

Making Terrain for Miniature Models

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Zachary Friedman-Hill

Introduction

This manual provides a guide to designing, constructing, and painting the terrain for miniature kit models. Because this work is inherently creative, readers are encouraged to adapt the instructions as needed to achieve their desired results.

A. Building the Initial Centerpiece Model

1. Gather all necessary materials and tools to build the base model. This will include the kit card(s), super glue, paints, and flush cutters. The kit shown in this manual is the 1968 Aurora Land Of The Giants Spaceship Kit.



Figure 1. Kit card and necessary tools to assemble the base model.

2. Follow the instructions from the kit's manual to build the model.
3. Once built, we need to prepare it for painting and later detailing by giving it a black base coat. Using either black acrylics or spray paint, cover the model in an even coat so that the base colors are no longer visible. Depending on the plastic material, it may be necessary to give it a light sanding before hand.



Figure 2. The centerpiece model was assembled and given a black initial coating.

B. Initial Terrain Building



Figure 3. Left: final terrain piece, Middle: Initial layered cardboard, Right: Middle of the smoothing process.

1. Once you have built your centerpiece, take some time to consider what you want the terrain surrounding your model to look like.
2. With a general idea in mind, layer slices of cardboard to build up your rock formations. Each layer should leave only a few millimeters between its edges and the layer below's edges to create a more uniform slope. Figure 3 shows the general shape you should be going for.
3. Glue the layers together using super glue or PVA glue, and allow them to dry before proceeding to the next step.
4. Cover the layers of cardboard with a mixture of 80% wood filler and 20% PVA glue. You want to fill in all holes left by the corrugation in the cardboard and smooth out any abrupt height changes left behind by your layer lines. Your terrain should be fully covered, as seen in Figure 4.
5. Allow the mixture to air dry. This can take anywhere from 24 hours to 72 hours, depending on the thickness of the applied layers and the ambient temperature. To help speed up the process, you may leave it in the sun by a windowsill, but DO NOT heat it; this will cause flaking and compromise the stability of the filler.



Figure 4. Final rocks with filler applied and dried, ready for painting.

6. Finally, once dry, apply a black base coat to the whole terrain as you did in A.3. Be sure to fill in every crack since the white filler will be very noticeable later after painting if not covered.

C. Painting Your Terrain

- Once your black paint coating dries, it is time to apply a xenethol highlight to the terrain. Using a coarse-bristle brush or mop brush (I find a blush makeup brush also works very well for this), and ensuring the brush is dry, apply a small amount of white acrylic paint to the tip and paint onto a scrap piece of cardboard to remove the majority of the paint. Then, using light strokes going only over the top of the model, drybrush on the white so that the raised edges of the rock are highlighted. This process will create the illusion of natural lighting after further painting. Your model should look like Figure 5 so that most of the terrain is still black except for the raised features.

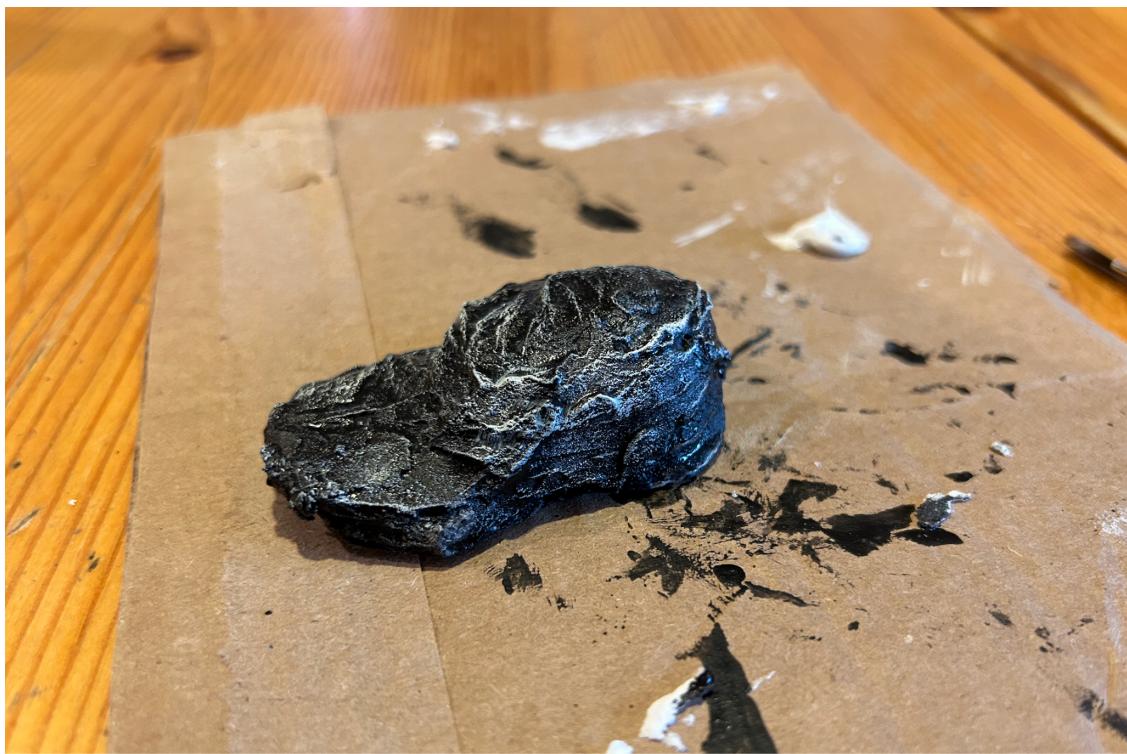


Figure 5. Terrain piece with black coating and xenethol highlight applied.

- The next step is to add the earth coloring to the rock. This is a very freehand process, but the general idea is to build up the colors on top of your highlighting to produce the look of weathering and natural shadows within your rock.
- Starting with a dark earth brown, apply a light base coat over the whole terrain. It is ok to be messy with this step since nature is not clean, and we will be layering multiple colors over this.
- Using a russet or burnt sienna paint, watered down using a few drops of IPA for acrylics or mineral spirits for oil-based paints, dab it in areas where it would make sense for dirt to be built up over time. This will be in small dips and crevices in your terrain or most areas near the very base of your cliffs.

5. Combine black oil paint with mineral spirits in a 60-40 ratio to create a dark wash. Apply this from the top of the terrain so that it drips down and runs along the natural weather patterns of the rock. Dab up the wash after allowing it to soak for 2 minutes so that the color is applied but is not overwhelming.
6. Finally, using a light grey paint, do the same process as in step 1 to create a dry brush effect on the rocks and give the appearance of natural weathering, removing the dirt and exposing the rock beneath.
7. If you desire, fake foliage can be applied to the cliffs as well in the areas where you applied your russet paints.
8. The final effect should look similar to that of Figure 6. If it doesn't quite look right, try adding more layers of varying browns, reds, and light greys to achieve the natural rock look that you desire.

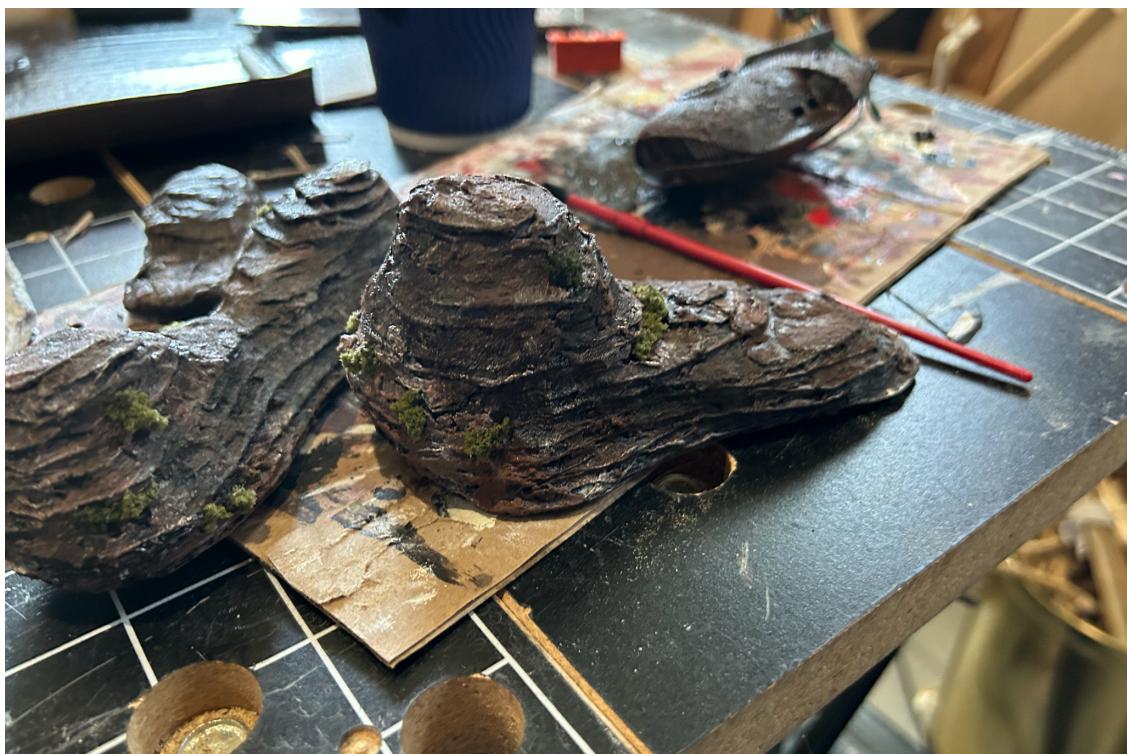


Figure 6. Finished rock terrain painting with foliage applied to it.

9. Additionally, if you want a more muddy and dirty look to your terrain, textured paint can be used. A mixture of 80% paint to 20% sand or shredded paper creates a natural-looking mud or rust texture once dry. Allow the mixture to air dry, as drying with a hair dryer can cause the textured paint to peel, and more of the texture is lost. Figure 7 shows the textured paint in use.



Figure 7. Textured paint is used to create a muddy effect on the base of a model.

D. Conclusion

Following along, you should have produced the terrain that you desired. The shape, coloring, and textures you use can vastly change the look and feel of your scene to tell the story that you desire. Figure 8 shows the final product of the instructions in this manual and just one possibility for what you could do.



Figure 8. Finished terrain in the final model.