

THE BATON RACES OF YAZ

Grandfather's Story

A warm drizzle soaked the few seats in the grandstand that weren't occupied yet. The way the crowd was still coming in, it was certainly going to be another full house. The crowd was happy, because this was perfect weather for the Baton Races of Yaz. On this day all differences were forgotten—Flibdill welcomed Tarnose, Skadingle made room for Luggant—as members of all the races of Yaz prepared to celebrate together.

One infant Tarnose, still in his birthfuzz and full of questions, sat propped on his grandfather's knee.

"Grandfather, why are the Baton Races today?"

"Because, little one," replied the old and (relatively) wise Tarnose, "it was on this day, hundreds of rains ago, that our planet escaped the tyranny of the Floydds."

"Who were they?"

"Slave-masters who came from the skies. See that bulge they're putting in place over there? The ships that the Floydds came in were shaped like the bulges, only much bigger."

"Why do the others have to play? Why can't we just have a Tarnose race and they have their own races?"

The little Tarnose didn't notice as a Skadingle sitting nearby turned slightly and glared at the questioner and his grandfather. The old Tarnose phrased his answer carefully, to satisfy the infant and the skittish Skadingle at the same time.

"Because it took all of the Yazzites, working together, for Yaz to become free again. Tarnoses are important, yes, because only we can carry the baton through the swamps. But other folks have their places, too. Skadingles can run much faster than we can, and Luggants can throttle."

A Flibdill, sitting right behind the old Tarnose, ruffled her feathers but did not protest his failure to mention her race. Next thing, she thought, the old gramp will be telling the child that it was a Tarnose who came up with the idea that freed Yaz, when she and all her friends *knew* it was a Flibdill. . . .

. . . And the Skadingles say it was a Skadingle who came up with the idea. Pride plays a part in such things. Only the dim-

witted Luggants make no claim to such a prestigious ancestor—they've always been much better at throttling than thinking anyway.

Actually, it was closer to nine thousand years ago that the Floydds came, not "several hundred rains," as the grandfather said. (Every year on Yaz, it rains constantly except for one day, so the Tarnoses keep track of time by counting rains instead of years. No one has bothered to come up with a decent calendar since Yaz only has one season.)

It was on a day like any other that the Floydds came to Yaz, bringing to the Yazzites the knowledge that Yaz was not alone in the universe. Unfortunately, that wasn't all they brought, for the Floydds knew technology and slavery. In huge spherical ships they landed, disgorging many small hovercraft and Floydds with stun-guns. The Floydds quickly forced the defenseless Yazzites into submission—which eventually led to the tyrants' downfall because the races of Yaz were made to work together for the first time in their soggy history.

Legend has it that the beings of Yaz shared a simple language even before the Floydds came. Thus, interracial communication had been possible. In practice, however, it's likely that such exchanges consisted of statements such as "Outta my way, chicken-head," and "Take a hike, mud-mouth," and so forth. The races of Yaz have never actually fought each other, but they sure did (and still do) know how to insult one another.

All four of the races got along better than ever before when Floyddian slavery forced Yazzites to work together in crews. For the first time, Flibdill cooperated with Skadingle, Luggant toiled with Tarnose. Each race came to appreciate the special talents of the other three, and every slave developed a sense of Yazzite pride—an attitude that had never existed before.

It took time, but finally every Yazzite hated the Floydds much more than he disliked the Yazzites who didn't look the same as he did. From there, it was a small step for some anonymous Yazzite to come up with a planet-saving idea. (It may not seem like much of an idea, but you have to understand that Yazzites are not the most imaginative creatures.)

Even though the Floydds had stun-guns, the Yazzites had a great advantage in numbers—but the slaves couldn't use their advantage as long as they stayed fragmented in small groups. The answer was to stage a massive uprising of all the Yazzites all at once, and to make that possible, creatures of all the different races would be used as messengers to spread the word. Skadingles, Flibdills, Tarnoses, and Luggants would each use their special abilities, rushing off to alert members of other work crews. When each messenger became exhausted, he would direct a fresh messenger to take the news to another crew. And the revolution would spread, faster than the outnumbered and surprised Floydds could run for their ships. . . .

"Grandfather, what are they doing with those pretty sticks?"

"Those are the batons, little one. Each side is placing the baton on one of the bulges, so the Races should soon begin."

"But what is the baton for? What does it mean?"

"The baton is a symbol, little one, which means that it stands for something else. The batons stand for the message that was carried to the different camps. And that message was, 'It is time for Yaz to be free!' Now—look! one side has already broken a bulge! The Races have begun!"

The Basic Rules

Object of the Game

The *Baton Races of Yaz* is played by two teams of Skadingles, Flibdills, Tarnoses, and Luggants. The team that breaks all of its bulges with its baton in the shortest time is the winner.

The Playing Field

The race takes place on a field that looks just like the rest of the surface of Yaz. Some of the areas are *mud* (orange hexes), the closest thing the planet has to clear terrain; others are *muck* (brownish hexes), a special kind of mud that's thick and bubbly; and the rest are *mire* (greenish hexes), which looks like swamp. As explained below, some types of creatures can only move through certain kinds of terrain.

The Playing Pieces

The game contains 70 pieces and markers that are placed on and moved across the playing field. Each side has 2 batons, 5 Skadingles, 5 Flibdills, 5 Tarnoses, 8 Luggants, and 10 bulges—more than enough to play either a small scenario or a large one. (The extras can replace lost pieces, or can be used by players who want to experiment with different combinations.) The bulge markers are shaped like trapezoids (half-hexes), so that two of them can be placed in one hex without overlapping.

Each Yazzite is identified by an illustration on the counter—and, in case you don't already know what Yazzites look like, an initial letter. Each counter also has a number and one or more dots, indicating the movement rate and maneuverability of each creature type.

Skadingles (S) can move up to 6 hexes per turn. However, each Skadingle counter has only one dot, meaning that it can only move through *mud* hexes.

Flibdills (F) can move up to 4 hexes per turn and (as indicated by the two dots) can only travel through *mud* and *muck*.

Tarnoses (T) can move up to 3 hexes per turn and can travel through all three kinds of terrain—*mud*, *muck*, and *mire*.

Luggants (L) can move up to 2 hexes per turn, and (like Tarnoses) can move through any kind of terrain. Luggants are special for two reasons: They are the only creatures that can *throttle* opposing Yazzites, and they are the only type of Yazzite that can *not* carry the baton. (See the sections on "Luggants" and "Baton Movement" below.)

The Scenarios

The *Baton Races of Yaz* can be played as a small scenario or a large one. The small scenario is less complex, because fewer pieces are used, and for that reason it is recommended to beginning players. However, it is not necessarily shorter than a large scenario.

In the small scenario, each side has 1 baton, 2 Skadingles, 2 Flibdills, 2 Tarnoses, 4 Luggants, and 6 bulges.

In the large scenario, each side has 1 baton, 3 Skadingles, 3 Flibdills, 3 Tarnoses, 6 Luggants, and 9 bulges.

Sequence of Play

I. Setting Phase

The *game* starts before the *race* actually begins. During the Setting Phase, players decide where the pieces will be located on the playing field when the race begins. All pieces are placed before any are moved.

A. Bulge Placement: One of the two players is designated as the "setting player"; this is determined randomly or by agreement. The setting player takes all of his bulge pieces (either 6 or 9, depending on the scenario) and puts them on the playing field, one to a hex, with these restrictions:

- No bulge may be placed in a hex adjacent to another bulge.

- One third of the bulges must be placed in each of the three types of terrain. For the small scenario, this means that two bulges must be placed in mud, two in muck, and two in mire hexes.

- Especially recommended for beginning players: Each bulge must be placed at least four hexes away from any other bulge. (The farther apart the bulges are placed, the longer the game; it's best to learn by playing an extended game, then setting up shorter races later.)

When the setting player is finished, the other player puts his bulge pieces in the same hexes, so that two bulges of different colors fit together inside each hex. Bulges do not move, and are removed from the playing field when they are broken. (See the section on "Breaking Bulges" below.) A hex containing bulges (or one bulge, if one is broken) is referred to as a *bulge hex*.

B. Yazzite Placement: Players now put their Yazzites on the playing field one at a time, alternating turns beginning with the setting player. Any type of creature can be placed at any time, with these restrictions:

- No Yazzite may be placed in a bulge hex.

- No Yazzite may be placed in a hex that already contains a Yazzite.

- No Yazzite may be placed in a hex where it is prohibited from moving; in other words, no Flibdill can begin the race in mire, and a Skadingle must be placed in mud.

C. Baton Placement: The setting player puts one baton counter in each hand, and the other player chooses a hand. The baton that is revealed is placed first—by the *opposing* player—and then the second baton is placed by the other player, with these restrictions:

- A baton can only be placed in a bulge hex.

- Both batons cannot be placed in the same hex.

II. Movement Phase

Now the race begins! Players alternate turns, with the setting player going first, and go through as many Movement Phases as necessary to bring the race to an end.

Each player, in turn, can move as many of his Yazzites as desired, up to the limit of each counter's movement number, and taking the pieces in any order. (To keep track of which pieces have been moved so far in a turn, it's a good idea for each

player to place all of his Yazzites on the board facing toward him and then rotate each one 180 degrees—so that it is upside down from the viewpoint of the owning player—when its move for the turn has been completed. When the player has moved all of his Yazzites, or does not intend to move any others, then he declares that his turn is over and rotates all his pieces so that they are facing him again.)

Of course, no Yazzite can be moved into terrain that is prohibited to that creature type. The other restrictions on movement are these:

— At the end of a player's turn, no hex can contain more than one Yazzite belonging to the same side.

— At the end of a player's turn, no hex can contain Yazzites from opposing sides unless at least one of the pieces is a Luggant.

— The entire move for one Yazzite must be made at one time; it's not legal (for instance) to move a piece one hex, then move a different piece, and then move the first piece again.

A Yazzite may move *through* a bulge hex or a hex containing another Yazzite; one may also end its move in a bulge hex, as long as doing so does not violate one of the above restrictions.

Luggants

The sluggish and powerful Luggants have a unique role in *The Baton Races of Yaz*. They are the only Yazzites *not* allowed to carry the baton (see the section on "Baton Movement" below), and they are the only Yazzites that can *throttle* opposing Yazzites.

A Luggant can end its move in a hex occupied by an opposing Yazzite (of any race, including another Luggant). When this occurs, the Luggant counter is stacked on top of the other Yazzite, and the bottom piece is throttled—it cannot move as long as the Luggant is sitting on top of it. *Special note:* Because they are slow starters, Luggants may *not* throttle on either player's first turn.

A Yazzite being throttled can get out of its predicament in one of two ways. If the Luggant is moved in a later turn, the piece that was beneath it is free to go on its way again. Or, the Luggant doing the throttling can itself be throttled by an opposing Luggant. If this happens, the Yazzite that was originally throttled is *popped out* and free to move again.

When a Yazzite is popped out, the owning player places the piece in any hex adjacent to where the throttling took place, subject to terrain restrictions (and, of course, the edge of the playing field). If it is not possible to place a popped-out Yazzite one hex away, then it may be placed in any legal hex that is two hexes away from the site of the throttling.

A popped-out Yazzite may move during the same turn in which it is popped out, and the pop-out movement of one or two hexes does not count against its movement capability for that turn. The owning player can choose any legal hex to be the target of the piece's pop-out movement. However, if the chosen hex contains another Yazzite, then the player must move the popped-out piece immediately (since no piece can stop in a hex containing another piece)—unless the popped-out piece is a Luggant, in which case the player can choose to throttle the piece that is being landed on.

When a Yazzite carrying a baton is throttled, the baton can-

not be passed as long as that piece remains throttled. (See the section on "Baton Movement" below.)

Since a player is not required to move all of his Yazzites on every turn, a Luggant may continue to throttle an opposing Yazzite for as long as the throttling player desires.

Yazzites of either side can move through a hex where a piece is being throttled. (Hexes are actually a lot bigger than Yazzites.)

Baton Movement

Any Yazzite except for a Luggant can carry the baton belonging to that Yazzite's side. At the start of the race, each side's baton is located in one of the bulge hexes and must be retrieved by a Yazzite from that side. From that point on, the baton can be carried continually by a single Yazzite (legal, but not very efficient), or it can be passed between friendly Yazzites. Once a baton is picked up, it must always be in the possession of a Yazzite; it cannot simply be dropped (for instance, to keep the baton from being throttled along with the baton carrier).

A baton may be passed from one (non-Luggant) Yazzite to any friendly Yazzite in an adjacent hex. This action can be done as often as the player wishes and at any time during his turn. Neither passing nor carrying the baton counts against a Yazzite's movement capability.

Breaking Bulges

Whenever a Yazzite carrying a baton moves onto or through a bulge hex, the bulge of the same color is broken, and that bulge piece is removed from the playing field. There is no restriction on the number of bulges that can be broken in one turn.

As soon as one player's team breaks all of its bulges, that player has finished the game—but he is not necessarily the winner of the race. (See the following section.)

At the start of the game, the Yazzite that picks up a side's baton automatically breaks the bulge of the same color in that hex. Other bulges can be broken in any order.

Even if a bulge hex is occupied by an opposing Yazzite, the bulge can be broken as long as the baton carrier has enough movement to get through the hex. It is possible to move through a bulge hex by entering it and then moving back out of it, into the same hex that the Yazzite just vacated (in some cases, that may be the only hex adjacent to the bulge hex into which the Yazzite can move). Remember that terrain restrictions apply to bulge hexes as well as any other place on the playing field, so that a Yazzite can only break a bulge if it is able to move through the terrain of that hex.

Ending the Race

When *The Baton Races of Yaz* are conducted for real, both sides move simultaneously, and the first side that finishes is the winner of the race. But in the game, players must take turns (because moving simultaneously would make a big mess). As a result, finishing the race first is not always the same as winning. To keep the setting player from having an unfair advantage, use these rules:

1. **An anticipated finish must be announced.** A player who calculates that he can break his last bulge on his upcoming turn must make this announcement to the opposing player before starting his turn. If a player miscalculates and announces a finish but is not able to break his last bulge by the time his turn is over, then that player automatically loses.

2. **Both players must have an equal number of turns.** If the setting player announces an anticipated finish, both players should keep track of how many Yazzites the setting player moves before he breaks his last bulge. The non-setting player then takes his last turn, and if he can break his last bulge after moving fewer Yazzites in his turn than the setting player did, then the non-setting player is the winner of the race.

If the non-setting player announces an anticipated finish before starting his turn and then breaks his last bulge on that turn, he is the winner, because at that point each player has had an equal number of turns.

If both players finish the race with an equal number of turns and an equal number of Yazzites moved in their last turn, the game is a draw.

Strategy Tips

Placing Yazzites

Since each player has the same bulge hexes at the start of a race, the initial placement of Yazzite counters is the main way in which one side differs from the other. (The placement of batons is the only other difference.) Many games are won or lost because of how each player deploys his Yazzites.

In general, you should try to get the most out of your Yazzites, placing them and later moving them so as to take full advantage of the movement capability of each type. It's often a good idea to place Yazzites so that at least one counter is within range of every bulge hex (and, of course, that Yazzite must be able to move into the terrain where the bulge hex is located). By doing this, you'll be covered no matter where your opponent decides to place your baton; at least one Yazzite will be able to get to the baton, and break your first bulge, on your first turn.

When placing and moving your Yazzites, keep in mind that the best way to break a lot of bulges as quickly as possible is by using your Yazzites in a chain. The baton carrier should be able to use all or most of its movement before passing the baton to another Yazzite that has not yet been moved, and so on. By doing this (when circumstances and your opponent's strategy permit it), you can cover a lot of ground in just a turn or two.

The placement of Luggants requires a different outlook. Since Luggants can't carry the baton anyway, they don't have to be chained for maximum efficiency; in fact, the opposite is generally true. Luggants work better in pairs or small clusters, so that one or two of them can throttle opposing pieces while another one lurks nearby, waiting to pop out one of the other friendly Luggants that gets throttled by the opposition, or to throttle an opponent that was popped out on the previous turn but couldn't move away quickly enough.

Most of the time, it's wise to place your Luggants on the field during your last few turns in that part of the Setting Phase; by

then, you'll know the general layout of your opponent's pieces, and you can put Luggants where it looks like they'll be the most effective in ruining or delaying his plans. Keep your Luggants within range of bulge hexes, if you have no other specific purpose for them; that way, they'll be in a good position to throttle a baton carrier that comes close to that bulge. When you're choosing targets for throttling, keep in mind that it's sometimes more effective to throttle a Yazzite that doesn't have the baton, especially if that maneuver leaves the baton carrier stranded with no one to pass the baton to. (This tactic can work particularly well when the baton carrier is one of the slower-moving pieces and the Yazzite being throttled is a speedy Skadingle.)

Placing Bulges

Strategy isn't nearly as important in the placement of bulges as it is in the placement of Yazzites, but how you (as the setting player) choose to do it can have a great effect on how the race is run. For a wide-open, relatively long game, you can disperse the bulges over the entire playing surface. For a game that will probably be shorter, you can place bulges close together (but remember that two bulges cannot be adjacent).

You can reduce the effectiveness of the fast-moving Skadingles by placing bulges in mud hexes that are almost surrounded by other types of terrain, so that a Skadingle can only get to that hex by going the long way through a narrow corridor of mud hexes. This will force your opponent—and you—to place Skadingles close to those hexes during the Setting Phase, so they don't have to move too far to get to the bulge later, or else it will force you to rely on Flibdills and Tarnoses to cross through muck or mire to break the bulge in the partially isolated mud hex.

Placing the Baton

The suggestions on this subject are centered around one basic strategy: Make it as difficult as you can for your opponent to get to his baton, or for him to make great strides with it immediately after it is picked up.

If your opponent has failed to follow the advice (under "Placing Yazzites" above) about covering all his bulge hexes, then the best place to put his baton is on an isolated bulge hex that he can't reach during his first turn of movement. However, that sort of good luck (or bad planning, depending on your point of view) probably won't happen very often.

The next best tactic—which only works well if you're the setting player—is to place your opponent's baton close to one of your Luggants; even if he retrieves it right away, your Luggants will be threatening to throttle on your next turn.

If you're not the setting player, then your opponent will get two turns of movement before you can do any throttling. That means that if you put his baton close to a lot of your Luggants, he may be able to dart in, grab the baton, break the bulge, and scoot away from your throttlers before they can do what they do best. It might be better to put his baton on a bulge that's *not* covered by your Luggants—give him the first bulge, because he's going to get it anyway, and sooner or later he's going to have to approach the bulges where your Luggants *are* lurking.

If you don't have a special reason for placing the baton on a

certain bulge, then put it in a muck or mire hex, so that it can only be retrieved by one of the slower-moving Yazzites. Allowing a Skadingle to pick up the baton immediately is liable to turn the race into a runaway against you.

Throttling

There is no defense against throttling—if it's going to happen, it's going to happen—but by thinking ahead, you may be able to make throttling as painless as possible.

If one of your Flibdills or Skadingles is in immediate danger of being throttled and you can't get it far enough away, try to move the piece into a hex that's nearly surrounded by terrain that it can't move through, forcing your opponent's Luggant to do the throttling at that location. Then, on your next turn, you can move one or more pieces adjacent to the "throttle hex," occupying all the places that your piece would be able to pop out into. On the same turn, you must be able to bring up a Luggant to re-throttle, so that when you do that, the popped-out piece will be able to travel two hexes instead of one. That single hex of difference can be the difference between winning and losing.

Of course, the situation described above won't occur very often, but you should always look for ways to take advantage of a popped-out piece sometimes being able to travel two hexes. Popping out over a hex of forbidden terrain is a lot better than only popping out one hex and then having to take the long way around with normal movement.

All of this advice applies—in reverse—if you're the one doing the throttling. Unless the situation demands it, you should not throttle a piece that might be able to pop out two hexes on your opponent's next turn. It's generally not a good idea to throttle any piece that can be popped out right away; all that does is waste your Luggant's move, and give the popped-out piece an extra hex (or two) of movement besides.

Optional Rules

After you've played *The Baton Races of Yaz* a few times, you may think of ways to alter or add to the rules—and that's fine, as long as none of your optional rules harms the balance of the game. Here are a few suggestions you might try, or that might get you thinking about other alterations.

Lugging

If Luggants are big enough and strong enough to throttle Yazzites, they also ought to be able to lug them around. If you use this rule, any Luggant is allowed to carry any friendly non-Luggant (including the baton carrier), usually as a way of getting the passenger over terrain that it can't move through. A Luggant does not suffer a movement penalty while carrying a passenger, but it can't carry and throttle at the same time. If a Luggant and a passenger are jumped on by an opposing Luggant, the carrying Luggant is throttled and the passenger is popped out—but the other Yazzite can't move any farther until its next turn, and it may be throttled by another opposing Luggant later in the current turn.

A passenger may not split its move, using part of it to get to a

Luggant's hex and the remainder after it has been carried in that turn; any movement that remains unused when a passenger jumps on a Luggant is lost.

Dropping the Baton

If you use this rule, it's legal for the baton carrier to drop the baton in an unoccupied adjacent hex at any time during that side's Movement Phase.

A dropped baton can be picked up by any friendly Yazzite that is allowed to carry it—or by an opposing Luggant. (However, a Luggant carrying a baton still can't break any bulges.)

The only way to get a baton away from an opposing Luggant is for a Yazzite from the other side to jump on the Luggant. When this happens, the baton is popped out into an adjacent hex (chosen by the player owning the baton). If the pop-out hex contains a Yazzite that can carry the baton, it is considered picked up immediately, and the new carrier can move or pass it in the same turn.

If the Yazzite that pops out the baton is a Luggant, then the opposing Luggant is throttled, just as if that act had taken place without the baton involved. If the Yazzite that pops out the baton is not a Luggant, then the Yazzite that rescued the baton is throttled (earning a place in Yazzite martyrdom).

Dropping the baton is really only a useful tactic when your baton carrier is in danger of being throttled and you want to keep the baton from being immobilized. But if you're not careful to drop the baton where no opposing Luggant can get to it right away, you may have an even bigger problem.

If you use this rule in addition to the previous one, a Luggant can't carry the opponent's baton at the same time that it's lugging around a friendly Yazzite. If a Luggant holding the baton decides to pick up a passenger, the baton is popped out just as if it had been dropped normally (to a hex chosen by the owning player). If a Luggant carrying a passenger decides to grab the baton instead, then the passenger is dropped in the same hex (not popped out) and the Luggant must move with the baton at least one hex away. If the Luggant uses up all its movement to get to the baton, then the passenger must jump off and move at least one hex away immediately. If the Luggant can't move any farther, and the passenger can't get off the Luggant and move away (because of terrain or because the passenger had already moved earlier in the turn), then the baton is popped out. (See how complicated optional rules can get sometimes?)

First and Last

In this variation, the bulge where each player's baton is placed is the one that the player must break *last*. After a Yazzite retrieves the baton, it can't be used to break the bulge it was placed on until all of that side's other bulges are broken.

Credits

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