

WARMMASTER

My Kind of Game

Warmaster Competition Winner

By John Bennison

DESIGNING YOUR ARMY

Tabletop strategy and tactics can be won or lost at the army design stage. Before you can consider the devious tactics you'll use on the table-top you have to have thought through the design of your army. So I'll look at this first. I've based most of my suggestions on using 2000-point armies. This is the size of army I most often use. I'll also take a more general view rather than sticking to one army. Most examples will be taken from Vampire Counts, Bretonnians and High Elves. Hopefully that will illustrate the variations between the armies, which are one of the attractions of Warmaster. What you will read is based on bitter experience, of lost battles and stupid mistakes. The suggestions below also do not take into account your opponent's army. This is for the occasion when you don't know what you are facing. Adjustments would be made for those times when you know what you are facing. An easy example is not taking wizards when facing Dwarfs or expensive terrorising mounts when facing Undead. You'll also learn to design different mixes of troop types to cater for different opponents.

THE PROCESS

I see the game as a process involving trying to increase the odds in my favour whilst reducing, if I can, those in my opponents favour. Your strategy and tactics will be dictated to some extent by your army and its design.

CHOOSING THE COMMANDERS

Since Warmaster involves a great measure of chance during the command phase this part of your army is of great importance. First, consider your playing style and look at your choices. Do you like to attack? Are you cautious? I'll use High Elves as an example of how your choices here can affect our game. Your Ld 10 General is the Napoleon of Warmaster so it can be tempting to take him without any extras. Well, it's your choice but I've played games (one very recently) where he rolled an 11 on his first order for two moves in a row. A horrible defeat was inevitable. Since this game is about odds so you have to weigh up the benefits of arming him with the Orb of Majesty. If you don't give him this then ensure that you have enough heroes to use before you have to rely on him. For this size game two is ideal. It will also allow you to use smaller brigades, which are much less vulnerable. I've seen too many four-unit brigades (even cavalry) get taken out in one attack and an army broken to risk that too often. A decent number of heroes allow you to overlap your command areas. I'll develop that in part two.

DO I TAKE THE HERO OR WIZARD?

For all armies with eight command wizards this is something to consider. Beware of the 20cm range is all I say. Cutting out heroes in place of wizards imposes two limitations on your army. The first is the command range of the wizard. In order to get a second order off you have to be extra careful of this. Yes, I know a hero at over 20cm command range on his second order needs a 6 but it can be done. The more important restriction, though, is the fact that you have to compromise the wizard's magic. You cannot always have the benefit of him being both in command range and in spell casting range in an area you need him. This is especially true of High Elves since all their spells are 30cm range.

So bite the bullet and take at least one Hero, unless you plan to move slowly. Conversely you can leave out a wizard. My own view on this is that if you are going to leave out one leave out both. Two wizards can enhance each other. I'll give you an example. The High Elf spells Light of Battle and Storm of Stone can be used together to as can the two shooting spells to target one unit. If you have some infantry shooting and causing casualties to an enemy unit you can then try the armour piercing Heaven's Fire. If that succeeds you could then have a go with Hail of Destruction on the infantry unit that did the original shooting. If you are particularly lucky and have armed the latter wizard with the Rod of Repetition you could even try it again if you have another unit of archers or Reavers in range. So look at your spells and imagine how they can be used in support of each other.

Consider the effect your choice has on your opponent. If he recognises that you have no heroes and only wizards and the general he'll get a good indication of where your attack is coming from; where the general is. Having a couple of heroes allows a little bluffing. Orcs and Undead are exceptions here. This is where the Orc command can be an advantage since no one (including the Orc Commander) has a clue where the attack will come from whilst with the Undead it is more of a steady shuffle forward.

MAGIC ITEMS AND MOUNTS FOR CHARACTERS

Now that you have chosen your characters you have to consider what, if anything, you are going to give them. Let's continue with the magic users. If you have spells that require only 4+ to succeed I'd consider the Wand of Power since you have greater chance of successful use. A combination I use a lot is the Bretonnian Sorceress on her Unicorn armed with a Wand of Power. Each gives a 1+ to a casting attempt which means that a spell like the Shield of Combat will only fail on a 1; at least for one attempt anyway. Add to that the fact that the Unicorn gives 1+ in combat and you have a combination that is probably more flexible than the Ring of Magic. I nearly always take a Scroll of Dispelling. If your opponent has the Ring of magic and gets that game-winning spell through you'll regret not taking it. One spell I used to take but don't now is Staff of Spellbinding. Why? Because I kept forgetting to use it.

As a side issue always have any character or unit that has some banner or magic item clearly marked. This is as much for your own use as your opponent's. I have forgotten and seen others forget to use swords, banners and all sorts in the heat of battle as well as seeing a bland looking unit suddenly being declared as having the Banner of Shielding.

Lastly, consider any mounts that are available. I've already used the Unicorn as an example. A lot can be gained by combining a mount with swords, the Sword of Might being the most straightforward. Be careful here. Some armies lend themselves to large numbers of cheap units. The Vampire Counts are one and they have a nice juicy mount in the Winged Nightmare. Many is the time I have lost this because one, I've rashly thrown him in with an attack by a weak unit which has been more easily destroyed in the counterattack or two, he's been displaced by the enemy and has had to join a measly Zombie unit which has then



been joyously destroyed by my opponent. If you are a player who likes to skulk in woods consider where your expensive mounted character will run if displaced. On the other hand an Eagle mounted hero supporting High Elf Dragon Riders and Eagles is an awesome combination. Think before choosing.

THE TROOPS

By choosing your command you have already gone some way to dictating how you will play. Most Warmaster armies have a relatively limited choice. Now that you've paid for your command and your compulsory units you will be left with what looks like a paltry amount of points to spend. I tend to look first at the hardest units with the highest maximums. That gives you a flexible sized attack force. With many armies it will be your standard 3/3/4 knights or a variation of. For a 2000 point army a couple of 3 unit brigades or 3 2 unit brigades makes a nice punchy spearhead. I then look at what can support them. Vampire counts have Dire Wolves. They can cover the flanks and act as a first wave. As a rough rule of thumb I'll spend about 100 points on supporting cavalry for every 200 points of knights. You will save points which can be used elsewhere and used properly some of these units can be almost as lethal. By mixing up your troop types you will also be a little more unpredictable to your opponent. He expects an attack from the Silver Helms, but the Reavers? Remember that the heavy cavalry force without any protection can be vulnerable once broken up and is expensive too. I've sent in Dire Wolves on what amounts to a suicide attack just to break up a line of knights. It quite often works.

Once you've got that have a look at the special units. These are those that have the long description below the army list such as Troll Slayers and are nearly always limited to one or two per 1000 points. An easy choice would be Grail Knights, for instance. They only cost 10 points more than standard knights but get an extra 1+ attack when charging in the open. Consider carefully how you will use these specials and whether they suit your style of play. If they don't you may have picked the wrong army in the first place. One of my favourite units is, strangely, the Vampire Count's Ethereal Host. I love to get them in a wood and work

round a flank through the wood. Not much can take on a terrorising defended infantry unit with 4 hits. I really will have to paint some more. I also like to swamp my opponents with cheap stuff like Dire Wolves. Both these units suit my style of play and I generally do reasonably well with them. My opponents say that I like to mince around, keeping the expensive stuff to the rear while I slink through woods or send in expendable stuff. I call it the measured approach. At the end of the day bear in mind how you play and design your army accordingly.

This is the point where you will consider banners for units. An example is Banner of Shielding for the Grail Knights. Imagine this combined with the spell, Shield of Combat and you have an exquisite combination. Don't waste banners on cheaper units. They are too easily lost.

When you get to the more expensive specials like some monsters and machines you have to consider what is going to screen and/or support them. Stegadons and the like need protection as they tend to get picked on.

Artillery is a subject all of its own. Be aware that it will slow your army down and that it needs protecting. The cannons of Empire and dwarfs are probably a must but the rest is really a matter of choice. If you are by nature an attacker don't bother with Rock Lobbers and the rest.

Now you have all the heavy and fancy units you do need to look at some of the basic units, usually infantry. Depending on how much terrain you have they can be a game saver. High Elf archers backed up by Spearmen on a hill are not so easy to take out. I've seen knight bounce off expensively. In woods they are useful, especially if they are slightly forward of your main battle line and able to cause a -1 command to your attacking enemy. Infantry make a good breakwater allowing you to counterattack and take out, hopefully, damaged cavalry. Bretonnians are great for this. Their infantry are expendable, cheap if you include a peasant unit in a brigade. Get a brigade into a wood and cast Eerie Mist on any enemy infantry that is hiding there or attempting to winkle them out and you can get -3 on the enemy infantry command. The cheaper kind boost your break point and can screen your expensive monsters. Look too at the combinations if you have a variety of infantry to choose from. I use Grave Guard as supports for Ethereal Host, for instance. That combination in a wood can beat off even the Lizards. As I've said your army design will influence your tactics.

Finally, we come to the flyers. These are a special but I think of them as 3 distinct types. Narrow based, broad based and the unique and terrifying Dragon Rider. The former are like super fast cavalry and can be used as an effective shock troop. I try to have at least one, preferably two and keep them as a threat to send in when one, there are more vulnerable and easily seen enemy available and two, break point is near. The broad based are less useful but still ok as a blocker placed behind enemy that you want to wipe out in one round of melee. Both are useful as flank threats and are well worth keeping in reserve to cramp your opponent's style and send out to cause that irritating -1 to his command just when he is gathering for an attack. If you have spells that can cause command problems the combination can be a killer.

Last but not least, the Dragon Rider. About the most expensive unit in the game. He can win games. He must be kept for the latter stages of the game though. The threat he poses is partially worth it as your opponent will try to stop him charging with whatever magic he can use and maybe forget about your Silver Helms. At the end of the game though his vision will be much better on a depleted battlefield and then he can be sent in for a break point kill on that damaged unit your opponent is trying to get back to the rear and that he is perfectly equipped to take out. Sheer bliss on the rare occasions I manage to pull it off.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John is an experienced Warmaster player and winner of the Warmaster Tactics competition with this very submission.