Wargame Replay - Punic Wars
First Punic War scenario
by George Nap

This is an old SPI game with some interesting mechanisms. There are no zones of control, combat is not mandatory, there is no turn limit but can be automatic victories. I am playing the First Punic War scenario, a war which in actuality was fought pretty much on the island of Sicily with a disastrous Roman foray into North Africa. Rome finally ended up winning. The reason I like wargames is that we do not have to follow history. Carthage will attempt a different tack in this game.

Playing the First Punic War scenario.

Automatic victory is 40 revenue points to start the revenue phase, or occupation of your opponent’s capital.

For the diplomatic phase, I will roll decimal dice and devote that percentage of each sides revenue, rounded down, to diplomacy.

During game stream-of-consciousness observations: I am reading Peter Perla’s “The Art of Wargaming” as I am playing this game. (Covid-19, teacher, stuck at home and social distancing). Both the book and game are new to me (If I played the game it was in the 1970’s and I do not remember doing so.) Perla makes the comment in his book that Dunnigan and SPI ran into the problem of creating new and different gaming systems – some revolutionary – but this made their games difficult to have mass appeal as players had to learn new systems and tended either specialize and spall as a group, or learn the system on a shallow level and not explore its true potential/pratfalls. Avalon Hill, by contrast, had games with similar rules and CRT’s (especially the old warhorses, Stalingrad, Waterloo, AK) so AH players were working within a pretty defined system most of the time.

This game has a revolutionary combat system which has room for application in other games. The attrition system in this game may even be better suited to WWII games on the eastern front, certainly WWI games. This is the first I have seen it, although 1812 from CSL games has a similar system, though not exactly the same. Game designers can learn from this system and apply it to games being made today.
Playing through the first two turns I note that aggressive actions do not work well and assaulting cities is suicidal without incredibly overwhelming odds. I see the drm (die roll modifier) is more important than the odd (harking forward to GMT’s Battles of the American Revolution series, where DRM’s are much more important than combat strength odds).

Turn 1 264BCE
Diplomatic phase D: No revenue and no casualties, so no die roll adjustment. No effect.

26 revenue. Carthage decides to take the war directly to the Roman peninsula, taking Pisa and contesting Etruria. One fleet is lost crossing to Sicilia from Carthage. With 13 revenue points available Carthage spends eight revenue. The limit of half the provinces value for builds really canalizes what and where you can build.
Roman elections E: None on turn 1, we will assume these are the elected at start leaders. 20 revenue. Since Roman fleets are so precious at the moment, they will not be risked.
In Sicily the Romans attack Agrigentum, they lack one movement factor for the leader to return overland to claim the last two factors in Messana, so they attack with two fleets and two factors, the defenders inside the town walls 10% attrition fails to cause any casualties. A second Roman force leaves Rome, attacking Pisa (which is not considered besieged as there are fleets present for Carthage and none for Rome) at 2:1 but a die roll modifier of -2 (city and leader differential) the attacker taking a loss. Rome can build 14 force points and may build fleets (rolled a 1). Rome uses all build points (I notice that the compact nature of Rome allows a quick build up of forces, whereas the poorer and more spread Carthaginian provinces, and limits on number of leaders make building forces in far flung areas – which then have to be supported but cannot move without diverting a valuable leader – a losing proposition. Nice modelling.
Diplomacy – modifier +1 for one Roman and 0 Carthaginian losses last turn, as the Roman treasury is bare, Carthage spends one Treasury Point (which I shall refer to as ‘talents’ from here on out because I can.) to modify the die to +2, Corsica revolts, so that is not good. The fleet and army in Corsica are wiped out.

Revenue 24. Campaign phase, Pisae leader gathers the Faesulae force and the Sardinian force and attacks the legion at 2:1 +1, Carthage loses one factor to none for Rome, one Carthage SP redeploy to Corsica.
Carthaginian forces move to relieve Agrigentum, attacking 2:1+0, Cartage rolls a one and is decimated, 75% loss, General Hamdrubal evacuates Sicilia relocating to the city of Tarentum. Disastrous turn for Carthage. The fleet in Agrigentum is lost due to siege attrition. (I note I made a mistake on the first turn, allowing a one for one purchase of unit points, it is two talents for one strength, since I did it for both sides, no harm, no foul). With 15 talents remaining, Carthage can purchase seven units and does so.
Elections: For the Roman election phase you remove two leaders (the entire amount in this scenario) mix them up with the unused leaders (except the 3-rated leader who is not used in this scenario) and replace them with the two you draw. I added to this, deploying the leaders to the stacks they came from before looking at the new ratings (who knows how good a leader would be until they were in battle, and each time is different), this was moot because all leaders were 1’s, but I like the mechanism and will keep doing it.

Revenue 20. Campaign leads off with Agrigentum (there is a temptation to chase Carthage into Apulia, but to the business at hand first), the town survives 45,000 Roman troops lost trying to take it.
Titus Agrestic commander of the Pisae force gathers all armies in the peninsula and attacks Hamdrubal in Tarentum 3:1-4, the entire attacking force is lost, Titus Agrestic’s head being sent back to Carthage for all to revile. A horrible turn for Rome, we take Sicilia but lost Apulia and ten legions in the process.

With 9 revenue available after supply, four forces will be build, all armies. We will have to weather the Carthaginian phase before drawing a replacement leader. Ironically that battle occurred near the historic battle of Cannae. Reinforcements to Rome and Capua.
Turn 3 262 BCE

Diplomacy: By random die roll neither side commits talents to diplomacy, die roll is +1 due to SP loss (R10C5) last turn, Syracuse allies with Carthage.

Revenue 36 (auto victory is 40). Hamdrubal deploys forces to Beneventum taking Samnium. Agrigentum falls to the besiegers. Padrubal from Pisa reoccupies Sardinia and then moves on Perusia, the forces their hiding inside the walls of the town. This would increase revenue to 40 next turn, so Rome must respond. 20 supply points are spent, leaving 16 which are spent on forces to attempt to keep Carthaginian gains.
E: No change in leadership values. R: 16 talents.
Titus Lastchancicus gathers the legions in Rome and Capua and attempts to relieve the siege of Perusia, the defenders sallying forth in support 4:1 +1 both sides lose one strength point and Titus sends in the reserves to attack again and the Carthaginians die gloriously. Titus redeploy to Rome and Capua. In Sicilia Marcus Longshoticus puts the Marmites (loved their food when I was in the army – inside joke) on board ships and heads for Masslyii (Carthaginian home turf, what’s sauce for the goose...) 75% attrition rate (cannot build fleets again) brutalizes the Roman force but the survivors sail past Carthage and land at Thapsus – this denies control to Carthage but is not enough force to take control for Rome, need 2SP’s which is half the region’s value. 3 talents remain, fleet roll fails (no money for that anyway) one legion built in Rome.
**Turn 4 261 BCE**

D: Rome spends a talent to offset the Carthaginian advantage in losses (R5C2), well spent, Corsica revolts, a 1 destroys all SP’s there.

R: 35 (forgot to pay for Syracuse last turn, so reducing to 31 immediately. The Syracuse points are spent supporting their army which if not attacked wipes out their contribution although it does count towards victory). Hamdrubal takes Lucania and Brutium. Padrubal regarrisons Corsica, heinvests Perusia, and returns to Pisae. 8 talents left for builds, four armies are built.
E: A 2-rated leader (Drusus Overthereicus) finally shows, only to be dispatched to Massylii by the Senate. Revenue: 12. Drusus promptly takes Mauretania (maybe styling as a new leader for a new empire?), this frees up two revenue for Carthage, but will allow a build in Mauretania (since it is only a 2 province, Drusus can control it). I do not see another way to make progress as Rome. Titus Lastchancicus, reelected by the Senate, relieves the siege of Perusia, losing a legion and winning another victory. Supply eats up all revenue, so no builds. Hanging on by a string.
**Turn 5 260 BCE**

Diplomacy: Carthage spends a talent to offset the DRM for losses (R1C2) – Corsica revolts, should have left it alone. One factor lost, but Corsica is held. R:42 talents, game ends. Hamdrubal leads the Etruscans back to glory as Carthage cements trading relations with them, in the south Pasdrubal leads the cities of the southern peninsula. Syracuse is granted the balance of Sicilia as the Romans are forced to withdraw in exchange for peace. As for Rome Titus Lastchancicus administers the remnant of a dying empire. Forgotten in Mauretania is Drusus Overthereicus who begins to hungrily eye the Iberian provinces of Carthage while fermenting chaos in Massylii.
I was much too aggressive in this game as Rome and lost by attacking Tarentum. I should have maneuvered and gained a province here and there while waiting for Carthage to fall apart. I think sending the African expedition was a good idea and might have turned the tide (or at least made the war last longer) had then not rolled a one and suffered a 75% attrition rate in the crossing. Then the narrative changes quickly as with two factors they take Massylui, swinging the treasuries +4/-4, they could build armies and then either approach Carthage or start chipping away at Mauretania, Gades, et al. With Carthaginian Generals stuck in Italy there was a vulnerability on their home turf.