

Warfare for Beginners is a short EN Publishing supplement for the PATHFINDER RPG by Russell Morrissey, around which the final battle aspects of *The War of the Burning Sky* adventure path were hinged. The system was modified to meet the requirements of the adventure, but it is presented here in its original form. Game masters can use the supplement as is or modify it to suit their own adventures.

This supplement presents an easy-to-use mass-battle system which involves your player characters on an individual level. The key to the system is focusing on tactical and strategic missions which affect the overall outcome of a large battle.

The system assumes that the player characters are integral to the battle — in other words, without their actions, the battle will be lost. That's why we play fantasy role-playing games, right?

You'll find that the system is remarkably simple to use, and allows your players to feel they truly are affecting the course of the battle in a vital way, without forcing you to adopt large-scale and clunky mass-battle rules involving army units and the like.

The Basics

The system works on a basic Victory Points scale. Successful missions performed by the PCs earn their "side" Victory Points, while the passage of time deducts Victory Points. The scale runs from 0–20; if the PCs' Victory Points total reaches 20, the battle is won; if it reaches 0, the battle is lost.

Generally speaking, the heroes' side will start with 10 Victory Points, adding Victory Points when the PCs succeed in a mission, and deducting Victory Points as time passes. This creates a sense of urgency, because if the PCs sit around doing nothing for too long, the battle will, left to its own devices, be lost.

Missions include such things as: assassinations, captures, reconnaissance, spying, sabotage and so on. A successful mission will earn 1–4 Victory Points: the more difficult the missions, the more Victory Points.

Passage of time reduces the PCs' Victory Points tally at a rate of 3 Victory Points per day.

Optional Rule

Make the PCs' task easier or harder by increasing or decreasing the starting score. Apply a 2-point bonus or penalty

for major conditions that affect one side or the other, such as being greatly outnumbered, having significant fortifications, having flying troops, being thoroughly prepared or being completely surprised, and/or for having either extensive or next to no experience. Try not to add or subtract more than 6 Victory Points, or the PCs' job may become either trivial or next to impossible.

The Missions

Each day, roll 1d20 three times and offer the players the three resultant missions. They are free to attempt any or all of the missions available. Any missions failed or not undertaken on a particular day may be undertaken on a later day unless failure incurs a penalty, in which case the damage has already been done to the heroes' side.

A successful mission gains the party's side the number of Victory Points indicated in the "Success" column, above. A failed mission means that the party's side loses the number of Victory Points in the "Fail" column, above.

If the failure penalty is 0 Victory Points, the mission can be attempted again at any point.

Roll (d20)	Mission	Victory Points	
		Success	Fail
1-2	Minor Assassination	1	0
3-4	Major Assassination	3	0
5-6	Minor Sabotage	1	0
7	Artifact	4	0
8	Major Sabotage*	2	-1
9-10	Reconnaissance	1	0
11	Spying	3	0
12-13	Minor Abduction	2	0
14	Major Abduction	4	0
15-16	Defence	2	-2
17	Bodyguard	1	-2
18	Counterspy	2	-2
19	Morale	2	0
20	Allies	4	0

*Major sabotage may constitute a larger, or better defended installation than Minor sabotage, or it may comprise three acts of Minor Sabotage.

Important Note

Missions with a penalty for failure count as failed if they are not undertaken. They are time critical: the

PCs don't get to wait until tomorrow to defend that breach in the wall.

Daily Events

Each day, roll 1d12 for a Daily Event. The event can apply to either side in the battle — which side that is should also be determined randomly. The heroes' side gains or loses the number of Victory Points indicated, depending on whether the event benefits them.

Roll (d12)	Event	Victory Points
1-2	Weather Change: A change in weather favors one side or the other.	1
3	Reinforcements: Reinforcements arrive for one side or the other.	3
4	Illness: Plague or other widespread illness affects onside or the other.	3
5-6	Spy: One side's secrets are leaked to the others' by a spy.	2
7-8	Hero: One side is badly damaged by a successful mission by a hero of the other side.	2
9	Omen: An omen reduces morale of one side.	1
10	Desertion: Desertion problems weaken one side.	2
11	Traitor: An important individual or unit defects to the other side.	3
12	Major Death: An important individual or unit dies, either slain on the battlefield or at the hands of an assassin.	3

Putting All This Into Practice

The preceding sections outlined the basic mechanic for outlining the course of a battle. However, this needs to be put into practice. You can't just tell your players: "Your daily event is Illness. Missions available are Major Assassination, Minor Sabotage and Defence, plus the Reconnaissance saved from yesterday." You need to translate these results into interesting and varied game encounters!

You should keep your players apprised of the score they have achieved, and the Victory Points available for each mission. This allows them to weigh their strategic and tactical options and creates tension when the score approaches one end of the scale or the other.

Each available mission should be described as an encounter. For example:

"General Arvistas calls you to his tent. He informs you that three artillery



pieces mounted on the hills to the east are creating havoc amongst the defenses, and that it is imperative that these weapons be destroyed. As far as he knows, each is manned by three ogres.” [Major Sabotage]

“Spies have identified the tent of one of the opposing generals, Lord Borstas, and General Arvistas has decided to attempt to abduct him. A small group will need to sneak through the enemy camp at night, infiltrate his tent while he sleeps, and transport him back to the fort.” [Major Abduction]

“Morale is low, and supplies are running short. In the nearby village of Bitterne, a cellar full of beer can be found. Obtaining this beer and bringing it back for the troops will result in a great morale boost.” [Morale]

The mission possibilities are almost endless.

Designing the Encounters

The most important piece of information you need when designing the mission encounters is the same piece of information needed when designing any encounter: you need to know how powerful your PC party is and create a challenging mission.

Some missions will be easier than others. The difficulty of the mission matches the number of Victory Points gained for succeeding: between 1 and 4 Victory Points. A 1-point mission should be fairly easy, while a 4-point mission should stretch the party to its limits.

In terms of Challenge Rating, a 2-point mission should have an average CR equal to the PCs’ average party level (APL); see the PATHFINDER core rulebook for more information.. A 1-point mission (easy) should have a CR 1 less; a 3-point mission (challenging) 1 more; and a 4-point mission (hard) 2 more.

So a party of 8th-level characters undertaking a 3-point (challenging) mission will find that the CR of the encounters that make up the mission will be 9. If they undertake a very difficult 4-point mission, the average CR of the encounters will be 10.

VP	Mission	CR
1	Easy	APL -1
2	Average	APL
3	Challenging	APL +1
4	Hard	APL +2

The Mission Itself

You should divide your mission into three parts:

1. **The Approach:** Do the PCs need to scale a cliff, sneak though the enemy camp, fight their way across a guarded bridge, or explore a secret tunnel or cave?

2. **The Mission:** This is the bit where the PCs actually accomplish the task they have been set.

3. **The Escape:** In most cases, the PCs will need to go back the way they came — but this doesn’t necessarily always have to be the case.

Passage of Time

As mentioned earlier, the default assumption is that, without the PCs’ help, the battle will be lost. Therefore, every day, the heroes’ side automatically loses 3 Victory Points. In other words, if the PCs do nothing, eventually their Victory Points will reach zero and the bad guys will win.

Scaling

It’s easy to scale these rules. The default assumption is a battle of 2–7 days, roughly, with short missions that can be accomplished in a day.

You may want to use these rules to handle more epic battles lasting weeks, months, or even years. All you need to do is replace “days” with whatever unit of time you prefer, and make the missions themselves larger in scope.

For example, you could have an massive war which you plan to take months. The PCs have a month to accomplish a given mission. These lengthy missions may involve long-distance travel or major exploration of expansive locations. In this type of campaign, each mission is actually an entire adventure and is part of a full length PATHFINDER campaign hinged around this basic structure.

Sample Battle

Castle Northam is under siege! Manned by a few regiments of green troops, it is surrounded by a massive army of veteran killers. To make matters worse, the enemy has brought monstrous allies: a group of hill giants who are bombarding the fortifications with massive boulders, and are busy digging a massive tunnel under the walls. The enemy is led by an evil wizard, Count Jarvis, and his three lieutenants. It is rumored that the enemy has a small dragon, but this has not been seen as yet.

The cause seems hopeless.

Start

Default — The defenders of Castle Northam start with 10 Victory Points.

Bonuses — Castle Northam counts as a significant fortification (+2 Victory Points).

Penalties — The defenders are outnumbered (–2) and are rookies to boot (–2).

Result — With 8 Victory Points, the castle will fall in three days if nothing is done. Enter the Heroes of Northam!

Day 1

Daily Event: Hero — A mighty minotaur, hero of the enemy army, slays an entire unit of soldiers singlehandedly (–2).

Mission: Minor Sabotage — The enemy is using a strange mechanical digging machine to construct its tunnel. The heroes infiltrate the tunnel and destroy the machine (+1).

Mission: Minor Abduction — The castle commanders have decided to abduct a staff member on the enemy side. The heroes sneak through the camp

at night and attempt to abduct a cook. Unfortunately, they are spotted and barely escape with their lives (+0).

Mission: Bodyguard — Spies report that agents within the castle intend to make an attempt on the general’s life. The heroes mount a secretive watch, and intercept a small band of kenku as they close on the general’s private quarters (+1).

Result — At the end of the first day, the heroes still have 8 Victory Points. They will need to do better than this if they are to save the castle.

Day 2

Passage of Time — The heroes’ side loses 3 Victory Points automatically.

Daily Event: Desertion — Reports indicate that the enemy’s hill giant unit has grown tired of the battle and left (+2).

Mission: Minor Sabotage — The enemy has constructed another digging machine. It is not in the tunnel yet, and the heroes sneak behind enemy lines and manage to destroy it (+1).

Mission: Major Sabotage — The enemy is almost certain to build further digging machines. The only long-term option is to flood the tunnel. The heroes make their way to a nearby dam and manage to destroy it, causing the enemy’s tunnel to fill with water (+2).

Mission: Defense — The castle has a small lookout tower one mile to the east, which has been used to spy on the enemy camp. Unfortunately, the enemy has decided to deal with this nuisance and has dispatched a unit of ogres to tear it down. The heroes mount a stalwart defense, barely scraping a victory. For now, the tower stands (+2).

Result — Today was a much better day for the good guys, who close the day with 12 Victory Points. The tide of battle seems to be swinging in their favor.

Day 3 and Beyond

If the heroes can keep racking up victories, and especially if they can find and defeat that dragon, the defenders of Castle Northam may yet snatch victory from the jaws of defeat.

MISSION IDEAS

Assassination/Abduction

Leaders (generals, clerics, wizards)
Monsters (giants, dragons)
Hero (captain, gladiator, champion)

Sabotage

Artillery (catapults, cannons, onagers)
Structure (bridge, viewing tower, gateway)
Magic (portal, scrying pool, altar)

Artifact

Obtain the MacGuffin of Winning (a lance that is quite good at killing dragons; a torch that can teleport armies)

Reconnaissance

Scout out a nearby hilltop
Investigate a cave complex
Search for a way across a river or gorge

Spying

Obtain maps, plans or other documents
Eavesdrop on a meeting or council
Recruit an agent

Defense

Rush to a breach in a wall
Guard a bridge or other strategic location
Prevent an assassination attempt

Counterspy

Identify and apprehend a spy or traitor

Morale

Organize a bardic performance
Activate a symbol (a beacon, a flag)
Obtain resources (ale, an entertainer, food)
Make a rousing speech

Allies

Incite an uprising of the populace
Convince the nearby dwarves to help out

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