

WARMASTER

My Take on Kislev

John continues his tour of the races with a look at the Kislevites!

By John Bennison

When the Kislevites were first released I just had to have them. Lovely figures, and a unique selection of units. Over time I tried to get the best out of them but never had the success I had with other armies. The Bears seemed too vulnerable and the War Wagons not quite strong enough. Coupled with the tricky challenge of coordinating a defensive style of unit like War Wagon with Knights and I found them a little too challenging. The result was that they got left on the shelf in favour of the dashing Bretonnians and swarming Vampire Counts.

And then came Version 2.

ARMY DESIGN

As always, my suggestions are based on 2000-point armies.

CHARACTERS, MOUNTS AND SPELLS

First off, let's look at the general. I always upgrade "her" to Tzarina status. Having a third magic user in a 2000-point army is an advantage not available to many armies so take it. Couple that with the fact that Kislevite spells are amongst the best around and you will find that the extra 25 points is well spent.

When taking magic users, Shamans in the Kislev army, my view is to take the maximum or none at all. I see armies of 2000 points with one wizard. That is a waste of time to me. There are a number of spells that work well together and so taking as many magic users as you can will give you the opportunity to combine the effects of different spells. I'll always arm one Shaman with dispel whilst the second Shaman usually gets the Wand of Power. The reason behind the latter choice is that there are spells that are melee linked and one that requires the Shaman to join a unit. Add in the fact that the Tzarina has an inbuilt Wand of Power as part of her stats and you have quite a good combination, which I will develop later.

I'll usually take two heroes. One will be on a Bear and have Sword of Might. That gives a handsome three attacks if he joins a melee.

COMPULSORY TROOPS AND ARCHERS

In your 2000 point army the compulsory troops cost 500 points in total. This is a higher cost than any other army (that I can think of anyway) and does restrict army design especially if you upgrade your general to Tzarina and take the War Wagons, which I always do. Consequently I very rarely take more than the minimum compulsory troops. Two Axemen make a good support to a War Wagon and the Horse Archers equally can support the Knights and hide behind the War Wagons when laagered or dash out in front whilst they are limbered and vulnerable.

I generally take a couple of archers to help cover flanks and also to help cover limbered War Wagons.

THE KNIGHTS AND BEARS

These are the troops that will win you the game. Since the combination of compulsory troops and War Wagons is expensive I've played around with various options.

The two that I most often use are; six Knights with no Bears and four Knights and two Bears. In the latter case I arm one Knight with Banner of Shielding. The Bears are probably, along with the Archers, the easiest troops to leave out. However, I do like them for the threat value. They are about the only zero armoured "nutter" unit that does not have to charge on initiative. Now that they are classified as infantry you've got to have two mutually supporting units. Skulking on the edge of a wood, they can be quite a nuisance. I think the answer is; if you don't know what you may be facing then take them. The bonus hits give almost certain victory but they are a one shot weapon. You do, at least, have the opportunity to choose when you use them, unlike Flagellants and the like. Just remember that they have a compulsory pursuit, if victorious.

THE WAR WAGON

If you have a Kislev army then you just have to use them. That may seem obvious but I have seen Kislev armies without them. Aside from the aesthetics I do think they are a boon. They do need very careful handling though.

Laagered War Wagons prepare to face the enemy.



When limbered they must be the most useless piece ever to grace a Warmaster army list. They advance with the team to the front and that gets no attacks. If caught frontally they get to shoot but don't fight. They are virtually certain to be pushed back in any melee and in such a circumstance are destroyed in the same way as artillery. I shiver when I think of it.

When laagered the opposite is true. They are probably the hardest Warmaster unit to kill off. With 5 hits to each stand, and defended, I've seen Stegadons bounce off.

Let's develop that a little. First off, just think of this. The War Wagon when laagered is defended and also has a 4+ armour save. Now couple that with two stands with 5 hits each and what do you have.

A unit that your opponent is going to have to attack with no less than a total of 60 attacks to kill it.

To explain the obvious; 60 dice on a defended target will get, on average, 20 hits. With a 4+ armour save 10 of those should be saved leaving 10 effective hits and a dead War Wagon.

Being defended the attacker will get no bonuses so even a unit of Chaos Knights will attack with only 12 dice.

Your opponent is going to have to attack your War Wagons with more than one unit and may consider using a terrifying mount, if available. Even then it will take 3 or more rounds to do the job. Bear in mind that each round gives the War Wagon the opportunity to whittle away a few hits.

I've found that if I have a War Wagon on its own then there is a good chance that attackers will bounce off in the first round. With 4 shots at a -1 armour save plus 4 combat attacks (3 if terrified) it has a good chance of inflicting 2 or even 3 hits in the first round. The attacker will need 12 to 15 attacks to give him something like even odds. After that it is pure attrition.

I've come to prefer, though, to have defended Axemen adjacent to the War wagons. It means that the first round attacks can be directed against them and so increase the odds in favour of the attacker. However it does give more attacks for the Kislev player which means that the combat will last even longer. Providing the Kislev player has Knights to counterattack any enemy left after the combat this should prove successful.

When considering missile fire the only concerns you are likely to have is long-range artillery fire. especially if batteries are doubled up. Cannons with their bounce through can take War Wagon stands out so ensure you have a screen or have them hidden from the Cannons line of sight.

John's Call To Arms Kislev force.



SPELLS

I think that the Kislev spells are about the best I have used. Most armies have two or three useful spells with at least one that gets used very rarely. I've found that all the Kislev spells get used and they can be combined very effectively.

Freeze I'll start with this one because it is invariably the first I attempt. With a 60cm range it is very good for worrying your opponent early in the game. Go for single based Monsters or Machines. You do need a six and then a five or more to kill, say, a Hydra. Remember this, though, if you roll one six then your opponent has the dilemma of deciding on whether to use his dispel at such an early point in the game. Assuming that you have done as I have advised and taken the maximum number of Shamans then you may be able to attempt three of these spells right from the start. In two moves you should get one through. If there are no such targets then go for artillery if there is any or at the very least hard-hitting attackers like Knights.

Icy Blast The standard "shooty" spell that can be used in conjunction with "Freeze". I often find that I can attempt this from my Shamans whilst the Tzarina uses "Freeze" because she has to stay near her troops for command purposes and is therefore too far away for "Icy Blast". A nice combo.

Chill I love this spell. At 4+ it acts like a reverse Terror. It is one spell I will consider using the Wand of Power with. That gives a 3+ and a very good chance of success. In the closing stages of a game when the crucial melees are joined, having three magic users capable of casting this spell is potentially a game winner. My opponents hate it; always a good sign. Tactically it is a spell that I have sometimes cast on a unit that I hope will be a second target. For instance, I may have some Knights attacking a weak unit of infantry that they should take out easily. Behind them is a hard unit. I'll attempt to cast "Chill" on the latter.

Monster Bear This is the spell I probably use least. I do use it, though, generally towards what I see as the end of the game and combined with "Chill" and using the Wand of Power. I'm always reluctant to send a Shaman into a melee. At 5+ and in what you perceive as the final move, though, it may be a risk worth taking. Add Wand of Power and you get a 4+ chance. I invariably try to use this spell as an add on to "Chill", creating a deadly combo. I'll send one Shaman in with some Knights and have two ready to attempt "Chill" on the target unit. It often works, given the odds. This is where the Tzarina bonus to the casting roll comes in useful.

PLACING YOUR ARMY

My main proviso at the outset of any game is to keep everything very close. I'll always place the general within 20cm of both War

Wagons so that they have the best chance of getting where I want them. The Heroes will be placed so as to get the light cavalry moving. Once the War Wagons are laagered the General can be moved elsewhere.

TACTICS

Assuming you've taken the War Wagons your tactics will take the form of a "before and after". I am, of course, alluding to the War Wagons.

Whilst limbered they need protecting; big style. That is why you need the Archers, Horse Archers, Axemen and the rest.

If you are facing narrow based flyers you need to screen the

War Wagons with something. If caught by these units they are dead. I generally have two Axemen per war wagon as a brigade. Even with this defence the War Wagon can get taken out. If I can I will manoeuvre my War Wagons behind terrain such as hills to negate such a threat. If I can't then I'll have to place an Archer unit in front. Whilst limbered I'll send forward the Horse Archers too. In fact, everything is sent forward.

Since they are so vulnerable it is crucial to get them laagered early. My format goes a little like this.

I'll use my Heroes to move everything except the War Wagons so as to cover the latter. Assuming some movement, the general will then attempt one move and one only for each War Wagon. The second order will be to "Laager up". Initially my opponents thought I was being unduly cautious, until they realised just how easy a limbered War Wagon is to kill. Very rarely will I attempt two 20cm moves and then a third to "Laager up". Very risky.

Once laagered my whole army will use the War Wagons as protection. Each War Wagon will have two units of Axemen (one either side) in column next to the Wagons. These will be defended. The cavalry will usually be all on one flank and often slightly behind the War Wagons. The Bears and Archers will cover any terrain features near to the flanks.

If I feel the need to move the War Wagons it will be along the following lines. On the first move I'll attempt to move it. This can only be 10cm from a Laagered formation. I won't attempt

another move. The second order will be to "Laager up". It sounds very cautious but believe me I have still ended up with limbered War Wagons just waiting to be pounced on using these tactics. I nearly always use the general for this.

As you can see it is a defensive strategy. If you leave the Bears out and take six Knights you can be more aggressive. The problem with that is you are likely to end up with a split army. One part attacking and another, by its nature, defending.

If you take the four Knights then you need to take "Banner of Shielding" with one of them. Combined with "Chill" and "Monster Bear" this unit can be your battle winner.

With this army you are a little reliant on your opponent attacking. If he plays a waiting game then you have the spells to, hopefully, break him up ("Freeze" and "Icy Blast"). This is where the Horse Archers can come in. A carefully timed attack from them can weaken the enemy line in readiness for your Knights.

CONCLUSION

This is a strange army to command. Warmaster does lay a great stress on the attack. If you take War Wagons with associated defended infantry then a large part of your army goes completely against this. You then have to attempt combined arms and indulge in a cat and mouse game.

I say cat and mouse simply because most of my opponents seem to avoid contact with the laagered War Wagons at all costs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John is an experienced Warmaster player and winner of last years Warmaster Tactics competition. John will be writing a series of army specific tactics articles over the course of this year – thanks John!