

# SIEGE WEAPONS

By **Bill Coffin**

Siege warfare -- no fantasy world is truly complete without it. Sure, you can have all the daring sword fights and magical battles you want, but as long as there will be castles and armies in the Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game world, there will be siege combat.

Attacking a castle in this setting isn't quite like it was in real-life medieval Europe because there was no magic to help you out. I mean, why bother besieging a castle when an earth warlock can shatter its walls with a snap of her fingers? Or when a summoner can call in a demon to do the same? Or when a fighter wielding the rune sword *Castlerake* can simply crumble the mightiest defenses?

But for those armies without magic (or a god) on their side, the next best thing is to roll out the Palladium fantasy equivalent of heavy artillery -- siege weapons.

These devices probably would probably enter most campaigns during times of war or siege, both of which are more the province of wargaming than role-playing. But for those of you who've always wanted to know how hard a trebuchet hits, or how far a ballista shoots, or would like an expanded description of the weaponry described in the back of the *Adventures on the High Seas* sourcebook, then this article is for you.

After reading this article you want more information on the nature and workings of siege weaponry, check out Palladium's *Compendium of Weapons, Armour and Castles*. Not only does it have fine descriptions of all major siege weapons, but it also has one of the best descriptions that I have ever read of how siege warfare was conducted.

## Siege Weapon Training

All of the weapons described in this section require the W.P. Siege Weapons skill to effectively operate and maintain. While most adventurers never encounter or operate siege weapons, professional soldiers do. In the Western Empire, for example, the frequent civil wars there encourages many of that realm's mercenaries and soldiers to take the W.P. Siege Weapons skill. And in the Timiro Kingdom, siege weapons are an essential part of that country's border defenses against bands of marauding ogres.

For many warriors, operating siege weapons is a coveted assignment -- how else does a simple fighter get the chance to knock down an entire castle wall? Plus, mercs and soldiers trained in siege weapons are specialists who get two or three times the going rate, too. And they usually aren't even on the first lines of combat! In general, knights and palladins disdain heavy weaponry as "grunt work," and tend to stick with their cavalry charges and hand-to-hand combat. As a result, knight or palladin characters aren't likely

to take W.P. Siege Weapons unless they've had a lowlier background before they chose their current O.C.C.

If a siege weapon's crew is less than entirely skilled in W.P. Siege Weapons, then the following modifiers apply:

If 75% of a crew has W.P. Siege Weapons, then the weapon will fire at -4, the damage inflicted by the weapon will be reduced by 25%, and the rate of fire will be halved.

If only 50% of the crew has W.P. Siege Weapons, the weapon fires at -6 to hit, its damage is halved, and takes four times as long to operate. That is, if a weapon shot once a melee round, it now fires once every four melee rounds.

If only 25% of the crew has W.P. Siege Weapons, the weapon fires at -8 to hit, has its damage reduced by 75%, and takes eight times as long to operate.

If less than 25% of the crew has W.P. Siege Weapons, the weapon is at -10 to hit, and will only do 10% of its normal damage. Moreover, crews this unskilled are very likely to hit somebody by else accidentally if they miss. When operating indirect-fire weapons, such unskilled crews might accidentally fire their projectile straight up in the event of a miss, in which case, damage to the weapon or its operators might result. Better warm up those dodge modifiers, boys! Also, operation takes sixteen times as long.

In case players ask, the reduction in damage accounts for the crew not knowing where to hit their target -- this is especially applicable to castles and other reinforced structures. In addition, unskilled shots tend not to hit dead-center, causing only a glancing blow. Hence, less damage.

## **Other Modifiers**

With the exception of arbalests, siege weapons are designed to hit large, stationary objects. But now and then, gunners might feel the need to hit a moving target -- say, a dragon or other large nasty. For hitting moving targets with large siege weapons, the following modifiers apply:

Ballistas (all types), light springals, light catapults, light onagers: -6 to strike small (man-sized or smaller) moving targets, -4 to strike large (giant-sized and larger) targets.

Medium springals: -4 to strike small moving targets, -3 to strike large moving targets.

Heavy springals: -3 to strike small moving targets, -2 to strike large moving targets.

Medium and heavy catapults: -8 to strike small moving targets, -6 to strike large moving targets

Trebuchets cannot be aimed at moving targets. Period.

# Siege Weapons

For the purposes of the Palladium Fantasy Role-Playing Game, there are six basic types of siege weaponry: arbalests, ballistas, springals, catapults, onagers and trebuchets. Each of these weapons falls into one of two categories: direct-fire weapons and indirect-fire weapons.

## Direct-fire Weapons

Arbalests, ballistas and springals are direct-fire weapons, that is they fire their projectiles in a straight line. The advantage to direct-fire weapons is that they have no minimum range. The drawback is that they tend to have shorter ranges than indirect-fire weapons.

Arbalests essentially are very heavy crossbows with greater range and hitting power than conventional crossbows. Since these things are so powerful, they are cocked by a crank, winch, or other hand-held mechanism. Sometimes these cocking devices are built into the arbalest, as is the case with cranks and winches. Otherwise, cranking devices such as cocking hooks are separate tools that the operator must keep around for reloading. (A common tool was a pair of hooks worn on the gunner's belt.) Although they resemble normal crossbows, W.P. Archery DOES NOT give one bonuses to strike or an increased rate of fire when using an arbalest. These are W.P. Siege Weapons devices ONLY. G.M.s, don't let your players get away with cranking off 4 or 5 arbalest shots around -- the increased power of these weapons requires a lengthy reloading time, so the maximum rate of fire for all arbalests is two shots per melee round. No exceptions. Giant-sized arbalests do inflict an extra 1D6 damage, however. (Arbalests are the one and only type of siege weapon that has a giant-sized damage bonuses. All other siege weapons do the same damage whether they are giant-sized or not.)

Light arbalests cost 100 gold, medium arbalests cost 110 gold, and heavy arbalests cost 120 gold. arbalest bolts cost 30 gold per dozen.

- **Light arbalest: Damage: 2D6; Range: 740 ft./225m; Weight: 7.5 lbs./3.4 kg**
- **Medium arbalest: Damage: 3D6; Range: 1,090 ft./330m; Weight: 12 lbs./6.0 kg**
- **Heavy arbalest: Damage: 4D6; Range: 1,400 ft./425m; Weight: 18 lbs./8.0 kg**

Ballistas resemble wagon-sized arbalests that fire javelin- or spear-sized projectiles. Typically, they are crewed by two or three gunners. Although ballistas cause much less damage than the heavier indirect-fire weapons, they remain a popular and effective battlefield device -- probably because they are light, easy to transport, and use cheap ammunition. Ballistas also are commonly used on warships (including well-equipped pirates and merchants) as an anti-personnel weapon and as an anti-ship weapon. Small vessels, such as corsairs, lighters, and trimarans aren't large enough to support a ballista. Medium-sized vessels such as barks, caravels, merchantmen and Wolfen longboats can support one or two ballistas. Large vessels such as war galleys, behemoths, destroyers

and frigates can support up to four ballistas. The maximum rate of fire for ballistas is once every five minutes (20 melees rounds).

- **Light ballistas cost 2,000 gold and heavy ballistas cost 5,000 gold. Ballista arrows cost 40 gold each (480 gold per dozen).**
- **Light ballista: Damage: 1D4x10; Range: 1,155 ft./350m; 100 S.D.C.**
- **Heavy ballista: Damage: 1D6x10; Range 1,320 ft./400m; 125 S.D.C.**

NOTE: The aforementioned damage is for ballista arrows. Flaming arrows will do an extra 4D6 per melee round until extinguished, and will have a 12% chance of igniting what they hit (if it is combustible). Ballistas can also fire small rocks (@ 10 lbs./4.5 kg). The range is the same, but the damage for these is only 5D6.

Springals are another type of javelin-projecting weapon in which missiles are placed on a frame and a wooden arm, or springer, is drawn back and released. The springer hits the butt of the missile, firing it. Springers are made of several layers of glued wood, similar to a compound bow. Springals are roughly the same size as ballistas, but they fire much smaller projectiles, about the size of a normal javelin. The real advantage to springals is that they can be built to fire more than one projectile at once, making them an effective anti-personnel weapon. Like ballistas, springals also can be used as shipboard weapons (and, it is rumored, are very popular among the pirates of the southern Yin-Sloth coastlines). Light springals fire a single projectile, like a cross between a ballista and an arbalest. Medium springals typically fire 8 projectiles upon a 20 square foot target area that can accommodate up to 5 man-sized humanoids, 3 giant-sized humanoids, and 7 small (dwarf-sized or smaller) humanoids. When hit by a big cluster shot like this, all targets within the target area must successfully dodge the shot or get hit by multiple projectiles. Large springals typically fire 16 projectiles upon a 40 square foot area that can accommodate up to 10 man-sized humanoids, 6 giant-sized humanoids or 15 small humanoids. Like with a medium springal, all targets in the target area for a heavy springal must dodge to avoid getting hit. Of course, if a medium or large springal is fired against a large object like a building or ship, then the damage is just to the structure. The maximum rate of fire for a springal is once every five minutes (20 melee rounds). Springals require a four-man crew to operate.

Light springals cost 2,000 gold, medium springals cost 3,500 gold, and heavy springals cost 5,000 gold. Springal ammunition costs 30 gold each. needless to say, a heavy springal can rack up quite an ammunition tab.

- **Light springal: Damage: (1 projectile)4D6; Range: 825 ft./250m; 100 S.D.C.**
- **Medium springal: Damage: (8 projectiles)1D4x10; Range: 825 ft./250m; 110 S.D.C.**
- **Heavy springal: Damage: (16 projectiles) 1D6x10; Range: 990 ft./300m; 125 S.D.C.**

NOTE: Springals can fire flaming projectiles. The extra damage and chance of causing a fire as the same as ballistas.