

LEADERS IN SPQR

Command and Leadership

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SPQR is a game rich in detail and color. Units of all kinds are present. Sarissa-armed phalanxes, half-naked Celtic warriors, elusive Numidian cavalry, ranks of Roman legionaries and many others stand ready to charge foe and vanquish them. Numeric values such as Troop Quality are assigned to all in order to quantify their size and abilities.

Yet behind the mass of weapon systems and troop types, lies the heart and mind of the army, the leader. **SPQR** has a subtle and interactive command system which provides tension and excitement beyond the usual *You Go, I Go* boardgame. This article will discuss the system, how it impacts game play, and provide a few command tips.

Unlike many wargames, leaders are of the utmost importance in **SPQR**. Simply put — *nothing can happen without them*. Not a single unit can move, fire, or shock attack without a leader being involved at some point.

The commanders in the game are not just named counters with a combat bonus to the die roll. They have a variety of ratings, which like the ones found on combat units, are used to quantify their abilities. The higher those numbers, the more actions and success a commander will have. It is not surprising, therefore, that an army's success has as much to do with its leaders as does its size or troop composition.

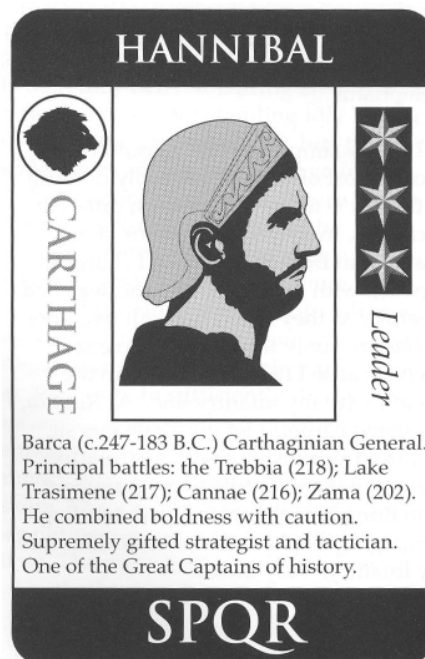
The above statement is not to be misunderstood. Army composition is important. For example, a standard Roman Consular Army is extremely powerful with its multiple lines of legionary units. However, an opponent with good commanders and a sufficiently sized army can defeat it. Make that leader a Hannibal or Pyrrhus and the pendulum can swing in favor of the non-Roman player.

Know thy enemy:

That old adage holds true in **SPQR**. Before you examine an enemy infantry

line or compare cavalry strengths, look at your opponent's leaders. Ask yourself the following.

- Is the Overall Commander an Elite commander?
- What are his values, especially Initiative and Strategy Ratings?



- How many subordinates does he have, and what are their values?

After examining his leaders, take a look at his army. Note its size (in terms of counters, not strength points), troop composition and placement. At this point, you can estimate how easy or difficult it will be to command his army. Having a very large army doesn't mean much if its leaders are poor and/ or insufficient in number. For example, if he has many combat units with few leaders, then you know he will have difficulty moving them all using Individual Orders and will therefore need to rely on Line Commands to do so. If that's the case and his Strategy Rating is low, then the army's maneuverability decreases. Movement outside the OC's command range will be limited, since Line Commands will be hard to come by.

Finally, do the above for your own forces. The battle plans you formulate must consider the abilities of your leaders. The player that believes they can use Varro the same way they would Hannibal will be unable to accomplish much other than lose.

Elite Commander Initiative:

SPQR uses the Elite Initiative Orders Phase to simulate *the marked superiority of certain commanders*. It may seem best to use the Overall Commander himself during this phase. He automatically issues line commands, and generally has the highest initiative for issuing Individuals Orders. However, a key option within the rule is the ability to give the phase to a subordinate. This allows the player to select a commander that is closer to being in the right place at the right time.

At the start of each turn, assess how the battle is going. The elite phase should be taken by the leader whose actions will have the most impact. Are you a move and combat phase away from attacking an opponent's flank? Does the enemy have many routed units ripe for destruction? Do you have a similar situation for which a few rallies will re-establish your line?

Analysis of Command and Leadership in SPQR

These are the spots at which a commander should get an Elite Orders Phase.

Activation, Momentum and Trumping:

Initiative is the most important leader rating. Due to the command system, it has greater meaning than just how many Individual Orders he can issue. It is used to determine when a commander activates and how successful he will be in rolling for momentum and trumping.

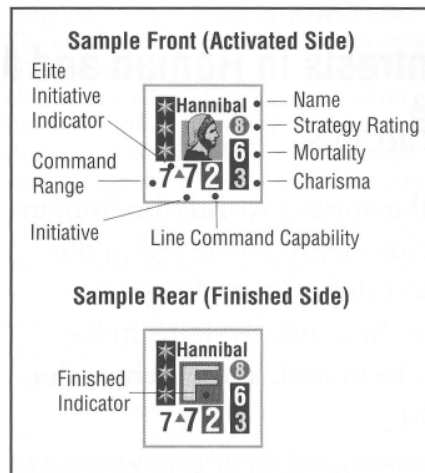
Everyone will quickly find the highest rated leader in a scenario, but they aren't the only ones to be concerned about. Leader activation starts with the lowest rated leader. Therefore, excluding the Elite Phase, those leaders will have the opportunity to strike before higher rated leaders can react. If several low level leaders are on one side, then the potential for deadly successive strikes exists. Let's see how this works.

Players will notice after setting up a scenario or two that it is the Roman army which has the majority of low rated leaders. So low in fact, that unless a trump is rolled, many will activate before any one of his opponent's does. The Roman player must accept this and turn it into his advantage by hitting the enemy with a one-two punch e.g. attacking with the Hastati, followed by the Principes. If timed properly, such a combination can rout and eliminate a substantial amount of the enemy before he has a chance to rally them.

After the first leader is finished with his activation, players will now fight for successful momentums and trumps. This is the point where one needs to be more subtle. Acting too hastily can find your plans for victory fall apart as the opponent gets the jump on you.

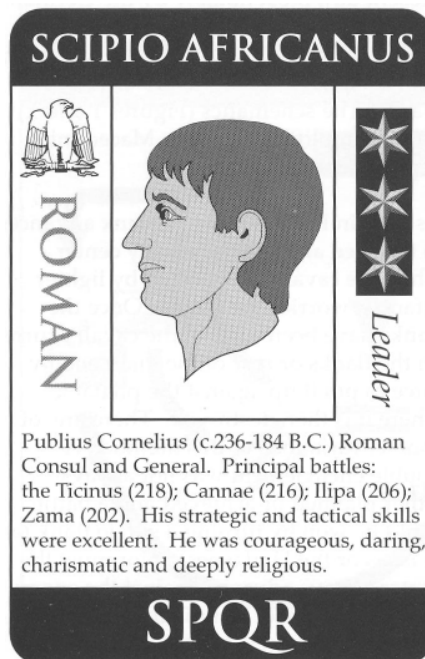
Momentum is the mechanism by which leaders get multiple activations within a single turn. It is a very useful tool, but it is not guaranteed. These additional activations should be used to strengthen your tactical position on the field by outmaneuvering the opponent. This may involve pushing troops already moved, or freeing up an unactivated leader by leading forces originally planned to be commanded by him.

A common action taken by a leader with a successful momentum will be to move *moved* troops again. This doesn't mean



that you should march your troops into the ground. Just because the opportunity is there doesn't mean it will be worth the cohesion suffered for it. The movement should be taken with the intent to either cause greater hits upon the enemy, or save yourself from a potential disaster.

Offensively, look to give a force the extra move it needs to plow into the opponent's flanks. Taking an extra hit on some cavalry will be well worth it, if you can surround his and eliminate them. Going after freshly routed units within reach is also something to watch out for. Often, it will only take the Pre-Shock TQ check to eliminate them. Defensively, you may need to readjust your line to cover holes which were opened up due to combat. It is better to give that Heavy Infantry unit



an extra hit and move it to cover an exposed Phalanx's flank rather than trying to keep its cohesion hits down.

Trumping is the method by which higher rated leaders break the normal activation sequence and get to go before lower rated ones. Rule 5.44 states a leader that was bypassed by a successful trump cannot roll for momentum. This rule has a substantial impact on gameplay within a turn. When trumping, you should strive to pick a leader that has the same or greater initiative than the majority (or all) of your opponent's leaders. By selecting this highly rated leader you not only improve your chances of success, but will also prevent your opponent from attempting momentum with anyone else. Once he is out of momentums, you can make an accurate estimate of how much more movement and combat he can perform for the rest of the turn

If you are playing Hannibal or Pyrrhus, the desire to use them to trump early will be strong. Both have an 80% chance of success, and doing so will guarantee that not one Roman commander, even Scipio Africanus, will be able to roll for momentum. The down side to this unfortunately is that you do the same to your own leaders thus reducing one of your key advantages. Much more can be accomplished if your subordinates can get momentum. In addition, a failed trump (and it does happen) will find you having your best leader finished. Therefore, instead of immediately jumping to the man in charge, select one of your subordinates. Even one with a only a 4 initiative has a 50% chance to succeed, and will deny momentum for most of the Roman commanders in a scenario. If unsuccessful, the loss of that leader won't be as strongly felt. You'll still have that Overall Commander and his 7 initiative waiting in the wings.

Winning in **SPQR** requires much more than just having the largest army or the best troops. One needs to understand the weaknesses and strengths of the opponent and yourself. This not only includes knowing which combat units are attacker superior or who has the greater cavalry strength, but also how good the leaders are. Command and control has been and always will be an integral part of war. It is quite often the difference between victory and defeat.