



Axes All Areas

By Ian Davies

If you've read anything about the last two GW Mordheim events, you'll have heard of Ian and his roving band of Dwarfs. Morgan the Moon and his merry men (well, Dwarfs) managed to win not one, but both of the events, and so who better than he to offer up some sage advice on the warband and its tactics? You'll also notice the prevalence of (bad) puns in Ian's writings, something he claims he could stop at any time... if only he wanted to. Anyway, you came for the Dwarfs, so "Hair We Go"...

Before We Begin...

First, a word of warning. If you're expecting an article explaining that Dwarfs are stout mountain folk with a penchant for axes and foaming ale then I'm afraid I'm going to disappoint you. Of course Dwarfs are stout mountain folk with a penchant for axes and foaming ale, but this information can be found elsewhere, most notably in the Warhammer Dwarf Army book which contains all the background you could wish for.

Instead I'm going to try to highlight some of the playing tips that I've picked up by running Dwarfs through several different Mordheim campaigns. If you're not a Dwarf fan (and I'd like to know why not!) then I hope that some of the principles that follow apply across the board with other types of warbands.

If you're playing against Dwarfs then you may even find one or two snippets that might help to overcome your adversary. In that case a breach of security has occurred and you should stop reading immediately.

OK, first the basics...

1. Dwarfs, obviously, have a lousy movement of 3".
2. With high Toughness and the Hard To Kill special rule, they're adept at surviving hand-to-hand combat.
3. Their access to crossbows, pistols and shooting skills means that they have a strong missile potential that should not be ignored. I will now explain why not.

Shooting Part 1: The Hard To Kill advantage
Dwarfs have several advantages in a prolonged firefight, some of them not immediately obvious.

Firstly, thanks to the Engineer, your crossbows have a whopping 36" range. This is only bettered in the game by the rarely seen, and ludicrously expensive, Hochland long rifle. Clearly if you are out of range while your target is within range then you'll want to make the most of this. You've nothing to lose.

Even if you're within the enemy's range of fire you probably still have a nice advantage over him, courtesy of the Dwarfs' Hard To Kill special rule, which he may not have thought of. Let me explain.

As there is no "auto-killing" of knocked down or stunned models with missile fire, your opponent will need to roll a straight 6 on the Injury table to take a Dwarf *out of action*. You, on the other hand, can take him out with a roll of 5 or 6. This gives you twice as much chance of causing an *out of action* with missile fire as your opponent. A big advantage you'll agree.

Add to this that you've got a well-respected Toughness of 4 and that the Strength of your crossbow is also 4, and the balance of the firefight swings very much in your favour.

To illustrate with some hard figures, it would require, on average, eighteen Strength 3 arrow hits to take a typical Dwarf *out of action* (ignoring criticals).

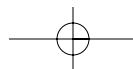
By contrast, it would require only 4.5 Strength 4 crossbow bolt hits to take a typical Human *out of action* (again, ignoring criticals).

This means that as long as your marksmen aren't outnumbered by more than 4 to 1 then it's quite possibly in your interests to get involved in a protracted exchange of missile fire.

Of course, this tactic needs to be viewed within the context of both the scenario and your opponent's ballistic prowess.

Shooting Part 2: The "Retreat & Shoot" Deterrent

Every now and then you'll come up against an opponent who plays the "retreat & shoot" tactic. What's that? Well that's the one where a contingent of enemy bowmen retreat 4" and then fire their bows at your nearby group of Dwarfs. In your turn, because you're within 8" of the enemy, you can only advance 3" towards them. They then repeat the process indefinitely. A quick calculation reveals that, table edges notwithstanding, the bowmen can repeat this strategy to their hearts' content with no chance of being caught.



"Ob Grungi! They're behind the barrels!"



To my mind this is a perfectly reasonable strategy by your opponent, who is merely exploiting your warband's weaknesses. But fear not, there are two effective deterrents to this tactic, namely the crossbow and the pistol.

Pistols can move and shoot. Thanks to your Engineer their range is 9". Ensure you have a model armed with a brace of them (with BS4 your Noble is the obvious candidate) in the vanguard group. With starting warbands you will probably be hitting on 5+ and wounding on 3+. You only need to knock an enemy off their feet at which point the rest of your boys can come steaming forward, trampling him underfoot. Easy pickings, which might persuade your opponent to rethink his tactics.

To maximise the effectiveness of this counter-strategy I like to have at least two other models armed with crossbows. These should ideally be in an elevated position if they're to be certain of targeting the retreating bowmen.

Shooting Part 3: The Increased Options Option

The other nice thing about being toolled-up with crossbows and pistols is simply that it forces your opponent to reconsider his strategy. During early games the fear of missile weapons often outweighs the effectiveness of the weapons themselves, but as long as your opponent hasn't realized this then so much the better.

As well as the above considerations, having a decent array of missile weapons allows for that game-saving long shot when all is otherwise lost. It's worth it for those dramatic moments alone.

Hand-to-hand Combat

The Dwarfs' big problem is that, under normal circumstance, they will nearly always expect to strike last. In the first turn of combat their low Movement means that they are likely to be receiving the charge. In subsequent turns their low Initiative means that they're still likely to be striking last.

It's therefore important that the player does all he can to make sure that he sticks around long enough to fight back.

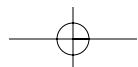
Thankfully the same innate characteristics that help in missile exchange – high Toughness and the Hard To Kill rule – are equally useful in this respect.

That's good but there are other factors that the shrewd player can utilise to help his cause.

Spears, helmets, Lucky Charms (the Warhammer Regiment Box has a nice selection of pipes and tankards for a visual reminder) and Dwarf axes (with their Parry rule) all help in this respect. They're discussed later in the Equipment section.

The skills Master Of Blades, Thick Skull and Step Aside are all good in this regard and are detailed under the Skills section

And to look on the bright side, the fact that the Dwarf is already likely to be fighting last means that the double-handed weapon's Strike Last special rule is far less of a disadvantage than it would be for other races. With that in mind it may be worth forking out the extra cash for a



"nutcracker" – a strong warrior built for dealing with high Toughness and/or armoured enemies – relatively early on in the campaign.

Despite what I've said about surviving the first strike, I wouldn't personally advocate armour (even at the bargain starting price) until much later in the campaign when you've a nice pot of gold crowns to raid.

Playing the Game

Ordinarily, I'd advise that you keep one eye on the scenario objective. However with Dwarfs' low Movement I'd recommend another strategy.

Most scenarios are winnable through either achieving the objective or by forcing a Rout test. Given Dwarfs' low manoeuvrability, their most achievable method is usually to concentrate on the latter.

To use an example, consider the Breakthrough scenario. If you get the choice always, always, always choose to be the Attacker.

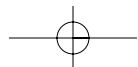
You then have the option to win the game by either forcing a Rout test or by getting the little guys across the board. If you choose to be the Defender then you've deprived yourself of the second option and simultaneously handed it to the opponent (which, incidentally, means you're now in deep trouble).

The same principle applies to lots of other scenarios. Of course you'll need to do your utmost to hamper your opponent's efforts at achieving the objective. Missiles can sometimes be a good substitute for pace in this regard. The problem is that relying on missile to take sufficient enemies *out of action* is dicey at best. The chances are you'll need to get up close and personal sooner or later.

Which brings me onto a major downside with having a low Movement stat: it's very easy for your men to get isolated and therefore picked off by the enemy. By the time their comrades arrive it could be too late. As far as possible keep your guys together. As a rule of thumb I try to keep every model within 6" of another at all times. Nimble is a useful skill for keeping crossbowmen with the main body and is discussed under the Skills section.

If you're outnumbered, and you often will be, then it can be a good idea to make a stand across a narrow street. The narrowness will restrict the number of enemy that can get into base contact, thus evening things up. Just like the tunnels back home. By the time the enemy has run around the back it could all be over. The opportunity doesn't come about too often but it's worth exploiting when it does.

Naturally you shouldn't be relying on your little guys being able to climb up buildings, whether for reasons of protection, scenario objectives or ballistic considerations. If you plan on doing this regularly then get them a rope & hook.





Conversely though, don't be afraid of jumping down heights of less than 4". You may just pass our Initiative test. If you don't, you will still only be wounded on a 6 (S2 vs T4). And even if you take a wound it's most likely, thanks to the good-old Hard To Kill rule, that you'll just pick yourself up and dust yourself down. All things considered, it's often a risk worth taking.

The same logic applies to the Diving Charges. While the little fellows aren't renowned for their acrobatic abilities, it's worth flinging a couple from a building every now and then just to surprise your opponent. If you give them your trust you'll be amazed at how adept they become at this.

One final point, get familiar with the length of a 6" charge. It's often longer than you think. If you think you're close then often you might as well go for it. If you fall short then you've set yourself to be charged but, as you would have been charged anyway, you've not lost anything.

Warband Development

It's commonly observed that Dwarf warbands have a tendency to perform fairly modestly during the early stages of campaigns, probably due to their relatively expensive warrior costs. However, if you apply the classic Dwarf traits of stubbornness and perseverance, then they'll soon begin to prosper.

Dwarfs have a small maximum warband size (only twelve). Their warriors tend to be expensive although nine is an achievable starting number and will give a healthy Rout Threshold of three. Having a warband of nine warriors also places you at the top end of the appropriate column on the Wyrdstone Trading chart which is nice. I personally don't like playing with bands of less than nine warriors as a Rout Threshold of two seems far too fragile to me.

In due course you could aim to bolster your numbers up to thirteen (giving a Rout Threshold of 4) courtesy of a Hired Sword. Alternatively you could stick to nine and get them some nice toys instead.

At the outset, Clansmen are too expensive for what they bring. Instead you should look to fill out your warband with the cheaper Beardlings, perhaps with a Thunderer or two included for added firepower.

As the Beardlings fall by the wayside over the course of the campaign you can aim to upgrade these troops to Thunderers or possibly Clansmen, depending upon your preferred playing style.

Slayers, at 50 gc, are possibly the worst value troops in the game at the outset. Fear not though, once they gain a few advances they turn into fearsome warriors. That's why my

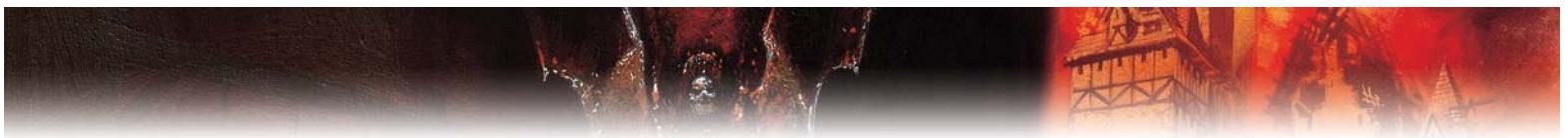
If you are outnumbered, drag your opponents in a narrow place and finish 'em!



Noble gives them strict instructions to stay behind the Beardling screen, itching for the countercharge. They don't like it, but they respect his authority.

Your Noble's Leadership of 9 is a great asset and will allow you to stick around when many other warbands would have long since fled. That said, don't be afraid to take a reality check if things are getting messy. Your high Leadership can allow you to badly damage your own warband in a brief moment of bloodlust (hey, we've all done it). If there are a high number of short hairy bodies strewn around the battlefield then it might just be better to opt for a strategic withdrawal. You can always get even next time.





Equipment

Could I tempt you with any of the following?

Helmets. Dwarfs are stunned on a roll of 3-5 on the Injury table. This means that helmets – a nice stocking-filler for every warband – are even more useful for Dwarfs. Furthermore, having a Toughness of 4 means that a knocked down Dwarf has a fighting chance of getting up again, your typical Human needing 5+ to apply the coup de grace.

I'd recommend getting some for your Noble and Engineer (at least) as soon as funds permit.

Dwarf axes are discussed under the Skills section. With regard to Troll Slayers and parrying, it should be remembered that Slayers do not simply want to die (otherwise they could just throw themselves off a tall building). No, they want to perish in glorious combat while taking down as many foes as possible. If a sword or a Dwarf axe helps in this then they'll use one.

Spears. There have been many debates over the years on the use of spears by Dwarfs. The MHRC have considered this and concluded that it's perfectly reasonable to assume that a small raiding party would want to make use of any weapons that would serve their cause. If you disagree then of course you shouldn't choose these. My own personal preference is to allow the untrained Beardling rabble to take spears with which they have been instructed to form a spearwall to defend their superiors.

Remember to cover your warband with some long range weapons



However, I stop short at issuing spears to the officers who prefer to be seen with more noble weapons. That's just a personal preference though.

Hammers. A nice Dwarfy option which is both cheap and comes with the handy Concussion special rule.

Two-handed weapons. As mentioned under the Hand-to-hand combat section, the Strike Last special rule is not such a drawback to Dwarfs making these a more tempting option.

Skills

Skills of particular interest to Dwarfs include...

Extra Tough: An underused skill in my experience, probably because it doesn't have any in-game effect. It's brilliant to protect your favourite hard-as-nails warrior. If you restrict its use to re-rolling the Dead result on the Serious Injury table then his chances of going to The Great Gold Mine In The Sky reduce from 14% to 2%. That's not to be sniffed at.

Monster Slayer: This Troll Slayer skill is most useful later on in campaigns when high Toughness opponents are more common.

Master of Blades: The combination of a pair of Dwarf axes in conjunction with this skill is undoubtedly one of the Dwarf warband's special perks. Make use of it whenever you can.





Resilient: Now this might be seen as overkill for a T4 warrior. I don't agree. As well as halving your chances of being injured by a Strength 3 opponent it also means that the same warrior can no longer cause a critical against you. That's a nice little bonus.

Step Aside: This provides a very useful 5+ save against all hand-to-hand combat attacks.

Thick Skull: Everything I've said previously about the usefulness of helmets applies to this skill. Especially worth considering for your Troll Slayers who refuse to wear armour.

Nimble: This is useful for keeping your crossbowmen up with the main party, although Quickshot followed by a 6" dash achieves the same number of shots without the -1 Movement penalty. Nimble, though, has the advantage when your target is outside line of sight at the start of the turn. Your call.

Hatred: While it's a special rule rather than a skill, it's worth emphasising: remember your Hatred of Greenskins! This is a very powerful asset, but easily forgotten in all the excitement of a blood-fest. Tattoo it onto your palms if necessary!

Hired Swords

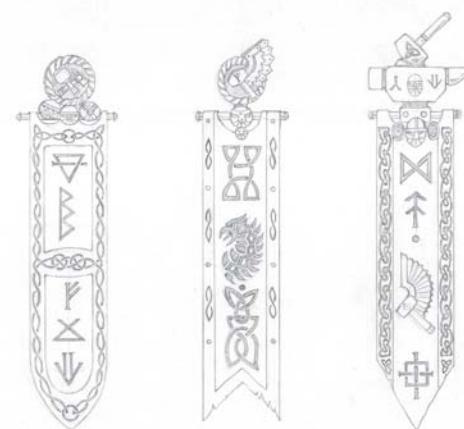
Hired Swords can be used to bolster your warband size up to thirteen and hence your Rout Threshold to 4.



The option to take a Hired Sword has a further bonus for our little-legged friends, namely that it allows you to introduce a model with a bit of extra pace. This can sometimes be handy in achieving or rescuing a scenario objective.

Although it's not his primary function, I've used the Tilean Marksman as a last-ditch "sweeper" on more than one occasion.

If you really want to inject some pace then consider the Ogre Bodyguard or even the Freelance Knight. Just be careful not to allow them to dash off alone only to find themselves completely isolated.



Sample Warband

Here's a sample starting warband based on the article's principles:

It's got nine warriors giving a Rout Threshold of three and the maximum number of Heroes. Three warriors have missile weapons including a Tilean Marksman for a bit of extra pace. One of the Slayers has a double-handed axe as he'll be striking last anyway. The Noble has a helmet for extra protection. The Beardling Henchmen group all have spears to make a screen that won't mind being charged.

1 Dwarf Noble 128 gc. Free Dagger; Brace of Pistols; Hammer (x1); Helmet

1 Dwarf Engineer 78 gc. Free Dagger; Crossbow; Hammer (x1)

1 Dwarf Troll Slayer 65 gc. 2-Handed Axe (x1)

1 Dwarf Troll Slayer 53 gc. Free Dagger; Hammer (x1)

4 Beardlings 140 gc. Free Dagger; Spear (x1)

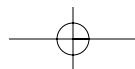
1 Tilean Marksman 30 gc. Free Dagger; Crossbow; Sword; Light Armour

Warband Rating: 102

Number of models: 9

Total Warband Cost: 494 gc





A Call To (Interchangeable) Arms

You know the feeling. Having spent days secluded in your lonely vault, your task is finally completed.

You rise, staggering and blinking into the daylight. Invigorated by the heady scent of the first blast of non-stagnant air you've experienced for days, you skip gaily through the streets. On arriving at your destination you proudly unveil the fruits of your labour – your brand-new warband; all painted, wysiwyg and everything.

Gratified by the grunt of what is either appreciation or possibly indigestion, that emanates from your opponent you settle down to the first real game with your new charges. The game passes well enough. You hold your own in combat, don't take too many casualties and even find a decent stash of wyrdstone.

Then your day starts to go wrong. You find yourself with a pot of cash to spend. Hmm, a nice double-handed sword for your newly Strongman Champion, a set of hammers to reward that loyal Henchmen group and maybe a brace of pistols for your Captain. They all sound good. They all sound time-consuming too. So with more painting to do it's back to the gloomy vault for you, stopping only at the gaming shop to pick up some more models.

But it doesn't have to be that way. Of course the easy option is simply to use any old models you can get your hands on. The problem with this method is that, if you're anything like me, without the visual reminder of a sword, a helmet or a nasty scar you'll easily forget all about that parry, helmet save or Fear test in the heat of battle.

A far more satisfying solution is to put in a small amount of extra effort when first modelling your little beauties that will save you time over the course of a campaign.

A quick perusal through the Specialist Games catalogue reveals that many of the warbands are supplied with weapon sprues, allowing you to mix and match the various weapons and other accoutrements to suit your starting warband design. This list includes Mercenaries, Dwarfs, Kislevites, Skaven, Sisters of Sigmar, Pit Fighters and Beastmen figures as well as several others. Of course if you make use of the good value Warhammer Regiment Boxes to bolster your warband's numbers then this increases your weapon options still further.

Having decided that 2004 was going to be the year of the Dwarf in my own Shed Of Doom, I wanted to model a starting warband that would serve in several very different campaign formats. I didn't

want to have to keep returning to the modelling table and I didn't want to run up any unnecessary mail order shipping charges by ordering new models after every battle.

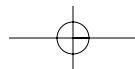
The solution wasn't steam-powered rocket science. I would simply make full use of the range of weapons supplied, by fixing them securely enough to endure the rigours of battle, but not so strongly that they couldn't be removed when the warrior had earned a weapon upgrade.

But how? Well first off I'd need to drill some sockets into the models, even into the plastic warriors from the Dwarf Regiment Box. Then I'd fix some "pins" into these sockets.

If you've never used a pin-vice before then it's a lot easier than you probably imagine. There are two key tips to remember:

Tip 1. There's no need to apply any serious pressure to the pin-vice. If you do you could find that it snaps off inside the model. If that happens then you've got a real problem removing it (and yes, I have learned this from bitter experience). Your best bet in that case is to use a fine electric drill bit to clear out the area around the offending item, yank it out and then refill the resulting chasm with Green Stuff.

If you'd prefer to avoid all that malarkey simply hold the pin-vice firmly but gently in position, twist and let that twisting action do the work. Through plastic it'll bore as





effectively as a Longbeard reminiscing about the Golden Age. Metal miniatures will take slightly more time, but before too long you'll have yourself a lovely little socket just waiting for a pin.

Tip 2. It's better to drill too shallow than too deep. By too deep I mean that the drill actually pokes out the other side of the model. See what I mean?

Err on the side of caution. A socket of around 3mm depth is ample for your purposes.

You can get pin-vices and spare drills for them from most modelling shops as well as GW stores. For the pins I used paper-clips, cut to size with a pair of strong snips.

So how to secure them? Well clearly superglue was out as it would be too permanent. On the other hand Blu-tack™ was far too weak (I'd like to take this opportunity to thank Nik, a regular playing partner, for his patience during this experimental phase). There are only really so many times during a game you should have to wait while your opponent picks up their Troll Slayer's arms).

The answer turned out to be good old PVA woodworking glue. Strong enough to hold up during play, weak enough to be able to yank out when the time comes. Plus it dries clear so any overspill won't be spotted.

All that remained was to think about what weapons my developing warband might require in the future. I pretty much painted at least one set of every weapon available on the sprues. My starting warband now had its own little armoury (aw, bless) of two-handed hammers for the first Hero to gain the Strongman skill, spare crossbows for when the money starts to roll in, an axe for when armour begins to feature in the campaign and so on.

*From the bitz box to a brand new model!
Here some examples of components from Ian's combi-warband!*



Dwarf with crossbow



Dwarf with hammer



Dwarf with spear
Note: Ian used Skaven spears for his conversions, which look great 'cause Dwarfs and Skavens have the same size of bands anyway!

Of course with all this swapping of arms it's inevitable that not all of the joints will meet perfectly. My advice is not to worry about it. A splash of black paint – the bodger's friend – to look like shadow around the joint and no one will even notice. Remember you're building a working warband, not a Golden Demon entry.

That's it. Pretty simple really. Already this year Morgan The Moon's Stag Party have had successful forays at the GW Gang Wars campaign weekend, the Call To Arms Grand Tournament and a campaign at my local Tin Soldiers club in Exeter. And apart from the odd bit of arm-swapping I haven't had to brandish a modelling tool in anger.

Which is very nice. But there's one other little perk to this method that I haven't mentioned yet. You see the PVA woodworking glue, being fairly flexible, allows an amount of "give" in the positioning of the weapon. This means that you can play about with the precise poses, preferably with little noises to accompany it, while you're waiting for your opponent to take their turn. No practical purpose to that at all, but it's strangely satisfying.

And far, far better than this, it also means that whenever a fellow gamer picks up your model for a closer look you'll notice a brief moment of panic cross his face as he thinks he's just broken your figure.

Of course responsible gamers will be sure to forewarn their opponent, in order to avoid this distressing situation. Me, on the other hand, well I've put in the work, I want to enjoy all the benefits.



Author

Ian is a prolific Mordheim player, winning the last tournament held at Warhammer World. He is also on the Mordheim rules committee, the results of which can be seen earlier in this issue, so he knows his stuff.



Further Information

The Dwarf Treasure Hunters are available to buy from your local Direct Sales department (see page 68 for more information).

More Mord Websites

Turn to page 67 for the rules review.
www.Mordheim.com

