

MOUNT AND BLADE: WARBAND

A Game Design Analysis



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Greetings and salutations, welcome to my essay analysing the game design features present in 'Mount and Blade: Warband', a title in the franchise 'Mount and Blade' by TaleWorlds Entertainment. Warband is the second game to release in this franchise, of four currently available to buy. Their first release was simply 'Mount and Blade', which came out in 2008. Seeing its success, using the same engine and core design elements Warband released two years later to huge laudations and a growing fanbase. A year after that, 'Mount and Blade: With Fire and Sword' released but was generally underwhelming, and the gunplay did not fit the engine or general theme of the series well. Finally, the fourth instalment in this franchise was released this year into Early Access; 'Mount and Blade II: Bannerlord'. Bannerlord, initially announced in 2012, has been one of the PC gaming community's most awaited games, rivalling even 'Half-Life 3'. The reason for this extremely long development time is difficult to say, but there have been hints as to why in the multitude of developer blogs released in the last eight years. One reason is initial unsurety as to what game they were intending to make. Initially, the plan for Warband's sequel was to be in the same engine, but with more depth and scope. However, approximately two years in 'Armağan Yavuz', the founder of TaleWorlds, decided to change tac. This meant that all two years of development that had been put in, was immediately scrapped. They decided to develop a new engine, and Bannerlord was the result.



TaleWorlds, despite originally being a two-man team, now has over ninety developers.

All of this to say that, while Bannerlord is graphically superior and its engine is incredible, Warband is still the better game despite being released ten years prior. While seemingly oxymoronic, I hope to explain my point throughout this essay.

To begin though, I would like to introduce Warband. Warband's game world is primarily in a top down map, similar to most Real Time Strategy games, but when you engage in a battle it becomes either first- or third-person directional attacking mayhem. Set in the late medieval ages, on a fantasy continent called Calradia, Warband exists purely to allow you to profiteer off war. That is the goal. Whether a merchant, simple warrior, mercenary leader, lord, or King, accumulation of wealth is paramount, and it almost always comes at someone else's loss. In order to gain this wealth, you'll most likely have to start building a warband, hence the game's namesake. This will be discussed more thoroughly later. For now, it suffices to know that power and wealth are generally proportional.

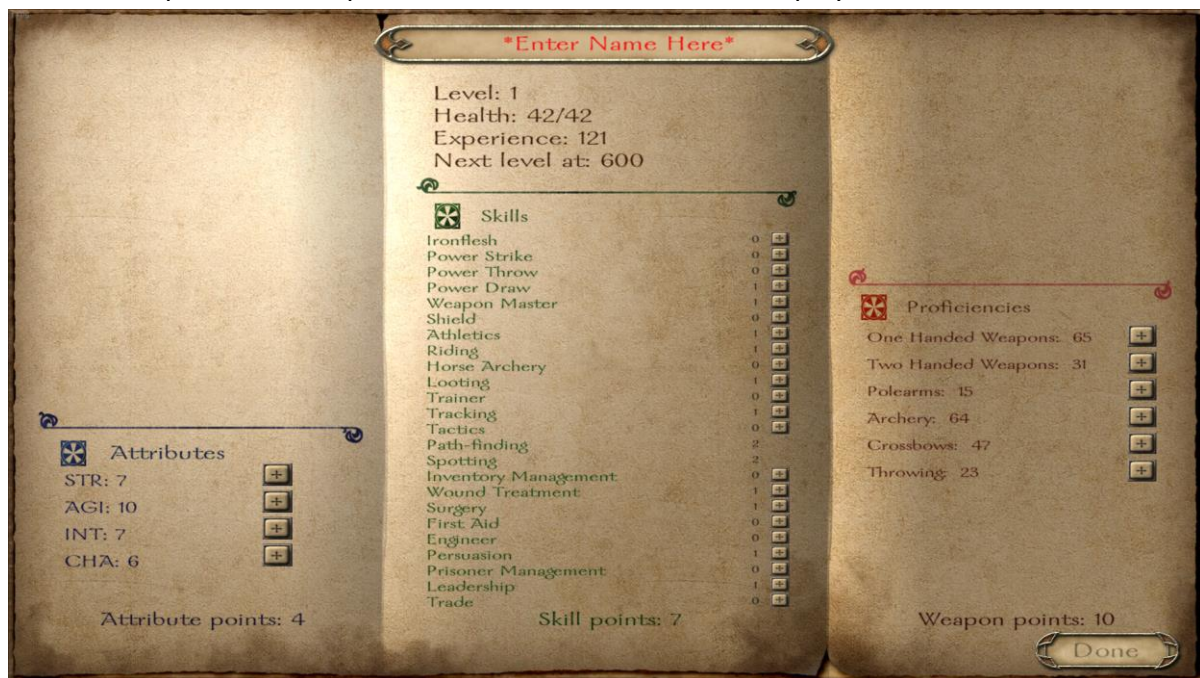
It is near impossible to label Warband as any one genre. It is certainly Action filled, you will always have a sense of Adventure, and Strategy is paramount if you want to get anywhere. It is first-person, second, and third. It is absolutely a Role-playing game, but aren't you playing a role in every game? Open world? Yes. Medieval? Yes. Warband is like another life, one with a lot more killing and money.

This other life you will be living is on a continent called Calradia. After the collapse of the Empire, the continent fractured into six different Kingdoms, each with a unique culture. The Nords are your standard Scandinavian Viking types, bearded warriors in chain mail wielding axes. To their East are the Vaegir, Slavic lamellar plated warriors with expertise in bows. South of them are the Khergits, a Mongolian style tribe with horse archers and lancers. They say every Khergit is born in the saddle. Even further south, in the Great Deserts, reside the Sarranid Sultanate. Poorly armoured, equipped, and organised, Sarranids usually make the whipping boy of any Kingdom looking for some easy land. West of the Sarranids are the Rhodoks, expert crossbowmen and spearmen. Long ago, a Kingdom called Vlandia was split asunder by rebellion. The South Vlandians who lived in the mountains became known as the Rhodoks, while the Northern forces became known as the Swadians. These Swadians have the heaviest cavalry, but due to their central position on the map they usually get their fiefs passed to other kingdoms like a bag of Taytos at a party.

This incredible sense of setting the game imparts upon its players is hugely important. It grants a sense of absolute immersion, and the character you make feels worldly because of this. Every action you take will affect one of these Kingdoms immensely. You kill a bandit party near Dhirim? You have just helped to ensure the safety of a Vaegir caravan travelling from Reyvadin to Dhirim. This means the economy of Reyvadin gets that little bit better, and the lord of the town can afford to grow his army by just that little bit more. This emergent storytelling is so in depth and fun, it can feel like the game is swallowing you.

The last point I will make about Calradia is something that took me about 1200 hours of play to realise. Not only is Calradia made to resemble the shape of Turkey, due to the team being Turkish, but the factions are all in their respective locations to the cultures they resemble. The Italian Rhodoks in the South, Frankish/Germanic Swadians in the West and

centre, Scandinavian Nords in the North, Slavic Vaegirs in the North-East, Mongolian Khergits far to the East and Arabic Sarranids to the South-East. I am unsure as to the intended effect of these choices, but it certainly adds a sense of subconscious familiarity with the map, another step towards total immersion for the player.



Warband begins with a character creator, like many RPGs. For its time, the creator is surprisingly very impressive. The characters look better than the famous 'The Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion' thumb people, but of course vastly worse than Skyrim that released a year later. Arguably it has more customisable faces than Skyrim though, including a slider for age that I do not recall any games of its time having. These are only the visuals though, and where Warband shines is in its mechanics. As such, the mechanical aspects of the character creator are unrivalled. You are asked your gender, you father's occupation, what you did in your early life, what you grew up to do, and what set you on this adventuring course. These all contribute to raising different skills of the twenty-four available in the base game, and raising your four ability scores, Strength, Dexterity, Intelligence, and Charisma. You are then given seven skill points to raise your skills and four skill points to raise your abilities. For every three points in any ability, you can raise a skill of that abilities type by one. For example, with fifteen Strength your Ironflesh can be maxed out at five. On top of this, you have proficiencies with different weapons that raise through use in game and every time you level up. Your maximum for how high you can raise these proficiencies through levelling is determined by your Weapon Master skill. As you can see, Warband has the complicated ability system of any MMO worth its salt. Not only does this help to build a better image of your character in your head increasing immersion, this character builder also allows for a deep learning process as you learn to make your character how you want them to be played, which is the epitome of self-defining play.

At the end of the character creator, is a question. Where do you go? It then lists the capital cities of each faction, and a means of getting there. For example, you join a caravan to Reyvadin, capital city of the Vaegirs. Wherever you choose to go, the line every Warband player knows by heart appears. "All of a sudden, you hear a sound that stands the hairs of your neck on end – the rasp of a blade sliding from its scabbard...". As soon as you press continue, you are in the streets of where you chose to go. A bandit is rushing at you with a sword, and you must defend yourself with what you are given. Warband has no mandatory tutorial, only a frenzied gold lusting bandit sprinting at you. Once you dispatch him, which is no easy feat for those unused to directional blocking and attacks, a merchant approaches you to make sure you are all right. He takes you to his home, and explains banditry is rife in Calradia. You can choose to end the questline here or continue through it for reward of gold and loot. For now, let us assume you tell the merchant you are interested in his proposition. He explains his brother has been taken by bandits and needs you to gather five men to go and rescue him. This leads us neatly into the recruiting system in Warband, but first a grounding. This early game excitement, the near immediate action, and thrusting into an involved sensical story, is testament to the power of this game. You know what you must do from the offset, and from here on you are completely free. It is open world like no other, where everything is not tailored around you like Skyrim. You cannot just do a few quests for a faction and become their leader. You are not born with ancient blood of a dragon. You are just a human, in a brutal world of violence and death. And it is absolutely fantastic.

To form the eponymous party, recruitment is a must. It can come in two forms, tavern recruitment and village recruitment. Villages are small corollary outposts, with no garrison or militia, always adjacent to a city or castle. They have an elder who gives you quests and can sell you produce and livestock. Either through the village menu or the elder, you can ask for recruits. At the beginning of the game, you might get a few volunteers. They will be the lowest tier troops from the faction the village's culture is, so probably equipped with a pitchfork and if you are lucky, a club. You would be a fool to underestimate these peasants though, as they grow fast and strong with experience. There are two ways to better the troops you can recruit from villages, without having to bring them to battle or a training field and train them manually. Doing quests for the village elder or saving the village from bandits will increase their opinion of you, increasing both the quality and quantity of troops available for recruitment. Also, as your Renown score increases by taking difficult battles or initiating major sieges, villages will be more likely to give you better and more plentiful recruits.

Tavern recruitment is rather different. There are only two types that can be recruited from a tavern, one type is Companions, the other Mercenaries. Mercenaries are more expensive to buy and have vastly larger weekly wages than other troops. Despite this, they are usually very strong troops with top tier armour and weaponry. While not particularly useful in the early game, if you lose some men in a field battle in the late game and need quick, strong, supplementary troops, Mercenaries are hard to beat in that regard.

Another aide may be lurking in the tavern though. One who has a real name, not just a description like Mercenary Guard. It could be Jeremus, Matheld, Artimenner. Marnid, Borch, or Lezalit, to name but a few. These are Companions, the ultimate weapon for any Warband player who knows how to build a party. Companions are unlike other troops, they are often expensive to recruit (or sometimes free), they have a story they are willing to share with you, and the skills they bring contribute to the party. For example, Jeremus comes freely to your side, with skills in Surgery, Wound Treatment, and First Aid. This man is a godsend¹, as these skills mean that soldiers who fall in battle are more likely to be wounded than dead, they recover health quicker, and so do you. Companions are also hugely important late game if you choose to form your own Kingdom. I will explain this later.

Not only are Companions extremely useful in your warband, they also provide about the only insights Warband offers into the history of Calradia. They tell you of the Khergits being pushed into Calradic lands in the East, the Rhodok rebellion in the West, the bloody Nord-Vaegir wars in the North and Sarranid corruption in the South. They provide the most emotional connection to the game most players form, and they have emotions of their own. If you recruit two companions and they do not get along, it is very likely that one will eventually leave out of spite. Conversely, if they get along well, they will come to you while your Warband camps and tell you directly about each other's valour or shared values. Admittedly, to a veteran of the game these squabbles are tiresome, but to new players it makes for immersive interesting gameplay with stakes related to who you recruit and why.

Quests are another interesting aspect of Warband, with them being somewhat of a mixed bag. They are often fetch-quests, being told to go deliver a letter or kill some lawbreaker in a village. Then, lightning strikes. Suppose you are asked by a Lord in the faction you are trying to ingratiate yourself into to rescue his brother from the dungeons of Sargoth, capital city of the Nords. Warily, you ride through the streets of Sargoth, looking for the jail where he is kept. Finally, you find it, but the guard cannot be bribed to give you the keys to the cell. You end up having to cut him down, but not before he calls out for help. You slaughter the first wave, and rush into the dungeons to free the brother. He grabs a sword, and fights at your side as you flee the city and free him. The reward is denars, renown and relationship, and you feel like a King. But that is assuming everything went right, which is often not the case. Perhaps a guard got a lucky throwing axe off and you took it to the head? Maybe you could not kill the jailor before the guards arrived? Maybe the Lord you rescued was knocked down as you fought your way out? The likely outcome is jail, and some of your equipment and inventory being stolen. About a week or two later you will manage to break out, but the shame is permanent. This is part of the beauty of Warband. The stakes are high, every action you make is consequential. To elaborate, that Lord you rescued will be grateful. Years down the line, when you found a Kingdom of your own, who

¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ktkl119x2Nk&list=WL&index=47&t=0s>

is to say an old friend will not be waiting in your great hall? Ready to make a pledge of vassalage?

Quests like that are what make the quest system in Warband so brilliant. It is entirely emergent storytelling. The game didn't place that Lord in that dungeon for you to rescue him, the Lord was in that dungeon because he was captured, and you happened to ask his brother if he had anything that needed doing. The story of the game, of your character, is entirely of your own making. There is no set path, no assumptions made on your part. You simply exist in Calradia, and that is the most immersive any game can get.

The greatest impact any feature Warband had on the industry is absolutely the combat. Completely ground-breaking for its time, this easy to learn hard to master style of combat is commonplace today. There are four directions you can attack or be attacked from in Warband, with some weapons like scimitars not being able to use the stab (bottom direction) attack, and some weapons like lances only being able to use the stab. While automatic blocking is usually enabled in singleplayer, multiplayer lobbies will usually have manual blocking on. This means that, despite how simple it may seem, unless you are a confident swordsman a shield is a must have. To complicate things further, a chamber can happen if you attack at the right time and side you are getting attacked from, hitting their weapon with yours, which blocks theirs but yours will hit. The finesse required to achieve a chamber consistently is something not many players will ever achieve.



This combat, while simple at first, becomes more difficult to master the more you learn about it. Things like relative velocity are accounted for, making your movement as important as your swinging. In effect, these systems were revolutionary. We can still see the impacts they have had on the industry to this day, effectively creating a genre of directional attacking multiplayer competitive games like Chivalry, War of the Roses, and most notably

Mordhau. Warband was foundational in the creation of these games and is awarded its due respect in that industry because of it.

In ranged combat, bows, crossbows and throwing weapons are all included. Your accuracy is determined by proficiency in the relevant skill and the accuracy rating of the weapon itself. For example, crossbows are more accurate than bows and javelins are more accurate than throwing axes. This does not mean the crossbow is better than the bow though, despite also doing more damage. Most decent crossbows cannot be reloaded on horseback, whereas most Khergit bows can. They also load faster, and not having to stand still to reload makes kiting a viable strategy. Skirmishing with a band of archers is an extremely effective tactic for field battles against shield-less enemies. Conversely, crossbows are better at breaking the shields in a shield wall, so the strategy changes.

As you can see from above, army composition is absolutely vital in Warband. You would be a fool to rely solely on any one type, as eventually you will be at war with a faction that counters them. For example, Swadian Knights are a brilliant unit. Heavily armoured and armed, they excel at open field battles or even close sieges. Put them against an army of Rhodoks though with their crossbows and spears, and they will be dead in the dirt in no time. Similarly, Nords are excellent infantry and excel at sieges due to their powerful throwing weapons and shields, but a Khergit army of horse archers will dance around them like its nothing. But try bringing a horse archer to a siege? He will be dead in seconds. Interestingly, one companion, Lezalit, explains what he would do if he were a warring lord. He would gather Swadian Knights, Vaegir Archers, and Nord Infantry, and I completely agree with him. However, not everyone would. Rhodok Sergeants have the most health of any unit, Sarranid Mamelukes have incredibly powerful lances, and Khergit horse archers are fast and accurate. This variety of choice leads to high levels of experimentation by the player, thus adding to the depth of the game, without being so initially complicated as to disenfranchise a new player. The core game loop of recruiting, fighting, recruiting, is simple but fun. Every addition to that is where new players will have to use their imagination, but meaningful play will smack them in the face regardless.

After you complete the initial quests and rescue the merchant's brother, the world is your oyster. To build your army up from the five or so men you have, hunting bandits is almost always necessary. To begin, looters will be your first prey. They are poorly armoured, never have shields, and your recruits should be about equally matched with them. Once you have stolen all the freshly dead looter's jerkins, hats, and pitchforks, you can sell them at a town or village. Grab some more recruits and upgrade the ones you have if they have gained enough experience. This increases their weekly wage and costs Denars to do, but the offset is miniscule compared to the utility they will offer your party. Once you are stomping through looters, move on to bandits and deserters. Each faction has different bandits based on their surroundings, for example Rhodoks have Mountain Bandits and Vaegirs have Taiga Bandits. The strongest of any of these are Sea Raiders, the Nord bandits. They carry throwing axes, huge impenetrable shields, and chain mail. They will absolutely tear through

that they be rewarded to you is the best tactic. I would define this as the midgame, where most players find their meaningful play. It is incredibly rewarding to get to know your factions Lords, fight with them on the battlefield, and against them in Tourneys. If you grow particularly fond of a family, you can ask if they have any suitable suitors for yourself among them. If they do, poems learned from Wandering Skalds in taverns throughout Calradia will woo your prospective, and soon if you match the poems to their personality you will be married. Oddly, the marriage scene is the only cutscene in the entire singleplayer campaign, and it is quite sweet. I find that Warband characters are extremely believable, despite their misshapen models and lack of voice lines. One can still find themselves attached, making player driven storytelling frequent and enjoyable.

Late game Warband is not attempted by most players, which I think is a pity. Players tend to get lost in the maze of relationships they have in a Kingdom, growing attached to their Liege and fellows. There is still much more to enjoy though, with self-governance being the ultimate goal. What use is being the strongest warrior in Calradia if you do not lead the strongest army? Claimants are one form of late game play. A Claimant is a direct challenger to the Kingship of any faction. For example, Lady Isolla of Suno claims that King Harlaus is an unlawful tyrant and asks you to help her displace him. If you take on this mission, you must first leave your faction. This can be done in two ways, either you leave peacefully, lose all your fiefs, and lose some relation with your Liege, or you make a big deal of it. To do this, you must take a fief in war and ask it to be rewarded to you. If it is not, you will generally be offered Denars to compensate you. Finding this an insult to your honour, you can leave with all your fiefs and become immediately at war with your former faction. Then you can speak to any Claimant and ask to support them, and the civil war will begin. Whichever faction you are claiming, you will be in permanent war with. You will be a permanent marshal in this new faction, having the power to call the Kingdoms armies at will.

Alternatively, if supporting a Claimant is not a high enough level of self-determination for the player, they can choose to start a Kingdom of their own. Whether it be through leaving a faction on bad terms or just taking a fief by yourself, you will become King of the Player Faction. You can rename this however you like and choose your colour on the map. The next step is the most difficult. You are now at war, with whatever fiefs you have taken, a lone King with no Vassals to support you. Vassals are gained in three ways, the best of which I will leave till last. First, you can try to convince Lords to join you. This is often difficult, and requires you selecting the right dialogue options tailored to their personalities. Unlike Fallout 4, not every dialogue leads to the same outcome. Often, they will tell you to bugged off, unwilling to risk their Lieges wrath for some lone King. If they do join accept, you will have to give them a fief. Dependant on what type of fief you give and their own skills, they will have a different size army. Alternatively, if you have fiefs available and a Lord sees an opportunity, they may abandon their faction, or be exiled from it, and wait for you in your capital. They will offer you their sword in vassalage, and you can deny or accept as you wish. Once again, the emergent storytelling sallies forth. Is this the Lord that you had to duel

to gain your wife's hand? Or is this the Lord who saw fit to help you in an unwinnable battle when you were a mere mercenary? The choice is yours.

Finally, my favourite way to gain Lords is through Companions. Simply speak to them and offer them a fief, and they will tell you what this means to them. For some, this is a blessing. Others, a curse. Bunduk will refuse to call himself Lord, preferring the title "Tribune", due to his hatred of nobility.

“ It's a long story, but if you get yourself a drink, I'll be glad to tell it.

A sergeant I was, in the garrison here at (town). Twenty years I stood guard for the city, taking many a hard knock in many a tough fight, until they appointed a snot-nosed, downy-lipped princeling, barely out of his mother's cradle, as commander of the garrison. He came upon me standing watch atop the tower, with my crossbow unstrung -- on account of the rain, you see... Can't have the cord loosen... But Little Prince Snot-Nose tells me that an unstrung bow is dereliction of duty. Says he'll have me horsewhipped. And something in me snapped. So I walked off my post.

Now I'm here getting drunk, and the Devil take tomorrow.

”

— Bunduk's introduction

Rolf will love you for it, a self-proclaimed noble finally legitimised in the eyes of the world. Making Firentis a lord will lower other Lords opinions of you, due to his fratricidal past. Regardless, Companions made Lords will have an extremely high opinion of you, making managing your Kingdom that much easier.

The late game of Warband is generally as stated. More Lords can be better but if you do not reward them with fiefs, they will begin to plot against you, so finding the balance between how many Lords and how quickly their opinions lower is an important aspect. By now, your army should be about able to run through every battle chopping heads left and right, so the main difficulty is managing who you are at war with. If you expand too quickly, everyone will declare on you in fear. If you expand too slowly, a larger faction will see you as weak and take the opportunity. A balance between them is not an easy find, and the other Kings can be tricky, but with proper efforts and placations from the player it can be done. All in all, this sums up the Warband singleplayer native experience. It is complicated, fun, often extremely difficult, but rewarding enough to make it worth it.

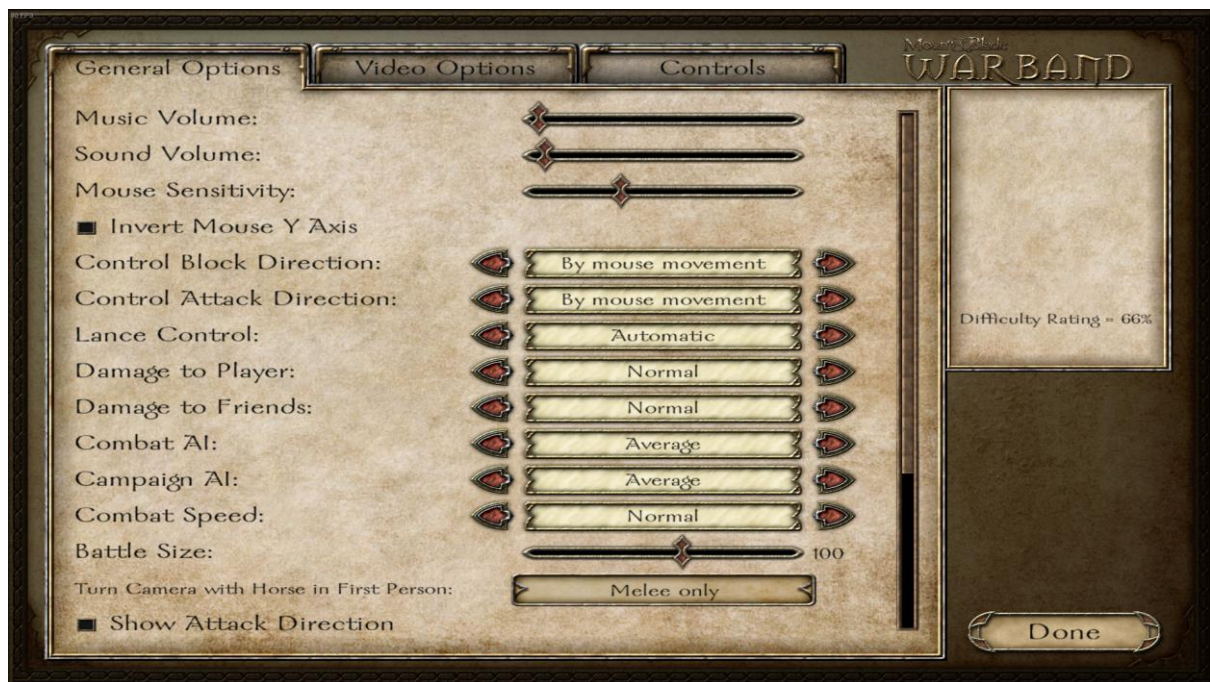
Both Downloadable Contents (DLCs) for Warband are completely transformative, changing the game world entirely. Napoleonic Wars is a multiplayer only expansion, placing you in the brutal line battles common in the 19th century. Armed with muskets, sabres, and a random assortment of instruments, the multiplayer events that still go on to this day are a

sight to behold. The level of organisation is incredible, with officers directing where to stand, where to face, and when to fire in full military mannerisms. Napoleonic Wars is a triumph of DLC, in that it is transformative, and brought a huge number of new players to the game.

The second DLC is called Viking Conquest, and is made by the team that made the mod Brytenwalda. It is extremely brilliant business practice in my opinion to give modding teams who make excellent contributions to your game the resources and funding to make more content for you. Viking Conquest is a testament to this concept, brining about fantastic new ideas that have since been implemented in the sequel to Warband, Bannerlord. For example, usually when you enter a town or village you are in full armour. This is ridiculous because it implies people can walk around all day fully clad, and so Viking Conquest implemented a secondary clothing system. Only light cloth clothes can be worn and smaller weapons, like short-swords and hand-axes. This makes walking around villages feel much more immersive and increases player choice. More importantly however, it showed the first signs of a full narrative campaign in any Mount and Blade game. While it is relatively short and not worth dissecting, this was the foundations that Bannerlord was built on, and due to its early access state, is still being built on.

Now is where I will pull the wool from your eyes. This game I have described, every aspect, from layabout to lord, is only a template. Mount and Blade Warband is a skeleton, that modders can easily build on. The extend of the modding community in Warband completely outweighs any other I have seen, including any Total War instalment, with only Skyrim holding any weight in comparison. Full Downloadable Content sized mods exist in their hundreds, all of them huge improvements over the base game. The Last Days puts you in Middle Earth in the final days of the Third Age, fighting along side the fellowship or against them. A Clash of Kings lets you roam Westeros, joining any house to help win the Iron Throne. Samurai Japan? Gekojuko. Warhammer Fantasy? Warsword Conquest. Even Star Wars? Bear Force II. These mods are so genuinely massive, transformative, and immersive, that describing any one would take another document of this size. Suffice it to say, my 1300 hours of play is barely a dent in the content on offer.

The final aspect of singleplayer content I will be discussing is difficulty. This is not easy, and this section might drag, but the importance of difficulty in Warband cannot be understated. See image below for reference to my points.



To begin, Control Block Direction. One of the most important aspects of Warband is its combat as I have mentioned and choosing whether to manually block or not can radically change the difficulty of the game. For instance, if a new player enjoys two-handed-weapon fighting but cannot get their mind around the manual blocking, it could hugely disenfranchise them and lead them to stop playing. Thankfully, the setting is manually on automatic so new players can learn the ropes progressively rather than being thrown in the deep end. Damage to Player and Damage to Friends are both similarly important, determining how much damage the enemy does to you and your allies. It is a tasteful and smart way to determine difficulty in my opinion, rather than the gaming trope of just adding more health and damage to the enemy. Combat AI determines the tactics enemy commanders will take, for example whether they will position their men on hills or flank with cavalry. The Warband AI is not perfect by any means but boosting this does immerse you more into the concept of being a commander on commander fight, rather than just a slugfest like the Battle of the Bastards. Campaign AI determines how likely factions are to gather behind their marshal to defend their lands or attack others. Keeping this low makes late game a lot easier, so it is absolutely recommended for a first run. Battle Size, while it may not seem like an aspect of difficulty, is. Imagine a scenario where you have five men versus a hundred. If you go into battle, your four allies will certainly be slain, and you will be captured. Conversely, if you set the Battle Size to the minimum of thirty, it will only be you against twenty-nine enemies more than likely. Depending on your tactics skill, you may be able to bring more into the battle. These odds, due to you being the player and probably very capable of dispatching thirty enemies, makes the fight much more manageable. I believe this to be the most immersion breaking aspect of Warband, and a cheap way to win, but what works, works in the end. These choices together add or subtract from the difficulty percentage, mainly there to compare with your friend's playthrough.

The final and most important aspect of Warband's difficulty is your saving mode. Many games, Warband included, have the concept of 'Ironman'. You only have one save file, and you cannot quit without saving. This makes your actions, and your mistakes, permanent. In opposition to this is 'Reload Anytime' mode, where eponymously you can reload your saves anytime. Ironman is a lot more difficult of course, and some players prefer the harsh challenge. It is more immersive; your actions feel weightier and the game feels slower. Reloading anytime will likely make you feel more heroic though, often pulling off fights against impossible odds, purely because you won on your tenth try. Both choices are entirely respectable, and it would be foolish to look down on either choice. Games are meant to be enjoyed, and whichever way people choose to do that is completely fine.

To summarise difficulty, whatever makes you enjoy the game most is what you should choose. The options are there for a reason, and that being the case is a sign of fantastic game design. TaleWorlds understand that, while some people may love their game for its difficulty, others may love it for its emergent storytelling. These kinds of differences are found throughout Warband and are only natural for a game of its magnitude. Some people prefer Rhodoks, some people Nords. Some think using Cavalry is akin to cheating, others literally use the cheating system in the game to enjoy it more. Whatever your playstyle or preferences, Warband can facilitate it, and I think that is wonderful.

Now onto multiplayer. At the time of my writing this, it feels as though Warband's multiplayer community are finally winding down. Napoleonic Wars events are few and far between, and more servers are empty by the day. In its prime though, Multiplayer was a beauty to behold. Warband was, as I have mentioned, the beginning of the directional medieval competitive scene. Nearly naked men, with great claymores and flamberges, would charge around the battlefield swinging wildly while spinning constantly. Moderators would dress in wedding dresses to distinguish themselves, and anyone seen on a horse would be immediately screamed at in chat. What made this all possible, as I see it, was the modular equipment system. When a player joins a server, they generally start out with 1000 gold. With that, they must buy head armour, body armour, gloves, shoes, weapons, and if you are Cavalry, a steed. Each faction had different choices, and each of the three classes too. The possibilities were nearly endless because of this, player expression was paramount, and everyone had their own fun way to play and engage with the multiplayer. This design decision was an absolute gift to the game, something so perfect and pristine that it really would make or break it. It is my belief that because of this feature, once the multiplayer community have had their fun with Bannerlord, there will be a huge resurgence in Warband's multiplayer. Player expression is so often overlooked by developers, and as such Warband's multiplayer is an all time classic.

At the genesis of this essay I proposed that I believe Warband to be a better game than its sequel, Bannerlord. I have not yet explicitly stated my reasoning, but I will now. It all stems from the fact that Bannerlord is in early access. So far, it's much less polished than Warband. The AI makes ridiculous decisions, they get caught on ladders, they will suicide

run to prop up a ladder no one is intending to climb. Bandit hideouts are nearly impossible even to the best troops, as arrows do an insane amount of damage. It has a dead-end storyline, with an annoying infinite glitch at the end, and there is nearly no emergent storytelling type of quests. Good relations are impossible to build, and some interesting game features are essentially locked behind "If you do this, you'll never be able to persuade anyone to do anything, ever again.". The Skill system is completely broken, with half the perks not actually doing their intended function. The modding community are working hard but due to regular patching by TaleWorlds, every Mod is broken after a week. In comparison, Warband is as I have stated throughout this essay. It is polished, pristine, has plenty of emergent storytelling, great interactions between the player and NPCs, notable companions with stories of heartache and heroism. Warband's mods are incredible, vast, and stable. The skill system is perfect, with limitless progression. For these reasons, Warband is still the best game TaleWorlds have released, but I am truly excited for when Bannerlord starts to fully spread its wings.

So, with that we have reached the end of my Game Design Analysis on 'Mount and Blade: Warband'. I hope that I have given you a view into what makes the game so special to me, and many other members of its community. I was so thankful to have been given the opportunity to participate in Bannerlord's closed multiplayer beta, and despite my complaints I will continue to give TaleWorlds all my love. I even hope to work there for my placement in third year! Thank you for reading and have a nice Summer.

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