an arithmetic economy game with auction elements, following up the good old tradition of MEDICI. Thematically, this trip to China is not too far-fetched, because after all the Great River was of immense economic importance in the period depicted here, the Qing dynasty, which begins in 1616 with the Emperor Nurhaci and ends in 1912 with Puji, the last Emperor of China.

At the center of the game is the trading of goods that are shipped down the Yangtze River by boat. Eight trading locations along the river sell goods of daily use as well as some rarer luxuries. Their price is not dependent on their type, but on the place of purchase. At the mouth of the river, in Shanghai, it amounts to only four coins, at the headwaters to ten.

Each player begins the game with 30 coins and two randomly-drawn goods tiles. Your very first purchases depend on what you got out of the bag; for the revenue increases dramatically when you sell goods of the same

type or the same color. While a single luxury good is worth five coins, five of them add up to 60 coins, which means that even high purchase prices may later pay off.

Tight budgets

If the game was all about having enough cash to purchase goods, the starting capital would be plenty to get by, particularly since acquisition is restricted to one piece at a time. However, the 20 trading post buildings will ensure the budget is always tight. They appear when the goods for sale on the river are replenished with tiles from the supply bag, after the old goods tiles have been shifted

to less expensive positions. The building tiles come in four different types, two colors and values between 1 and 5. If a trading post gets drawn from the bag, it is immediately auctioned off among the players. Everyone is trying to get as many different types in the two colors as possible, for these are worth up to 50 coins in the end. Additionally, majorities in the building types are also rewarded, with the winner in this category gaining 30 coins, and the second 15. As a result, an individual trading post can easily reach a value of over 20 coins, which means auctioning it off turns out to be hard work. If one is drawn at the beginning of a game, the ensuing bidding war can entirely clean out traders' purses.

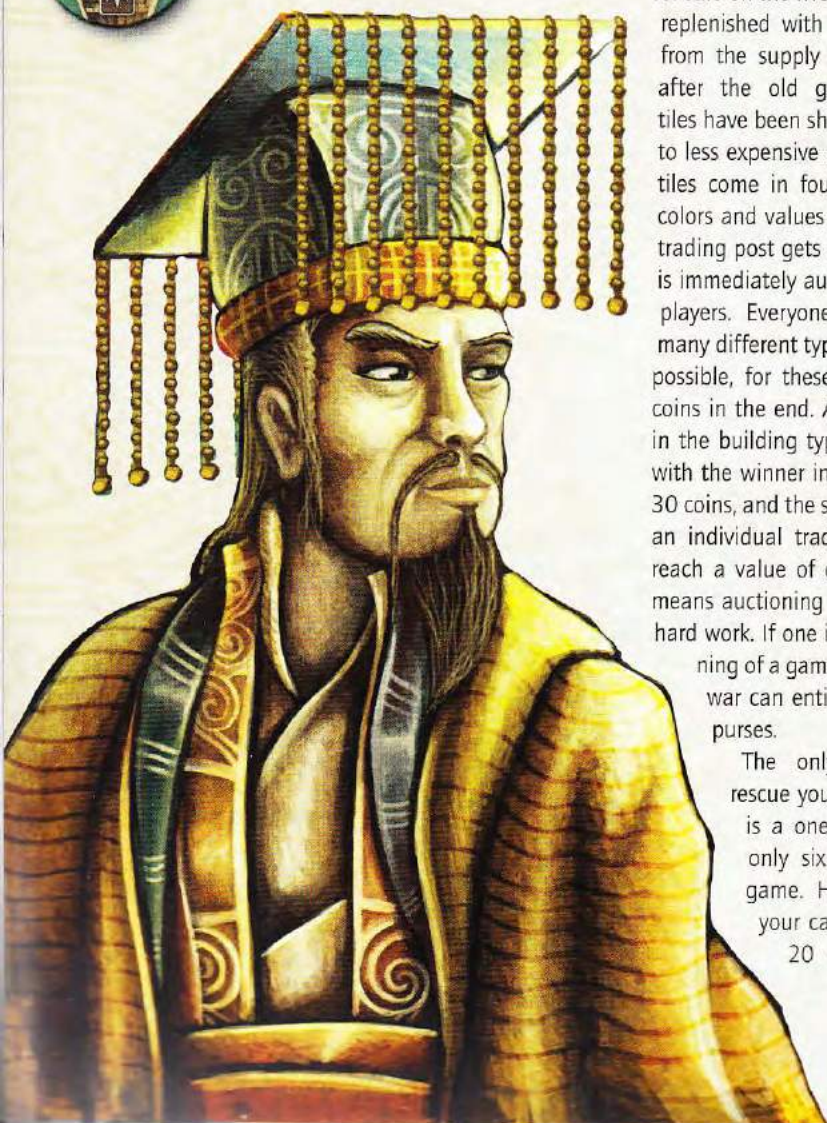
The only thing that might rescue you from such dire straits is a one-off special card, and only six are available in the game. Half of them increase your cash flow (by 10, 15, or 20 coins), allowing pur-

chases of goods or continued participation in auctions. Even though you do not need to pay interest per se, each unused cash flow card is worth 30 coins at the end of the game. This may sound like a lot, but playing these cards might be a good idea, regardless. This is certainly true in the case of those three one-off special cards that do not score anything at the end of the game. One allows for a free purchase, the other for buying two goods in one go. With the third you may sell a set of goods at any time, something which is normally only allowed at the beginning of a turn.

Apart from goods and trading posts, the supply bag also contains 12 emperors. If one of these is drawn, the tile will show if you need to pay taxes and

what amount. Some of them also grant cash benefits and other advantages.

The game is over when the twelfth emperor gets drawn from the bag. The instructions on the tile are still executed before the

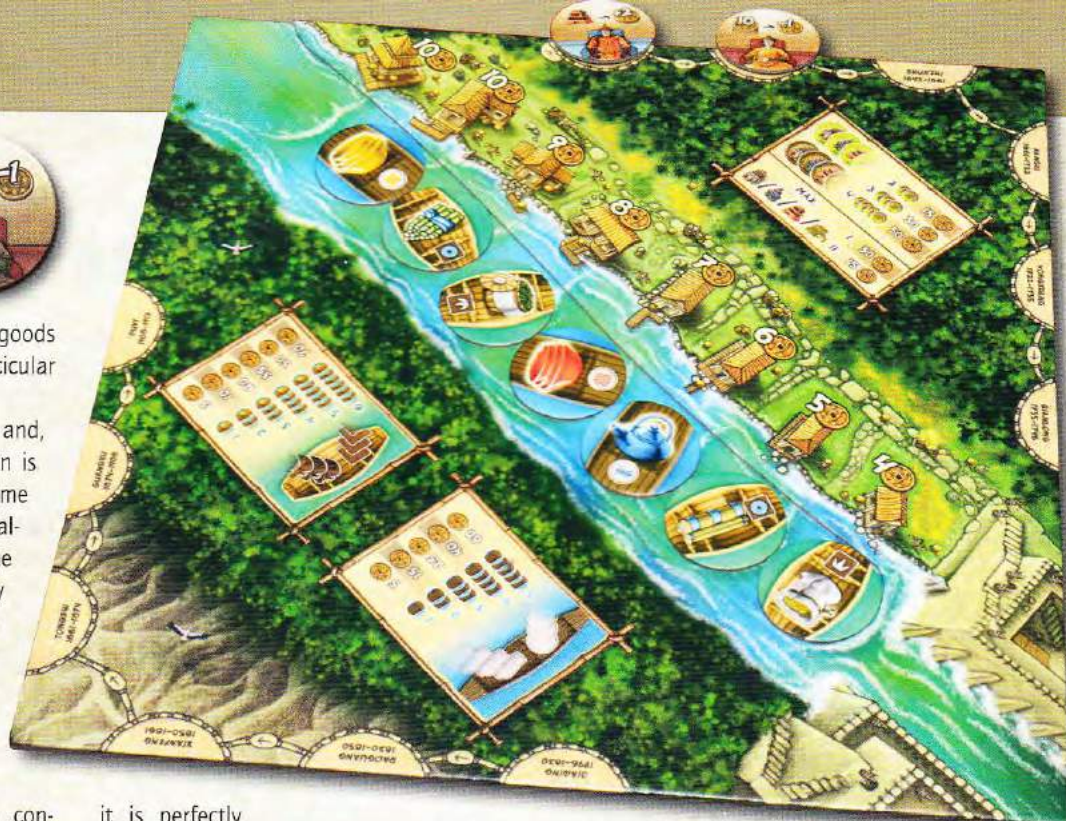




final reckoning, when all unused goods are sold and the branches in particular are scored.

YANGTZE is a typical Knizia game, and, thanks to the tight budget, tension is kept high over the entire playing time of around 45 minutes. Constant evaluation is required, starting with the purchases: Do you continuously buy cheap goods for four coins and build up a random collection, or do you invest in luxury goods instead, which promise larger profits, but will in most cases not even get close to Shanghai?

There are similar considerations connected with the auctions: Do you prefer to bet on the brown trading posts, because it is easier to get four different ones, or on the scarcer green ones? After all, in this



gamble for majorities you not only gain an additional 15 coins by securing at least a second position; at the same time you also take it away from your opponent, so that in the end

it is perfectly possible to get biddings as high as 20 and above. The problem of if and also when you should fall back on your three cash reserves is also not an easy one to tackle.

For all the arithmetic going on in the background, YANGTZE is a clearly-structured and easy-to-learn game, and even eight-year-olds without pocket calculators are able to join in – and thanks to a moderate amount of

luck they will not necessarily drown. If you were born with a golden spoon in your mouth because you initially received two matching luxury goods, you have 15 coins at your disposal straight away, and this amount can be multiplied quickly by making the right acquisitions. If you are unlucky, you drew two regular goods that are just about worth six coins. But for the redrawing of new tiles the element of luck has almost a negligible effect as the high entry prices act as a deterrent against buying immediately. The playing time is ultimately dependent on coincidences; if the emperor tiles appear early on in the game, it can end quite abruptly, with some players still waiting for suitable trading posts.

Excellent artwork

Both the idea and the design are very pleasing here. The square game board with the recesses in the Yangtze's riverbed

contains all the information necessary for scoring. It is also printed on the trader screens, behind which only cards and goods are hidden from the other players' view. The counting boards for the face-up money are also handy. Klemens Franz has again done an excellent job regarding the graphics design.

YANGTZE is not only a solid family game; experienced players may be able to get a lot out of it as well.

Wieland Herold/cs



Title: Yangtze
Publisher: Piatnik
Designer: Reiner Knizia
Artist: Klemens Franz
Players: 2-4
Age: about 8+ years
Duration: about 45-60 minutes
Price: about 29 €

Reviewer	Playing appeal
Wieland Herold.....	7
Udo Bartsch*	6
Christwart Conrad**	6
Stefan Ducksch	5
Harald Schrapers***	7

* Entertaining auction game with a significant element of chance.

** Graphically appealing traditional fare.

*** Mathematically thought out Knizia game, nevertheless entertaining and with a nice auction element as well as an uncertain end.

