Bases and scenic effects Part 3

Making the name plate and finishing

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A neat name, or title, plate will finish off the presentation of a model. On the other hand a poorly made title can spoil the appearance of an otherwise attractive display. Time spent on this final part of model is well worthwhile and will give the viewer instant information about the figure or group.

Part 3 Name, title plates and finishing

3.1   Using a Computer for title plates

Creating simple name plates via a computer is very easy all you need to do is type your text and print onto good quality paper or thin card, try not to use white paper use very light coloured paper instead such as fawn, blue or grey. When choosing which font to use select ones that are easy to read and print in a dark contrasting colour. Fill the page with copies of your nameplate before printing, as it is likely that you will make mistakes when cutting out. Use a sharp craft knife rather than scissors. Make sure that your nameplate is the correct size for your base again there are no rules just experiment with different sizes and 'if it looks, right use it'. Try to stick to fonts that are easy to read some script type fonts look good but again look for the ones that are clear and not too fussy. To see examples of computer generated titles go to 3.8 below.

Times New Roman. - Arial - HARRINGTON - *Lucider Calligraphy*
Monotype Corsiva - *Informal Roman* – Blackadder

3.2   Dry transfer lettering:

There are materials and aids, which can be used to make neat title plates without recourse to computers, special skills or great expense. The wide range of dry transfer lettering provides suitable typefaces in many styles. Many of my older figures have titles made with this medium from the Letraset range such as Optima, Helvetica

Medium, Universe Medium or Times New Roman. Most dry transfer lettering sheets are available in black or white. Some are also available in colours. Rub down letters are relatively easy to use but you will have to be careful to keep them in a straight line.

3.2   Engraved nameplates.

A professionally engraved name plate is of course a bit of an extravagance but there is no doubt that they look beautiful and will finish off a model in style. Taking into consideration the time, patience and skill that has been spent creating the model the extra cost of this little extravagance is negligible engraved name plates can be bought from any qualified engraver who will embellish a piece of polished brass with the font of your choice. Another way to acquire this type of nameplate is from your local store that makes 'keys' and various tags etc. Here you will find a wide variety of plastic and metal materials, which can be engraved, to your requirements at a reasonable price.

3.4   White on Black:

Using white letters on a black background is very attractive and the contrast stands out drawing the viewer's eye to the nameplate. To do this use white rub down letters on black card or thin plastic card painted matt black.

3.5   Coloured Backgrounds:

Caution is needed here or the nameplate will look cheap and toy like. Try to aim for a light colour on a dark background of use a monochromatic set up with one very dark and one light of the same colour. Try to avoid very bright colours subtle shades are the best for the majority of these type of name plates, however Gold on a dark green background looks good along with silver on dark blue.

3.6   Old weathered parchment types:

These are made by printing onto light cream coloured paper bought from craft shops. The torn edge is cut to shape with scissors and the edges and star shaped nail holes painted with black acrylic. The nails are made from cut down pins painted black and pushed into pre-drilled holes, paint a tiny spot of white offset onto the pin head to simulate reflected light. Curl the edges of the paper to give a 'nailed on' effect. Fig 1

3.7   Fixing to the base:

Having made the nameplate for your model you must now determine how it should be attached to the base. If the sides of the base are upright as in a plinth type base the inscription may be difficult to read at anything other than eye level so make sure that the lettering is clear. Bases with molded edges have an advantage as the plate will have a naturally upward slant. Shave a little flat area off the curved molding so that the plate will sit more securely against the wood. In some cases the nameplate can be fixed 'offset' to one side, which is a little different and will give added interest. It is not necessary to fix a title perfectly flat, sometimes allowing the title to stand forward a little looks good as in fig 2. Another factor to remember is not to use to much glue to fix your name plate to the base, a thin coat is all that is needed, glue that spreads

out around the edges will very likely ruin all your hard work, on the other hand you don't want corners sticking up so make sure the coating is even all over. One common problem is contamination from your fingers so make sure that your hands are clean and dry prior to fixing. Getting the nameplate fixed into the correct position can sometimes be frustrating and your will rarely get a second chance to get it right. One method is to use masking tape to mark exactly where the edges of title should go then once the glue is dry it can be removed. This technique is especially effective on plinth type bases.

3.8 Computer generated name and title plates:

All of these examples were designed with Microsoft Word software using the drawing tools. Reduced to the correct scale these could be printed onto white inkjet photo paper and carefully cut out ready to use.

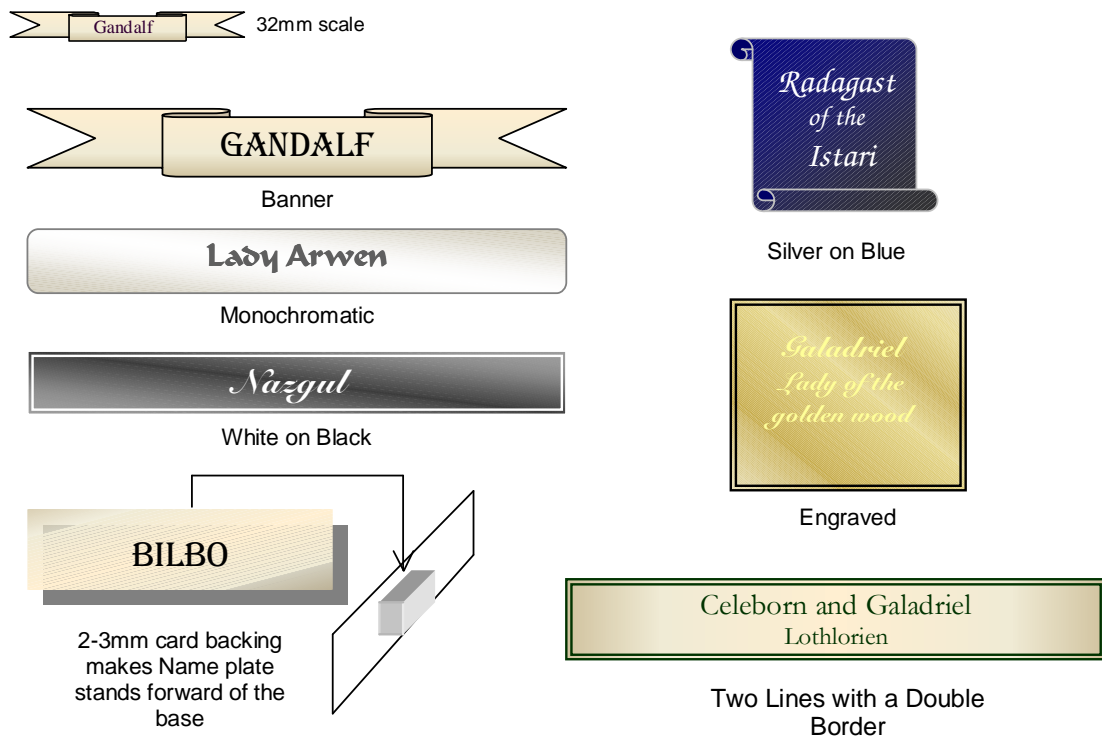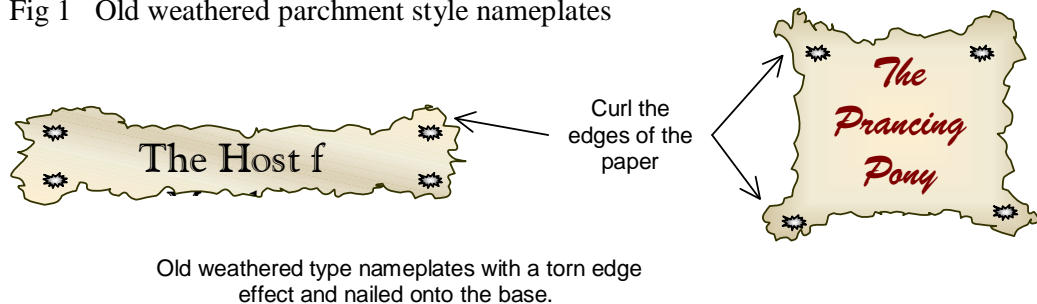*The sizes below are considerably exaggerated for clarity.*

Gandalf   32mm scale

GANDALF

Banner

Lady Arwen

Monochromatic

Nazgul

White on Black

BILBO

2-3mm card backing makes Name plate stands forward of the base

Radagast
of the
Istari

Silver on Blue

Galadriel
Lady of the
golden wood

Engraved

Celeborn and Galadriel
Lothlorien

Two Lines with a Double Border

Fig 1   Old weathered parchment style nameplates

The Host f

Curl the edges of the paper

The Prancing Pony

Old weathered type nameplates with a torn edge effect and nailed onto the base.

3.9 A plinth type base ready for a figure of Aragorn.

The text on the nameplate gives the viewer a little additional information, which adds interest to the completed model. Fig 2. This one uses HARRINGTON SCRIPT and reads:

ARAGORN
OF THE LINE OF ISILDUR.
HEIR TO THE THRONE OF
GONDOR.

Fig 2

Hard landscaping extended down the plinth corner

Small stones

2 layers of static grass

Plinth type display base

An unusual nameplate protruding forward gives added interest

Creeping ivy extended onto the display base

3.10 Making the Aragorn name plate:

This nameplate is made of cream A4 writing paper. The text was typed into a computer word processor using HARRINGTON font. Several different sizes were printed out and test fitted. Once the size had been established the edges were cut to shape with small scissors and painted with acrylic to resemble burnt edges. Next the paper was placed text side down onto a piece of foam that is used to package Mithril figures and gently rubbed with the index finger forming a subtle convex shape. A piece of thick card 1cm sq was glued to the back then in turn glued to the side of the plinth making the name plate stand out by 2-3mm. Fig 3

Fig 3
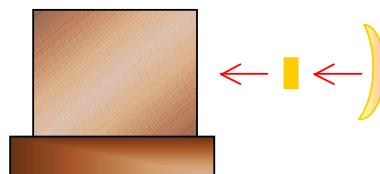
3.11   Examples

Fig 4. Examples

A figure of Radagast set on a round plinth type base with groundwork extending onto the plinth itself and surrounding the nameplate, giving added interest to the viewer. The flowers are the seed heads from a species of natural moss. The figure is painted with Plaka acrylic colours.

On this model of Tom Bombadil and Fatty Lumpkin the title was written on the signpost scroll using a mapping pen a fine nib. The figure is painted with Plaka acrylic and the pony with oils.

The edges to this foundation base have been roughened with a cocktail stick, painted and dry brushed.

These old weathered title plates are made from paper with the burnt edges painted with black acrylic. Note the curled edges and ends also the nails made from pins. The text uses dry transfer letters and scratched to indicate age and ware.

Conclusion:

As I stated in the text I find it strange that modelers who cheerfully spend hours painting a figure often seem reluctant to spend more than a few minutes on the base and groundwork that support it. Yet neither of these two elements requires a great deal of time or skill — all you need is an awareness of their importance and a few basic techniques, which I have outlined here. After many years of figure painting I find the first important element in a project is the base itself, since it forms the "frame" around your figure. Just as you would not put an Old Italian masterpiece in a cheap frame, neither should you put your own masterpiece on a bit of scrap plastic with some sand and flock powder. Good-quality wood bases are not expensive, and the extra cost is well worth the money.

This is the last part of my tutorials featuring methods and Techniques for making bases and scenic effects for now, the final part will be published at a later date. The next Tutorial will focus on my experiences when painting figures with Artists Oil Paints.

As usual with these tutorials, if you have any comments or questions related to the contents you can e-mail at mike@bunn955.wanadoo.co.uk and I will do my best to answer your queries and provide further guidance. In the mean time I hope you will find something useful here that will enhance your knowledge, skills and techniques and give you encouragement to try some of my ideas.

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