Mordheim Architecture

By Nigel Stillman

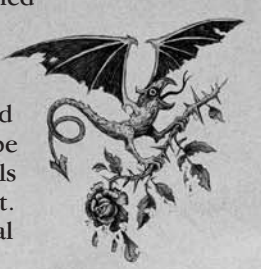
In our second installment of Mordheim Architecture, Nigel Stillman explains just how easy it can be to make your own ruined buildings for your battles in the City of the Damned.

The idea of fighting Warhammer battles with small bands of warriors running about and hiding in the streets of a ruined medieval city opens up vast possibilities for fantastic scenery. As a fantasy landscape, this is something completely new. Players of Warhammer 40,000 and Necromunda have long been used to playing games set in ruined cities, but who would have thought you could do the same thing in an age of swords and sorcery?

The setting is Mordheim, a city of the Empire ruined by the impact of a huge meteorite. The city has not been entirely destroyed, but there is a massive crater where part of it used to be. As you go outward from the crater, the buildings become gradually less ruined, varying from totally demolished to areas where only part of a building has been destroyed. leaving the rest of it precariously intact, and on into parts of the city which are only slightly damaged, but deserted and eerie. Here, there are just holes in the roofs and walls made by flying debris and fragments of meteorite. Stone buildings survive better than timber ones and often the stone built lower stories of buildings still stand, while the rest has been destroyed. This then is the setting we should aim to recreate for our games of Mordheim.

The entire battlefield (an area 4x4', suitable for a skirmish game) needs to be covered in ruined buildings, separated by streets. To make the battlefield interesting, the streets need to be narrow and winding, opening up now and again into a square or market place. There must be open areas between the cover for the models to run and shoot across, but the battlefield should create the cramped and menacing atmosphere of a fantasy medieval city.

The key to creating a Mordheim battlefield is the style of the buildings. Ideally we want a lot of different buildings, such as houses, shops, taverns, workshops, temples, stables, archways, ruins, towers, graveyards, docks and anything else we could think of that might be found in Mordheim. They should look as if they were built of stone or timber or a mixture of both, and all be ruined to varying extents so that it is possible to move models into them. The doors and windows should be open to permit models to enter and shoot. There should be several



floors partly remaining so that troops can be placed on different levels.

The buildings should also feature overhanging upper storeys, tall chimneys, high pitched roofs, balconies, archways and anything else you can think of, and be embellished with such things as grotesque gargoyles, tavern signs or lamps. The buildings should really look like they belong in the townscape of a John Blanche painting!

Constructing Basic Buildings

Materials

To construct the buildings we used for playtesting Mordheim I used foamboard. This is available from art and craft shops. It consists of two sheets of thin white cardboard with a thin layer of polystyrene foam in between. It is easy to cut with a modelling knife, and is quite strong even though it is very light.

Other materials which could be used instead of this are cardboard packaging of the sort which has two layers of thin brown card with corrugated card in between *(like GW Mail Order boxes! – Fat Bloke)*, polystyrene ceiling tiles (which must be painted with textured paint before spraying so as not to melt the foam), balsa wood or thin card like that from cornflake packets would all be viable alternatives. Each of these materials has strengths and weaknesses for modelling, so it's worth experimenting.

The buildings which I made were constructed entirely from foamboard, but you could use a stronger, heavier material such as MDF board, hardboard or cork tile for the bases. By having a heavy base a building can overhang without falling over.

Construction

To make the buildings I cut out the shapes I wanted from the sheets of foamboard using a modelling knife. I drew the shapes on the foamboard beforehand. It's good practice to have a rough idea of what the building will look like and work out what shapes will be needed to make each storey. These shapes were basically squares and rectangles of a standard size. I cut strips about 2" high and 12" long that were then scored and bent at right angles to create walls of buildings. Then I cut rectangles or squares varying from 4" square to 6" square to be used as bases, floors and roofs. I also cut out extra shapes 2" high and varying lengths to be the inside walls of the buildings. This 2" height is the minimum height for each storey – any less and the buildings may begin to look a little too small, and more importantly, your models won't fit inside. You could make them higher than 2" or even vary the height of the storeys within a single building.

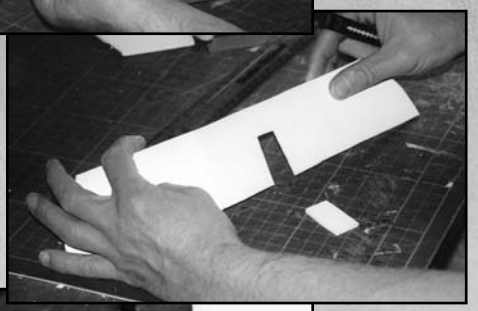
When I had a pile of varying shapes I began constructing buildings. I made them up as I went along. To fix each of the pieces together I put PVA glue on the edges I wanted to join together and then pinned them with ordinary pins. The foamboard is easy to pin in this way and the assembled pieces are held together firmly while the glue dries, enabling you to work quite rapidly.

This is one of the finished basic buildings. It was easy and fun to build and took very little time to do. The more complex buildings use exactly the same techniques but just a little more patience.

I assembled the buildings storey by storey. First I took a 2x12" strip and scored it in two places, then bent it along the score lines. This created three 2x4" walls. Then I cut a door in one wall, and windows in the others. I bent the scored section around to create three sides of a square with the final side left open. I then cut the edges of the open side to give a ruined effect.

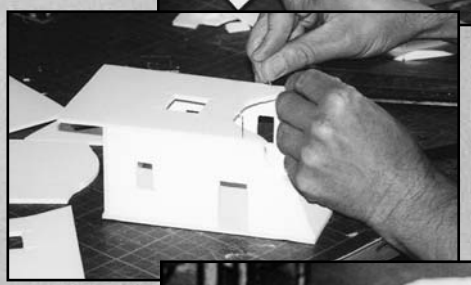
First I took a 2x12" strip of foamboard and scored it in two places.

Then I cut the doors and windows into it.



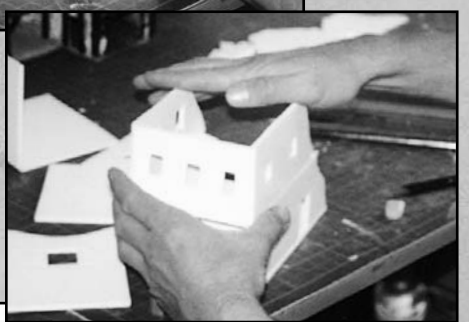
I folded it around to form the three walls of the ground floor.

Next I attached the base, using pins to hold it in place while the glue dried.



After the basic shape of the first storey was made, I attached what was to be the floor of the next storey.

The second storey was made with exactly the same technique and glued to the top of the first.



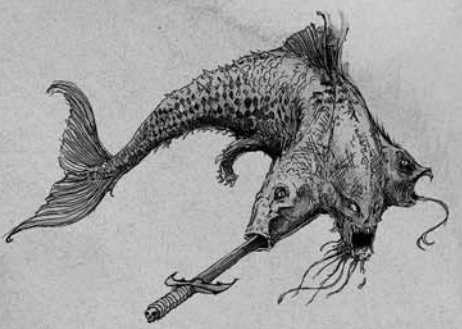
Finally the basic structure was finished with the addition of the roof, made from three pieces of foamboard with a window cut into the triangular front piece.

Then I fixed this onto a 4x4" square piece of foamboard as its floor. I repeated the process to create a second storey, which I fixed to the first one, positioning it so that it overlapped the front of the first storey. This creates the effect known as 'jetting' in medieval timber-framed buildings, where upper storeys projected over lower ones allowing people to throw their muck out into the street onto passers by!

Top Tip: Safe use of Knives

When using scalpels and modelling knives remember to make all cuts away from yourself. By pressing lightly and scoring several times you do not risk slipping or snapping the blade. Also change your blades regularly, sharp blades are much safer to use than blunt ones.

Next, I placed a further, third storey on the second in the same way. I find that three storeys create the right 'look' to buildings and the jetting makes it lean out over the road in an appropriate squalid, medieval way. The back of the building is open and looks ruined, as though half of it has collapsed. This allows models to be put inside to shoot out of the windows.

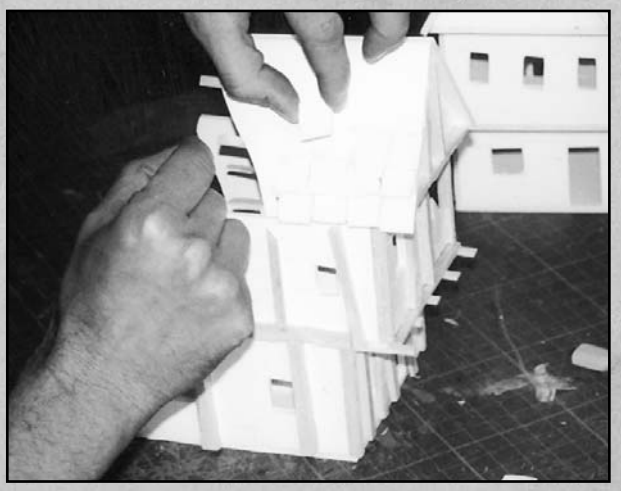


The Roof

The roof was made by fixing two square pieces together along one edge and inserting a triangular piece at one end to be the gable. I cut a window in this so that models could shoot out. This was mounted on another rectangular piece and then fixed, jutting out slightly, on top of the third storey. The house was now very tall and in danger of tipping over. The best way to counteract this is to stick something weighty in the bottom storey, like some small rocks, but if you mount the model on a heavier base, such as MDF board, it should be stable enough. I made my subsequent buildings more stable by increasing the length of the bottom storey to counterbalance the weight.

Top Tip: Getting Scale Right

When making buildings it is useful to have a few human-sized models to hand. These can be used to measure and check the height and size of the model buildings as they are constructed. The buildings in Mordheim were built for humans and so do not have to be easy for bigger models to get into. It is realistic if bigger models find them cramped and humans can use them as a safe refuge.



Embellishment

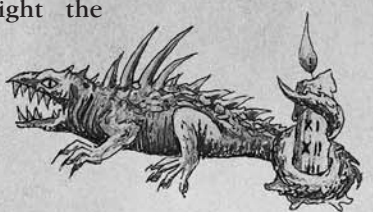
The building was now ready for stage two – embellishment. This involves sticking on strips of balsa wood or card to create the effect of timbering. I just stuck on strips in logical places and a few bits jutting out where half the house had been demolished. These strips represent structural timbers of the beams and rafters. Then I stuck small squares of card all over the roof in overlapping rows, to represent tiles.

Painting

Then comes stage three, which is painting. I sprayed the exterior of the model with Bubonic Brown, using Bestial Brown spray under the eaves, on the roof and inside the model. Then I sprayed the roof red. Finally I sprayed the inside and open edges of the model with Chaos Black. I did this because it is meant to be a burnt out ruin, so the interior would be dark and charred.

An effective finish has been achieved using very simple methods.

When the spray paint had dried I proceeded with the detailed painting of the timbering, for which I used black. Then I drybrushed the exterior with Bleached Bone and the roof with orange to highlight the timbers and tiles. With this done the model was finished!



Building More Advanced Structures

All of my buildings were made using this method, the main variation being in the basic design or size. Later I decided to represent stonework on lower stories by sticking on card rectangles instead of balsa strips. These areas were sprayed grey and drybrushed with white.

A particularly good design was to join two buildings together in such a way that they formed an arch over the street. This would happen when two opposing buildings jutted out so much that someone spanned the gap and built an extra storey that bridged the road. To make such an archway I first made a couple of two-storey buildings as described above and mounted them on a single base opposite each other with a space between for the street. Then I positioned a third storey as a bridge across the jutting out second storeys to link them. In other words I was using the basic foamboard rooms as modules for creating more elaborate buildings.

Ruined Effects

The main thing to remember when making Mordheim buildings is that they should be partly ruined and accessible to models. The easiest way to indicate damage is to leave all doors and windows open and drybrush black around the openings. Other holes can be created and treated in this way, especially in the roof. These provide openings for troops to enter buildings and shoot out from, and so will make for a more exciting game.

The streets of Mordheim are likely to be partly blocked here and there by heaps of rubble, and some buildings will have been totally reduced to this state. Heaps of rubble make good small terrain pieces for use anywhere among the buildings and are easily made. Just cut an irregular base and stick onto it stones, pebbles, bits of balsa wood, sticks and broken bits of polystyrene packaging or tile. Arrange the debris in a random pile and fill up gaps with PVA glue and gravel or sand. Paint textured paint over any polystyrene and the base, then spray the entire piece with Chaos Black. It is now ready to be drybrushed. The quick way is to simply drybrush the entire thing with Bestial Brown followed by Bleached Bone, or you could pick out different kinds of rubble with different shades of grey, brown etc.

A partially destroyed building, reduced to no more than a corner, can be made using the same technique described above. Just fix two pieces of foamboard together along their straight edges and cut the other edges at an irregular angle. This is then placed on a triangular base. Windows can be cut into it and perhaps the remains of an upper floor. Such ruins are useful for marking the corners of streets.

Moving Models About In The Ruins

The most important function of the buildings in the Mordheim game is as hiding places and cover for models. Also they provide a vertical dimension to the game since models can occupy upper storeys. A building can even become a mini stronghold if all of a warband decide to defend it. Therefore a good building for Mordheim is one that allows you to place models inside it preferably on several floors, and has windows and doors to shoot out of. Bridges, colonnades, walkways, balconies, ruined sections and such like make buildings even more interesting to fight in and around.

A simple walkway joining two buildings makes for an interesting piece of terrain.

Bridges and arcades that pass over a street to link buildings at the level of the first or second storeys are very useful terrain pieces to make. This enables models to move from certain buildings to others without coming down to ground level, and allows them to shoot down into the street below, forcing opponents to try to capture the building. Instead of taking the form of a room suspended above the street joining to two houses, bridges can be mounted on archways or colonnades.

A colonnade can be made using plaster cake pillars. Arrange these in a row, spaced a couple of inches apart, and stick them to a long flat base. Stick a similar floor to the tops of the columns. Then put walls along the top, cut at regular intervals with windows or gaps. It works better to use only one partly intact wall, with the other side so ruined that models can be placed and moved from behind. For the same reason, if you roof the bridge, make the roof very ruined to allow access for models.

An archway can be made by cutting half circular shapes out of rectangular pieces of foamboard. You can do one big arch or a row of several to create an arcade. Two identical arch sections are fixed to a base about two inches or more apart. The inner part of the archway can be made by fixing flexible thin card along the curved edges of the interior of the arch. The arch can be covered in rectangular bits of card to represent masonry. This piece could be used on its own or as a support for timbered rooms. Just fix partly ruined buildings onto the top. These will look good if they overhang the arch.

This large building has been made from several modules fitted together to bridge the street below

The street running under the house has been made using textured wallpaper to imitate cobbled streets.

Gargoyles And Other Embellishments

Empire buildings are decorated with gargoyles and other carvings, such as heads, shields, runes and symbols. Any piece of protruding timberwork is likely to be carved into something. These carvings are not only decorative, but are done to bring good luck to the house or ward off evil. The effect is to make the narrow streets look grotesque and frightening, especially at night, with gargoyles grimacing out of the gloom from the corners of buildings.

Gargoyles and such things are easily represented on model buildings by attaching heads of monsters, model gargoyles, shields and other odd pieces from your bits box. Fix them to corners, overhanging or protruding timber beams, gable ends and roofs. Shields look good over the doors. Larger models can be put on a pedestal of their own and turned into statues. Little paintwork is required, just undercoat in black and drybrush in brown for wooden figures, grey for carved stone or dull bronze for metal statues.

Staircases

How do models get into the upper storeys of the buildings? There are three possibilities. One is that they use remaining staircases where they can find them, another is that they use makeshift ladders and failing that, they climb. Staircases are easy to make. Just stick varying lengths of foamboard, tile, thick card or balsa wood on top of each other so that each piece is about 10 cm shorter than the piece below. Continue doing this until the staircase block is high enough to reach the next floor from the ground. These staircases can be stuck onto or inside suitable buildings to indicate places where access to the upper floors is allowed. As well as staircases, you can stick ladders in suitable positions, piles of crates, barrels or rubble to make access to upper storeys easier. Another way of creating staircases might be to use several slotta bases stuck together. Ladders can be made by cutting balsa wood into thin strips, two long and enough short ones to make the steps. There are also model ladders in the Warhammer Siege Attackers box set, which you can order through Mail Order.

Cobbled Streets

Apart from just leaving gaps between rows of buildings, there are two ways of representing streets. One is to make sections of cobbled streets to place between the buildings. These could vary in width to create wide or narrow streets or could be made to a standard width so as to be certain of joining up. There could be special corner sections, crossroads, junctions, market squares and winding lanes. The other option is to make several base boards or even one big 4x4' board and permanently mark the streets on it, or texture and paint it to represent cobbles or bare ground. Street sections can be made from foamboard, hardboard, MDF or thick card.

Cobbled or paved surfaces can be represented either by laboriously sticking bits of card onto the base as paving stones or by using embossed plasticard. The best option is to try to find wallpaper with a raised pattern on it that looks like cobbles or paving stones. There are several designs which can be painted grey and drybrushed over to give the impression of cobbled streets. This is the quickest and cheapest way of covering large areas.

Odds and Ends

The ruined streets of Mordheim are strewn with all kinds of debris, especially since the populace abandoned their homes leaving behind plenty of stuff and everywhere has been ransacked several times over. This means that there are barrels from pillaged storehouses, furniture, overturned wagons and carts, lumps of wood and many other things scattered around the buildings. It is a good idea to gather a few odds and ends like this to place around the streets to give extra cover and hiding places to models trying to cross open areas such as market squares or wide streets. Barrels can be made from corks painted brown with black rings around them. Carts can be made of balsa wood or matchsticks using plastic cannon wheels from your bits box. Sacks of grain can be made by modelling pillow shapes in modelling clay and pressing several on top of each other so that they appear to be sagging. Put them on a small base and paint PVA around them, then scatter this with sand to represent spilled grain.

Well I hope this has inspired you to have a go and create your own Mordheim terrain. Just remember that the only limitation on your creations is your own imagination.

The stonework arches were made to look really effective just by gluing card squares to the basic foamboard structure.