



# After the Cataclysm

The Future of Mordheim, by Jake Thornton

**HEALTH WARNING!** I can't call these "J-Files", as Jervis has pinched that name, but I'll still caution you in advance that there's a similar danger of rambling here. If you're after rules, then you'd best turn away now; the following pages are prone to ranting...

*At every convention and tournament I've been to, the most common questions are always about what's going to come out next and what the plans are for the future? Well I don't think for a moment this article will stop you asking those questions, but what I'm going to try and do is explain the broad shape of my plan for Mordheim.*

## Into the Depths

For some years now, Mordheim has been rumbling along its merry way, producing cool models and fearsome warbands to lure the unwary into hunting for wyrdstone. Now this has all been fine, but it was really a strategy based on the old Fanatic, when it was a barely noticeable tentacle on the great Chaos Spawn that was the main studio. Mostly this was shorter term planning as there was rarely any time to do anything grander. This might have continued, but for the loss of Steve Hambrook which was a catalyst that forced a reassessment of the way that Fanatic worked.

It was increasingly obvious that Fanatic needed to grow in size and complexity if it was to adequately cope with seven games. Part of this resulted in the magazine you hold in your hands: a replacement for the many smaller magazines that were often hard to come by. Another part was the reorganisation of who was in charge of what, and my joining the team as Head of System for Mordheim, among others. Finally, it was a good opportunity to look once more at what made the Specialist Games great, and where we wanted to go with them in the future.

## A Change of Emphasis

So there I was, with Jervis' high-level master strategy document in my hand, working on a slightly less "god's eye view" level of plan to fill in all the nitty-gritty about how we were actually going to achieve these lofty objectives. The main point I had to keep in mind was what Mordheim was for, in the sense of where it sat compared to Warhammer battles, Warmaster, Warhammer Skirmish and so on. "And where did it sit?", I hear you ask. Right in the middle of the details, that's where.

One of the real opportunities that Mordheim offers is to dig deep into the Warhammer background and shine a flickering torch into the dark corners that nobody's ever explored before. Sure, there'll be rats and nasty gribbly things aplenty, but it'll be fun! Like the Roadwarden and the Highwayman, there's loads of people and places in the Warhammer world that are simply glossed over by the battles game because they don't matter in a war. What's a

single highwayman going to do in the face of thousands of foes? Run away and hide, that's what. But when it comes to games of Mordheim, that's a different matter entirely. Then we positively want to ferret out those odd corners of the world and bring them kicking and screaming into the daylight (so we can capture their souls and make little pewter idols of them... muahahahahaaa!).

Ahem.

Anyway, whilst this objective seemed to be really cool, it did have an obvious downside, and that's what I needed to address in my plan. With a limited amount of resources, how was I going to get all this detail into the game? It's all very well wanting to add detail everywhere, but that's simply not realistic. There are only so many hours in the day, only so many models I can get made and so on. Clearly I would have to cut my cloth very carefully here.

So I pondered this for a bit, and in the end came down to a simple conclusion. I could either cover one area well, or several badly. If I chose to try and deal with Khemri, Lustria and all the rest of the alternative backgrounds as well as the Empire and the Cursed City itself, then I'd never be able to do any of them the justice they deserved. I had to pick one.



Choosing was difficult in some ways because I really like the alternative settings, and would love to do some more new ones of my own. However, in reality there was only one realistic option: I'd focus on the Empire and the smouldering city of the damned that lurked within it. This is the core of the Mordheim background because that's where the city itself lies. It's also the core of the Warhammer world as it lies at the heart of the Old World. For all these reasons, it was the place for me to focus.

## The Playing Field

So, let's refocus Mordheim not just on the city itself, but on the Empire that surrounds it. We'll take as our borders the mountains that surround the Empire, including them in our 'playing field' as they too are full of abandoned Dwarf holds, dank Goblin tunnels and other intriguing possibilities for adventure and loot.

The Empire itself isn't all smiles either, it's a divided Empire, an Empire that wars amongst itself. There are several claimants to the Imperial throne, and they aren't shy about coming forward. Battles between rival factions are both open and covert, with spies and assassins lurking in many a shadow. Skirmishes break out regularly between rival mercenary bands, sometimes in the name of their patron, other times just for loot, for this Empire is an increasingly lawless place. Let's bring this to the fore, let's make this lawlessness and anarchy really part of the games.

Into this political soup of intrigue and treachery we drop the millennium – a time of uncertainty and dire portents, of raving doomsayers bent on stirring up the darkest fears among the population as they pause to consider the fate of their immortal souls (clearly we need more frothing loons and fanatics).

And what happens next? Of course, the sign of the god Sigmar himself, the portent of his triumphant return smashes into one of the cities of the Empire, wiping out thousands in the blink of an eye and turning the bustling hive of industry into a blasted wasteland. One of the Empire's cities has been destroyed, and not by the actions of a mortal foe, but by the hands of the gods themselves. What does it all mean? How does this change the balance of power? Is this a portent of the end of the world? The second coming of Sigmar? What do the gods mean by it? What is it punishment for? And with the deadly, but valuable, warstone cluttering the streets and scattered across the eastern provinces of the Empire, who will profit by it? It's all these questions, and more like them, that I think can form an increasingly vibrant backdrop for our games of Mordheim if we take the game to be about the Empire in the time of the cataclysm rather than just about the city itself.

The plan is to go through the Empire, describing all the provinces in turn. Once that's done we've got our basics covered. Then we can revisit them, picking up on small details, on haunted woods and ruined farmsteads and expanding upon them. Who lives there, what's going on, who are those shadowy figures in the woods? Each time we go through an area we add more detail, digging deeper down. At some point we'll look at doing what amount to adventure packs: linked scenarios that form mini-

## Core and Splash Releases

One slightly separate notion that's worth discussing is the idea of Core and Splash releases. Note that this isn't anything to do with official and unofficial warbands or characters, it's all to do with availability. Also note that this is the way we'll be approaching the figure ranges for all of the Specialist Games ranges. Before we start though, don't panic. It's a good thing...

For a while we've been releasing anything we could find that we thought was cool. That was fine, but did cause something of a headache for the guys that have to actually cast the models and keep track of them all: it's just getting to be too many! So rather than having things go out of stock all the time we sat down and agreed a principle so that we all know where we stand, you included. The idea is that we define a certain number of warbands, say, as being Core. What that means for you is that we guarantee they'll be available. For example, if Skaven are Core, then they're always available. The particular models might change over the years, but you'll always be able to get your hands on a Skaven warband.

Splash releases, on the other hand, may be around for years, but we don't guarantee it. And that's the only difference – no guarantee. Of course, knowing Mail Order, they're quite likely to hoard the moulds for decades, but this way they don't have to. Splash releases will come and go in the range, and the Core will remain. Simple really.

One final thing to note about Core and Splash releases is that the availability or otherwise of models has no bearing on their rules. If we release a warband then their rules come out too. If they subsequently are removed from sale then their rules are still just as usable as they always were. So, if you happen to have the models already, or convert some of your own, then you can continue to use them in your games.

campaigns with their own objectives and characters. Not just yet though, we must learn to walk before we run.

If and when we come to producing a second edition of Mordheim, this change of emphasis, and this extra background would probably be included in the main book itself. However, that's a long way off for the moment, so don't get too excited just yet. Nonetheless, the concept is a sound one and that will be the underlying background assumption when you're reading more stuff by me. What this means for you guys is that the rulebook and Empire in Flames background are melded together to become the 'official' one. If you play in Khemri, Lustria or another variant, then you might have to make some house rules to ensure that everything dovetails perfectly. I don't foresee any major difficulties though.



## Alternative Settings

So where does this leave Lustria, Khemri et al? Well, it leaves them in the capable hands of the keen fans that started those projects off in the first place. One of the really great things about the particular bit of the GW hobby known as Mordheim is the immense creativity of you lot: the fans. There's loads of alternative settings being worked on, and what I'd like to do is encourage this, rather than try to absorb it as was done before. Making things quasi-official just confuses things, and, in my view, actually stifles the creativity which makes them so much fun in the first place. To this end, I'll be inviting people to contribute articles that discuss their alternative setting in a broad sense, but I don't want to print the whole thing en masse. Why not just point people at the sites that started them all and let them join in the creative process there?

On top of these magazine features, I've already sorted out a section on the official forums where people can post and discuss fan rules, and this is perfectly suited to discussing any alternative settings that you dream up. All of which brings me neatly to the website itself.



## Floating In The Ether

The 'new' Mordheim website will have been up for almost six months by the time you read this, so it's not so new, but as I write this it's still early days. Websites are funny things – there's always something else to add, or to tweak. However, the basics are in place.

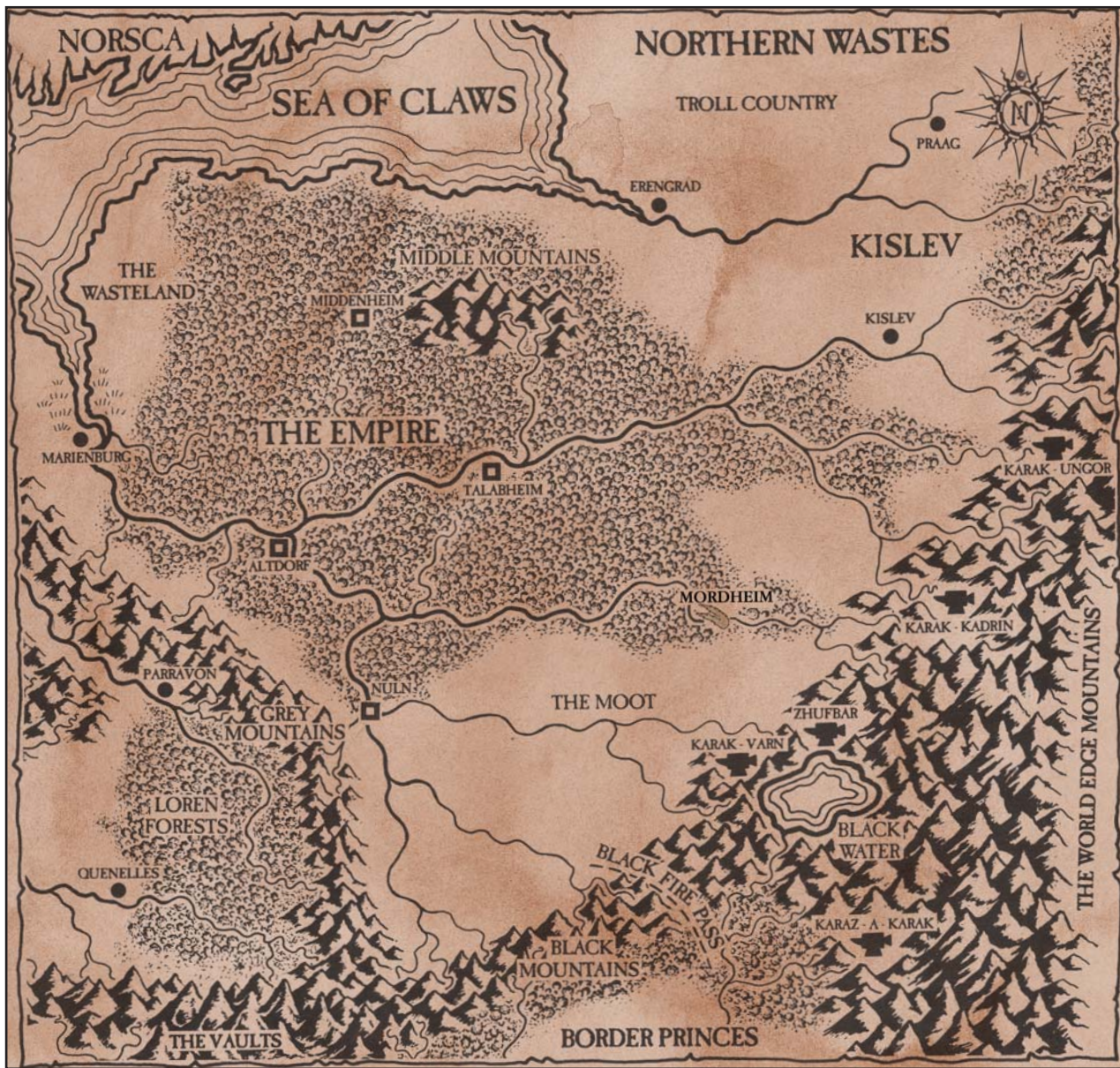
Perhaps the most exciting part of the website is the Playtest Vault and the associated section of the forum. The Playtest Vault is where I can post new Hired Swords, Warbands or any other rules and the Official New Rules bit of the forum is where they get debated. This is very useful for me as I get lots of keen Mordheim players checking through and (hopefully) playing the early versions of a rule before it gets into print. It also means that you guys can have the fun of participating in the evolution of your favourite game and having a say in how it progresses. In the light of your comments and everyone's games I then modify the rules and put a new version in the Playtest Vault, and so on, round and round until it's finished. At best, this means that we'll be able to catch all the mistakes before they get printed, thus avoiding embarrassing errata. At worst, we all have a fun time playing with the new rules before they're generally available. Either way I think we're all winning.

One further thing that I'll be adding to the website is a complete list of official Warbands, Hired Swords and Dramatis Personae so you can keep up with where we are. It should also be a handy reference for those of you that might have missed the odd issue of Town Cryer, or even Fanatic magazine.

## The Devil In The Details

Of course, even within a rules set as clean as Mordheim generally is, there are still some niggles that cause debate. Steel whips, braces of pistols and intercepting charges are a few that spring to mind. Well, we've got a plan for that too. Blood Bowl has had annual reviews for a while now, and it seems like such a sensible idea that we're pinching it for the other Specialist Games as well. This means I've appointed a small group of people to the Mordheim Rules Committee to help me sort out the review. If you're not familiar with the principle of the Rules Review, every July (in the case of Mordheim) we set aside a month to have a serious look at what's been niggling everyone about the rules. If bits are broken we try to fix them. If they're unclear, then we try to move away the mists. It starts with asking the forums what's bugging everyone and ends up with a cleaner, better set of rules for everyone to use. The errata is posted on the website together with a Living Rulebook (an 'LRB'). It's also printed in the magazine. Living Rulebooks, by the way, are another idea pinched from Blood Bowl. They're a free PDF that's available from the website and which is a copy of the rules containing the





updates from the latest Rules Review. These are only changed once per year, as a result of the review, so you won't have to worry about needing to check back every five minutes.



Also, as part of the Rules Review, we also look at the various Warbands, Hired Swords and Dramatis Personae in the game. From time to time, sometimes as the result of changes in the rules, these may become a little unbalanced and we aim to keep these core elements as close to being as fair as possible.

### Onward and Upward

I, for one, think it's going to be an exciting time for Mordheim. Although I might look wistfully at the possibility of doing a Cathayan alternative setting now and again, I know that I'm not going to get round to that for many years. In the meantime I want to bring the dark and the cataclysmic back to the ruined streets and the abandoned fields. After all, the end of the world really is nigh.

<b>Author</b>	<i>Jake Thornton is the Head of System for Mordheim, and is currently finalising his long term plans.</i>	
<b>Further Information</b>	<i>Keep an eye on the Fanatic Magazine for more J(ake) Files!</i>	
<b>More Mordheim Website</b>	<i>Page 66 for the Province of Reikland.</i>	
	<i><a href="http://www.Mordheim.com">www.Mordheim.com</a></i>	

