

CHILDREN OF NEW ROME · FREE EXPANSION

Battle Groups

Large-scale combat across every theatre, using the core engine



A free add-on for the 9th-century historical RPG.

Scales 2d6 + Trait to armies, sieges, galley engagements, and the press of a counter-mine.

Includes a solo Manzikert scenario.

A Battle RPG, Without Leaving the Game

Battle Groups does not replace the core combat rules. It scales them up — and folds in the portable subsystems already in print or draft (the Cappadocian cavalry grammar, the Amorium siege dashboard, and the Constantinople galley rules) — so that a battle in any theatre is recognisably the same game, played at a different range.

A Battle Group is rolled exactly like a character: $2d6 +$ a Trait, opposed, margin of victory decides the outcome. The only new thing at this scale is that one roll now represents several hundred men, a galley's crew, or a column on the march, instead of one person.

What you need at the table

- A copy of *Children of New Rome* (the core $2d6 +$ Trait engine, the wound track, Grace).
- Two players, or one player and a GM — the Manzikert scenario at §8 plays solo with the priority list provided.
- Two ordinary six-sided dice and a pencil.

Three ways to use it

- 1. As a battle RPG.** Build an army to a points budget, pick a scenario, and play out the engagement. Manzikert (§8) is the worked example.
- 2. As a fast resolver.** When the dashboard says the relief column has finally arrived, or the players' ship is being run down by Cretan pirates, run the fight as a Battle Group exchange in fifteen minutes rather than a full session.
- 3. One theatre at a time.** The theatre sections are written to be used independently. A GM who only ever needs §5.5 for one dramatic session does not need to read the rest.

What a Battle Group Is

A Battle Group is a body of troops, a ship, or a column — treated as a single actor for the purposes of a large engagement. It has:

- A **name and type**.
- A **Trait rating** (1–4), used like BODY in an opposed roll.
- An **Order track**: Steady → Wavering → Broken — the battle-scale equivalent of Shaken / Bleeding / Down.
- A **point cost**, for building a force against a budget.
- One or two **special rules**, usually inherited from the theatre subsystems below.

There is no grid, no model count. Zones are named in conversation — left wing, centre, right wing, reserve, routed; or windward, leeward, the chain, open water; or the gallery face, the listening post, the breach. The system runs the same whichever theatre you're in, because the theatres differ in their special rules, not in their resolution.

THE ORDER TRACK



*Wavering rolls 2d6 with **no Trait bonus** — cohesion failing, exactly as a Bleeding character does.*

A Broken group has left the field.

The Battle Round

Side-based initiative, as Chapter 5: the GM names the side acting first from the fiction — surprise, higher ground, the weather gauge, who lit the first torch in the gallery.

One action, one move, per Battle Group capable of acting. A Broken group has left the field. A Wavering group rolls 2d6 with **no Trait bonus**.

Holding works as in Chapter 5 — a Battle Group may declare a trigger and resolve later in the round. This is how a feigned retreat, an ambush, or a counter-mine is actually built at the table.

§3 Attacks Between Battle Groups

Attacker rolls **2d6 + Trait**. Defender rolls **2d6 + Trait**. Higher total wins.

- **Win by 3+:** defender takes the next Order hit.
- **Win by 1–2:** pressure — repositioned, disordered, no Order hit.
- **Defender wins or ties:** attack fails.
- **Defender wins by 3+:** reversal — attacker pressured, or defender's next action gets +1.
- **Reversal bonus does not stack.** A Battle Group may hold only one reversal bonus at a time; a second reversal before the first is spent refreshes it rather than adding to it. Without this limit, a weak unit attacking a strong one can spiral into an unbeatable bonus chain through repeated failed attacks — which is the dice punishing the weaker side for trying, not a result the system intends.

Flanking or rear attack: the defending Battle Group rolls with no Trait bonus.

This single rule is what makes Manzikert, a feigned retreat, and a gallery breakthrough all make sense with the same sentence.

Every theatre below modifies this default roll, or replaces it with a small theatre-specific exchange — never both at once.

Probability note

At equal Trait, a single attack is roughly: 24% a clean hit, 20% pressure, 32% a clean miss, 24% a reversal. A +1 from a commander or terrain shifts these meaningfully — it is worth more than it looks.

Not every armed encounter needs the dice. If one side clearly outmatches the other and the outcome isn't in doubt — a routed raiding party, a single watchtower against a relief column — the GM may simply narrate the result and move on. Battle Groups is for engagements where the outcome matters and is genuinely uncertain, not a mandatory procedure for every clash a campaign produces.

Commanders, Grace, and the Dial

A named commander lends their best relevant Trait as +1 to an attached Battle Group, and may spend Grace exactly as in Chapter 4 — including the theatre-specific Grace spends below: *bless the horses*, *bless the siphon*, *quiet the sea*.

If a commander's group Breaks or the commander is wounded, the bonus is lost immediately, and the GM may call for a morale check on nearby friendly groups — sparingly, and only when the fiction has earned it.

Where a theatre rule calls for a Battle Group's WITS or BODY specifically, use its single Trait rating in place of either, unless a named commander with their own character Traits is attached and the GM rules the commander's personal stat applies instead.

The dial: how big is this fight?

The same engine resolves a four-man tavern brawl and a forty-thousand-man field battle. Pick the dial that matches the story:

Dial	Each Battle Group is...	Typical points
Skirmish	a band of 10–20 fighters	15
Engagement	a company of 100–300	30
Field battle	a regiment of 500–1,500	45
Campaign hinge	a tagma, a whole wing	60

The dial sets only the fiction and the points budget; the dice and the Order track are unchanged across all four.

5.1 Open Field • 5.2 Mounted Operations

5.1 Open field

The default, as §3. Terrain and position modify the roll exactly as cover does for a person: **high ground +1**, **a defended crossing +1 or +2 to the defender**, attacking uphill or out of a feigned-retreat trap a flat GM-named penalty.

5.2 Mounted operations (Cappadocia grammar)



Kataphraktai, lances couched — one charge, then default.

Any Battle Group built as cavalry carries a **horse track** alongside its Order track — **Winded** (–1 to rolls depending on the horse), **Lamed** (cannot be galloped), **Foundered** (out of the fight, on foot). A mounted group takes horse-track hits from forced marches and from missile fire that misses the Order roll narrowly (GM's call).

Forced march

If the army marched hard to be there, each mounted Battle Group rolls the forced-march check once, as a unit (2d6 + Trait): **10+** fine; **7–9** take one hit,

GM/player choice of Order or horse track; **6 or less**, both.

Special attacks (once each per engagement, per group)

- **The couched charge.** +2 on this attack only — the lance is one use. Every subsequent attack reverts to the default roll.
- **The bow from the saddle.** Roll **2d6 + WITS** instead of Trait. A hit only ever produces Wavering, never Broken outright — saddle-bows wound an army by accumulation.

Mystic's blessing on the horses (1 Grace)

Before a forced-march check or a mounted engagement. **Grounded:** ignore the next forced-march hit. **Liminal:** ignore it, and the horse track clears. **Miraculous:** a Foundered group rises and fights one more round before it founders for good.

Mountains and Passes

No new mechanics — fold in the Cappadocia grammar directly.

The defile ambush

Runs exactly as written for individuals, scaled to Battle Groups. The ambushing side's **setting roll** (2d6+WITS vs. **7 / 9 / 11** for obvious / tight / perfect ground) decides whether the first exchange is at +2 *with no defence roll* for the ambushed group, or merely at +2.

The defending commander's **break roll** (2d6+WITS vs. **9**) decides whether the ambushed force routs coherently (normal battle from here) or scatters into a pursuit — run as shadowing contacts every hour rather than every day.

A Battle Group caught in a defile it did not choose **always treats the ground as the ambusher's**. Terrain in the passes belongs to whoever knows it.

Ground	Setting target	On a hit
Obvious	2d6 + WITS vs 7	First exchange +2
Tight	2d6 + WITS vs 9	+2, defender's first defence roll lost
Perfect	2d6 + WITS vs 11	+2, no defence; pursuit is shadowing-by-the-hour

Sieges (Amorium dashboard, two layers)



The breach goes in. The dashboard decides what week it is; Battle Groups decide the morning.

The siege dashboard stays exactly what it is: a behind-the-screen pacing instrument, never player-facing, never resolved by Battle Group combat. **Use it to govern the slow weeks.** Battle Groups only enter the picture for the sharp moments the dashboard produces — a sortie, a relief column's arrival, the morning the breach is stormed.

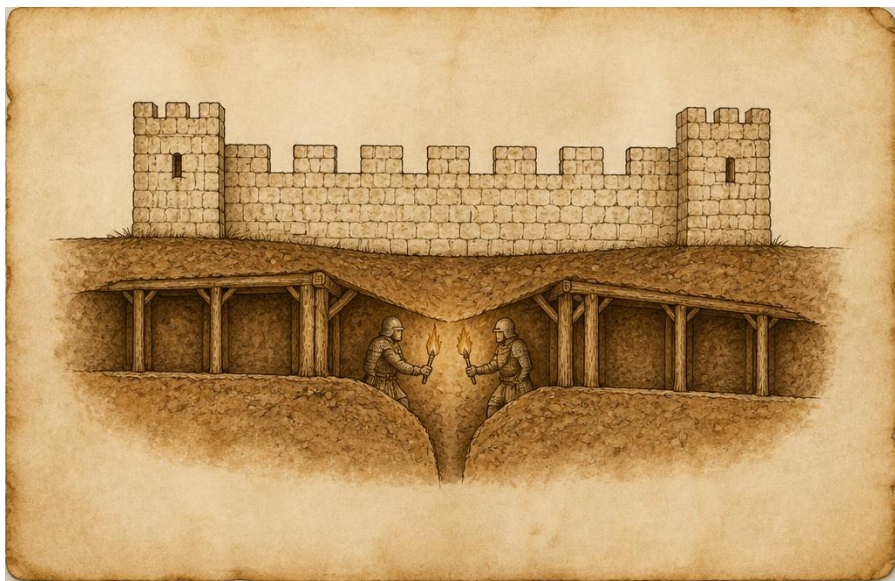
Sharp-moment modifiers

- **Holding a wall or fortified line:** defender +2, on top of any high-ground bonus.
- **Storming a breach:** attacker loses the high-ground bonus regardless of the wall's height — a breach is a breach — and the first exchange only is resolved as in the defile ambush (defender's choice: stand at +2 with no defence roll on the attacker's first volley, or fall back a zone and fight the second exchange normally).
- **A sortie from the walls:** the sortying group gets surprise (acts first) but may not hold the field — win or lose, it returns inside by the start of the next round, and the dashboard's Garrison Morale track moves **-1** on a failed sortie.

- **A relief column arriving:** resolved as an ordinary field engagement against whatever the besieger has left watching the road, using the forced-march rule if it marched hard to get there.

The dashboard's five tracks (Cistern, Mine, Garrison Morale, Civilian Cohesion, Caliph's Patience) are not replaced by any of this — they are still what decides whether there is a sortie to fight at all, and the GM still answers the players' concrete questions in the voice of the city, not the voice of the rules.

Underground — the Gallery Fight



Two galleries meet beneath the wall. Numbers no longer matter.

A sap or a counter-mine is fought differently from everything above, because a gallery has no width. **Only one Battle Group, and within it only one named fighter, is ever actually engaged at a time** — the press of the tunnel makes numbers irrelevant until someone falls.

The listening roll

Before the galleries meet, whoever is digging toward the other rolls **2d6 + WITS** against a target the GM sets: **8** if the enemy has been careless or the soil carries sound; **10** in ordinary digging; **12** in dry, well-shored ground or against a sapper who knows their trade. A win means the listening side knows roughly how many days until breakthrough. A loss means breakthrough is a surprise — the Chapter 5 flinch rule applies exactly as written.

Breakthrough — the press

Run as an ordinary opposed exchange (§3) but: **no Trait bonus from numbers or rank, no high ground, no flanking** — there is nowhere to flank to. A torch, a lamp, or warning in advance is worth a flat +1. A side that loses an exchange **falls back one length of tunnel** rather than taking the wound immediately.

Firing the props — the deliberate collapse

2d6 + WITS vs. 9, modified by how well the enemy gallery is shored (Mine Progress track on the dashboard — wk 4 loose alluvium, easiest; wk 5 shored, hardest). **Hit:** the enemy Battle Group is Broken outright. **Miss:** the roof comes down on the side that lit it. The one attack in the module that can remove a Battle Group with a single roll in either direction — a desperate last resort, never a default tactic.

Smoke and the siphon

A *cheirosiphon* or a simple smoke fire fed into the enemy gallery's air works as a missile attack at **WITS**, automatically winning the Trait-bonus contest — there is no defence against air — and produces **Wavering** rather than a wound. It drives the gallery's defenders back to clean air; it does not usually kill them outright.

Naval (Constantinople galley grammar)



Position before exchange. Then ram, board, burn, or break off.

A ship is a Battle Group with a **ship track** instead of an Order track — **Strained** (−1 to hull-dependent rolls) → **Holed** (no full speed, taking water) → **Foundering** (roughly an hour to beach, transfer the crew, or strike colours). Class sets the slots before Foundering: Dromon 3, Chelandion 4 (Strained one step easier), Pamphylos 2, merchantman under sail 3 (only Holed actually threatens her).

Sea state as adversary

The GM sets the sea in one word, with a stat exactly like an opposed Trait: **Glass 0**, **Working 1**, **Set 2**, **Foul 3**. Any roll asking a ship to do something the sea resists is opposed by this stat. The Bosphorus and Hellespont run a current worth +2 against a northbound galley; the Golden Horn's current is trivial; the raised harbour chain is treated as Foul for one round plus a flat 9-target BODY roll by the captain to avoid Strained.

Position before exchange

Each round, both sides roll **2d6 + WITS opposed**, modified by sea state in favour of whichever side it suits. The winner names the line of approach and chooses one:

Ram, Board, Burn, Break Off

- **Close to ram** — $2d6+BODY$ captain vs captain. Win by 3+: next ship-track slot. Win by 1–2: target Strained. Lose by 3+: rammer Strained, bow locked a round, boarding automatic if the enemy wants it.
- **Close to board** — a position roll for the deck ($2d6+BODY$ officer vs officer; loser's side at –1 that round), then 3–5 rounds of ordinary Chapter 5 combat between named characters, unnamed crew swinging when a named character falls.
- **Close to burn** — one Greek-fire spend per engagement: siphoneer rolls **$2d6+WITS$ vs $9+sea$ state**. **Hit:** target Holed directly, named crew aboard roll $BODY$ vs 9 or take a wound. **7–9:** catches but blows back — firing ship Strained, one named crewman Shaken. **6 or less:** misfire, firing ship Strained regardless.
- **Break off** — $2d6+BODY$ captain vs $9+sea$ state. **Hit:** clear; pursuit becomes a stern chase. **Miss:** engagement continues at the enemy's choice.

The stern chase

Runs as Cappadocian shadowing sideways — one contact per four-hour watch, $2d6+WITS$ opposed, modified by sea state, closing the gap or losing it exactly as the land version closes or loses a column. Close each day with the crew roll ($BODY$, as the forced-march roll) — second day at the oar –1, third –2; the sea ends the chase if neither captain does.

Saltwater Grace

Bless the siphon and **quiet the sea** (1 Grace each). Grounded forgives a misfire, or drops sea state by 1 for a round. Liminal upgrades a 7–9 to clean, or adds a re-roll. Miraculous turns a miss into a hit at the cost of Strained, or flattens the sea to Glass and grants every named character aboard an extra move. Quiet the sea cannot be used twice in the same engagement.

Building an Army • Byzantine Roster

Points budget agreed before play — **30** tight, **45** the assumed default, **60** a long afternoon.

Unit	Trait	Cost	Notes
Tagmata Infantry	2	5	Disciplined line troops.
Thematic Infantry	1	3	Levy spearmen. Cheap, fragile, free to take in number
Kataphraktoi	4	10	Heavy cavalry. Horse track (5.2); couched charge once
Varangian Guard	3	9	First Wavering result each battle is Steady instead.
Norman / Frankish Mercenary Cavalry	3	6	Horse track. After any hit, roll 2d6: 2–5 withdraws.
Pecheneg / Turkic Auxiliary Horse Archers	3	5	Horse track; bow-from-saddle freely. Desertion on 2–4
Dromon Squadron	3	12	Built and resolved entirely under §5.6.
The Reserve	—	—	See §7 — a command structure, not a unit type.

*GMs may invent further unit types: **Trait** × roughly 2.5–3 points, plus 2–4 for a genuinely powerful special rule.*

§6 cont.

Seljuk Roster • §7 The Reserve

Unit	Trait	Cost	Notes
Ghulam Heavy Cavalry	3	8	Horse track; couched charge once.
Turkmen Horse Archers	2	5	Horse track; bow-from-saddle freely.
Feigned Retreat (any HA unit)	—	+2	Once: withdraws a zone, takes no hit, pursuer flanked
Light Raiders	1	3	Cheap skirmishers, harassment and screening.
Alp Arslan (commander)	3	12	Built as a character per §4. Attached group re-rolls on

§7 The Reserve, the Emperor, and Doukas

Theatre-independent — a command structure, not a terrain rule. The Byzantine player assigns points to **the Reserve** and chooses, at character creation, to play **the Emperor** or **Andronikos Doukas**.

Emperor

The Reserve obeys orders normally. If the Emperor's group Breaks or the Emperor is wounded, every other Byzantine group makes an immediate morale check (2d6, no Trait, **2–6 drops one Order step**).

Doukas

Each round the Emperor signals the Reserve to commit, Doukas's player rolls **2d6 + commander Trait** against a target the GM holds privately — roughly 8, shifted by how the campaign has played Doukas's ambition. Success commits the Reserve; failure narrates the hesitation, the late order, the unfavourable ground. **The dice are open; the target is not.**

Manzikert — For One or Two Players

26 August 1071. ~50 points a side — *Seljuk forces deliberately heavier.*

Theatre: open field with a mounted engagement — §5.1 and §5.2 both live throughout.

Byzantine 51

Tagmata Infantry ×2 (10) · Thematic Infantry ×2 (6) · Kataphraktoi ×2 (20) · Norman Mercenary Cavalry ×1 (6) · Reserve = Varangian Guard (9). Total 51. *Variant: swap the Reserve for a third Kataphraktoi group for a total of 52 — a valid build, not an error.*

Seljuk 55 (deliberately over)

Ghulam Heavy Cavalry ×2 (16) · Turkmen Horse Archers ×4 with two upgraded for Feigned Retreat (24) · Light Raiders ×1 (3) · Alp Arslan (12) attached to a Ghulam group.

Seljuk priorities for solo play (checked in order each round)

1. Attack any isolated Byzantine Battle Group.
2. Spend an unused Feigned Retreat now rather than later, if engaged.
3. Otherwise advance and use the bow from the saddle, withdrawing any group that takes a hit.

Victory, and Playing It True

Victory

More Battle Groups Broken than remaining on one side — or, playing Doukas, three failed Reserve commitments, at which point the GM narrates the historical collapse regardless of the board.

Playing it straight vs. playing it true

A fair fight is the Emperor with a balanced split. *Manzikert itself* is Doukas, the imbalance above, and a Byzantine win as the remarkable outcome it would have to be.

After the battle

Whether the Byzantines win or lose, this is a campaign hinge. The GM may seed two or three of the following into the next session, depending on outcome: a missing wing-commander; a captured emperor; a column the players never quite catch up with; a fortress whose garrison has heard the news first; a Reserve whose loyalty has not been settled by any dice roll yet.

Quick Reference • Battle Group Card

Photocopy, fill in pencil, cross out as the battle progresses. One per Battle Group.

NAME			
TYPE		TRAIT	
COST		THEATRE	land / mtd / siege / UG / naval
ORDER	[STEADY] [WAVERING] [BROKEN]		
SECONDARY	[] [] []		
	horse / ship / —		
SPECIAL RULE			
COMMANDER			

NAME			
TYPE		TRAIT	
COST		THEATRE	land / mtd / siege / UG / naval
ORDER	[STEADY] [WAVERING] [BROKEN]		
SECONDARY	[] [] []		
	horse / ship / —		
SPECIAL RULE			
COMMANDER			

Theatre key: *mid* = mounted (§5.2) · *UG* = underground / gallery fight (§5.5). All five theatres are spelled out in full in §5.

Using This Outside Manzikert

A Battle Group is a Trait, a cost, an Order track, and whichever theatre rule applies — which makes this a fast resolver for any large engagement a campaign throws up:

- a background field battle the players only hear about,
- a sortie during a siege the dashboard is already tracking,
- a stern chase after a pirate galley,
- a desperate gallery fight under a wall the players are trying to hold.

The theatre sections above are written to be used independently — a GM who only ever needs §5.5 for one dramatic session does not need to read the rest. Lift any single subsystem into another rules-light game with the same 2d6+stat shape and it will still work; the subsystems were designed to be portable, not to require the rest of the book.

CHILDREN OF NEW ROME

A 9th-century historical roleplaying game of late Roman frontier life — Cappadocia, Amorium, and the City. The core rulebook, sourcebooks, and free GM tools are at tabletop.childrenofnewrome.com.

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