

# WARMASTER

## My take on the Bretonnians

*A fresh look at the Bretonnians*

By John Bennison

A battle with Bretonnians is fast, furious and never boring. I don't think I have ever had a draw with them. Mind you they are not for the faint hearted. The victories you can gain can be absolutely glorious, defeats terrible. No halfway measures with these guys. I would also see them as a second army. It is not a forgiving army to use. You need to understand the game system fairly well before you take the plunge with them.

### WHERE TO START

I've already said that most games I play revolve around 2000 points and that I look to collect around 3000 points worth of figures in order to give some choices for the 2000 point armies I'll create. With the Bretonnians I thought it would be nice to create a series of Dukedoms, each with their own livery. I decided to build a base "army" for each one. Without any great thought on how to use them I bought two each of every pack plus one Grail Knight and Command Pack for each Dukedom. Each of these would give a comfortable 1000 plus points and give me the incentive to add to the army in 1000-point blocks using a new livery. To start with I created two of these Dukedoms along with a few extra Knights from small independent orders (at least that is how I imagined them). That way I got a couple of spare knights, Squires and the third Grail knight.

That made 4 packs from each of the infantry, 6 each of Squires and Knights, 3 Grail knights and 3 command packs.

It didn't stop at that though; I now can field over 5000 points what with wanting a variety of colour and, of course, buying some Knights Errant when they came out.

### PAINTING

You really can go to town on these. I tend to like a simple theme to my armies so each of my Dukedoms would be given a basic heraldic scheme using two main colours. As an example my first and most senior Duke was given a white cross on a red background as his livery. All tunics are red. The white cross only appears on the shields, standards and the knights horse covers. I felt that painting white crosses on all the tunics would "clutter" the figures too much at this scale. For the peasants I used the red along with a couple of other colours that would give a bit of variety within the units to take away the "uniform" effect. It would also stay within the general theme of the livery. So some peasants have red tunics (ex men at arms?) whilst others have grey or reddish brown. The knights also have a third colour for each unit (not the Grails) to differentiate.

### ARMY DESIGN

As I've done before I'll go through each character and troop type.

#### Characters, Mounts and Spells

Much of Warmaster is all about keeping the initiative and denying it to your enemy. With Bretonnians this is more important than with most, if not all, other armies. This is all because of the breakpoint system used with them combined with the compulsory initiative. You need to keep control.

You therefore should consider equipping your general with some sort of command benefit. I usually use the Orb but the Helm of Dominion is also worth considering since you can use

him like a High Elf general for one move. This combined with the spell "Lady's Favour" actually gives a potentially more potent movement potential; for one move only though.

In a 2000-point game I try to take at least two heroes. The general will command the strike force and he needs a hero to support. You also need a hero to command the screening squires and any reserve you may have. If you are using lots of Squires with Knights consider a third hero as you need to keep mobile. If you are using a lot of infantry as a screen then once you have them in place on hills and in woods you have less need of mobility and therefore heroes. I nearly always mount one hero on a Pegasus along with the "Sword of Might". You don't much in the way of additions you can give them in melee so that extra three attacks going into the melee of your choice can be crucial.

For me sorceresses are amongst the most useful magic users in the Warmaster range. Why? Well, first of all three of the spells only need a four or more to succeed. The combination of spells is useful too. They are unusual in that there are not any spells that shoot or add attacks to melees. There are two command based ones which can be a huge help.

"Eerie Mist" gives a minus one to enemy command and prevents initiative attacks. This can muffle an enemy threat especially if you have a nice irritating commoner unit within 20cm giving another minus one.

"Lady's Favour" can help get that extra unit into attack that failed an order. Combine it with either the Unicorn benefit and/or "Wand of Power" and you have a potent combination.

Combined these two can help keep your initiative.

Then there are the two protective spells. I don't use "Aerial Shield" much at all. In fact I can't remember the last time, if ever, I have used it. I think that is because to use it you have declared that you have lost the initiative. Basically you are trying to protect your troops from shooting. It is only of use against a "shooty" army. If my Knights are stood around getting shot at it will be because I have failed to get them moving with "Lady's Favour" and therefore have lost the initiative.

"Shield of Combat" is a magnificent spell. Combine this with "Banner of Shielding" and you have a near invincible unit.



Unicorns; Now, I always mount my sorceresses on Unicorns. There are two reasons for this. The last spell mentioned needs the sorceress to join the melee. You might as well get the benefit of the extra attack. In addition you can gain an extra point once per game when rolling to cast a spell. All those four plus spells suddenly become three plus. Much better. Taking that into account I often will arm a sorceress with the "Wand of Power". Used together with Unicorn power it is nearly as good as the "Ring of Magic". Conversely you could get two attempts at three plus for three of the spells. The first choice in items for the sorceresses is, though, the "Scroll of Dispelling". Your opponent will target the knights with everything he has so you want to minimise the risk of losses through some surprise magic. You don't want the Vampire Counts to get their knights onto your knights flank having failed their third order by using their "Vanhel's Danse Macabre" do you? Depending on the size of game the "Rod of Repetition" is useful. You'll get more opportunity to use it successfully with these magic users. Also the "Staff of Spellbinding" is one I would consider using with this army. With a low breakpoint chance magic gains by your opponent can have a disproportionately large effect on your Knights

Remember, your command structure has to consider protecting the knights at all costs and giving them every means you can think of to keep the initiative.

### **Commoners**

You've really got two main choices here as to which direction you want to emphasise; cavalry (Squires), or a combination of infantry.

Squires are the most useful. They are flexible and you can be fairly cavalier in their use as they don't affect your break point. Remember, though, that those points you are throwing away can creep up. Any Squires I field I will brigade in twos. If attacked they will usually get six shots off and if overcome you will lose "only" two of them. If you brigade them in larger groups you will find that you may lose the whole lot in one attack and they aren't really any more effective in larger formations. I try to use them to attack the enemy main attack force. If successful they can break up and kill off enough to make the Knight's task less risky whilst most enemy secondary troops will not be strong enough to be a threat to your Knights.

Infantry are very useful for a couple of reasons. They frustrate your opponent. Often the prospect of sweeping up vulnerable infantry is seen as an easy way of getting your opponent near his break point. Not so with these guys. He often has to wade through masses of cheap stuff to get to anything that counts. For this reason I normally brigade my Bretonnian infantry in threes. I field them in line, one behind the other. That way if attacked from the front there will usually be one unit left, the third one, to continue the frustration. Sometimes these brigades will have archer at the front with peasants and/or men at arms behind. More often, though, it will be two peasants with one Man at Arms. The cost for the entire brigade is only 105 points, less than one unit of knights. On a hill or in a wood these brigades can be very effective. Generally I'll place any brigade with archers in a wood whilst the cheap non-shooting brigades will go on a hill.

### **The Knights**

In no other army does so much depend on such a limited range of front-line troop types; the Knights. All the rest are mere supports.

A few points to note;

First I'll state the obvious, although I have been known to ignore this myself. Always, but always, have an odd number of your knights. It will hit home just how low your break point is when you design your army and see a single figure of, say, four for your

seemingly numerous 2000 point army. Seven Knights gives a break point of four whilst six a break point of three. An odd number is a good idea for most other armies. It is must for Bretonnian Knights.

Take the maximum number of Grail Knights that you can. That extra attack is important given that the Knights are really all you've got.

Give one of your Grail Knights the "Banner of Shielding". When you combine this with the "Shield of Combat" spell you have a devastating combination and also a good way of helping to protect the sorceress that has joined the unit.

Brigade them in twos with one three-unit brigade. The latter will often be the one with the Grails and their "Banner"; not always though as it doesn't pay to advertise. If a small brigade gets caught by a counterattack owing to failed orders you will suffer less. A large brigade getting caught like that will probably lose you the game. If you do get carried away and advance in a long line of Knights don't blame anyone but yourself if your opponent plonks some flyers or some cheap cavalry in front of them and forces them to charge. I've had fun doing that.

## **RATIOS AND TACTICS**

Screen, screen and screen again. I liken the command of this army to being a parent to adolescents. You have to shield them where you can from threats. If you fail they will charge off and do their own thing with you being left looking on helplessly. They are arrogant and have no thought for anyone else. And yet, that arrogance and lack of fear can pull them through challenges that others would recoil from. Yes, just like teenagers.

The numbers are therefore important. The inexperienced cavalry freak may be tempted into minimising the commoners. Fatal. I've played against that kind of army and all I've had to do is send off some sacrificial unit to lure the Knights into an attack and my opponent has lost control.

I would suggest at least one commoner to one Knight is a must. I occasionally go as low as that if I am fielding a lot of Squires and not much infantry. If you are using a lot of infantry then up to two to one will be satisfactory. For the typical 2000-point army I will field two brigades of infantry totalling six units. I will have four to six Squires and seven to nine Knights. Knights to Squires always seem to end up on a three to two ratio or thereabouts. It seems to work.

I'll then try to position the army in a kind of fan with the Knights at the base. The infantry commoners will act as a breakwater against attack whilst the Squires will, hopefully, soften up the targets for my Knights.

Well, that is the idea anyway.

## **CONCLUSION**

This is a very volatile army to command. Games are generally short and sharp. There are no half-way measures with Bretonnians. Yet the spells are all defensive and there are no really big meaty mounts to use.

On balance they are my favourite army to play with. It revolves around those arrogant Knights and the combination of command, unit ratio, spells and banners along with the knightly immunity to terror and their lack of control. Get all that right and you have probably the most exciting army in the entire range. Well, that's my opinion anyway. I'd even go so far as to say that Bretonnians are the nearest thing to "Extreme Warmaster" you can get, the fast sudden death game in its purest form.

At the time of writing I've convinced myself that this is the army to take to Euro GT. The reason? The games will be over quickly, win or lose. That way I can go and look at other games with glass in hand.

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## **ABOUT THE AUTHOR**

John is an experienced Warmaster player and winner of last years Warmaster Tactics competition. John is taking his Bretonnians to next month's Euro GT.