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# REVIEW

Marco Polo II - In the Service of the Khan

## May Contain Traces of Marco Polo

Marco Polo has turned into a brand. Not only those that know him from before will like that. But this is how business works: Once you have grown to a certain size you can't keep managing everything on your own. Even Walt Disney did not draw all Mickey Mouse cartoons himself, Friedrich Engels worked as a ghost writer for Karl Marx at times, celebrities let their fan mail be answered by agencies, and politicians have their own social media team. And if they choose to tweet themselves, it usually doesn't go so well.

In short, Marco Polo is too busy to keep checking on things in Asia. Therefore, he lets himself be represented by Cantulga Od, De Wu, Abha Basu and other extras from the Marco-Polo-trust. This might be disappointing for the audience after all they paid to see the real Marco Polo. What is easily missed though is that even in the first part of the series the master was not personally present. You only walked in the footsteps of Marco Polo. Just check the game box if you don't believe it. It's written in big letters.

MARCO POLO II can also contain traces of Marco Polo. They are even quite prominent. The level of newness compared to the firstling compares to that of a good game expansion. But it isn't one. Support is no longer available. If you had to refurbish electronics lately, you will know that replacement parts are so last century. The mobile era speeds up aging. Not surprisingly, Windows 1 leads to Windows 2 and now we are already at 10. Something similar happened here: after the big updates THE NEW CHARACTERS and THE AGENTS OF VENICE, it was time for the jump from MARCO POLO I to MARCO POLO II.

The developers completely revamped the operating system. There is a new game board. The polonaise of the companions now starts in Beijing instead of Venice. With jade a kind of meta-resource is introduced, voyages by sea require guild seals, and there are seven new characters with individual skills. There are no guarantees for compatibility with the first game underlines the publisher. But this only pertains

to the technical data surrounding MARCO POLO II - IN THE SERVICE OF THE KHAN. The important thing is what it Khan do.

### I General overhaul

Even though the map that you travel on is more crowded than on your outbound trip, even though even short distance connection costs fees now, and you therefore have to trade, add, and calculate in more currencies, and even though a game now takes longer due to there being more options and challenges, MARCO POLO II feels more elegant and more mature. It had a great general overhaul. The foundations of the game haven't changed. MARCO POLO still is a dice placement game in which everyone rolls dice at the beginning of each round, then placing them on various action spaces during the turn. Higher value dice usually have a better yield, but they can work against you when you are not the first to place them on a certain action space as you will have to pay fees equal to the pip count.

The traveler's goal is to explore exotic countries and their specific habits and customs in order to earn points. Basically there are three options. More weight is placed on the goal cards that are chosen in the beginning of the game and travelling in the far East. Contracts play a less central role now, but still give you points or

other rewards when fulfilled with gathered gold, silk, pepper, camels, and jade.

The contracts no longer come to the merchant, but the merchant comes to the contracts now. Supplies are no longer comfortably placed next to the game board, but are only accessible in specific

cities. Having established a trading post there prior will give you access.

MARCO POLO has arrived in the mobile age and gets players moving better. This is a good development as you get around more. In order to encourage the wanderlust, there are now three instead of one placement options to get the caravan moving. The eye of the needle, through which players had to pass with their camels before, has given way to a multi-lane onramp.

Even those that continually have bad luck when rolling dice were considered. More profitable than in the first part, even low dice rolls can be put to use decently, while higher numbers are sometimes almost too much of a good thing, because in some cases you don't get more than the players that rolled low numbers, but you pay more for it.

The class of Marco Polo I and II is shown by the fact that you can participate in both games almost intuitively. Certainly, costs and details must be calculated and taken into account, but there are no bulky special rules or hidden insider knowledge that can only be accessed by researching strategy tips on the internet. The base mechanism (placing dice and taking actions according to the numbers rolled) is crystal clear and makes sense; this ever repeating principle carries the whole game.

You will want to get the most out of your dice, have plans, pursue goals and, at the same time, compete with the other players to either steal actions from them or at least make them more expensive. A second big plus are the seven characters. Each player picks one at the beginning of the game and each gives you a unique ability like traveling without interruptions, accumulating jade faster, or winning guild seals easier. These special abilities do not deviate quite as spectacularly from the basic rules as in the first Marco Polo, but still generate a large amount of variation so that it will probably take a very long time before curiosity about further games and further experiences evaporates.

### I Options instead of constraints

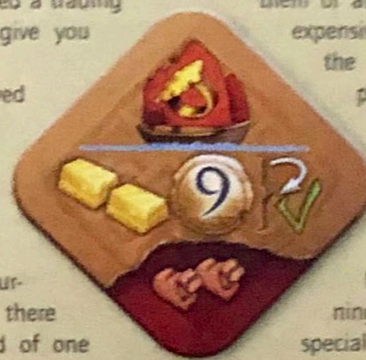
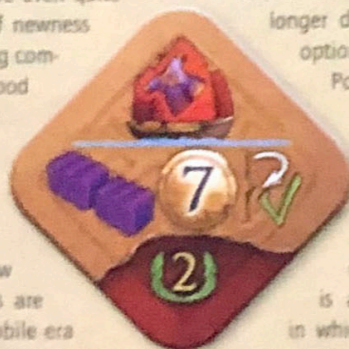
MARCO POLO II replaces the constraints of the first game consistently with options. The game events have become more diverse and require more flexible approaches. In retrospect, you will notice that the market and voyages had been subject to an unnecessarily rigid system in the past. Now more spaces are available on the board and five of them change each round when cards and tiles are

being replaced.

MARCO POLO II is less easy to read and plan from the get-go. It is more about seizing opportunities and taking advantage of temporary offers. Because the dice no longer crowd the same spaces, there is a nice feeling of having choices instead of being forced to take certain actions. Because there are enough spots in the cities remaining the same throughout the entire game and, in addition, the goal cards now have more weight, MARCO POLO II does have a need for purely reactive playing styles.

At the same time the publisher also refined the components and changed the size of the goods. It is now easier to distinguish a 3 from a 1. However, in several of my games we ran out of resources. MARCO POLO II could use a few more camels.

Udo Bartsch/dm



Title:	Marco Polo II - In the Service of the Khan
Publisher:	Hans im Glück
Designer:	Daniele Tascini, Simone Luciani
Artist:	Dennis Lohausen
Players:	2-4 (for two: --)
Age:	about 12+ years
Duration:	about 60-120 minutes
Price:	about 55 €
Reviewer	Playing appeal
Udo Bartsch	8
Christwart Conrad	8
L.U. Dikus*	8
Matthias Hardel	8
Christian Klein	8

\* Even stronger in character than Part I