

Painting Hints

Written by Brendan Day

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More than once at recent club meetings, I have received compliments on my painting abilities and the presentation of my armies; thank you once again for all those kind words. It's only once I talk to the person paying the compliment that the problems start, I mention that they can paint as well as me and have some really nice table top quality armies, only to hear many variations of "I can't paint" or "I will never be a good painter".

I used to think like this, looking through the glossy pages of many wargaming magazines at the miniatures and armies presented inside filled me with envy. Why did my crudely dabbed blobs of paint look so bad? It has only been through cases of trial and error and 15 years (has it already been so long?) of experience that has got me to the level of painting I am at today.

I might not be able to save you the 15 years, but I will save you some trail and error by passing on what I have learnt.

Use the correct paints. This might seem silly, but I feel it needs reinforcing. When I first started I had no idea that there was special miniature paints designed for just that purpose in mind. I used house paint, car paint, and gloss enamel scale model paint when I first started. To say the results were horrible is an understatement. I am not suggesting you use one particular brand, but whether it be Vallejo, Games Workshop's Citadel range, Privateer Press and their range of P3, Army Painter paints or one of the others I forgot to mention. But do use at least one of them. They have been formulated specifically for this purpose and will make your job so much easier and give you better results.

Now, before you cry poor over the price of paints or struggle to justify the price of them remember. The miniature you spent cold hard cash on is going to be ruined with cheap paints, meaning that the money you saved on paint you wasted on the miniature.

Think thin. The detail on new wargaming figures is phenomenal. If you use thick paints you will

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cover up all that lovely detail. It might seem like a good idea to use thick paints so you only need one coat. But once all the detail is covered up, the further painting effects like highlighting or shading or just simple dry-brushing and washing will all become difficult or impossible. Making the time you saved earlier with your thick coat cost you more time in the long run as you try to fix the clogged up detail. How thin should your paint be? It's a hard one to describe, but just thicker than full cream milk is a rule of thumb that has served me well so far.

Preparation. Preparation. Preparation. I have painted houses, cars, scale models and wargaming miniatures. And all across the board, the best results come from good preparation. Don't worry, I won't bore you with the preparation stages for houses or cars or scale models. But with wargaming figures, make sure firstly you clean off all mould lines and flashing, clear off all excess glue from assembly, fill all gaps with a sculpting putty (I have found that the new citadel Liquid Green Stuff is ideal for this) and base the figure. Then undercoat with a proper undercoat. I find spray works well, but extra attention will need to be paid to make sure you don't miss any spots on the figure while spraying.

A quick note here about assembly. If you have the option of multi pose figures think carefully about the poses. While it may look cool to have a whole army of kung-fu kicking, acrobatic, John Woo movie action masters this creates lots of problems. Ranking figures up in a regiment (if you have to) can be almost impossible. Storage and transport of the army becomes a chore with figures requiring special bulky storage solutions or you have breakages occur while transporting. And lastly, the wow factor of an awesome pose significantly diminishes when everyone is doing it. One or 2 in an army is cool, just not 50.

Colour Choice. Painting historical figures is less of a problem as you have references to go on. But when painting a fantasy or sci-fi army, choose colours that work well together and limit yourself to four. Any more than four and the figure looks too busy and distracting. Four, Black or grey usually for me, followed by a metallic for weapons and buckles and so on and then two for the uniform/armour. Skin and hair should also be in there, but I don't feel they need mention as they will always be there regardless. And as for colours that work well together, remember that your whole army will look like this. Lime green and purple might work well for the Joker, but do you really want to see a whole army painted that way? If in doubt, I try to use a warm colour and a cold colour. One light and one dark. For example, dark blue and a bright yellow or a dark red and a bright green. If still in doubt, check out sports team colour schemes. They are usually designed with these types of theories in mind and made to be pleasing to the eye.

Consistency. Keep the painting and colour scheme consistent throughout the whole project. Unless you have a special reason for painting one thing in your army a different scheme to the

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rest, keep them all the same. I have seen some simple paint jobs come off really well as the whole army is painted the same and it looks like a cohesive fighting whole. On the flip side, I have also seen some really well painted armies that don't look right as one unit is in desert cam while another is in artic cam and a 3rd in jungle cam.

If you want some variation in your figures to make them look more disorganized through moving the colours around on the figures, while one has green pants and a red shirt, another has red pants and a green shirt and yet another has black pants and a red shirt and a fourth has green pants and a black shirt. The figures all look like they are working together but at the same time are different enough to make them look like a disorganized rabble.

Such consistency also carries over to painting style. If one squad has highlighting, shading, and washing but another is just flat colours they won't look like the same army. Rather, they will look like two separate armies cobbled together into the one. Remember to apply this rule to basing as well.

Ask others. Never be afraid to ask others. Most wargamers are a friendly bunch of fellows happy to chat and share information. So if you're at a tournament or a club meeting and you see a painting technique or colour scheme that catches your eye, ask the owner about it (most will take this as a compliment). Also, look in books and online for painting articles. Not every piece of advice will be of use to you, but you won't know that until you read or try it.

Try new things. Last tip I promise. If you see a new technique or colour scheme that appeals to you try it. Don't commit a whole army to it, just try it on one figure and see how you go. You won't improve or learn new skills if you don't try new things. If it didn't work out as you hoped, ask someone who has done it successfully for advice, don't give up. Remember it took me 15 years to get to a standard I am happy with. I hope it won't take you that long, but it will take some time.