Battle Report:
THE CONQUERORS

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THE CONQUERORS: THE MACEDONIANS/THE ROMANS
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The Conquerors: The Macedonians/The Romans is one of the most fascinating games to come from SPI in a long time. It is actually four games in one, three strategic and one tactical. **The Macedonians** covers the Persian Campaign of Alexander the Great, 334-331 B.C.; **The Romans** covers Roman expansion into the Eastern Mediterranean, 200-189 B.C., and reconstructs both the Second Macedonian War and the Syrian War; and the **Tactical Game** enables Players to fight major land battles on a

stylized Tactical Battle Display. For the purposes of this report, Brent and I concentrated on **The Romans**, and players should note that although many of the rules in **Romans** and its **Macedonians** companion are nearly identical, there are significant differences (e.g., the time/Turn-scales are different, and units from one game are **not** compatible with units from the other.) **The Conquerors** is basically a two-player game and plays well as a solitaire game.

The physical systems, on the whole, are both attractive and complete. The entire **Conquerors** package includes **two** 22-inch x 34-inch paper maps depicting the Ancient World from the Balearic Islands to Babylon, 44 pages of rules in two booklets, a

Tactical Battle Display, and an assortment of charts, tables, etc. as play aids. There are also beaucoup die-cut cardboard playing pieces in a variety of colors — everything from Tribunes to triremes — something like 56 different unit types, not including reduced-strength units and miscellaneous utility counters. Most of the combat units are back-printed to show reduced strengths. The only significant packaging pain is that the single box the games come in isn't large enough to conveniently segregate all these pieces (it takes at least **three** SPI-type boxes to do the job). There are a few other minor annoyances in the physical system (e.g., no City-State labels on the Greek leaders, no Victory Point track), but nothing to get worked-up about.

THE BASICS

The scenarios in **The Romans** last a specified number of 'Campaign Years', which consist of eight (monthly) Game Turns and a Winter/Planning Game Turn. During each 'regular' Game Turn, Players attempt to gain support from Greek City-States and Leagues (by bribery and/or expending 'ambassador' units), besiege cities, move, engage in combat, and — under certain conditions — suffer attrition. In the Winter/Planning Game Turn, Players collect taxes, raise and pay maintenance for armies and navies, consult the Augury (i.e., random events) Table, check for attrition, draw new ambassadors, and the Roman Senate elects new Roman Commanders. Victory is achieved by capturing cities and winning major land battles.

Although **The Romans** is basically a two-Player game in which one Player commands the forces of Rome and the other commands either the Macedonians or Syrians, Players may also gain control of the small, but important, armies of the various Greek City-States and Leagues through diplomacy, and there is an interesting three-Player option in the Syrian scenario.

Commanders play a key role in the game, and making the maximum, most efficient use of Commanders is central to playing the game well. Units may move voluntarily **only** if accompanied by a Commander, similar to the systems used in **Punic Wars** and **Frederick The Great**. Commanders also affect the combat capabilities of the Forces under their control (e.g., raise morale, column-shifts on the Strategic Combat Results Table, the number of units which may be moved per Turn on the Tactical Display). The Romans have a slight edge in leadership in that they have more commanders available to them and each Legion has two Tribunes organic to its TO&E. The entire Roman command, however, is replaced each Winter/Planning Game Turn by a random draw of new leaders (with certain exceptions). The strengths/weaknesses of these new Commanders remain unknown to both Players until the Commander in question either engages in battle or attempts a Forced March. These 'hidden' Commanders add a delicious degree of uncertainty to the game.

Combat can take place when opposing Forces occupy the same hex, but rarely occurs unless both Players are looking for a fight since defending units almost always have the option to voluntarily retreat in order to avoid battle. The exception to this is when a moving Force tries to bypass an enemy Force and is 'Intercepted'. This concept of Interception is fundamental to the success of the strategic game system. It gives the non-phasing Player the capability to stop a moving enemy Force during the latter's movement phase, adds a slight flavor of simultaneity to play, and prevents the game from degenerating into endless, inconclusive 'dosey-doe' maneuvers. Combat is resolved either by: (1) comparing the opposing Forces' relative strengths, determining odds-ratios, and simultaneously rolling for results on the Strategic CRT, or (2) deploying the engaged Forces on the Tactical Battle Display and actually conducting a unit vs. unit battle. Once battle is joined, it continues until one side or the other either voluntarily retreats or sustains so many losses it exceeds its morale level and flees the battlefield (leaving 25 Victory Points for his opponent behind him).

The Tactical Battle Display is an interesting experiment. The Display itself — i.e., the tactical 'map' — is merely an arrangement of boxes in a configuration that ostensibly reflects

the tactical flexibility of the combatants. Movement and missile fire is allowed only between adjacent boxes connected by lines, and melee combat occurs when opposing units occupy the same box. This system is obviously not intended to be 'realistic' — whatever that means vis-a-vis wargames — yet still allows the Players to grasp and simulate the essential elements of basic ancient warfare tactics (e.g., restricted movement, fire, melee, and command). There seems to be a basic flaw, however, in that Roman units loose their maneuverability once they cross into 'phalanx territory', and, conversely, non-Romans gain maneuverability once they cross into 'Roman territory'. Players who use the Tactical Game System should find overall playing time of the strategic game increased by 30 to 60 minutes per battle so fought.

Military operations in **The Romans** are strongly influenced by logistics. Basically, land Forces are supplied if they are within ten Movement Points of either a Friendly Naval Base or their Capital City. Otherwise, a Player must expend funds from his treasury if he wishes his Forces to move and/or fight beyond their supply range. Any Force that cannot pay the economic penalty for being out of supply or is out of supply during the Winter/Planning Game Turn undergoes attrition. Supply restrictions for Naval Squadrons are less severe: Fleets are supplied up to 20 MP's from a Friendly Port, although they must end their movement in a Friendly Port or suffer attrition. Because of these limitations, Players will find that a large portion of their efforts — conquests, naval blockades, diplomacy — will be directed toward securing supply sources (and revenues) for themselves while trying to deny them to their opponents.

THE PLAY

Brent and I learned many things the first few times we attempted to play **The Romans**. The first thing we learned was that you need more rules than those provided to play the game. We consulted the oracle at SPI (aka Richardio Bergus), and he was kind enough to answer our 13 typed pages of questions in record time. (This 'errata' — necessary to properly play the game — appears condensed in this issue). With Berg's 'official' rulings in our hot little hands, we sat down to replay the Second Macedonian War...

Initially, the Macedonians (Brent) had 22 talents in their treasury, 75 Strategic Strength Points of land units, a fleet of 20 SSP's, and control of strategic Corinth and a half-dozen cities in Macedonia. The Romans (me) had 25 talents, five Legions (114 SSP's) in Italy, a merchant fleet, miscellaneous barbarians in the western Med, and naval squadrons totaling 24 SSP's. We had 26 Game Turns in which to avoid being defeated in a major land battle while attempting to sieze control of as many Greek cities as possible.

We both spent our opening moves establishing bases of supply for the upcoming campaign. The Macedonians gobbled-up the small cities on the east coast of Greece and built a naval base at Corinth; the Romans captured Naupactus and bought Athens — both important naval bases.

The crucial importance of game economics revealed itself almost immediately. The Macedonians received uncommonly low tax income in the first Winter/Planning Game Turn, the Romans received uncommonly high. After raising new units and paying maintenance costs, the treasury totals were Rome 26, Macedonia 7. We discovered that having low funds severely curtails a Player's options, not only by limiting the size and composition of his military organization, but also by limiting what he can do with them (see 'supply' above). Brent had money problems throughout the game — not only because of consistantly poor tax collection, but because I deliberately sacked all the cities in the no-man's-land between Macedonia and the Peleponnese to deprive him of the revenues he might have acquired by sacking these cities himself. The economic pinch eventually forced Brent to disband his naval squadrons (giving Rome absolute control of the sea) and prevented him

from doing little more for most of the game than sit around and wait for the Romans to make a mistake. Meanwhile, Rome captured Corinth after a prolonged siege and conquered all of the cities in the Peleponnese with the exception of Sparta (which allied itself with Rome anyway). April, 198 B.C. was the high-water mark for Roman fortunes, with 38 Roman Victory Points to Macedonia's paltry 12.

But then I made the blunder that cagey devil Brent had been waiting for: when I tried to lure his phalanxes into battle by naval transporting my Legions to the Macedonian heartland, I inadvertantly left Corinth unguarded. Brent was quick to exploit my error, and hustled his main army south in a desperate gamble to retake Corinth before I could transfer my Legions back in time to challenge him. To my dismay, Corinth fell on his first siege attempt, and the Macedonians swept through the Peleponnese sacking every city on the peninsula. As clouds of smoke from the burning City-States rose over the map, Brent observed that he wasn't certain who was winning, '...but the Greeks are losing...'

Now it was my turn to be desperate — there were only two or three Game Turns left. I had to come up with a foolproof plan that would force Brent into battle. 'Aha!' I schemed. 'I'll naval transport my Legions to the Macedonian heartland and lure his phalanxes into battle!' The plan had a vaguely familiar ring to it, but was crazy enough that it just might work...I landed my Forces at Pydna and started to mutter about burning Macedonia to the ground. To my surprise, Brent fell for it — but only because he had committed an uncharacteristic oversight: he failed to count the current Victory Point totals. By laying waste to the Peleponnese, the Macedonians were now ahead in Victory Points, yet Brent mistakenly assumed that if I were allowed to run free in Macedonia I could either sack and/or capture enough cities to change the balance back to my favor — in the single Game Turn there remained to play. He rushed his main army north out of Attica, planning to link up with the sizeable Force he had hiding in Demetrias and, with their combined strengths, intended to crush my invading Legions.

But the gods have a bizarre sense of humor. They allowed the Roman Expeditionary Force to ambush the returning Macedonian army at Pherae on a 50-50 chance Interception roll. Thus, the single (and conclusive) battle of the war was joined in virtually the last Turn of the game: my 118 SSP's of five Legions and their Spartan allies under Consul Villus against 96 SSP's of Macedonians under Philip V. The odds were even despite the disparity in SSP's since the Macedonians had a superior army commander. Unfortunately, this leadership advantage was lost when Villus was killed in battle and replaced by Praetor Blabrio, a more able Commander. This doomed the Macedonians to defeat. They were driven from the field after suffering 48% casualties. Brent was sent home on his shield, and after 4½ hours the game was over. Final Victory Point tally: Rome 51, Macedonia 36.

PLAYERS' EVALUATIONS

BRENT ELLERBROEK: Getting acquainted with **The Conquerors** requires a certain amount of time and effort. This is in large part due simply to the game's novel movement and combat system, but all too much of the responsibility must be shouldered by a rulebook which is a decided cut below SPI's generally acceptable norm. Players will find that ease of play also suffers slightly at first on account of occasional annoying omissions in the game's charts and mapsheet. For example, the defensive values and stacking capacities of the different towns are buried deep within the rulebook, and the political allegiances of the multitudinous Greek City-States are not indicated on the map. Such details are admittedly minor, and most Players can of course survive easily enough without such aids after one or two playings; still, such rough edges and the lamentable state of the rules may cause **The Conquerors** to suffer somewhat in popularity and possibly acquire a reputation

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of complexity not wholly deserved. For, once you wade through the rules, **The Conquerors** is fairly easy to grasp. There is a lot of new stuff, but not too much to remember at any one point in the game.

The Conquerors remains worthy of more than cursory inspection in spite of its production flaws. Those with even a modest interest in ancient strategic warfare should find it an enjoyable and generally credible simulation on the subject. Genuine 'historical accuracy' is a bit much to ask for from a game on this period, but **The Conquerors** certainly seems to be correct in flavor, appearance, and general outline. Even better, it is interesting and challenging as a game, and the wargamer long accustomed to games involving essentially linear situations will discover an entirely new assortment of mistakes to be made and nuances to be appreaciated. Richard Berg has apparently discovered a workable framework for ancient and medieval strategic simulations, and I, for one, am eagerly awaiting its future applications and refinements.

RICHARD DeBAUN: There is something special about Richard Berg game designs. He's hip to the fact that **Illusion** is the principle factor in Players' acceptance of a game as having historical verisimilitude, and is a master at creating this illusion. He has a knack for getting the right feel/ambiance/mystical nuances into his games for the subjects/events which they portray simply by combining deceptively simple mechanics and a motherload of 'chrome'. He adds neat little touches like calling game money 'talents' instead of using some sterile term like ERP's or BRP's, calling random events the Augury Table, or identifying individual Commanders by name. More importantly, however, is the way he integrates such 'flavoring' into the basic game structure. Roman Legions, for example, are not represented merely by a single counter that has 'Roman Legion' stamped on it, but by a group of counters which reflect actual Legion organization (e.g., velites, triarii, etc.). And Roman Commanders are not differentiated merely by titles — Consul, Praetor, Legate, Tribune — but also have **functional** differences. All this combines to give Players' a real feel for the subject and make the game extremely entertaining to play.

The Conquerors is a game of maneuver, of outfoxing your opponent, and since getting it, it's one of the three or four games I now play regularly for fun. SPI is contemplating expansion of **The Conquerors** game package with three more maps, extra counters and rules to cover the Punic Wars, Roman expansion into Gaul, and Alexander's conquests east to India. I sincerely hope they follow through...

OFFICIAL ERRATA FOR THE ROMANS

(4.1) Change. Instead of having a separate Diplomacy Phase in each Player Turn, start each Game Turn with a Mutual Diplomacy Phase in which both Players secretly allocate bribes and ambassadors, simultaneously reveal them, and then make the necessary adjustments to Allied allegiences. (This keeps Players from buying Allies out from under each other.)

(5.83) Clarification. The Strategic Rating of as yet unrevealed Roman Commanders is revealed for Forced March purposes after the Roman Player announces his intention to attempt the Forced March and the distance he wishes to go for. If the declared distance is beyond the Commander's capabilities, there is no Forced March.

(5.86) Correction. The Forced March Attrition Table has been misprinted. The line 'Number of Additional Hexes Desired' should be transposed with the line 'Commander Strategic Rating'.

(5.23), (5.28), (12.12), (12.13), and (18.22) Clarification. Naval units commanded by Naval Commanders (e.g., Legates) may transport Land Forces without Land Commanders present, except that the Land Force may not move on land without a Land Commander. Similarly, 'unleadered' Merchant Fleets may also transport Land Forces without Land Commanders present. Furthermore, a Land Force could be under the **combined control** of both a Land Commander and a Naval Commander in a single Turn so long as the Land Force does not exceed 20 MP's per Turn. (E.g., A Roman Legion may be marched overland to a Port by a Tribune, be picked up there by a Naval Force under the command of a Legate, be Naval Transported to another Port or Amphibious Landing, and continue overland under the command of the Tribune. The controlling factor here is that the Land Force may not exceed 20 MP's worth of movement in any given Turn.)

(10.15) Clarification. A Force may **not** Retreat Before Combat into an Enemy-occupied hex (the size of the Enemy Force is irrelevant).

(11,2) Rules Change. Berg declares a new system for extracting losses from Naval Combat: Using the present CRT's it now costs three loss points to lose a step for a heavy squadron, two loss points for a medium, and one loss point for a light. Points are not cumulative. Thus, if you have a heavy squadron and a medium squadron in combat and suffer a four-point loss, you must remove both steps of the medium squadron. If the result had been a five-point loss, you would remove one step from the medium squadron and one step from the heavy squadron. You always remove as much as you can. This makes it harder to eliminate heavy squadrons, etc., and solves the problem of everybody building only light galleys, I suggest you add 'one' to all loss results on the Naval CRT (except to the No Effect Results).

(12.14) Addition. A Force which debarks on a clear terrain hex may later be re-embarked by the same naval units in the same clear terrain hex.

(12.17) Addition. Islands without Ports are assumed (for embarkation purposes to have Ports in any coastal hex.

(12.16) Clarification. A Land Force which is compelled to undergo Amphibious Retreat may retreat 'n' number of hexes via Naval Transport as described, then disembark and continue to retreat on land. (Sort of a 'great cooga-mooga, let me outa here!') If an Amphibious Retreat is more than four hexes (or MP's; long, the **land units only** suffer Disruption for the following Turn, not the naval units.

(13.2) Addition. A Player may siege or assault a City or Port City that belongs to a Friendly Active Ally. However, all forces of that Ally immediately ally with the opposing Player (in a three-Player game, to the Player with the nearest force), and they remain allied to that Player **for the remainder of the Game**. You also get a Revolt situation if an Ally's troops are in the attacking Player's City. However, if any of the Ally's troops are stacked with troops of the Player's, he may not atack (i.e., siege or assault) the Ally's City.

(13.2) Addition/Rule Change. Further effects of capturing of attacking Ally Cities:

EFFECT ON ALLIANCE LEVEL VIS-A-VIS ATTACKER

	Ally Status		
	Inactive	Enemy	Active
Sack	-3	-1	-6
Capture	-2	0	-4

(13.26-B) Addition. Among the options a Player has in disposing of captured Enemy garrisons, he may 'sell' captured Enemy garrisons into slavery — i.e., remove them from play entirely to deprive his opponent of their availability in the counter mix from which his opponent raises 'new' units. Captured garrisons are removed, sold into slavery, and may **not** be revived.

(13.28) Clarification. Fleets may assault unoccupied 'D' and 'C' Ports in concert with Land Forces which they are Naval Transporting (i.e., Fleets and Land Forces they are transporting may combine their strengths to make such an assault.) Such combined assaults may be against Ports in any type of terrain.

(13.4-A) Addition. Once committed to besieging a City, a Force does **not** have to sit tight and maintain the siege until the City falls. It may give up the siege on a subsequent Turn, but it must leave the City hex through the hexside which it entered that hex.

(14.12) Clarification. Land supply may be traced **only** through land and/or coastal hexes. It may not go through all-lake or all-sea hexes/hexsides. (This is quite restrictive and meant to be so — as supply was quite difficult unless you wanted to spend some cash.)

(14.21) Clarification. A Land Force which exceeds its supply radius while undergoing Naval Transport (only) does **not** pay the one talent cost for going out of supply so long as the Naval Transport itself stays in supply (i.e., within twenty hexes of a Friendly Port).

(14.24) Clarification. An unsupplied Force which does not move at all merely pays a talent for being out of supply.

(14.14) **Clarification.** Romans, Macedonians, and Syrians may draw supply from a Friendly, controlled Allied Naval Base (e.g., Athens). In fact, **any** Friendly, controlled Naval Base may be used for supply, regardless of its origin or previous circumstance.

(15.22) **Clarification.** Roman Merchant Fleets suffer attrition just like Naval Fleets.

(16.13) **Addition.** If all the Cities of a non-active Ally are sacked prior to its ever being activated, that Ally may never thereafter be activated. Additionally, in the case of Greek Leagues in which some of the League's Cities have been sacked and others have not, subsequently activated Allied Forces are reduced proportionately to the number of Cities in the League which have been sacked.

(16.24) **Addition.** If a Player buys the alliegence of an Ally that was previously Actively Allied with his opponent — and units of that Ally are in the same hex with an opponent's Force at the instant the Ally switches sides, move the Allied troops one hex away from the Enemy Force. Further movement triggers Interception.

(16.24) **Clarification.** Revolts are **never** considered to be Major Land Battles.

(17.3) **Clarification.** A unit eliminated by combat or attrition goes back into the counter mix pool from which a Player may build 'new' units.

(17.33) Players may construct Naval Bases in Port Cities which belong to Friendly Active Allies. If the 'owning' Ally changes sides via Diplomatic Action, the Naval Base goes over to the new Ally. However, if the Port is garrisoned, you have a 'revolt' situation. (See 16.24) No Friendly unit need be present for a Naval Base to be built per (17.33), but the site of construction must be a Friendly, controlled Port.

(17.35) **Addition.** Units may be 'refitted' — i.e., brought up to maximum strength — if they are in supply during the Winter Interphase, simply by buying the necessary SSP's to build them up again. Fleets may be refitted to full-strength at a cost of half their original build cost. (Remember, maintenance is paid for half fleets as well as whole fleets.)

(17.39) **Addition.** Players may voluntarily eliminate their own units at the beginning of the Winter Interphase, prior to any other action. Such 'disbanded' units are returned to the counter mix and are eligible for reactivation as 'new' units per (17.31).

(18.32) **Clarification.** For purposes of simplicity, when the Roman Player is directed by the Augury Table to send a number of Legions somewhere for the 'year', simply pick the Legions up and place them in the assigned sector. To be brought back **into** the game, however, the Legions must be transported, etc., as per the normal Movement Rules. (Note that such a Legion must — to be sent to Spain, etc. — be in supply and capable of moving. Otherwise, the Roman Player must build a new Legion to satisfy the Augury Table assignment.)

(18.32) **Clarification.** The 'newly chosen Praetor' referred to in items 2, 10, and 11 on the Augury Table is an **additional** Praetor — i.e., one not already on the board — who is activated for the sole purpose of the Augury assignment and is deactivated at the end of the year.

(18.32) **Clarification.** Item 9 of the Augury Table should rear '... **each** open Revenue Supply Source...' instead of '...**all** open Revenue Supply Sources...'

OFFICIAL ERRATA FOR **THE TACTICAL GAME**

(5.12) **Change.** Commanders need not have the same facing orientation as the Friendly combat unit(s) with which they are stacked. In fact, Commanders do not have **any** facing at all (i.e., they 'face' all directions).

(9.3) **Change.** Phalanx units may not Voluntarily Retreat **forward**. (In other words, phalanx units may not 'infiltrate' through the enemy lines as other units may using Voluntary Retreat.)

(9.3) and (12.11) **Clarification.** A unit that attempts a Voluntary Retreat and **fails** (i.e., the unit is forced to stay in place or flee) **does count** against the total number of units which the moving Player is allowed to move that Turn.