



PROJECT DIARY

DARK REAPER

LIST OF PAINTS

The Army Painter - Oak Brown

The Army Painter - Dragon Red

The Army Painter - Leather Brown

2 Thin Coats - Ancient Gold

2 Thin Coats - Doom Metal

2 Thin Coats - Spartan Bronze

2 Thin Coats - Doom Death Black

2 Thin Coats - Pale Skin

2 thin Coats - Plate Armor

Vallejo - Natural Steel

Vallejo - Sun Yellow

Vallejo - Orange Fire

Pro Acryl - Bolt Titanium White

Soilworks - Dark Earth

Soilworks - Ash

GSW - Black Soot

GSW - Burnt Earth

Liquitex - Fluo Orange

Liquitex - Fluo Yellow

Liquitex - Vivid Red Orang.

Liquitex - Tit. White

AK - Ultra Matte Varnish

As is often the case with my projects, this one was a bit messy and experimental, so instead of a step-by-step guide, I'll try to describe the creative process and the underlying ideas behind it. I hope you can take something away from this for your own journey — and now, let's begin!



The Conversion

I kitbashed this model a while ago, and while I really liked the initial idea, inspiration struck and I altered it a bit to lean more into a grim reaper/executioner-like aesthetic.

Weapon: Cut-off Inner Circle Companions sword.

Halo: Sadly don't know anymore, where I've taken it from. Might be cut off from a **Bladeguard Vet. backpack halo**.

Body-Basemodel: Bladeguard Ancient from the Dawn of War Boardgame.

Head: The initial head was taken from the **Judiciar** from the Dawn of War boardgame, hence the red color.

Pauldron: Sternguard Vets.

Purity Seal/Tilt Shield: Various Space Marine Kits (Don't know exactly)

"Lantern": Black templar Sword Brethren

Base: The original base got altered in the end but this one is just kork, diorama fx paste and come gravel.



Big Purity Seals: The big purity seals on the minis back, where taken from the back of the old AOS Lord Relictor.



FINAL KITBASH

Sculpting the Hood

In the end, I changed the head to the Primaris Chaplain one, but since I really don't like the shape of most of today's hood sculpts from GW, I try to improve them for the more relevant characters.

For this, I normally use Green Stuff, since you can spread it out thinly without breaking it, but I ran out of it, so I used Milliput instead. I cut off a thin and somewhat rectangle-like piece, then also cut away the front section of the original hood and put the putty on top.

Using a wet toothpick, I gave the putty a slightly curvy feel on the top section, pressed in both sides of the middle section a little bit, and moved the putty in the lowest section a tiny bit outward.

Therefore, I tried to give the hood an overall rounder and less angular appearance, while also covering a bit more of the helmet and thereby making the little reaper appear just a tiny bit more sinister.



Additional Parts

Axe: Horus Heresy Meele Weapons Upgrade

Chain: craftshop mini-chain

Candles: Grees Stuff World Resin Candles

Skulls: GW skulls pack

Base: slate pieces + kork + gravle



DESIGN PHILOSOPHY

Overall

After changing the whole appearance of the model from an alternate Justiciar to a Grim Reaper-like Chaplain with a hood, I really wanted to lean into the Grim Reaper aesthetic and basically make the whole model in dark, almost blackish colours. Assuming that a monochrome mini in only very dark colours could potentially look a bit lame, I also added candles to the backpack and the base, while planning to paint the relic in his hand as a lantern to add some variation in brightness and warmth to the mini.

Head

In my opinion the head is one of the most crucial parts when it comes to defining the overall vibe of a miniature. We naturally tend to look at the face first, and what we see there shapes our first impression

Dynamic

I really like miniatures in more subtle, stoic poses, as to me they convey a certain menacing calmness. To still create contrast and a sense of motion however, I like to have elements such as purity seals fluttering in the same direction, suggesting a strong wind sweeping across the scene. Meanwhile, the character himself remains still, calmly watching for his next victim.

With that in mind, I really like to play around with the head positioning a bit, because even small changes can make difference here. For cool and menacing characters from the grimdark future, I often like to tilt the head slightly downward, making the character's gaze feel more dominant and intimidating - like a battlehardened veteran looking down on his enemies.

I am also a big fan of hoods. They are simply a great accessory when aiming for a more mysterious and menacing feel, especially when they cover a bit more of the face - Not necessarily practical, but definitely much cooler.



PAINTING THE BASIS

1. I started off by applying **Oak Brown** with a cut-off kitchen sponge all over the mini to establish a rough looking baselayer.



Fabric: For the fabric parts, I then used a diluted mix of **Oak Brown** with a bit of **Black** to cover the remaining surfaces.

2. I then quickly slapped on some fitting base colors to all the other parts.



Armor: I touched the **black** armor parts with a selected brushstroke or dab of **Doom Metal** here and there, trying to let some of the brown remain while also leaving a bit of the black base coat. I really didn't think about where to place it, but just added some variation.

Metallics: For the remaining metallics, I just placed **Doom Metal**, **Plate Armor**, and **Ancient Gold** on my palette and then mixed them in varying degrees. I didn't have a clear formula in mind, but just went with what felt right.

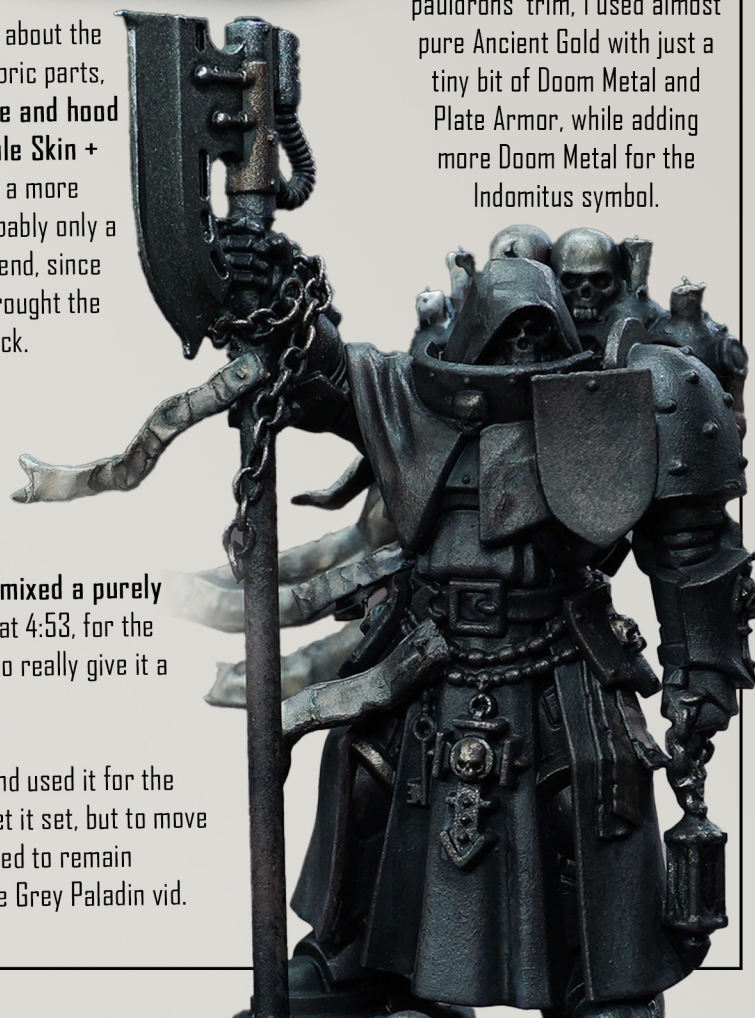
For example, for the pauldrons' trim, I used almost pure **Ancient Gold** with just a tiny bit of **Doom Metal** and **Plate Armor**, while adding more **Doom Metal** for the Indomitrus symbol.

Skulls, Seals and Candles: Here I just used a mix of **Oak Brown** and **Pale Skin** for a thin base coat and then added another rough layer of pure **Pale Skin** on top.

Base: Just a quick and dirty drybrush with **Pale Skin** + **Black**.



3. I then wasn't so sure about the brownish tone of the fabric parts, so I repainted the robe and hood with a thin layer of **Pale Skin** + **White** and **Black** to get a more grayish tone here...Probably only a minor alteration in the end, since the following washes brought the tone pretty close to black.



4. So now I mixed two washes using water and my regular acrylic paints. I mixed a purely black wash with **Doom Death Black**, like in the Grey Paladin Armor video at 4:53, for the armor parts, the robe, and the axe. I kept it a bit less watery for the robe to really give it a dark staining effect.

For the other wash, I additionally added a bit of **Oak Brown** to the mix and used it for the skulls, candles, and purity seals. I made sure not to just apply it fully and let it set, but to move the wash around a bit while it was still wet to free up the areas that I wanted to remain brighter, thereby adding a bit of volume as I went. Same approach as in the Grey Paladin vid.

MAKING THINGS MATT



Helmet:

For the helmet, I picked out the outlines of the skull with Pale Skin + a bit of Oak Brown, then added a quick wash on top (Doom Death Black + Water). After letting it set, I picked out the nose area and the left cheek with the Pale Skin + Oak Brown mix again and added little white dots to the eye lenses.



Even though "Death" is kind of the theme of the model, the whole helmet felt a bit too lifeless without these eye reflections. Working out the eye section is always a really rewarding step to bring minis to life - even though it can be a bit tricky sometimes to get those tiny marks right. I myself always work with a magnifying glass when doing this fiddly stuff.

Non-Armor parts:

I applied a coat of Ultra Matt Varnish by brush to all the fabric elements, skulls, candles, purity seals, and even the metallic decorative pieces to give them this super matte finish. This really sets them apart from the armor parts and adds a more realistic feel to the miniature. It also underlines the variety of brown shades that resulted from the different layers of paint built up on the robe.

Normally, I would do this at the very end, but at this point I wanted to get a better sense of the overall look and feel of the mini. I still wasn't entirely sure if making almost the whole model black would actually work, but in combination with some metallic edge highlights and a bit of color on the face, the mini suddenly already looked pretty cool - This varnish is a really powerful tool for changing the appearance of your miniature, especially on fabric parts.

Metallic parts:

So far I just used a mix of Doom Metal, Natural Steel and a bit of Spartan Bronze to pick out some edges on the metallic decorations and armor trims and just Doom Metal and Natural Steel for the Black armor parts (using the same quick method as in the Green Armor Video at 2:24)



SCRATCHES

Scratch pattern on the cloth:

I now added some wild scratches to the different cloth parts and picked out a few edges. I mixed Pale Skin and Oak Brown with a bit of White and Black to get a very bright brownish grey, varying the shade a little as I went. I used a bit more White and Black in the mix for the cloth on his belly and legs, and a bit more of the brownish mix on the parts around his neck area, while also adding a few more greyish strokes there and vice versa - just adding a bit more randomness to the look.

Since I liked the initial soft color variation of the cloth, I started here just by picking out the cloth's edges a bit, but since the mini just looked a bit boring afterwards and the very subtle color variation was only visible from a very short distance, I decided to spice things up a bit with those scratches - pushing the battle-hardened vibe a bit, while making the mini a bit more complex.



I now mixed a **dark brownish glaze** using **Oak Brown + Black** and some water. I then applied the glaze on top of the previously added scratches to tone them down and blend everything together while letting the scratches shine through - making sure I wiped some of the watery mix off on a paper towel before applying it, so that the mix was very thin but did not run all over the surface. Same principle as in the Thunder Hammer Video Guide at 4:29.

In the end, I added a **few new scratches** with some **Pale Skin + Black** to add selected brighter highlights, and after that, the cloth was done.

ARMOR FINISH



Now I wanted to add some highlights to the armor, tilt shield, and axe. For this, I just used some **White** and applied scratches to the armor parts while also picking out some of the edges. I deliberately made the edge highlights a bit irregular so that they add to the feel of wrecked metal shining through. I also tend to go a bit rougher at this stage and add a few more scratches than I actually want, because I just find it easier to decide afterwards which ones should remain. Since I like to smooth out the highlights afterwards anyway, I do not bother too much about little mistakes.

Axe: Here, I came in with some **Doom Metal + Natural Steel** and a little bit of **Spartan Bronze** to kind of match the tone of the axe. I then corrected my initial rough edge highlights until only a thin line remained and used very diluted black as a thin glaze on top to pull everything together.



Tilt shield: For the tilt shield, I deliberately didn't mix a dark metal color to flatten the scratches, but just used **Doom Death Black** to smooth out the lines and add some additional scratches and depth along the way. In the end, I used a very diluted black as a thin glaze on top again.

Decorations: Here, I just picked out a few selected parts with **Pale Skin** to make things pop a little bit more. Picking out both sides of a bar section, like the three parts around the skull, while leaving the middle part dark, always works kind of well for a quick highlight.

Armor: For the armor, I mixed **Doom Metal** with a bit of **Black** to take away some of the metallic shine and then used this color pretty diluted to smooth things out, following a similar approach as in the **Black Armor Guide** at 9:33.

With this method, I find it much easier to get pretty smooth highlights that are already blended in relatively nicely.

DETAILS

Purity Seals:

Getting purity seals to feel right can be a somewhat tedious process, so what I like to do these days is make sure I have a **fairly diluted black mix** - so that it comes off the brush nicely while still retaining good coverage.

Then I paint little lines at first, already trying to make them a bit unsteady. In a second step, I add a few dots and little brushstrokes to the lines to make them even more irregular, **while using Pale Skin with a bit of Oak Brown, the base color of the seals, to break some of the lines up** in the middle and give the impression of separated words.

Bloody Axe:

For the blood splashed on the axe, I mixed some **Dragon Red with Black** to get a pretty dark red, diluted the mix, and then used a synthetic brush to load the brush, bend it with my finger, and let it snap in the direction of the axe. Also, it is better to make sure you only hit the parts you intend to hit by trying it out on your painting mat first, if you are not familiar with this move. After adding some splashes this way, I also painted a few splashes by brush and called the axe done.



I then finished up the seals by **adding a few very small decals** from the Primaris Decals sheet. I added a little Micro Sol on top to give them better adhesion and then some Ultra Matt Varnish on top of the whole purity seal.

Also, if you mess up some lines, which happens to me all the time, you can just use the base color as well to fix some mistakes.



Tilt Shield Heraldry:

At first, I thought about giving the tilt shield a more elaborate pattern and some color variation, but then I thought that, for this particular model, it's probably best to stick to this very minimalist and monochrome scheme. So I just used a **white cross from the Templars Decal sheet**, applied some Micro Sol on top for better adhesion, and then added a few little physical scratches with the hobby knife and painted a bit of diluted Black to the edges. Ultra Matt Varnish on top and done.

Skulls & Candles:

So for the skulls and candles, I did not really do much more than the initial base coat(s) and the wash. For the candles, I just came back with a bit of **Pale Skin + Oak Brown** to smooth out a few rough stains, and for the skulls, I also used this mix, with a bit more **Pale Skin**, and did a little drybrush motion on the face section to pick out a few highlights, followed by another thin glaze of diluted black on those sections to pull everything together a bit. I didn't need to go too fancy here, I thought, since the DSL will hopefully add enough interest anyway.



OSL BASIS

Preparation

So, to spice things up a bit and contrast the overall dark vibe of the mini, I wanted to add some light effects in the final stage. As a preparation for that, I started to **paint the candle flames and the light source area of the lantern with White.**

Base:

I also did the base before adding the glow. Just a quick **drybrush with a bit of Leather Brown + Pale Skin**, followed by some **dry pigments**. I mixed Soilworks Dark Earth with Ash and added the mix by brush across the base and also to the lower part of the robe and his boots. The way I apply dry pigments can be seen in the Red Cape Video Guide at 1:35.

2. I then used **Liquitex Titanium White Ink** in my airbrush, added a tiny bit of flow improver, and very gently sprayed the paint around the areas I wanted to make glow.

My workflow here can also be seen in the Candles Quick Guide Video at 0:20.

3. I now used around a **50/50 mix of Liquitex Fluo Yellow and Orange** in the airbrush, always making sure to add a drop of flow improver to make the application smoother, and gently sprayed it on top of the white. Same as in the Candles Quick Guide at 0:50. I gently built up the color until I was somewhat happy with it.

With the candles on top I was happy with the initial airbrush finish and called it a day, but for the lantern and the base not so far.



OSL LATERN

Lantern Glow

So, for the glow reflection of the lantern, I added an additional **gentle coat with the Fluo Orange/Yellow mix** on top of the previous layer with the airbrush.

I then used **Vivid Red Orange in the airbrush** to very gently spray it onto the outer edges of the glow gradient on the robe, giving the transition a slightly reddish tone.

Lantern

For the lantern itself, I mixed **Sun Yellow with White** and painted the middle part of each glass section in a rough pattern, trying to imply the light source shining through some dirty glass.

I also mixed **Orange Fire with Black** and used it to paint the body of the lantern around the glass with a thin layer, giving the area a bit more contrast.

Lantern II

I then came back with the **Sun Yellow/White mix** and added a few **edge highlights** to the lantern's body, somewhat trying to imply a bit of reflectiveness while preserving a relatively strong contrast between the lantern's body and the glass where the light comes from.

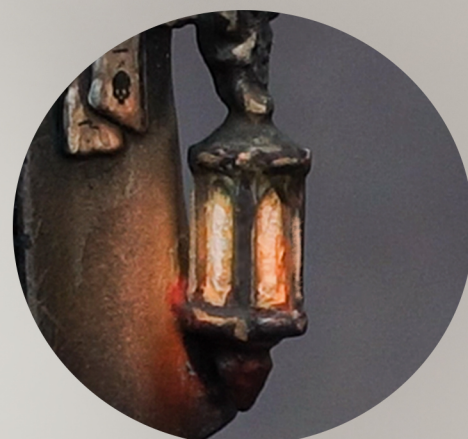
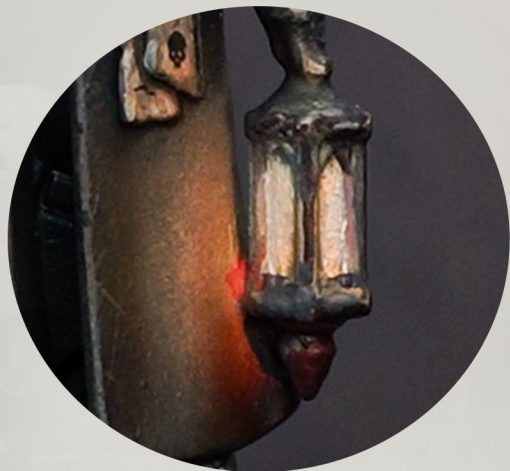
And after that I used the **50/50 Fluo Orange/Yellow mix** and applied it as a **glaze with my regular brush** on top of each glass section, making sure I had very little of the wet mix on my brush to give it a soft staining effect without letting the paint pool (Same principle as in the Thunder Hammer vid at 4:30). I also touched the body of the lantern to stain it, as well as the brighter edge highlights.

Lantern III

To finalize the lantern, I mixed **Vivid Red Orange** with a bit of **Fluo Orange** and used this **very thin mix** to tint the upper and lower parts of the lantern's glass, while leaving the middle section mostly untouched.

I used the same application principle as before (Thunder Hammer vid at 4:30) and made sure the mix was very watery, but wiped most of it off on a towel before applying it, so I could build up multiple thin glazes and create a smooth transition to the brighter section in the middle. Here, I used around two or three layers, and in the end, I came back again with **Fluo Yellow** and a little bit of **White** to fix any parts of the transition that didn't work out as intended.

By adding a bit more contrast and color variation, the centre of the light source now appears even a little bit brighter, while the very dominant bright section in the middle feels slightly more balanced.



OSL BASE



As a final step on the base, I applied another thin layer of the Orange Fire/Black wash over all the glow areas and the candles themselves to pull everything together.

And since the candle flames looked a bit too thick for my taste, I decided to cut them off. Instead, I mixed Fluo Yellow with just a tiny bit of White and brushed a generous blob of this wash-like paint into each candle hole, creating a more subtle, but I think still convincing, flame.

Base

For the base, I mixed a wash from Orange Fire and Black with some water and applied it very thinly on top of all the glow areas on the base to add some contrast.

I then used the Sun Yellow/White mix to gently add a few edge highlights with a drybrush motion to the stonework and the parts of the skulls next to the flame.

Most of the time like to keep my bases relatively subtle, so they support the miniature without distracting from it and keep the overall composition easy to read. With the overall darkness of the model in mind, I however wanted to add a little extra interest to the base through some candles and skulls. In the end, I think this ties the whole piece together quite nicely, as the same candle and skull theme appears both on the backpack/top section of the model and down on the base.



And so here we are. I hope you found these insights helpful and were able to take something away for your own projects. Hopefully seeing you next time - take care!

