

Light Fare but Too Long for a Family Game

Having the habit to look for the author's name first thing with new games, won't do you any good here. Cielo d'Oro? Rudimentary language skills are sufficient to translate this to "golden sky". Now this name may be possible for an author of Far Eastern provenance, but for an Italian game designer? Further inquiries brought to light, Cielo d'Oro is the name of a group of Italian game designers. Pier Volontè is one of them, and he submitted the game AQUILEIA at the last game designer competition Premio Archimede. And won. At the award ceremony, he was still only by himself. For licensing, however, it was agreed to name only the group as a whole.

Aquileia is a real place. Today only an insignificant village with 3500 inhabitants, the place was once founded as a military base, and because of its location developed into one of the most important towns in the Roman Empire. As citizens of this town we take part in public life, enjoy ourselves at the games, increase our wealth, built houses and most of all: collect victory points. Sounds familiar enough.

Classical worker placement

Before jumping in the middle of things, first a word about the coin systems of the Aquileians in game. They know bronze, silver and gold coins. When, however, something has to be bought, the payment has to be exact (as asked for on the board). Only the money launderer, at his stall on the market, changes money as required. To do this in the game, you only have to send one of your meeples there. In English this is called worker placement, but the workers are called henchmen in this game.

The town is divided into six areas, where all players initially send their meeples, so that they can then fulfill the tasks assigned to them. There is space

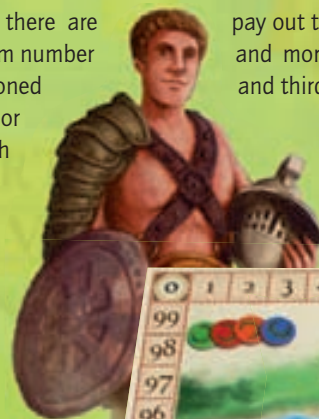
enough for everyone to place their henchmen somewhere, even when there are five of us playing (the maximum number possible). At the before-mentioned market slaves can be bought or cards can be obtained, which are meant to influence the results of the action in the arena or on the racetrack. We particularly enjoyed the area called "Potentia" – but we will get to that one a little later.

Fully equipped with weapon, horse and slave cards we enter the arena and the racetrack, aiming to fill our coffers with cash. Both areas are dealt with in a similar manner. The space where we placed our henchmen gave them a certain basic fighting strength. This strength is improved by rolling the dice. Dice?

Yes, there is some dice rolling involved in AQUILEIA. Basically, each player has some dice on hand, with every one of them showing a gold, a silver and a bronze coin twice. In the arena, only bronze rolls are asked for and equal one strength point each. The result of three dice

can be improved by playing slave or weapon cards. And when you have secured a set of additional dice on the formerly-mentioned "Potentia", you can now use them at will, unless you want to keep some in reserve for the racetrack. The strength points are recorded on a small score track, in order to be able to pay out the reward (bronze coins and more) for the first, second and third place.

At the racetrack the players need to decide whether to go for gold or for sil-



ver. In practice, there is however no single combat between these two parties taking place. It is every-one for themselves and again this is all about trying to gain the best result with your henchmen, dice and cards. When rolling the dice, now of course the gold or silver points, respectively, are of importance, and thus in the end payout is in gold or silver. Arena cards are also to be won here.

I From the races to the building Industry

Before we can now invest the collected coins in the building industry, we take a short detour via the theatre, where a culture card is auctioned off. What purpose this card serves – showing two colors only – is not revealed at this time in the rule book; we find out in the final scoring after the end of the game.

Up to five henchmen can be placed for the building transactions; depending on

their position they may erect one or two buildings, some gain you victory points immediately after building. What and how much is to be paid for a building is printed on the game board: mostly coins in certain combinations. Some buildings, especially those that generate a large number of victory points, also need slaves if they are to be built.

There are no special building rules to adhere to; everyone can build where he or she likes or finds it most lucrative. Workshops can gain victory points at the end of each round, when they are activated by a henchman in the harbor. Villas however only gain points once, at the end of the game. We missed this small but very important difference between these two building types in our first game. Was it due to our inattention or because it can be easily overlooked in the rules?

I Weak First Impression

The hustle and bustle in AQUILEIA will only last six rounds, then "villa points" are added to the so far collected victory points. These villas are located in differently colored quarters of the town. The theatre cards in the respective colors that you bought at the auction or the arena cards you've won on the racetrack are now used to multiply the value of your villas, ideally times five. Knowing this, your building activities will in future follow a much more specific plan.

The first impression after opening the box was full of skepticism. The eye fell on seven color dice (not even normal dice with pips!). Although the components are made of wood, the henchmen were represented by simple pawns. Even the prototype, which the author used in his application for Premio Archimede, had used better looking game pieces. Including zip lock bags for sorting pieces would have been much appreciated.

After a first game and the discovery of how the six areas of the town work together, AQUILEIA

had scored considerable points with us. Okay, how you fare when rolling the dice in the arena and on the racetrack is a matter of luck, and if you do not like that you should stay away from this title; but we actually liked the rest of the game.

There is the thrill during the distribution of the henchmen and the sudden realization that you have yet again chosen a wrong place, when another player occupies a position you had already in your sights. This is the case with many worker placement games; AQUILEIA can certainly not gain any bonus points for originality in this respect. However, many familiar ideas have been blended into an entertaining game.

The decision where to build which houses depends on your money and your cards alone. There are neither neighbourhood rules nor maintenance costs to be taken into account. Nobody is confronted with any serious decisions. AQUILEIA is a rather slight fare. To classify it as family game would however be inappropriate, as a typical duration of 90 minutes will probably be too much for some families. *KMW/cs*



Title: Aquileia
 Publisher: Zoch
 Designer: Cielo d'Oro
 Artist: Geoffrey Cramm, Victor Boden
 Players: 3-5
 Age: about 10 and up
 Duration: about 90 minutes
 Price: about 30 €

Reviewer Playing appeal
KMW 7

Udo Bartsch 6
 Christwart Conrad* 7
 L. U. Dikus 7
 Stefan Ducksch 6
 Wieland Herold 6
 Harald Schrapers** 7

* Getting (back) into the game is made easy by exemplary editorial work: Board game structure and symbolism cleverly support the rules.

** A good game, but sadly for the nth time the worker placement principle has been used.

