

WARMASTER

My take on the Vampire Counts

A fresh look at the Vampire Counts

By John Bennison

At the time they were launched I was looking to create an evil army to add to my preponderance of good armies. Vampire Counts looked interesting and I reckoned that they would be relatively easy to paint up.

DEPLOYMENT

Most of the games I play are 2000 point ones. Occasionally I will get involved on a bigger game but I've generally found that 2000 points is ideal for 3 or 4 hours play. When buying any army, though, I will design it around 3000 points. That way when I play a 2000-point game I have some choices. If I really get keen and find other alternatives of play then I will expand the army to 4000 points so that my choices extend to a 3000 point game. I think it is tempting providence to buy just enough figures for your most commonly sized game. Unless you've practised with them you will find that you want to alter the composition as you develop your style of play and play different opponents.

I decided for my 3000 or so points to get a bit of everything. 6 each of Skeletons and Zombies for the compulsory units. I liked the look of the stats for the Ethereal Host so got 4 of those along with 6 Grave Guard. I wasn't sure what to make of the Ghouls so only got 2. 6 Grave Knights and 8 Dire Wolves gave me some choice in the cavalry department and of course I had to have a couple of Bat units too. I only got 1 character pack as I had to have the Coach and the Winged Nightmare. Later I acquired the "Storm of Chaos" character pack which has a nice Baron von Carstein type figure in it. Being the compulsive collector that I am I got more but these are, as yet, unpainted.

PAINTING

I wanted the army ready quickly and felt that a "black horde" effect would be the answer to this as well as being fairly effective in appearance. Everything was sprayed black and the dry brushed with dark grey, white, gunmetal (Grave guard and Knights) or grey green (rotting flesh for Zombies) depending on what I was painting. Red was used to pick out shields and such like. The Grave Guard and Knights have nice shields with various designs, many of them skulls, on them. These were scarlet with the design being white. It gave them the look of elite units.

Everything was given a black wash and varnished.



THE ARMY

I'll do this by describing each character and unit type under their own headings with my views on how they play.

Characters and Mounts

The Vampire Lord is almost unique in being a wizard too. In a 2000 point game with 2 additional Necromancers you have 3 magic users. At 150 points I rarely add any magic items to the general. I always take the maximum Necromancers which gives me the edge in magic against most armies. Only Orcs and Tomb Kings can out do Vampire Counts in magic user numbers whilst Kislev can match them.

You can have up to 2 Vampires (Heroes) per 1000 with this army. I've rarely done this although I often go for 3 in a 2000 point game or 4 in a 3000 game. You do need plenty of commanders, though; since you must attack and you will usually have a lot of units to command. The Black Coach is almost a must at 40 points for a terrifying mount and nearly always appears in my army. The Winged Nightmare usually appears in the bigger 3000 point games. You need at least one of these because the army does lack terrifying monsters but be careful of them. Many is the time I have got my Winged Nightmare killed off. Keep him in range of a decent unit. You don't want him displaced to a Skeleton unit, for instance, only to be mopped up by the enemy.

Compulsory Units

Of the two types here the Zombies are the most use, hence the extra 5 points. With 4 hits they can be time consuming to shift from defended terrain and are a useful screen against artillery. I'll quite often send out single units to draw artillery fire whilst I try to get my army into position.

Other Infantry

I always include some Grave Guard. Often they will be brigaded with the Ethereal Host. With stats like the High Elf Spearmen they are quite a useful unit for the points. Brigaded with supporting infantry in defended terrain there are not many troops that can comfortably take them on. Add to that the fact that they cannot be terrified, confused or suffer the proximity to enemy command penalty then the penalty of not being able to attack on initiative looks a very good swap to me.

Ethereal Host are probably my favourite unit in this army. I've read a lot of comments criticising the stats for these guys. Yes, it does strike me as being a bit odd that ghosts can support or be supported by other infantry and gain defended status among other things. However they seem to work. Out in the open they are vulnerable and can be swept away as they have no armour. Put them in a wood though and you have a threat that your opponent will struggle to neutralise. I call it the "haunted wood" tactic. They are the only infantry that can terrify and with their frontage they can terrify a lot of stands. Most infantry will only get 2 attacks against them in a wood. With 4 hits and supports they are almost impossible to shift. Even Lizards struggle. Only Dwarfs led by Troll Slayers can take them on with confidence. Other "Berserker" style infantry can do it but sometimes come a cropper owing to them only having 3 hits. If they are hidden in a wood then there are going to be a lot of command minuses

against any infantry trying to sweep them out. For example, one order gets the enemy into the wood and in sight. The second order will have a minus 3 (second order, rough terrain and proximity to enemy). With a good chance of failing the Ethereal Host can counter attack as though the enemy are in the open. I'll often brigade them with Grave Guard so that even if they are killed off the (hopefully) damaged victor has something to think about. If you manage to get them onto the flank or rear of a unit then you really will make hay.

Against an army without artillery they are wonderful stood at the edge of a wood, defended, with 4 hits and unable to be pushed back.

One unit I struggle with is Ghouls. They come across to me as a watered down Flagellant that can also be terrified. I have only used them in the 3000 point games and they have never seen action. I'll leave it at that. Perhaps someone out there has found them useful.

Cavalry

Grave Knights are like your standard knight without the initiative ability. It gives the army that hard edge that the Tomb Kings lack. They do need Dire Wolves to cover them though as the inability to use initiative can sometimes leave them stranded. I tend to brigade them in pairs so that if they are caught I won't lose a whole lot of them.

Dire Wolves are a favourite of mine. This is partly because they are unique. Only the Chaos Hounds are similar (and cheaper) but you can have 4 Dire Wolves per 1000 as opposed to 2 for the Chaos Hounds. That means that you can really use the Dire Wolves as a horde. They need to get their attacks in because if they are attacked they are mincemeat with only 2 attacks and no saves. Also each one attacking is an opportunity to attempt "Raise Dead" and clog up your opponent. With the (usually) higher break point of this army you can afford, to some extent, to throw them in ahead of your main attack. The trouble is I often get carried away and send them in too far ahead. And that break point isn't always that high given the expensive units you can choose. However there have been times when they have proved very good. In one game I faced a 2000 point Lizard army whose commander was moaning about the predictability of Warmaster Heavy Cavalry tactics. Line them up and charge was what he said and was doing. He is a very good player. He had 4 Cold one units lined up in 1 brigade and I sent in 3 Dire Wolves. It was a suicide attack but it broke up the line and took out enough stands of his cavalry to make it worthwhile. I lost them all but 1 Cold One was down to 1 stand and another down to 2; all for 120 points. Since the 4 units was his entire cavalry arm (the maximum he could have) I thought it useful. I still lost the game though but he has never lined up his cavalry like that again since. That example does illustrate how they are best used. Break up the enemy strike force and have your heavy stuff ready to exploit. They also make a very good screen, especially if you are playing a multi player game. With Dire wolves it is a case of use them or lose them.

The Bats

Even in a 2000 point game I will often use 2 of these. Although based along the long edge and so not so effective at attacking they still make good blockers for your Grave Knights to push their enemy onto and thus destroy and can generally cause irritation if placed out of sight but within 20cm of an enemy unit or two.

Magic

With an attacking army like this "Raise Dead" is probably more useful than it is for Tomb Kings. You cannot stand off to shoot like you can with them. You have much more incentive to get stuck in and therefore get an opportunity to use this spell.

"Vanhel's Danse Macabre" is another useful spell, which goes a little way to counter the inability to use initiative, especially for the Grave Knights with their 30cm range. This is probably my most used spell.

The 2 spells above are the ones I rate highly.

"Deathbolt" is your standard shooting spell and since nothing in the army can shoot at all is useful for attempting to push a unit back. Other than that it isn't as useful as the equivalent spell in other armies, which can back up standard shooting and help take off a stand. This one rarely will.

"Curse of Years" is the spell I use least of all. I do not see the sense of risking a Necromancer in melee in the hope of rolling a 6. The only time I would consider using this is towards the end of the game and if the Necromancer had the "Ring of Magic"

Talking of which I nearly always arm my Necromancers with this and the "Scroll of Dispelling". If it is a 3000 point game I will sometimes use the "Wand of Power". All the spells need a 5 or 6 so this item is useful.

If I have the Winged Nightmare I will always arm him with the "Sword of Might" to give the whole thing a total of 4 attacks. Next choice is "Sword of Fate" for the Black Coach. I go for these to help make up for the lack of monsters and give any edge I can to the armies main advantage; melee in numbers.

I sometimes give the Vampire lord the "Orb of majesty" although I do this less and less since "Vanhel's Danse Macabre" goes some way to addressing any failed orders.

Lastly I will occasionally give a Grave Knight the "Banner of Shielding"; the best out of the banners in my view. Mind you I will have to paint up a distinctive unit of them as I sometimes forget who has it.

CONCLUSION

This is the only army that has not a single shooting unit. It has no really special monsters either. These factors make the army a challenge. Generally it is a hard army to beat owing to the numbers combined with the quality of some of the units. Ethereal Host are probably one of the most effective units when dealing with terrain whilst Dire Wolves present your opponent with sheer numbers of pesky fast moving cavalry. I've found that playing them against Chaos they'll as often as not win. Empire and Dark Elves too. Among my most frequent opponents are Dwarfs and Bretonians; the same player. When he commands Dwarfs I never win. The combination of excellent infantry and firepower are one thing the Vampire Counts is vulnerable to. With no shooting to disrupt the Dwarfs the Vampire Counts have to rely on numbers. Unlike most other armies there are no real weak links to pick on and because you can't shoot you are unlikely to get any disorganised units to slow up the Dwarfs. Troll Slayers are one unit that can take Ethereal Host in any circumstance.

Conversely the same guy has great difficulty when he commands Bretonians against Vampire Counts. This is one army that is very vulnerable to the hordes of Dire Wolves. If they get in to draw out the Knights in impetuous charges then the fun starts. The sheer volume of infantry is quite likely to do the same. The Vampire Counts also have their own Knights to take out the Bretonian Knights.

I think that is why I find the army so fascinating. It works brilliantly against some armies and not so against others. Add in the choice of units and you have some nice challenges to face.

Maybe I'll have to paint up some more Grave Knights to take on those Dwarfs.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

John is an experienced Warmaster player and winner of last years Warmaster Tactics competition. John is already working on his take on Bretonians!