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## Skin Deep

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Our colors today will be: Walnut brown, Dragon Red, Tanned skin and/or Fair Skin and Linen White. You can also use a bit of Pure White to dot the eye for the “glint” effect.

The key to painting skin is to mimic the smoothness of reality and the effect of light. This requires either precise blending or layering, and often the addition of a glaze afterwards. There is not a right way to paint skin, but there are easier ways that lead to smoother transitions.

### 1. Prep:

- a. remove mold lines, sand and smooth the mini, fill in any pits or bubbles.
- b. assemble as much of the mini as possible, pinning joints as needed.
- c. wash the mini with dish soap and water.
- d. prime the mini then basecoat the face and skin. Make sure this layer is complete with no missing spaces. If the basecoat is uneven, subsequent layers may not work well.

2. Skin colors: While many will use traditional triads or recipes for skin, these are not required, and sometimes the most interesting results can be achieved using unusual color combinations.

- a. human skin colors- you can simply use reaper triads, or experiment with your own. Of note, I feel the triad system does not provide enough contrast. I tend to use a single shade from a triad and go very light or dark beyond it to add contrast with completely different colors.
- b. nontraditional skin colors- any color can be used on the skin. Just remember that the brain interprets varying shades of brown or tan as skin, so a very saturated color choice may seem off to the mind, whereas an olive green or soft purple makes more intuitive sense.
- c. monster skin- can be bright or dull depending on the effect desired. Again, a bright saturated green will seem "unreal" but there is nothing wrong with it as long as that is the plan!
- d. Remember, blood is life! Reds and browns will make the mini feel alive. Purples and greens will make it seem old or sickly, so even undead!
- e. The benefit of using a color labeled as skin is often in what sort of filler elements have been mixed in the paint. Most “skin” colors have an opacifier, which make basecoating and even layers easier. They are almost always desaturated colors, which will make them seem more “skinlike” to our eyes.



3. Placement of highlights and shadows: depends on many things, but also on some basic principles

- a. which areas of the skin are the most luminous by virtue of anatomy? Areas of thin skin are lighter, as are bends in limbs, curves, fingernails or any area facing a direct light source. Some areas will appear more pink, others paler or tanner depending on sun exposure.
- b. placement of light source or OSL
- c. age and gender. In the above pictures, see the difference between the old Rembrandt and the young Vermeer. See how the lines in the face are more or less pronounced.

4. The face:

The single most important part of the miniature. As a general rule, spend the most time painting the face, and make certain it is lighter with higher highlights to help draw the viewer's eye to it.

- a. The eye/direction of gaze- use the gaze to enhance the sculpture. Where would the mini naturally be looking? Or, what other elements in a diorama would draw the mini's gaze? Paint the eyes first, because they will often help you choose how to paint the overall expression.



This is one step-by-step way to paint the eye! Remember it is ok to turn the figure upside down or change position to help facilitate eye-painting. There is usually a difficult eye based on your dominant hand. Do both eyes step by step together. Note, it is harder to do a central gaze, much easier to do a sideways look. If you are having trouble with the eyes, have the gaze facing off to one side. This is a more forgiving method.



Here the cloud giantess has a sideways facing gaze. This was accomplished by painting the eye socket walnut brown, then placing a single dot of linen white for the whites of the eye. It may require some touchups, but is an easy way to tackle smaller eyes. Another good method found on the Reaper forum is found in the Bette Davis Eye article. The current best way to locate this is: <https://web.archive.org/web/20181025134926/http://www.reapermini.com/TheCraft>

- b. Lips- the top lip tends to be darker as it curves back away from overhead light. The bottom lip curves up and out, catching the light. Lips have very prominent blood vessels, so they tend to be similar to the skin color but with a bit more pink. They are often moistened by the tongue. Wet things have more abrupt contrast. Thus, painting the bottom lip with an off white spot will give it an almost NMM glint.



- c. placement of highlights and shadows- the lighter points on the face are usually the brow, nose, cheek underneath the eyes, chin and lower lip. The upper lip is more shadowed.

d. makeup- This can add realism to a mini, but can be problematic at our scale. Blush generally lives slightly under the highest point of the cheek, and eye shadow can continue past the outer corner of the eye.

e. male/female difference- lighter shadows versus darker shadows are a good general rule. There is greater contrast in a male/elderly/monster face than a female/child/elf face for example.

f. old/young- darken the shadows under the eyes, add crow's feet or add age spots.

g. expression- how does the face change with emotion? What lines appear? Study pictures to help use expression to enhance the mini.

h. eyebrows- to paint or not to paint? If you do not paint them, shade just under the brow the mimic the appearance. Use a brown for a light haired mini. Black would appear unnatural.

i. color temperature choice- using warm shadows versus cool ones. Red shadows provide warmth or youth for a figure. Green, purple or blue shadows can work well with undead or monsters. Remember that blood=pink=health.

j. vary the intensity of the highlights and shadows. Not every crease or area needs the darkest shadow and not every area should be shaded to pure white.

Examples:



5. Painting technique. Layering is one of the best ways to achieve a smooth blend. In a sense, it mimics reality, since the skin is composed of layers! But, I will often cheat and do my first highlights and shadows with wet blending because it is faster. Regardless, the best way to get a smooth skin is time and patience, as well as appropriately thinned paint! Paint should be thin enough to appear almost translucent when layered. The shadows and highlights should take up figuratively less space or be "narrower" to appear more realistic. Also, once I have completed most of my painting, I will often glaze

a different color back over the skin. This will slightly change the skin tone, but also it helps smooth transition between my layers. It is a sneaky way to make the blending look better. The color choice depends on the effect you want. I will often use a color found elsewhere in the mini, but not one already used on the skin. This will darken the highlights, which you can layer back in as desired. Remember that the more steps in the transition between one color and the next results in a smoother blend.

6. Potential additions to skin: tattoos, scars, age spots, injuries, facial hair. In order to make an addition realistic, remember where it is located in the skin. A tattoo is not inked into the top layer of skin, but deep into the dermis, or it would simply be shed over time. So any lines you lay down should be thinned paint, highlighted just as you would skin itself, and they appear more real if you glaze a layer of skin tone back over top.

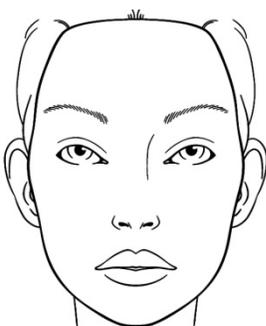
7. Larger miniatures: A benefit to working in a larger scale is that it is easier to put a great deal more detail into the face. Using a high-resolution photograph of an actual person is a useful tool to putting detail in the face. Also, color mixing can be helpful to achieve a more realistic skintone. There are zones in the face that tend to carry different highlights and shadows. Varying the color in these regions can lead to a more realistic look. The diagram below is from Gurney's Light and color book/blog.



yellow or  
white brow

red cheeks  
and nose

blue, green,  
or gray chin



On a drawing like the one above, you can practice where to place highlights and shadows. There is also a good link for placement of light effects using a light cage. It does require adobe flash to run. [http://www.photoworkshop.com/pages/light\\_cage.html](http://www.photoworkshop.com/pages/light_cage.html) The second picture demonstrates a makeup technique called contouring to enhance the structure of the face. See where the makeup artist has chosen to add highlights and shadows? You can web search images of this technique for help.