

WARMMASTER

Winning with the Undead

Warmaster Competition Finalist.

By Christopher Matney

If you are playing a game of less than 2000 points, steer clear of the Undead as they are one of the weakest small armies in Warmaster. At 2000 points, however, the Undead come alive. I have played over forty games with my skellies, and they have proven to be consistently reliable. My tournament record with them is 15-3, and I managed 10 wins in a row in our bi-weekly club meetings! Before you get the wrong impression about my playing ability, my dwarves have won only six times in twenty outings. To understand why 2000 points is so critical for the Undead, you must consider their strengths.

ON COMMANDERS

The Liche Priests are a key element to the Undead hordes. You need four of them, mounted or not. The reason is simple. If you attempt to charge into battle and fail (since you don't get initiative charges), then you need the ability to concentrate Doom and Despair spells against the enemy unit that you are undoubtedly going to get trampled by on your opponent's turn. Second, if you do make it into battle, you need Raise Dead spells to give you free troops for the rest of the game and a way to pinch off your opponent's retreat. One word of warning, if you Raise Dead behind your enemy's block formation you may give them extra attacks which will swing the battle in their favor. Then, not only do you lose the battle, but your opponent gets a free redeploy before they take their own turn.

For players who are comfortable with other armies, a word to the wise. Your command radius is very short with the Undead. Put your liche priests out a full 20 cm in front of your brigade. That way, you can move twice (up to 40cm with infantry and 50cm with cavalry). Remember, you can only move more than 50cm with your Tomb King, so you should get in the habit of: keeping your troops together (you have five commanders and twenty five units) and never trying to strike more than 40cm away. Since your troops are weaker unit-for-unit, you also need to keep your troops together to allow for effective counter-charges.

ON CAVALRY

The second key to the Undead are chariots. Forget the bone giants and sphinxes. They are cool, and in certain battles they can be devastating. However, if you are looking for a consistent winning strategy, leave them in the box. Believe me, I spent months playing around with every monster formation imaginable before finally deciding that some of my best painted units were not very valuable in the game. Undead chariots are the hammer. They should be placed behind a big wall of infantry or on the flanks and used to counterstrike your opponents with extreme prejudice. I always play with six units of chariots. Oftentimes I will make two cavalry brigades using three stands of chariots and one stand of cavalry each. Other than rounding out a chariot brigade, the Undead cavalry can be left at home too.

ON INFANTRY

Now the hard part. You need skellies and bowmen. Probably more than you want to paint. The Undead is the most effective horde army in the game. Forget the Orcs and

Gobbos. Forget the Skaven. A 2000 point Undead army has: a) superior leadership with five characters casting spells with an 8 or 9 command; b) an amazing breakpoint of 13; and c) enough flexibility to deal with whatever your opponent may throw at you. I typically use 7 units of skellies and 6 units of bowmen. These are arranged in 3 brigades with bowmen in the front and skellies behind. Why? Because the Undead can't be confused, any opponent missile fire into your bowmen either kills a stand or does nothing. Instead of falling back, just have the skellies refuse to make way. Normally, the units would be confused. In this case, nothing happens. Your brigades stay intact, they are easy to move, and you effectively eliminate the value of your opponent's missile fire.

Now comes an important point. The Undead don't care if they get destroyed. Horde armies are going to have significant casualties. With 7 brigades, you are going to lose ten or twelve units every game. Sacrificing a brigade to get your opponent's knights drawn into your midst is worth it. The biggest struggle I had learning to play the skellies is not worrying about getting absolutely crushed every time my opponent charged. Just keep throwing your troops at your opponent. You are going to win. Trust me. Now, there are two exceptions to this rule. Protect your skull chukkas. And make sure that your chariots get the first charge.

Some players think that not being able to use initiative charge is a big disadvantage. Wrong. Initiative charges are only really useful when the exact unit you want to fight is right in front of you. The bonus of not having a command penalty for nearby units significantly outweighs the no initiative charge rule. As your teeming horde of Undead moves into the middle of battle, don't worry about your enemy being close by. Put something useless in front of them to initiative charge and let them take the -1 penalty to order a charge on a different unit. It's a foreign concept for all other armies, but it really works for the Undead.

ON ARTILLERY AND MONSTERS

Finally, we come to the last two brigades. You need two skull chukkas. Remember when I said that the Undead were very weak with less than 2000 points? Well, this is one reason. Two skull chukkas get 6 shots, ignore armor, and confuse the enemy 50% of the time on each drive back dice. They will take out a stand almost every time. They will confuse an enemy unit every time. They are key to disrupting your opponent. With only one chukka, they will rarely take out a stand, most likely not confuse your opponent, and, in short, one is useless. Take two or none.



Bowmen		Bowmen		Bowmen		Bowmen		Bowmen		Bowmen	
Skeletons		Skeletons		Skeletons		Skeletons		Skeletons		Skeletons	
L		L		T		L		L			
Chariots	Chariots	Cavalry	Chariots	Carrion	Carrion	Chukka	Chukka	Chariots	Cavalry	Chariots	Chariots
						Skeletons					

Suggested Army Deployment

You can leave the bone throwers at home. In four years, I have never seen them used effectively. Clever readers will note that there is one lone skeleton infantry unit not deployed yet. Use him to shield your chukkas from opponent's fliers. Or, use him to block your chukka's line of sight from a close enemy unit that you don't care to shoot at. In 90% of the games that I have lost, I managed to lose my skull chukkas somewhere along the line.

The final brigade is the Carrion birds. When you use two units together, they are the commando strike force that can take out enemy artillery. Sacrifice them to take out cannons every time. If your opponent doesn't have artillery, use them to take out their fliers. Again, an even trade is a win when you have a breakpoint of 13. If your opponent has no fliers or artillery, then hold them back until late in the game. Then, use them as their name implies, to hit single stands stranded on the battlefield. Using homeback, you can oftentimes send three or four units to the carrion pile for the price of a few birds.

ON MAGIC ITEMS

I typically don't take any magic items with the Undead army except an occasional sword to put me at exactly 2000 points. Any other magic item is going to drop your breakpoint to 12. With such a large force, a single Orb of Majesty is not going to make much of a difference. It's not like you are charging into battle

with your uber-knights. If you fail to make the roll, just Doom and Despair the appropriate units and try again next turn. The Scroll of Dispelling is nice, but there are so few spells that can really do much damage against the hordes it is not worth lowering your breakpoint.

As a side note, sometimes you know in advance the scenario or opponent that you are going to be playing. If you end up in a situation where you need a really fast devastating punch right off the bat, team up two units of Carrion with a Liche Priest on Zombie Dragon. This can be awe-inspiring. I don't recommend it on a regular basis, but it can be effective if used in the right situations.

WRAP-UP

So, there you have it. Seven brigades of Undead. A breakpoint of 13. Missile fire doesn't really hurt you except artillery which can be handled by the birds. Monsters are no big deal because you can't be terrorized. Knights can only chew through one brigade a turn, and then a clever Undead general will have a counter-charge in the wings. You can disrupt charging knights with Doom and Despair or volleys of Skull Chukkas. Run through their infantry with your chariots. Harass them. Swarm them. Be mindlessly aggressive.



UNDEAD ARMY (IDEAL)

Character	Type	Atks	Hits	Save	Cmd	Size	Pts	
Tomb King	Gen	2	0	0	9	1	130	1
Liche Priest	Wiz	1	0	0	8	1	90	2
Liche Priest	Wiz	1	0	0	8	1	90	2
Liche Priest	Wiz	1	0	0	8	1	90	2
Liche Priest	Wiz	1	0	0	8	1	90	2
Unit	Type	Atks	Hits	Save	Cmd	Size	Pts	
Skeleton Bowmen	Inf	2/1	3	0	0	3	35	
Skeleton Bowmen	Inf	2/1	3	0	0	3	35	
Skeleton Bowmen	Inf	2/1	3	0	0	3	35	
Skeleton Bowmen	Inf	2/1	3	0	0	3	35	
Skeleton Bowmen	Inf	2/1	3	0	0	3	35	
Skeleton Bowmen	Inf	2/1	3	0	0	3	35	
Skeletons	Inf	2	3	6	0	3	30	
Skeletons	Inf	2	3	6	0	3	30	
Skeletons	Inf	2	3	6	0	3	30	
Skeletons	Inf	2	3	6	0	3	30	
Skeletons	Inf	2	3	6	0	3	30	
Skeletons	Inf	2	3	6	0	3	30	
Skeletons	Inf	2	3	6	0	3	30	
Skeleton Cavalry	Cav	2	3	5	0	3	70	Sword of Might
Skeleton Cavalry	Cav	2	3	5	0	3	60	
Skeleton Chariots	Cht	3/1	3	5	0	3	110	
Skeleton Chariots	Cht	3/1	3	5	0	3	110	
Skeleton Chariots	Cht	3/1	3	5	0	3	110	
Skeleton Chariots	Cht	3/1	3	5	0	3	110	
Skeleton Chariots	Cht	3/1	3	5	0	3	110	
Skeleton Chariots	Cht	3/1	3	5	0	3	110	
Carrions	Mon	2	3	6	0	3	65	3
Carrions	Mon	2	3	6	0	3	65	3
Skull Chukka	Art	1/3	3	0	0	1	85	4
Skull Chukka	Art	1/3	3	0	0	1	85	4

Breakpoint of 13

2000

1 Can increase combat factor of 1 unit within 20 cm by 1 once in the game.

2 Raise Dead, 5+, 30cm.

3 stands are raised into an existing combat. The raised dead do not count as charging.

Touch of death, 4+, in contact.

3 attacks against one enemy unit in contact that carry over into the combat.

Doom and Despair 4+, 60cm.

Lasts until the end of opponent's turn. The target unit can neither charge nor advance nor pursue. Even units that are otherwise obliged to charge, pursue or advance, will suffer from Doom and Despair.

Death Bolt, 5+, 30cm, LOS.

3 shooting attacks. Ignore armour.

3 Flyers.

4 Range 60 cm. Ignores armour. Cannot stand and shoot. Enemy confused on drive back rolls of 4,5 or 6 instead of 6 only.

Sword of Might +1 Attack to one single stand.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Christopher Matney is an avid Warmaster player having played almost 200 matches since first being introduced to the game in 2001. He runs Warmaster tournaments at Denver's two gaming conventions, GenghisCon and Tacticon; organises bi-weekly Warmaster club events at Valhallas Game Center and manages a Warmaster website at www.dragonsford.com/warmaster