

# Notes on making the diorama "Princess Bellefleur to the Rescue!"

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This article provides information about the building, painting and miniatures used in the making of the diorama "Princess Bellefleur to the Rescue!" for the Round Table of Bretonnia's third anniversary painting competition.

## Background

The third anniversary painting competition was announced on September 26th, 2008, and I was determined to submit an entry this time, having been too late in entering something for the 2007 competition and much too scared to submit anything for the first one. However, as I like to set myself a challenge, I decided that I would submit something other than just a single miniature or a unit. I rather liked the idea of creating a diorama that would depict something dramatic and different from the usual "documented" event taken from Bretonnian history. But what should I portray?

After establishing what was allowed for submission within the rules of the competition, I looked at what miniatures I already had available among my collection and started to use my imagination as to what I could sensibly create in the 35 days originally set before the deadline. I rather liked the idea of creating a diorama that was as realistic as possible, showing the grim effects that are wrought upon the lives of the common folk by the foes of Bretonnia, but contrary to the usual Bretonnian canon. Typically, everything Bretonnian concerns knights, beautifully painted in bright, clean colours, and their ragged, peasant men at arms and bowmen fighting valiantly against the many adversaries of Bretonnia. The only females that appear on the battlefield are the alluringly feminine Damsels of the Lady, again, always beautifully painted, and only ever casting magic spells.

An idea for the diorama started to develop, based upon two particular miniatures that I already had and that would form the focus of the scene I would depict. I had a GW Mordheim boxed set of Beatsmen, among which was a minotaur dragging an unfortunate woman by the hair. I also had a second "Dynamic Tiriel" miniature from Hasslefree Miniatures, the first one of which I had already modelled as my Bretonnian character, Princess Bellefleur, the Duchess of Brionne. When I looked at the Beastman and Tiriel miniatures, I could see immediate possibilities, especially as the dynamic posture of Tiriel lent itself perfectly for her to be attacking the minotaur.

My next consideration was where I would locate the scene depicted by the diorama, and what would its circumstances be? Also, I didn't want the scene to just involve the two main characters. I also wanted there to be quite a bit of activity that would help to make the entire scene seem more believable and create some additional interest. Consequently, it was two medieval houses that I had bought from e-Bob Miniatures, with a view to using them as terrain pieces, plus a whole lot of "forest" terrain pieces I'd already made some time ago, that helped to fix the location of the scene; a small community in a forested area. And, being that one of the two main characters was a Beastman, who happened to be dragging a female victim away by the hair, gave me the idea of the circumstances; an opportunistic raid on the isolated community by Beastmen.

To introduce the additional action and secondary interest, as well as depicting the grim reality of such a confrontation, I decided to include a couple of casualties and two or three characters who would help complete the scenario. I happened to have some "casualty" miniatures from the Perry Miniatures "Agincourt to Orleans 1415-1429" range; a GW Beastmen boxed set; a selection of spearmen from Mirliton SG; and a whole range of GW 5th edition Bretonnian men at arms and bowmen, including Champions, Musicians and Standard Bearers, from which I could select the most appropriate miniatures to make up the "supporting cast".

I decided to have two casualties, one of which was another beastman — lending some credibility to the premise of the scenario representing an opportunistic raid by Beastmen. I selected one of the plastic gor miniatures from the GW boxed set and decided that it would have dispatched the other casualty represented by the prone Perry Miniatures figure. Again, by considering the pose of the gor miniature, I could see that it would fit perfectly across the body of the Bretonnian man at arms that it had just previously slain. I also decided that the spear the gor was carrying, which is

unbelievably long, could be cut away from its right hand and the section that carried the spear head could be planted into the back of the fallen Bretonnian, so that it would look as though the gor had speared the Bretonnian man at arms from slightly behind and to one side. In addition, because the GW plastic beastmen figures are made with separate heads, arms, shields, etc. I could see the potential for adapting this to make the scene more realistically grim and grisly. Consequently, I decided that the gor's head and part of his left arm would be made to appear as if they were severed from his body by a single mighty sword stroke that would have been wielded by none other than Princess Bellefleur herself!

OK, so far so good. I had started the virtual construction of my diorama, with four figures so far envisioned in place. I then considered by whom Princess Bellefleur would be accompanied. I sorted out a couple of the figures from my collection of spearmen, from Mirliton SG, that provided the correct poses that would add both action and further support to the scene. And finally, I decided to use one of the 5th edition Bretonnian Standard Bearers to carry Princess Bellefleur's colours, since she is also one of my Bretonnian Dukes - albeit a female one and hence the Duchess of Brionne, which would link all the men at arms together with a common heraldry and livery colour. At last, together with the addition of the terrain pieces, my diorama was fully conceived. Now I had to actually make it! And by this time, at least 20 of the 35 days had already elapsed&hellip;

## Materials

All the materials that I used in the making of the diorama are listed below:

- 30cm square of 18mm thick chipboard for the base.
- 4mm thick cork tile and hardboard off cuts.
- 2mm thick cardboard.
- Trees and hedges from Games Workshop (GW) and my spares box.
- Green talus (ground cover) and static grass from GW.
- Balsa wood for the gate.
- GW Citadel Goblin Green acrylic paint.
- Fine grade instant Polyfilla (spackle).
- PVA glue.
- Super-glue.

## Notes about building the diorama base

Once I'd decided upon the basic layout of the diorama, I cut and shaped pieces of cork tile and hardboard to form some raised sections of ground and then PVA-glued these onto the surface of the 30cm square of chipboard, and clamped the sections onto the board while the glue dried. I used hardboard for the area where the figures would be placed in the diorama. This was because I needed to cut recesses into it, in which to locate the bases of the miniatures, and consequently I wanted a material that would not fragment or tear when it was cut, in order to leave a good neat edge around the recesses. Before cutting the recesses, I positioned the miniatures where they would be located and drew around their bases with a pencil. I then used a very sharp wood chisel to cut the recesses into the hardboard, using the penciled outline as my cutting guide.

I super-glued sections of hedge onto 25mm-wide sections of the 2mm thick cardboard that had first been painted Goblin Green. I subsequently PVA-glued the bases of these hedge sections onto the chipboard, so that the hedges were butted up against and hid the rear edge of the raised sections formed by the shaped pieces of cork tile and hardboard.

The trees were already attached to pieces of 6mm-thick MDF that I had previously shaped, painted and textured to form sections of forest and woodland terrain. So, all I had to do with these was to PVA-glue them to the base board. I also had another smaller tree in my spares box, so I super-glued this to a 20mm square plastic base, which I then painted and textured and set into a recess cut into the rear edge of the cork, adjacent to the end of a hedge section.

Next, I placed the two medieval houses at the rear of the chipboard base and behind the hedge section, and then traced around the bases of the houses with a pencil to mark their locations on the base board. The houses were not glued to the diorama base as I wanted to be able to use them again as separate terrain pieces.

The next step was to fill gaps and seams and to provide some additional contouring using a generous application of the fine grade instant Polyfilla, which I then blended, smoothed and shaped with a dampened wide, soft brush.

Once the Polyfilla had set hard, I painted the diorama base with a 50/50 mix of PVA glue and Goblin Green acrylic paint to seal the surface and provide a uniform base colour on which to apply a covering of talus and random patches of static grass. When the first coat of PVA / Goblin Green sealer was dry, I then applied a second coat and, while this was still wet, I immediately applied a good thick covering of talus over the entire diorama base (except for the areas where the two medieval houses were to be located), pressing the talus down gently to ensure that it adhered consistently all over and to avoid any thin or 'bald' patches. When this covering had thoroughly dried, I tipped the loose surplus talus off the base, assisting the process with a few good sharp taps under the base, to shift any recalcitrant grains of the material.

Before applying the random patches of static grass, I super-glued the gate post and gate into place in another recess that had been cut into the back edge of the hardboard, between the two sections of hedge. The gate and its posts were made from small pieces of balsa wood that were subsequently super-glued to bases made from narrow strips of 2mm thick cardboard. The gate was then painted and its bases were painted and textured first with talus and then with a few tufts of static grass.

After the gate was fixed in place, I applied random patches of watered-down PVA glue to the diorama base and scattered a thick layer of static grass onto the glue while it was still wet. The loose surplus static grass was tipped off and helped on its way with a few good thumps with my hand under the base. I then blew gently on the remaining static grass adhering to the wet glue, to help the strands to stand up-right. The two medieval houses were temporarily placed back onto the base board, so that the static grass could be glued in place adjacent to the bases of the houses. The houses were then removed again so that the loose surplus static grass could be shaken off the board. The diorama base was then set aside to thoroughly dry, before the figures and medieval houses were placed back again ready for photographs to be taken of the completed diorama.

## Miniatures used

The miniatures and accessories I used in the diorama are listed below, together with their manufacturers:

- Princess Bellefleur: Dynamic Tiriell from Humans Fantasy range, Hasslefree Miniatures.
- Two Men at Arms with Polearms: Spearmen (first & second ranks) from Fantasy 25-28mm Humans range, Mirliton SG.

- Great Helm with Coronet: Helmet for King or Duke 1250-1300 from Historical 25-28mm Arms and Weapons (Helms) range, Mirliton SG.
- Polearms: Medieval Polearms from 25mm Arthurian range, Thunderbolt Mountain.
- Sword: Medieval Hand Weapons from 25mm Arthurian range, Thunderbolt Mountain.
- Man at Arms casualty: Infantry casualty from Agincourt to Orleans 1415-1429 range, Perry Miniatures.
- Standard Bearer: 5th edition Standard Bearer from Warhammer Bretonnian Bowmen range, Games Workshop.
- Beastman Minotaur Champion (with female victim): Mordheim Beastman Warband boxed set, Games Workshop.
- Beastman Gor casualty: Beastman boxed set from Warhammer Beasts of Chaos range, Games Workshop.
- Medieval houses: Medieval House and Medieval Small House from the Buildings range, eBob Miniatures.

### Notes about converting the miniatures

I carried out some minor conversions on all but the Beastman Minotaur, as described below, to adapt the miniatures as necessary for the particular roles that they would play in the diorama.

#### Princess Bellefleur

The conversion work on Princess Bellefleur consisted of two modifications. The first was to remove the head from the Dynamic Tiriell figure. I did this by first clipping most of the head away with a pair of cutters and then filing the 'stump' flat with a needle file, so that the Great Helm would sit at a very slight angle on the miniature's shoulders. Next, I drilled a small hole into the top of the miniature's body and a corresponding hole into the base of the Great Helm, then pinned and super-glued the helm to the body.

The second modification was to add a 'spaulder' to the miniature's right shoulder, to match the one on the left shoulder. This was necessary because the miniature is made in two pieces, the main figure itself and a separate piece consisting of the right arm, hands and sword. I assume that, due to difficulties in the casting process or to make assembly easier, the right shoulder lacks its protective section of armour. I sculpted the spaulder onto the shoulder with a tiny amount of Green Stuff, which also conveniently filled a minute gap between the base of the helmet, the pony tail and the right shoulder.

#### Men at Arms

The two spearmen from Mirliton are supplied with separate spears, but these are quite thick and therefore look 'out of scale'. Consequently, I replaced the original spears with the polearms from Thunderbolt Mountain, and super-glued these into place.

#### Standard Bearer

The banner staff of the Bretonnian Standard Bearer was also very thick and looked more like the trunk of a small tree, so I removed it with cutters, drilled a small hole through the section left clasped in the figure's hand and inserted a

length of thinner hardened brass wire through the hole, then super-glued it in place. For the banner itself, I used a piece of lead foil (removed from the neck of an empty wine bottle), and cut it to shape with a very sharp craft knife. I wrapped the tabs of the lead foil banner around the wire staff and fixed them in place with tiny drops of super-glue. I cut the fleur de lys top from the old banner staff and after drilling a small hole into the base of the fleur de lys, I super-glued it onto the top end of the wire staff. For the techniques, tools and materials used to convert the standard bearer's banner staff, refer to the article [Techniques for Modifying Bretonnian Miniatures](#)

### Man at Arms casualty

The man at arms casualty only required a small modification to produce the result I wanted. After cutting the spear away from the plastic Beastman's hand, I took the section that carried the spearhead and, using a very sharp craft knife, I cut across the tip of the spear blade to produce a flat edge that could be super-glued into one of the folds of the man at arms' gambeson. I chose to place the spear at an angle to the casualty's prone position, so that the spear thrust would appear to have been from slightly behind and to the casualty's right side. As an extra touch, I placed a sword near him on the ground to make it appear that he had dropped it at the moment he was speared in the back.

### Beastman casualty

Finally, the Beastman's gor required three minor modifications to achieve the desired result. The effect I wanted was for the gor to look as though it had had time to dispatch the man at arms with the spear, before Princess Bellefleur had then removed the gor's head and part of its left arm with one mighty stroke of her sword. I also wanted the gor's severed left arm to appear as though the Beastman was trying to raise the shield in a vain attempt to ward off the fatal sword blow.

The first modification was to take one of the separate heads that are provided in the Beastman boxed set, and apply some direct but momentary heat to the head so that the braided hair would appear to be hanging downwards when the head was lying on its side. Next I placed an old craft knife blade into a handle and then heated the blade up in a naked flame and immediately applied the side of the blade very briefly to the base of the neck (of the Beastman head), so that it would melt the plastic just enough to make the edge of the neck splay outwards and to make the surface slightly roughened. This action would make the base of the head look more like it had been severed from the gor's body.

The second modification was to take a small amount of Green Stuff and sculpt the 'stump' of the severed neck onto the gor's body. The recess molded into the plastic of the gor's shoulders formed the perfect location for the stump.

And for the third and final modification, I glued the left arm to the gor's body in a raised position, so that it would appear the gor had lifted the shield up to protect itself from the sword blow. Once the arm was firmly glued in place, I heated up the old craft knife blade again in a naked flame and then sliced through the bicep of the left arm, leaving a stump attached to the gor's body. The heat from the blade melted the plastic of both sections of the arm just enough to splay the edges and roughen the surfaces so, like the head, the effect produced would look like the result of a fearsome sword cut. All in all, these modifications looked very realistic and incredibly grisly.

## Notes about painting the miniatures and houses

I wanted the miniatures and two medieval houses to look as realistic as possible, and for the diorama to show the true reality of such a confrontation, i.e. to portray the grim and grisly nature of conflict, especially the damage caused by the hack and slash style of fighting with medieval type weapons.

### Beastman Minotaur and his victim

Consequently, I chose to paint the beastman minotaur in darker, dull colours, so that it would appear dark, threatening and bestial. Unfortunately, the down-side of doing this was to produce a lot less contrast in the colours than would normally be the case, so to counter-balance this effect, I painted the female victim's clothing with brighter colours. However, the colours of her clothing were chosen to reflect the fact that she was a peasant and therefore would be wearing clothes made from homespun materials that would be dyed with more natural shades of greens and browns. I painted her eyes to be really large to reflect that she would be both terrorized and undoubtedly in pain from being dragged by the hair.

### Men at Arms

I always take the time and trouble to paint the eyes of all my miniatures for two fundamental reasons: firstly, the eyes are the primary focus of our view of another person, especially their face, and this is because of the second reason; the person's eyes convey a great deal about their intention towards us and the emotions they are experiencing. Therefore, I paid particular attention to painting the eyes of the man at arms facing the beastman minotaur. His body posture is one of readiness to attack with the polearm weapon and, although his head is turned in the direction of Princess Bellefleur - awaiting the outcome of her attack upon the minotaur and whether or not she'll need his support, his eyes are peering warily and rather fearfully, from within his barbute-style helmet, at the minotaur. I wanted him to appear as though he was maybe thinking either "Is the minotaur going to attack me? Maybe I should move back." or "Blessed Lady save me!! I'm getting out of here!" The expressions of the other two men at arms are intended to convey observational watchfulness / assessment of the situation and determination.

The gambesons of the men at arms were painted with blue and white quartered livery to reflect the heraldic colours of their liege lord, the Duchess of Brionne. They were also given an heraldic charge of a red flower on the white first quarter of their livery to also show that they were Princess Bellefleur's men. As a final touch, I tried to make the white of their liveried gambesons look scruffy and dirty, because in reality they would hardly be in pristine condition if they were true fighting men.

### Man at Arms casualty

The fatal spear wound of the man at arms casualty was painted to look as though the blood had seeped and spread into the fabric of his gambeson and then pooled onto the ground directly beneath his body, as again it would have done in reality. To reproduce the blood stains, I first painted the area of his gambeson surrounding the spear head and the

pooled blood on the ground with Scab Red, followed by a smaller patch, inside the area of the Scab Red, with Red Gore. Next, I painted an even smaller patch, inside that of the Red Gore, with Blood Red. And finally, I gave the Blood Red patch a coat first of Red Ink and then of gloss varnish, so that the blood would still appear fresh and therefore wet.

### Beastman casualty

The severed parts and wounds of the beastman gor were painted in the same fashion as the man at arms casualty. The only extra touches that I added to the grisly results of the gor's dismemberment was to extend the size of the pools of blood on the ground, to show that main arteries would have been severed and therefore would have sprayed out their contents. I also painted the open eye of the severed head first with Bleached Bone and then put the tiniest dot of Chaos Black just under the upper eyelid, to make it appear as though the gor's eyes had rolled back into their sockets at the moment of decapitation.

I painted the gor's shield and severed arm separately, to make sure that all the detailing was properly painted before assembling the two items together. I also completely painted the gor's severed head before attaching it to its own base. The intention behind going to these additional lengths in detailing the severed body parts was so that I could subsequently use these items for other dioramas, or just to add some extra realism to battlefield terrain or when detailing the bases of miniatures.

### Medieval houses

The two medieval houses were painted to reflect what they would really have looked like rather than to appear like clones of picturesque black and white painted thatched cottages that one tends to see reproduced on the covers of chocolate boxes or in pictures of Ye Olde Worlde England calendars&hellip; Therefore, I painted them with rather dull natural colours.

One of the primary things I've noticed about terrain pieces that contain buildings or ruins is that the masonry or stonework is always invariably painted various shades of grey. Now, unless one lives in an area where the predominant geological nature of the local rocks is granite, like the county of Cornwall or Aberdeen in Scotland, masonry is very rarely just shades of pure grey!! Rocks, stonework and masonry are generally and more typically various shades of greyish-brown, beige, brownish-orange, greenish-grey-brown, etc. In parts of the North-east of England, the stonework is more a deep reddish-brown or even brownish-pink in colour. However, if you're fortunate enough to live in the Cotswolds district of England, that is Gloucestershire and western Oxfordshire, the stonework of the buildings there is a beautiful light golden colour, NOT grey. I do realise that painting the stonework of terrain buildings and ruins grey is the easiest and pragmatic approach, but it's not mine, because it's not what I see when I look at buildings, stonework or even just plain rocks.

Likewise when I look at the bark of tree-trunks and branches and unpainted wooden objects like old gates, fences and barns, they are rarely if ever brown! Neither are the thatched roofs of cottages brown or yellow&hellip; Unfortunately, all these items are more likely to be variations of grey! Tree-trunks and branches are more likely to be silvery greenish-grey or greyish-beige, whereas unpainted, weathered wood is likely to appear silvery grey with just a hint of brown. Thatched roofs appear very similar to weathered wood, that is unless they're very old, in which case the thatch is usually a very, very dark grey-brown, with hints of green, where moss, lichens and even grass is starting to grow.

Therefore, painting the medieval houses presented somewhat of a significant challenge for me. On the one hand I wanted them to appear as realistic as possible, but on the other I didn't want them to appear almost a uniform greyish-brown-beige hue, due to the large proportions of stonework, timber-framing and thatch represented in their construction. The solution was to take advantage of the way the model houses had been detailed; the thatch roofing was modeled as old and dilapidated; the timber-framing was weathered and roughened; and the daub and wattle in-fill was cracked and weathered and, in some places, crumbling.

I started by painting both houses with a base coat of Chaos Black and followed this with Scorched Brown in the joins of the masonry and over most of the thatch. The next stage was to dry-brush Fortress Grey onto the stonework and thatch, followed by dry-brushing a 50/50 mix of Fortress Grey and Khemri Brown onto the thatch only. I then lightly dry-brushed a mix of Khemri Brown and Dheneb Stone onto the thatch and a mix of Fortress Grey and Calthan Brown onto the stonework. Dheneb Stone was next very lightly dry-brushed in patches onto the thatch, while the stonework was given a very light dry-brushing of a mix of Khemri Brown and Dheneb Stone, mainly just to create some highlights along the edges and on high spots. The wooden shingles on the larger house were also given a light dry-brushing of the Fortress Grey and Calthan Brown mix, followed by another of Khemri Brown and Dheneb Stone. The final touch for the thatch was to firstly dry-brush the merest hint of Dark Angels Green followed by Catachan Green and finally Goblin Green in patches, principally onto the most dilapidated sections of the roofs.

The chimney stack on the larger of the two houses was dry-brushed with successive layers of the mixed colours. However, I made sure that the top and upper portions of the chimney were left mostly Chaos Black blending into Scorched Brown and then into the hues of the stonework, so as to look smoke blackened. Likewise, I dry-brushed Chaos Black and then a mix of Chaos Black and Scorched Brown onto the edges of the thatch immediately surrounding the smoke-hole on the roof ridge of the smaller house.

To obtain a darkened but silvery greyish-brown weathered appearance to the timber-framing, window- and door-frames and doors, I first painted these with a very thin coat of Codex Grey mixed with Dheneb Stone. Once this was thoroughly dry, I then brushed on a watered down 25/75 mix of Black and Brown Inks, to which a tiny drop of Acrylic Flow Improver had been added to the water first, so that the inks would flow easily and freely over and into the texture of the wood grain.

The daub of daub and wattle was made from a mix of mud / clay, straw and animal dung, so I decided that I would paint the daub in-filled panels, between the timber-framing, with colours that would closely approximate the colouration of this material. I therefore used a mix of Snakebite Leather and a tiny drop of Flesh Wash Ink on the larger of the two houses. And for the smaller house, I used a mix of Snakebite Leather with a drop of Chestnut Wash Ink to produce a richer, darker variation.

The final touches that I added to the two houses were the green algal discolouration around the foundations, lower stonework and upward facing stonework, and the light of a candle in the upper window of the smaller house and one of the two windows in the gable end of the larger house. Again to add some realism to the algal discolouration, I firstly dry-brushed on Dark Angels Green, followed by Catachan Green, but only in those areas which were located below the overhanging edges of the thatched roof where the rain would have run off and then subsequently dripped down to splash back up onto the lower sections of the walls. The candle light was literally lightly touched in firstly using a thin wash of Blazing Orange over the Chaos Black, building it up slightly heavier towards the central portion of the arc of light. This was followed with a thin wash of Golden Yellow, starting from the more central area of the Blazing Orange, and building up to a heavier concentration in the centre to produce the effect of the candle's glow.

## Concluding notes

The entire project took me between 90 to 100 hours in total to plan, construct, paint and detail the diorama and all the miniatures and both houses. It was somewhat a blessing, as it turned out, when the moderator for the Painting Competition, Guillaume le Courageux, extended the deadline by another 14 days, in order to allow more time for more entries to be submitted. I had definitely underestimated the amount of time I needed to complete the diorama and, consequently, I managed to submit photos of my completed entry two days before the extended deadline date. Phew!



I thoroughly enjoyed making the diorama and meeting the challenges it presented. To me the final results were well worth the time and effort. I hope you think so too.

I hope that you found the information and techniques described in this article both useful and informative.

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