



Painting by numbers

– written by Nazgob

We've all seen them: those paint jobs that make us jealous. Those professional painters, the 'Eavy Metal standards, the Golden Demon or Crystal Brush winners. Even in our local clubs and gaming groups, there are always those guys that we know are just that little bit better. So often, our response to these works of art is, "I could never paint something as well as that." I say to you all: don't make that a prophecy, but a challenge. Let's change it to "I could never paint like that, but I'm damn well going to try."

This is not a process that happens overnight. No one gets to be good at anything without hard work; my own painting is the product of four years intensive hobbying and the best part of 15 years of dabbling. Even after all that time, I'm still happy to say that there's a lot to learn. The purpose of this How To isn't to teach something long and complicated, but to point out just how easy it can be to do the simple stuff well.

To that end, I'm going to be taking you through from start to finish on four models: a Black Orc, a Thrower, a Blitzzer and a Lineorc, all from the current Blood Bowl boxed game. The snag is that I've purposefully limited myself. No more than ten paints. Only one brush. One type of basing material. Painting quickly. No covering up mistakes.

With these rules in mind, the intention was haste without speed, precision without delays.

Starting to Paint

It's never quite as easy as simply starting. You need your materials, your brushes, your paints. Equally, you need to prepare the model, clean it and undercoat it. These are not complicated processes, but do require a bit of time.

First, cleaning the model. On many figures, you will notice a line that runs around the model. This is typically along the same axis as the base tab and follows the entire circumference of the model, starting with the outside of one foot and finishing with the outside of the other. This mould line is the result of the casting process and needs to be removed.

Using either a small file or a sharp craft knife, *carefully* trim it away. The best way is with a knife. Simply hold the blade perpendicular to the miniature and scrape at the line, gently. Small shavings will fall from the model until the mould lines disappear.

With that done, it's worth choosing some paint. A lot of people would disagree, but I still use the Games Workshop paints. If only because they're easy to find, I still recommend them to all newcomers to the hobby. Their system is incredibly easy with base colours, highlights and washes.¹

I really wouldn't recommend their paint brushes though. In my experience they don't hold a point and tend to have some serious issues with longevity. Instead, I would recommend the Army Painter brushes as they are of a much higher quality. The one I used for this project was a 'Hobby: Highlighting' brush.² I would strongly recommend that you buy a large brush for undercoating though.

Can I Start Now?

When starting any new team, you need to think about colours before you put paint to plastic. Ideally, pick a few that work well together. Too many and you'll over complicate things. Too few and the model will look bland (and won't be tournament legal). Equally, the colours you choose are important.

Typically, I aim for two or three contrasting colours and one spot colour. Imagine if you will, a team of humans with Caucasian flesh, beige armour with a light brown trim. All of these colours are different, but the model is going to look boring. Instead, try to combine red with green or blue with yellow. Colour theory is a big complicated thing, but the basics are just common sense (if you get stuck with this, remember that white and black contrast with pretty much everything).

Because so much of these models is skin, green will be the predominant colour. To counter that, I chose to give them red armour and black clothing. Simple, but effective. The first step then, was base coating. Thinning the paint with water ever so slightly, I just applied it carefully to the appropriate areas; nothing more complicated than that.



¹ For this project, I used Mournfang Brown (base), Mephiston Red (base), Carroburg Crimson (wash) Rakarth Flesh (base), Agrax Earthshade (wash), Stormvermin Fur (base), Nuln Oil (wash), Loren Forest (base) and Biel-Tan Green. The metal is Leadbelcher.

² Product code BR7002.

Are We Done Yet?

Now, at this stage you could stop. They're tournament legal (most tournaments just require 3 colours) and I've seen far worse pass muster. Still, we want to try just that little bit harder, right? We want to improve our painting. So, the next step is washing the models.

Washes are really simple. Shake the pot, load the brush (and I to mean load), then apply to the appropriate area. The wash will run into the recesses and collect there, making them darker, while the raised sections should remain largely unchanged. Instant shading.

Just in case you are confused, I used red wash on the red armour, black wash on the black cloth and green wash on the green skin (inks and washes are similar, but different. Basically, washes give a matt finish, which I tend to prefer, especially on skin). The one thing I would suggest is that you allow each one to dry completely before applying the next, otherwise they will bleed into each other.



You may have read blogs and posts recommending certain washes: Agrax Earthshade and Nuln Oil are common favourites. They are great, but if you can avoid it, you should never use one wash for the entire models. It does work, as if you use a black wash to cover the whole model, the recesses will be shaded. However, all of the colours will be muted. Use the correct colour of wash and you get brighter colours.

Surely, We're Done Now?

Well, you could stop here. But seeing as we've come this far, you could consider some highlighting. This sort of this can be massively complicated. You'll probably have heard of dry brushing and might have heard of wet blends or layering.

For now though, we're going to take a really simple approach. Take your brush. Take your base paint. Apply the one with the other to the raised sections of the model.



The idea here is that you're leaving the darker recesses dark and simply brightening the exposed sections of the model. It's really easy to choose what to highlight; if an area would catch the light, give it some paint.

I'm Getting Bored Now

Well, it's ok, because we're nearly there. The thing that makes a model stand out are the details. Some people talk about free hand, conversions or banners. I'm simply meaning spot colours.



A spot colour is one that contrasts sharply with the others used to provide a focal point. I like to use whites and metallic colours. As with the other colours, we go from base colour to wash to highlight. Just a little spot is enough and adds an awful lot to the model. I recommend covering any sculpted detail, especially teeth and horns. Eyes are a problem for another day.

Ok, Now We're Done

Except it's time for my rant. I have a pet peeve, and it's one that ruins models utterly and completely. It's the failure to attempt basing. It doesn't matter how good a model is, how beautifully converted or finely painted it might be if the base is just a shapeless lump of plastic.

What makes this worse is that this is actually a really easy thing to do. Pick one of your foundation colours and paint the edges of the base. This will remove any splatter of paint that invariably creep across the model (just look at the last picture).

Then pick your basing material³ and grab some PVA glue. From here on out, it's hardly rocket science.



Finally

We're there. There's always more you can do to a model, but for now, and for this tutorial, we're finished.

Hope you learned something.

³ I use Army painter Moss Green. Flock (as opposed to static grass) is very easy to use.