

WARMMASTER

My Kind of Game - part 2

A second article for John's previous winning competition entry

By John Bennison

WHERE TO START

So, you have taken great care to create your all-conquering force. Now you are faced with actually fielding it. Even after playing the game since inception I still pause and wonder what to do as I unload my army from its box and stare forlornly across the tabletop at my opponents horde. If I haven't stressed this before now I'll do so now. This is very much a personal view. Experienced players will read it and harrumph, "I don't agree with that" and so on. I make no claim to expertise, merely to experience, much of it embarrassing.

I've come to think of the game as involving three phases. Deployment, Build up and the Final Assault. All are important.

DEPLOYMENT

Depending on who you are playing against may influence your deployment. In most of the games I am involved in we just set our armies up in no particular order but keeping a weather eye on what our opponent is up to. In the group you play among you may have criteria to set up your armies. Often it is alternate placing of units. My own view is that this can be distracting. I've seen a wily player with a horde army spread his first units about widely and lure a less experienced player with a small army into doing the same. Think about what you want to achieve.

First have a look at the terrain and imagine how your army can use it. Assuming you are playing a standard game you will want to consider all the terrain between your army and your opponents. A rough rule of thumb is to have your cavalry with a fairly open area to operate in whilst infantry need to be kept near some sort of terrain they can bolt into. Place artillery as near to a hill that you can get it, providing, that hill is likely to be within range of a likely attack by the enemy for a defensive game. Think all the time of where you are going to move your units. It isn't a lot of use if you decide you want a lightening attack if you place your infantry in woods and commanders beyond 20 cm range. That may sound obvious but I've seen it happen. Indeed I've probably done it myself.

The Command Overlap. In many games an army is fielded in some sort of formation and then the commanders are placed almost as an afterthought. Given that so much emphasis is placed on command in Warmaster this can prove fatal. Where the characters are situated in Warmaster is crucial. So put a dice

down where you want your commanders to be. Then you can ensure that all your units will be placed within command range of not just one character but preferably two or even more. I try to place my units in brigades of two. I also try to place them so that each brigade is within command range of more than one character. That means if one of the characters fails elsewhere you have a chance of an alternative character getting his order through.

THE BUILD UP

This represents the bulk of the game. You've deployed your army with a view to a flexible command structure. You may have deployed your cavalry hoping to attack in a particular direction, for instance. I like to deploy with as much command overlap as possible so that I can choose what I do once I start moving, ok then, I should say attempting to move. Those pesky dice have a habit of frustrating your brilliant plans.

To some extent your movement will depend on who goes first. If you get the first move then you can start moving that cavalry into position against what you perceive as the enemies weakest spot whilst keeping your infantry in support. If the enemy moves first then you have to be prepared for surprises, especially if he gets a lot of orders off. That is why your initial deployment is so important.

Some dos and don'ts for this stage of the game:

- Do keep your army together; if you lose cohesion you'll lower the odds of getting your orders through.
- Don't send your cavalry off ahead of the infantry; yes they'll probably launch a successful attack. But unless they can break the enemy they'll suffer from the enemy cavalry counterattack, which is likely to be supported by infantry.
- Don't send your wizards to far ahead to cast that all important spell; they could be left with nowhere to run.
- Do remember to premeasure. All the players I have most respect for (they beat me more often than the rest) take time to do this. It is perfectly acceptable. There are enough unknowns within the game design to make premeasuring a must for Warmaster. I once played against a guy who suggested that we disallow it. I agreed. I then played a game where he seemed to

The first wave had killed off all bar one unit of warriors protecting the artillery and got around the rear. Weighing up the odds of the Grave Knights I could see that I should win. By sending in two terrorising mounts with swords etc I was increasing odds but tempting fate. He saved every hit.





A 2000 point Brettonian army with General and 2 Heroes in 20cm range of all brigades.

have a sixth sense as to range. In the heat of the game I imagined that he must have some sort of ranging device fitted to his spectacles. He was basically just a good judge of distance. I'm not. That meant he had a built in advantage owing to what amounted to better eyesight. So use that tape measure and check those distances. The time you take to do that will also allow you to come to your senses and realise that that crushing 3 move attack with those Grail Knights armed with the Banner of Shielding and then supported by a Sorceress who will get (hopefully) the spell, Shield of Combat" is maybe just a bit of a long shot.

- Do remember to move your characters at the end of the movement phase. I do still forget to move some of them. I don't think I'm alone. Think too about where you put them. It is very easy in the heat of battle to plonk your characters at what seem like convenient places; you want to get the game moving don't you. Don't. Pause and think. I have so often got carried away with events and move my characters without really thinking and then regretted it when I come to my command phase. I've seen High Elf commanders attempt to launch a crucial cavalry advance with just a Hero within 20cm whilst the general is relaxing near the infantry way over on another flank. I've laughed at that. I've cried when I've realised that is what I have achieved by thoughtless placing of characters.

Basically you have to set your objective and stick to it. Generally that objective will require a large proportion of your army to achieve it. If, sorry when, you fail orders in the run up to your assault don't get carried away and send in half your force. Wait.

This is where your army design should reap rewards. If you have enough commanders the odds are increased that you will keep cohesion.

THE FINAL ASSAULT

Now this sounds like the climax of the game. It is if you can recognise it. The easy answer is that this will be the final move. Oh, how often have I schemed and manoeuvred to get my army into position for the "Final Assault" only to find my sneaky opponent has beaten me to it and snatched victory.

First, keep a weather eye to both you own and your opponents break point. Any units that are down to 1 stand need to be protected. Get them out of range from, in particular, flyers. This is the section of the game when these can come into their own. Too often flyers are used early to take out menacing units, especially artillery, when they are very useful for taking out those last damaged units that tend to float around at the end of a hard fought game.

There will come a point when a break point approaches. Hopefully it won't be yours. If it is you've got to go for the long shots to take out enemy points and hope that if you break your points total is enough to achieve a draw. I won't go into that since

it is all down to chance. Yes, Warmaster is down to chance but if you've worked it right and the dice have been at least even (now there is another story) then, hopefully you will have got to the point where you can attempt to break your opponent and be ahead on points.

The flank attack; this is where this tactic can deliver. It can be a unit killer. It fits in with the 2 unit brigade concept. Move the brigade in range of your target on the first order. Assuming the second order is successful

the first unit will hit frontally whilst the second can target the same unit and because it is pinned can get onto the flank. This is provided you can see it, so be careful how you position the brigade after the first order. Considering that this stage of the game is the "do or die" section it does lend significance to whether you have chosen the "Orb of Majesty" or not. Too often have I failed at this point.

It is at this stage of the game that you will get tempted to risk your expensive mounts and wizards with spells that can only work when they join a combat. Think carefully. Imagine what will happen if you fail. At the time of writing I am weeping over such a choice that did fail in my last game. It involved Vampire Counts (me) against Dwarfs. I was winning. I had kept a coordinated attack and my first wave of cavalry went in and took out the Dwarf artillery screen. All except 1 unit. I had the second wave in support for the next move. I sent 2 units of Grave Knights against this single unit of Dwarf warriors on a hill. If I beat the Dwarfs I would get into the entire dwarf artillery contingent and probably win the game. I weighed up the odds. 2 units against Dwarf warriors would get 9 attacks each needing 5's to hit. That means they should have got 6 hits and given the 4 save 3 wounds. The Dwarfs in return would get 9 attacks with 4.5 hits and therefore 2 and a bit wounds. It was too close on its own. I decided to send not just one but two terrifying mounts, 1 for each unit to reduce the Dwarf capability and increase my own. I should have walked it since I increased my attacks by 7 and reduced the Dwarfs by 3. What happened? The Dwarf commander saved ALL his wounds and forced me back. He was then the able to wipe out the nearest unit that had the most expensive mount attached with his artillery and thus turn what was a losing game for him into a closer game. He subsequently won 9 more weeping from me). If I had hedged my bets and only sent in 1 mount to the farthest unit that wouldn't have suffered the artillery counterattack then I would have come away with a bloody nose as opposed to a horrible rebuff. But then I wouldn't have weighed the odds so well in my favour.

So think about possible failure no matter how unlikely it seems. Warmaster is about odds and sooner or later that unlikely dice roll will happen. It's not an easy choice.

This naturally leads on to the most frustrating way to lose at Warmaster. The counterattack. I've just described the perfect counterattack. This is where the overlap in your command structure is important. Your opponent has just spent his attack without breaking you (think of that encounter I've just described) and you have the opportunity to take advantage. No good if your characters are in the wrong place.

Warmaster is a combination of coordination regulated by chance.

Did I tell you about the time I rolled 8 sixes, yes 8 of them. Sheer joy.

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!