Maintaining Law and Order

In this issue of *Cianty's Heresy* Christian Templin proceeds his efforts to give structure to the many articles, rules and other contributions for Mordheim. As pointed out in his previous article "Stunned but not Knocked Down" (see LOD #1), he considers this to be a vital step in helping the game thrive.

This article is all about the eternal fight against the chaos. No, I do not mean what you are thinking now, you spoilt Warhammer addict! I am talking of structure. Since its initial release the range of Mordheim material has grown to a level that is hard to overview for beginners and veterans alike. Additional rules were published in the White Dwarf magazine and later on in the Town Cryer. Besides those official rules, there are many unofficial rules, so-called house rules, which were also released through Games Workshop via the Town Cryer, the Fanatic Magazine and the Fanatic Online issues. Finally, there is a lot of fan-related material spread over the internet, some of which has gained the attention and acceptance of the community. The first step in organising the plethora of material is finding exhaustive categories which cover all types of the existing pieces of work. Next a classification of the rules material is important so that the gamers know how reliable it is and if they can count on it being allowed in tourneys outside of their own gaming group.

Pigeonholes

Mordheim has always caused people to be creative and add their part to the game. Categories based on the game's rulebook are obvious distinctions for the rules. Experienced players know that Games Workshop has a habit of introducing new rules to the existing set through the White Dwarf magazine. This has been done not only via the White Dwarf, but also via three other mediums: the Town Cryer magazine, the Fanatic Magazine and Fanatic Online. Some of these rules are official, some are house rules. However, there are plenty of articles that do not add new rules like warbands or equipment to the game but which cover the hobby aspect like painting, collection and battle reports. The table on the next page tries to put the whole cosmos of the game into various categories.

Motivation for categorisation

But before that, let me explain why I think this pigeonholing is even necessary. First and foremost it is a requisite to structuring the existing material about the game. In order to create an overview of what is out there, it simply is not sufficient to make lists for "official", "unofficial" and "fan-related" rules. Such an overview would be the heart piece of a central Mordheim website for the community, which is – as you should already know – what I am aiming at and hoping to inspire other people as well.

Furthermore, with these categories in mind, it is easier to approach articles. For example, if you consider writing an article for this ezine, you can have a look at the various kinds of possible articles and see what you can come up with or how your already finished work can be classified.

In the end the categorisation is a fairly obvious work. Most gamers will probably have similar categories in mind when reading a certain article and already know where it belongs. A formal notation, however, is needed nonetheless and essential for further work, such as part two of this article.

The categories of the game

There are four major categories for Mordheim material. Firstly, there are "rules". This covers all sorts of rulings on how to play the game. The second category is for background. This is all sort of fluff from descriptions of the Warhammer world to exciting story-telling. Then there is the "hobby" category which covers the aspects of the individual gamer's experience of the tabletop such as painting and converting miniatures, battle reports, meta articles like this one, etc. The last category is for general and useful information like warband roasters or overviews of warbands. Note that while the meta articles may appear to fit in this category, they actually do not. This section is about objective and antiseptic material. "Hobby" on the other hand is for the subjective experience of the players. So although the suggested categories themselves belong to the fourth category, the context in which they are introduced – this article – belongs to the "hobby" section. Alright, now you should have the right "meta" feeling to continue.

The following table lists the aforementioned categories as well as their sub-categories.

	Sub-category	Description	Examples
1. Rules	1.1 Game rules	General rules for playing Mordheim games like moving, shooting, etc.	Rulebook, rules review
	1.2 Campaign rules	As in the rulebook.	Campaign rules
	1.3 Additional Rules	Rules that are not essential for playing a Mordheim game (as per the rulebook). They extend the possibilities and variety of games.	New Equipment, random happenings, weather rules
	1.4 Scenarios	Scenarios as those in the rulebook.	See rulebook
	1.5 Warbands	Warbands as those in the rulebook.	Mercenaries, Da Mob Roolz
	1.6 Hired Swords	Hired Swords as those in the rulebook.	See rulebook
	1.7 Dramatis personae	Dramatis personae as those in the rulebook.	See rulebook
	1.8 House rules	Restrictions, clarifications and expansions of existing rules with the intend of fixing a problem or simply adding a new dimension to the game. Note that house rules themselves contain rules which are of another category (e.g. house rules for shooting).	Special rules for shooting through windows, alternative armour rules
2. Background	2.1 Background	Background information on the specific setting where the game is set.	Mordheim, Lustria and Khemri background
	2.2 Story	Story-telling and fiction	See rulebook
3. Hobby	3.1 Battle report		"Call to Arms" (Fan8)
	3.2 Pictures & photos	Self-explanatory	–
	3.3 How to…/Guide	Articles about playing (tactis and strategy), collection, painting, etc.	"Painting Horses" (Fan3), "Axes All Areas" (Fan10)
	3.4 Meta article	Articles about aspects of the game that are on a meta level, like previews, opinions, etc.	"Designer's Cut" (TC8), "Stunned but not Knocked Down" (LOD1), this article
4. General	4.1 Warband roaster	There are various versions of Mordheim warband rosters available. Some are official, some are not.	As in the rulebook
	4.2 Overviews, categorisations, compilations	Any sort of overview on a specific type of Mordheim material. This includes alternate settings and supplements as they combine material from category 1 to 3.	Watchtower (from Town Cryer), this table
	4.3 Other	You never know what else will come…	

Table: The game's categories

The rules grading system

With the various types of material laid down, it is now possible to take a closer look at their trustworthiness. The described system for grading material in this section refers to contents in the "Rules" section of above categorisation, with the exception of the "House rules", which are re-writes of rules rather than additions.

Currently in the English wikipedia and the Warhammer Online wiki there are three traditional types of grading for warbands: official, unofficial and experimental.

Level	Description
Official	Any warband published by Games Workshop, which is currently allowed to be used on Official Games Workshop Mordheim Tournaments. They are listed on the Specialist Games Mordheim Rules Review.
Unofficial	Any warband published by Games Workshop, which is currently NOT allowed to be used on Official Games Workshop Mordheim Tournaments. They tend to be listed on the Specialist Games Mordheim Rules Review, but as a rule of thumb… if it is not explicitly listed as official, then it is unofficial!
Experimental	Any warband NEVER published by Games Workshop, and thus is NOT allowed to be on Official GW Mordheim Tournaments. For obvious reasons, they are not mentioned on the Specialist Games Mordheim Rules Review. They are usually home-brewed warbands and thus may be poorly balanced. Some of them appear to be ready for the big time, but they have never been submitted to Specialist Games for review or simply have been lost in the shuffle.

taken from:
Wikipedia (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mordheim), Warhammer Online wiki (http://warhammeronline.wikia.com/wiki/Mordheim_(game))
(last call: October 24th, 2007)

This division was practical for most purposes during the time of regular Games Workshop publications. Today it is, however, not ample in its diversity pertaining to the "Experimental" part. As Games Workshop is effectively no longer supporting the range of Specialist Games, a way of grading the fan-related work is strongly needed to warrant a clear overview. Not only because new material is being produced by fans only, but also because the publishment of these rules in the Fanatic Online magazine only adds to the confusion as those are not playtested by Specialist Games itself. This entails that the "unofficial" predicate is no longer meaningful either. Despite the rules being released through an official medium – the Specialist Games website – players cannot rely on them and their origin must be known. For this purpose, the following grading system extends the traditional trinity of official/unofficial/experimental rules. The system can then be applied to the existing Mordheim material and designers can use it when presenting their work, e.g. on their website or the Mordheim forum.

Note that currently the Fanatic Online magazine does not count as official medium for publishing trustworthy material, unless its content is explicitly declared to be official. As already mentioned this is due to the missing playtesting instances.

Level	Name	Description
1a	Official	Official Games Workshop rules.
1b	Unofficial	Material released through GW* but not declared to be official part of the rules. Otherwise the quality of this material is totally professional.
1c	Experimental	Material not released through GW. Approved of by people who have previously submitted level 1a or 1b material and who vouch for its professional quality.
2	Reliable	Created and tested by fans. Testing includes several runs of the rules. Approved of by that gaming group. Most ambitious projects are of this category. A list with the names of the group's members must be available to ensure the reliability.
3	Draft	New rules that are written down clearly but have not yet been tested properly.
4	Forum trash	Not tested, not serious, not anything good

*White Dwarf, (Best of) Town Cryer and/or Fanatic magazine – not Fanatic Online, though.

The first three categories – 1a, 1b, 1c – are supposed to be of equal quality, i.e. completely professional standard. The difference between them is the recognition they got from Games Workshop. The official rules are obvious and self-explanatory. The unofficial rules did get published by Games Workshop but have never been raised to "official" status, which (in many cases) is a mere bureaucratic formality. "Experimental" rules are thoroughly created and well balanced material by fans. As Games Workshop has forsaken Specialist Games activity in this very category is probably the most interesting for the fans. Creating new material of this kind is the community's way of keeping the game alive and interesting while its owner is inactive. The other levels are decreasing in quality or just in playtesting going from the desired "reliable" to the negligible "trash" material posted by the next best forum member.

Applying levels

The extended grading system is useful in a number of ways. It helps grading the existing material as well as serve as a concise labelling for rules designers to show how much time and effort went into their work.

Levels for the current material

Currently there are two definite resources for Mordheim: Mike "Thrasher" Kitchenman's *Uber Useful Mordheim Information thread* in the Mordheim forum and the famous Mordheim fansite www.mordheimer.com. The information on these sites could be organised in accordance with the proposed categorisation. Then the grading system could be applied. In my opinion, this would be the best possible overview of the Mordheim material available.

Using levels for fan projects

The grading system is a great way for fans to easily show the state of playtesting their project has reached. Freshly uploaded fansites can put a level 3 (draft) image on their website or just assign it to some of their rules. A well-tested piece of work can be labelled with a level 2 tag (reliable). Of course, to be truly trustable, the site will need at least a listing of the members of the gaming group who took part in the process of play-testing. In general, no project, whether it be on paper or a website, can do without a thorough credits section.

Exemplarily, the *Border Town Burning* supplement's website has been updated with the grading system. If you go to www.bordertownburning.de.vu you can see the system in use.

Further examples

So far, any set of rules that has been published in the *Letters of the Damned* ezine has a grading of 2 (reliable). Through my submissions for the ezine I got an insight of the editors' playtesting, therefore I trust the editor's claims and rate the published rules with level 2.

The future

After all, we are still reliant on the designers' honesty when it comes to statements of how much playtesting their rules went through. Nevertheless the presented categories and grading system can be used to sort the many existing works and create a straightforward compendium for Mordheim.

In order to let the game evolve a group is needed that has the knowledge and authority to raise level 2 (reliable) material to level 1c (experimental). As the three level 1 categories are meant to be of equal quality, the fans can then treat these as the "official" rules of the community. I believe that this is the way to keep the game going while Games Workshop does not care. How such a group could be selected I am not going to discuss here. Instead I hope to get some feedback on this article and then go from there.

Cheers!

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p.s.: watch out for the next issue of Cianty's Heresy which will be a totally different type of article!