

# Micro Tactics

by Mike Headden

Whilst reading e-mails on the Warmaster e-group, it occurred to me that there have been a few articles on how to build and use armies of specific races and some philosophical discussions on strategy and tactics ('The Art of Waaagh!' in Warmags 5 & 6, for example). There hasn't, however, been any short, snappy summaries of the 'Where's the best place to put this stand' or 'How should I allocate my attacks' type articles.

As an aside, you can find the group at <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/gw-warmaster> – well worth looking at, if you have access to the Internet, as you can read the messages posted even if you are not a member. Better still, join up and take part in discussions that range from the thoughtful and erudite, through the offbeat and comic to the downright strange! It's a good place to ask this sort of question and get all sorts of useful advice in return.

## Choosing and Deploying your Army

To begin with, it may be a case of using whatever figures you have but most people soon have enough troops to field several variations on their army. Try to choose your army with some plan in mind. Nothing too concrete, just along the lines of – artillery to pound the enemy, infantry to protect the guns, and cavalry to smack them with if they get too close. Try to have some role in mind for every unit. Once you've viewed the terrain and your opponent's army, you may need to modify your plan but at least you have a plan to modify! When choosing which units to select, bear in mind the army you're going to fight. The Undead with their large numbers of poorly armoured troops are more susceptible to shooting than the much tougher troops in the Chaos army, for example.

When deploying, keep your army together. Don't grab every piece of terrain going just

because it's there. If you have a 'shooty' army, plan how you will use terrain to give your missile troops clear lines of sight or if the enemy missile troops will outclass yours, think how you will use the terrain to deny the enemy line of sight in return. Warmaster benefits, even more so than most games, from lots of terrain to give the armies something to manoeuvre over and around.



## Command Phase – Movement

Once you have your troops on the battlefield you need to think about what you'll do with them. As a general rule, I'd advise that if you intend to use Heroes and Wizards to move troops that you move them first since a failure by one of them simply stops the unit or brigade concerned but a failure by the General stops anything else from moving.

Each character should move the most important unit(s) first – not the most valuable, toughest or whatever but the ones that will have most impact in the next turn. If ordering those two stands of cavalry into the flank of the last stand of Peasants will win you the game then that's probably the most important thing to move. Just remember that nothing is certain in Warmaster so don't leave your army vulnerable if your stupid cavalry bounce off the Peasants.

## Micro Tactics

Forming infantry brigades of three close combat units in column with a unit of missile troops in line in front is a common tactic. Such a brigade is manoeuvrable and allows for the best combination of attacks in defence and attack.

There are a few things I'll point out briefly as worth remembering in the Command phase. Firstly, Initiative can be used to run away as well as charge and sometimes getting out of the way is as, or more, important than anything else! Secondly, flyers can Home Back towards characters once Initiative moves are done even if they are confused, leaving flyers stranded is usually a bad idea and being confused makes it even worse. Finally, you may not make another successful Command roll this turn – don't let your army get too split up.

### Command Phase – Charging

Due to the way Warmaster works, it is usually better to charge than to be charged, the obvious exception being troops in defended or fortified positions. With that in mind, you want to make the maximum number of charges with the minimum number of Command rolls.

Whenever possible, command brigades rather than single units. One advantage of the infantry brigade as mentioned before is that the missile troops can move sideways to shoot at unengaged troops on the flank of the combat while the close combat troops charge. If the brigade is positioned so that the archers are 17-18cms from the enemy then when they move aside it leaves the close combat troops 19-20cms from the enemy. As a result the columns can charge without having to maximise frontage and three units can wind up in combat rather than just one. Removing stands from the rear of the column reduces the chance of losing support and if you win the combat, all three units can then Advance.

Always consider the order of your charges carefully. Charging with certain units first may allow different units to contact, may allow or prevent flank charges or may allow more or fewer shots at you as you charge in.

Since unengaged stands can shoot at each charging unit, you will want to contact as many stands as possible if charging missile troops with more than one unit. Take a unit of archers charged by three units of spear-

men. If the unit is hit on its left flank, right flank then centre, it gets three shots at the first charger, two at the second and one at the third. If charged centre, flank, and flank, it gets three at the first and that's it – only half the number of shots. A missile unit with a Dragon-mounted character attached is even worse!

Don't assume that it is always better to throw in as many units as possible into a combat. Remember that the enemy can choose which units in contact to attack, throwing a weak, poorly armoured unit into a combat and drawing more enemy stands into the fight may actually tip the combat in their favour. In the long run, dice rolls will even out so assume that results will be about average.

As an example, let's assume that a unit of Chaos Knights charges two units of Silver Helms. The Knights get 4 attacks per stand plus 1 for charging – a total of 15 attacks. On average, they will score seven and a half hits of which three and three-quarters will get past the Silver Helms' armour. So most of the time they'll score four hits. Assuming all of one unit of Silver Helms and one stand of the other unit fight back they will get 12 attacks. On average they will score 6 hits, with their 4+ armour saves the Chaos Knights will take three casualties. So the Chaos Knights will win more often than they lose. If the Chaos General throws in a unit of Chaos Hounds they get a further 12 attacks and wind up causing an average of three more casualties for an average total of just under seven. The Silver Helms put the attacks of four stands against the Hounds and cause an average of six hits, all of which count, since the 'doggies' have no armour. The other two stands of Silver Helms will add a further one and a half hits on the Chaos Knights for a total of seven and a half. On average, Chaos are now more likely to lose this fight than to win it – despite having another unit in contact.

Try to do this sort of calculation before a charge to give yourself an idea of the likelihood that you're win!

### Shooting

Since troops have to shoot at the closest target they can see, at the point when they shoot, it is hard to pick on a unit and blast it to pieces unless it winds up stranded somewhere on the battlefield.

It is sometimes possible to target specific

units by turning the shooting unit to make the preferred unit the closest unit in sight but this tends to leave the shooters in strange positions, vulnerable to charges in the next turn. Another tactic is to screen unwanted targets with other troops or by charging them. Opinions on whether this sort of thing is 'cheese' or tactical cunning vary – often depending on whether the person is 'doing' or 'being done to'!

It also pays to consider the order that shooting takes place to maximise the effect.

Another example may make this clearer. Consider a unit of High Elf Archers and a unit of Elven Bolt Throwers with two units of Chaos Hounds in front of them. The Hound units are one behind the other and the front one has already lost two stands. If the High Elf Archers fire first it is possible, but unlikely, that they will kill the front stand and so usually the Bolt Throwers will have to fire at the same stand – almost certainly wiping it out. Do the firing in reverse order and the Bolt Throwers wipe the front unit out most of the time leaving the archers to shoot the rear unit, driving them back and possibly confusing them. Most of the time shooting is not going to kill stands, let alone units, so disrupting brigades, driving away supporting stands and/or confusing units is what you are after.

The infantry brigade described in the Movement section above can be used in this way if fighting two lines of infantry. On a successful Command roll, the missile troops move sideways to shoot at units to the rear while the melee troops engage the ones in the front. Driving the rear units back even a centimetre is enough to deprive the front units of their support.

### Close Combat

In combat, your troops can allocate their attacks on a stand-by-stand basis against any enemy that the stand is in contact with. It is almost always better to attack stands with worse armour/fewer hits but remember that you can't inflict more hits than the stand has! Don't lose a combat because most of the hits you caused were on a unit with only a couple of hits remaining.

The use of 'combat multipliers' is important too. By this I mean things that make a unit stronger than it would normally be. This can include using defensive terrain, adding magic

items or attaching a character, especially if the character is on a mount of some sort. The most extreme example of this might be a Hero on a Dragon with a Sword of Might who gives you an extra five attacks to allocate in addition to one stand's normal attacks. This can save a unit attacked in the flank or allow you to devastate a unit you can only contact with a single stand.

If you win a combat, take a brief pause to think about what your troops are going to do next. You may want some units to stand still, some to Fall Back and others to Pursue or Advance – if so, think about the order you want to do this in. For example, having one unit fall back may uncover a target for another unit's Advance. Sometimes the order you do these things in makes a big difference.

A final thought for this section is that if your troops win a combat in the other player's turn they get to Pursue, Advance, Fall Back, etc, just like those of the player whose turn it is – so all the advice applies to them too.

### Fall Back

Remember that units that Fall Back can go anywhere as long as they stay 1cm away from enemy units and don't contact friends still in combat. Amongst other things, you can use Fall Back to position troops for the next turn, to block possible retreats in combats yet to be resolved or to retire to a defensive position.

### Pursuit

Pursuing troops have to make contact edge-to-edge, if possible, but bear in mind the following: you may have the option to bring another enemy unit into the melee or not. Balance the extra attacks against the chance to fight another unit without using up your one Advance for the turn. When wrapping round, consider the possibilities of an Advance and, where possible, wrap so as to leave an enemy in sight if you are liable to be able to Advance into them.

### Advances

An Advance is just a Charge move you get to make if you wipe out all opposing units in a round of combat. You get to move 20cm, remember no part of any stand can move more than 20cm, if you've fought a single round of combat or 10cm if you've fought two or more. All the normal Charge rules apply and you have to charge the nearest unit.

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If you win a combat in your opponent's turn and wipe out the opposition, (unlikely as it is), then you get to Advance too.

If your unit is close to losing a stand or becoming Badly Hurt then you may decide not to Advance even when you are able to. On the other hand, it is often better to charge now than be charged in your opponent's next turn.

In essence, though, this is a Charge and all the advice above on charging applies here too.

## Magic

It is hard to give general advice on using magic, as much of the advice would depend on the spells you have available and your overall battle plan.

However, it is important to make sure that the spells cast, or at least attempted, fit in with what you're trying to do with the army as a whole.

As an example, most magic users have access to a direct damage spell like *Ball of Flame*, sometimes more than one. Since missile troops have to target the nearest unit, but Wizards don't, it is often useful to wait until the missile troops have fired and then target the one you will do the most damage to.

Often denying the enemy a chance to do something is more important than being able to do something yourself. One example would be the Undead spell *Doom and Despair* which is particularly useful when cast on powerful enemy units (Chaos Knights, Dragon Riders, Stegadons and the like). Another would be the Chaos spell *Anger of the Gods* which can be very effective when used against armies that are relying on Heroes and Wizards for commands or against Orcs & Goblins!

## Characters

Perhaps the commonest avoidable mistake made by Warmaster players of all levels of experience is forgetting to move characters. More than anything else, Warmaster is a game of command and control, and having characters in the wrong place can spell disaster.

Characters need to be close enough to the troops you intend them to command to con-

trol them. Even Wizards can move units a reasonable distance if they are between the units and where they are going. A Wizard 20cm ahead of the unit can move them once, up to his position, once more out to the edge of his 20cm Command range and then a final move out of command. Always assuming you can make the Command rolls that is!

Characters who get too far from their units risk being 'run down' by the enemy and, with nowhere to go, getting wiped out.

Try to avoid throwing characters into combat unless they'll make a difference. If you're going to win anyway why tie the character to a unit the enemy will promptly target for destruction. This goes double for Generals whose loss ends the game. Even if you're running away with the game in terms of Victory points, losing your General takes you to a draw, at best. Been there, done that!

## Conclusion

So there we are, a few thoughts on how to play Warmaster. I hope that even 'old hands' will have found something in here to make them think. None of this guarantees you a win but it should at least allow you to make more of a fight of it even with the most atrocious dice rolls – we all have games like that! Remember the most important thing isn't winning or losing, it's having fun... but it's easier to have fun if your army isn't being stomped into the table by the opposition!

