

WARMMASTER

Lords of Chaos

Warmmaster competition runner up.

By Mike Headden

1. WHY CHAOS?

Although my first love in Warmaster has always been my High Elf Army I have long been the proud possessor of a Slaaneshi Chaos army too.

Before I go too much further let me make it plain that in this article I'm talking about the original, mortal, Chaos armies not the newer Daemon Legion one which plays quite differently and needs its own tactics and strategy.

Two things attracted me to the Chaos army in Warmaster. Firstly, there was the sheer combat power of the Chaos Warriors and Chaos Knights - arguably the best infantry and cavalry, respectively, in Warmaster. Secondly, there was the fact that a "Chaos" army is an open invitation to create a personalised army, at least as far as I'm concerned! I accepted that invitation with enthusiasm.

2. CHOOSING YOUR ARMY

2.1 Size Matters. Players starting out with a Chaos army often create a very small army of very tough troops - all Chaos Warriors, Chaos Knights and Dragon Ogres - believing that sheer combat power will carry them through a game, crushing all opposition. A very Khornate idea but as time goes on they come to realise that a balanced army with smaller numbers of those super-troops backed by cheaper and more numerous Marauders, Hounds and the like gives better results, by and large.

However, using an army of the tough stuff does have the benefit of letting you play with a fully painted army much quicker because there is so much less to paint! There will also be times where the sheer "brute force and ignorance" combat power of such a Chaos force will carry the day.

The problem with fielding lots of high stats/ high points value troops is that it is very vulnerable to various counters.

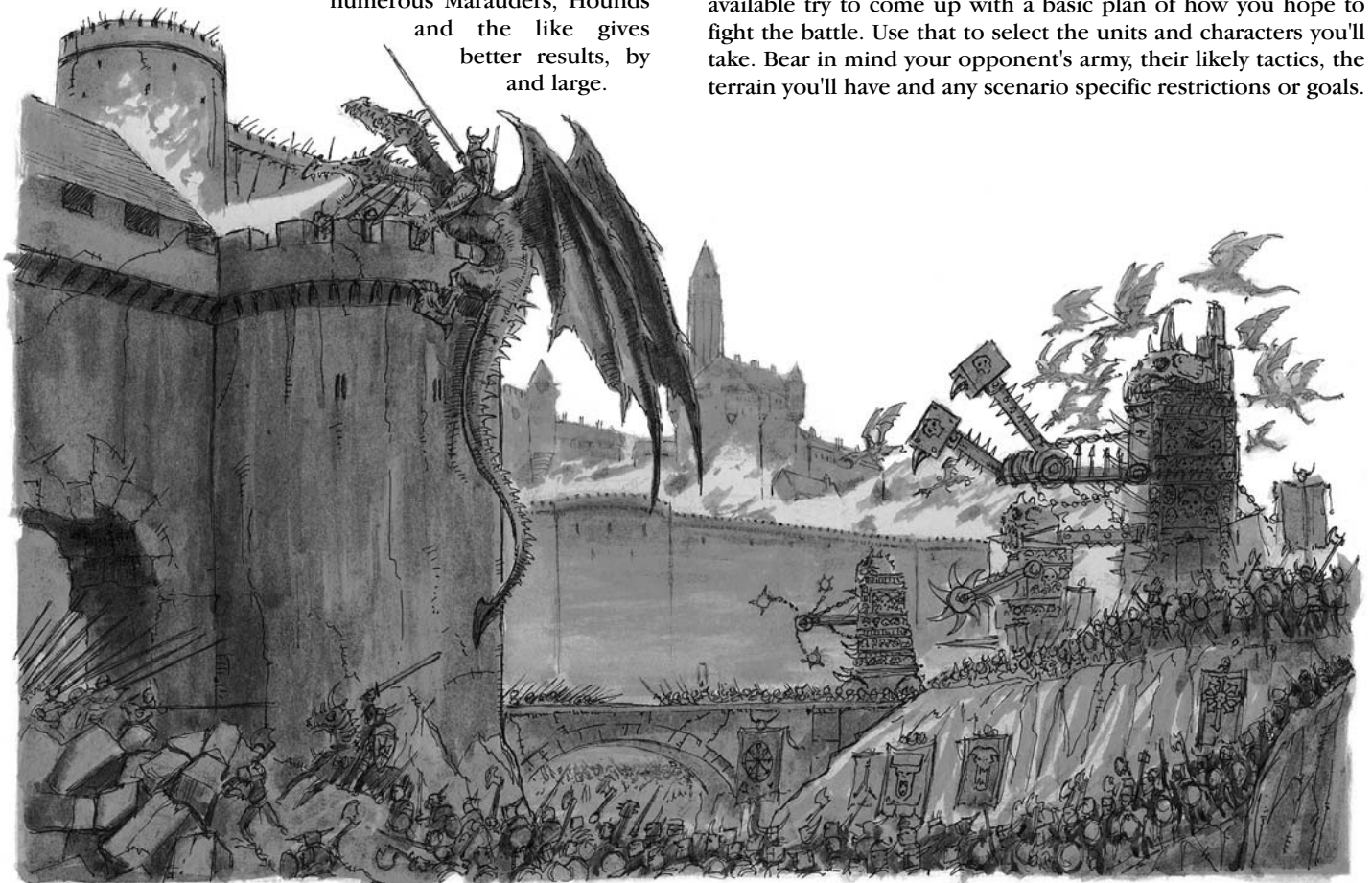
Firstly, there are spells like "Doom and Despair" that can neutralise a unit of Chaos Knights or Dragon Ogres at the most inopportune moments. Having 200 - 250 points of troops unable to attack at a crucial point in the battle is crippling.

Secondly, there are the artillery units and spells that ignore all that expensive armour your troops have.

Especially the cannon that not only ignore your armour but also the fact that you are sheltering behind a wall!

Thirdly, there is the problem that most other armies will outnumber you and may destroy you simply by encircling you and leaving you nowhere to retreat to. All that combat power goes to waste if the opposition can win the combat on support modifiers alone.

2.2 A Man With A Plan. Once you've got beyond the point where unit selection is dictated entirely by what you have available try to come up with a basic plan of how you hope to fight the battle. Use that to select the units and characters you'll take. Bear in mind your opponent's army, their likely tactics, the terrain you'll have and any scenario specific restrictions or goals.



It doesn't need to be terribly complex. Chaos Warriors back by Marauders to fix the enemy, Hounds and Marauder Cavalry to guard their flanks, Chaos Knights and Chariots to deliver the knockout blow and Harpies for targets of opportunity may be quite enough. At least the units you select will all have a part to play.

It is said in military circles that no plan survives contact with the enemy and yours is unlikely to be any different. However, at least you have a plan and can modify it so you are not just reacting to whatever your opponent throws at you next.

In straightforward fights the main aim of your plan is to deliver the awesome combat power of what I've called the tough stuff into combat with the enemy.

Be careful that you don't end up trading your expensive units for his cheap ones, though. Weigh the odds. A unit of Chaos Warriors charging a unit of Skeleton Archers will destroy them in a couple of rounds - probably without loss. However, wiping out a 30 point unit is no good if it merely sets you up to lose your 150 point Chaos Warriors to your opponent's counter-attack in their next turn.

2.3 The Lie Of The Land. Terrain should also play a part in what you select.

For example, on an open table the +1 charge bonus makes chariots well worth the extra points they cost over a Marauder cavalry unit. However, if you are likely to be playing on a table with lots of linear objects - hedges, walls and the like - chariots will be much more limited. This makes the cavalry a much more attractive option.

In Warmaster, on open tables, cavalry is Queen of the Battlefield so if you know there won't be much terrain emphasise mounted troops. Warmaster is a game that definitely benefits from plenty of varied terrain, though, and if that's the case you want rather more infantry.

Chaos Warriors, Marauders and Ogres are tough opponents in any circumstance and even more so if the enemy has to try to dig them out of a wood or village or push them off a hilltop.

2.4 A Test Of Character. Losing your General ends the game and restricts you to a draw, at best. For that reason you want to keep them out of combat as much as possible, despite that +2 Attacks stat. Resist the temptation to mount them on Dragons or give them magic swords. Your General needs to be positioned so that they can control the most important part of your army. This is not necessarily your toughest or most expensive troops but rather the bit of your army whose movement (or failure to move!) will have most impact on your next turn.

Try to avoid situations where the enemy can run over your General and force him to join a unit they can attack. Characters can't join Harpy units so never leave the General with harpies as the only unit within 30cms.

Heroes have a greater Command range than Sorcerors but in the case of Chaos that's about it. Command Value and Attack bonuses are the same, Sorcerors are a little more expensive but have access to several useful spells.



Mike's Dragon Ogres.

I tend to take Sorcerors rather than Heroes, though the latter can be useful for bringing up stragglers or similar situations where units may well be scattered beyond the Sorceror's command radius.

Monstrous Mounts are a very useful way of boosting a character's combat potential and, for me, the Dragon is the Monstrous Mount par excellence. The combination of melee and shooting attacks plus the ability to cause Terror make it a "must have" in any army I field. My 2000 point armies often have both a Hero and a Sorceror on Dragon Mounts.

2.5 It's A Kind Of Magic. Magic Items are another way of boosting your character's effectiveness.

The Orb of Majesty and Sceptre of Sovereignty are useful insurance against a poor die roll at a critical moment.

I usually arm my Hero on a Chaos Dragon with the Sword of Might to increase his combat potential to the maximum.

Your Sorceror, or one of them if you have several, should carry a Dispel Scroll against everyone except Dwarves. Every other army has at least one spell that you won't want cast at an inopportune moment - of course, judging if and when that moment has come is an art in itself.

Units too can benefit from the addition of a Magical Item.

A unit of Chaos Knights with the Banner of Shielding is a hugely expensive unit but it is potentially one of the most powerful units in the game.

I always feel that Swords are better allocated to characters who can move where opportunity or danger presents itself, however if you have a few points left over the addition of a Sword can make Chaos Warriors or Chaos Knights even more fearsome.

The spells available to your Sorceror include the suitably chaotic Rage of Chaos which is useful for boosting the combat power of any unit by D6 Attacks. In the case of Chaos Hounds it is probably worth risking 2D6 or even 3D6 on the grounds that it has more chance of turning them into combat engines than dog flambé but if it achieves the latter you're only risking 30 points of troops.

Anger of the Gods is particularly effective against armies like the Orcs and Goblins who have low Command values anyway - but even High Elves can be disconcerted to find their General reduced to the effectiveness of ordinary mortals!



Mike's Chaos Chariots.

Boon of Chaos is a favourite of mine where the Sorcerer is riding a Dragon.

Curse of Chaos can be used to pick off stands from already damaged units since the Sorcerer is not bound by the targeting restrictions that apply to shooters.

3. ON THE TABLETOP

3.1 Biting Off More Than You Can Chew. On a good Warmaster table there will be lots of varied terrain. Some of it will either be within your deployment zone or close to it. Don't be tempted to take all the potentially good positions. This applies to most Warmaster armies but applies in Spades to a Chaos army.

Chaos troops are quite expensive, therefore most enemy armies will outnumber you. If you spread out all over the place they will swamp you. Keep your army together so that each unit can support the rest.

Pick somewhere that suits your plan. If you intend to fight defensively you'll probably want a hill or wood or similar to put your infantry in to give them a defensive advantage. If you plan an attack you may want to try to use the terrain to shelter you from missile fire on the way in.

Your aim should be to set yourself up to attack part of the enemy's army with all of yours - overwhelming the enemy before they can bring numbers to bear.

3.2 Maintenance Of The Aim. This is true of any Warmaster army but particularly so for smaller Chaos armies. It is important to make sure that what you are doing is achieving what you intend.

In a straightforward fight it is possible to get distracted by easy

kills. There may be a temptation to go for the certain destruction of a stranded unit of but if that diverts away units that could be more usefully attacking the real threat resist the temptation!

That's not to say you shouldn't seize opportunities that present themselves, just don't lose sight of your real goal in the process.

This is especially true in scenario games where it is easy to lose sight of special victory conditions in the heat of battle.

4. CONCLUSION

You should choose both your army and the ground it fights on with care and remain focussed on your objectives if you want to win with a Chaos army but, that said, never lose sight of the fact that the main aim of Warmaster is to have fun.

There will be fights where your troops seem to have donned paper-mache armour and equipped themselves with rubber swords, games where Command rolls are so bad that it seems almost every order goes unheeded. Then again you're fielding an army whose patrons are fickleness incarnate so perhaps you shouldn't be surprised.

Fielding a Slaaneshi force I try to go for a subtle approach to the Warmaster Chaos army but if what you really want is a Khornate army of Chaos Warriors, Knights and Dragon Ogres and not much else, then go for it. Sometimes "winning" isn't about beating the enemy army. It's about taking that tiny rock-hard Chaos army and, with the imagined howls of "Blood for the Blood God!" ringing in your ears, giving your opponent the game of their lives. After all Khorne doesn't care if you win or lose as long as somebody is dying!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mike has been a Warmaster player for quite a while now. In the past he has played battle Reports against Steve Hambrook and a certain Rick Prestley.