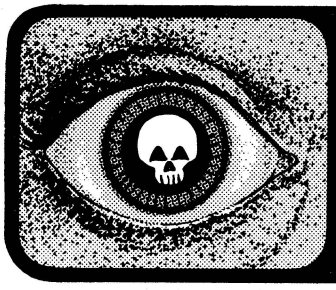


'IF LOOKS COULD KILL'

By Redmond Simonsen

The PINK PANZER (and how to avoid it!)

Oftimes, due to production limitations (or simple lack of imagination), game manufacturers are wont to supply the long suffering game consumer with Baby Blue and Froo-Froo Pink unit counters as standard equipment in many of the wargames on the market. Also, it happens that some playing pieces are designed with eye-strain optimization as their primary visual function.Even good old S&T has been guilty, upon occasion, of providing counters of less than prime quality (which has been due to production limitations, NOT mental dimness). Many gamers also design their own games (or variants) and remain unfulfilled as far as supplying themselves with adequate playing pieces is concerned. What then, you may ask, is a mother to do? Well, mothers, the answer shall be revealed unto you.

To make first class (as opposed to merely utilitarian) counters, you must invest a little money, a little time and more than a little effort but the results will be handsome, practical counters of any color which will actually be better looking and more durable than any of those commercially available. The technique involves the use of dry-transfer lettering, photostats, and aniline dyes.

LIST OF TOOLS & MATERIALS

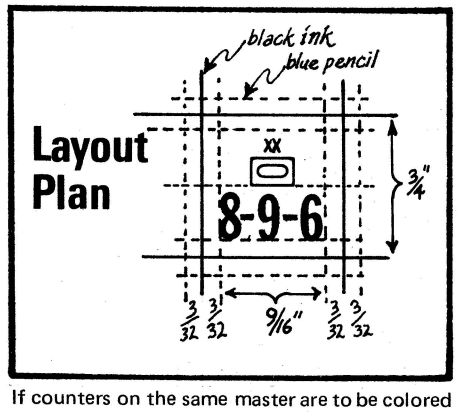
T-Square (at least 24" long and preferably stainless steel)// 18" ruler (steel)//12" draftsmen's triangle//Ruling pen or "Rapidograph" technical fountain pen (No.0 or 1)//"Mongol " Pencil: light blue// X-acto knife or mat knife//sterile cotton (high quality)//"Elmer's Glue All" white glue// "Dr Martin's CONCENTRATED Radiant Watercolors" (dyes)//"Krylon Crystal Clear" or "Krylon Matte Finish" spray// smooth-finish mat board//smooth finish illustration board or 3-ply bristol board//"Presstype" dry-transfer lettering: 24 point Franklin Gothic Extra Condensed/numerals No. 1240/N-24 and/or 24 point Franklin Gothic/numerals No.1245/N-24; (optional)- Futura Medium 8 point letters and numerals No. 1280-8//1" paint brush (a cheap one)//one roll ½" masking tape.

Some of the tools you will find to be a bit expensive. Therefore, unless you're going to get a great deal of use out of them, try to borrow them or split the cost with a fellow gamer. All listed materials are available at any good art store.

STAGE 1: MAKING THE MASTER COUNTERS

On a sheet of illustration board, draw a grid of ¾" squares using your rapidograph. Make the grid 13 squares by 18 squares and extend the grid lines about half an inch beyond the outer squares. This gives you 234 boxes, one and a half times the size of standard counters. In blue pencil, draw a set of parallel lines 3/32nds of an inch from each of the black grid lines and on both sides of every grid line. These blue lines are "safety" lines which indicate the area within each square available for numbers and symbols. The bottom safety lines are also the guidelines for your factor numbers; you may wish to draw in guidelines for the unit symbols (see Layout Plan). In black ink, draw unit symbols (instead of drawing them, you may prefer to use "Presstype" military mapping symbols No 5210; this sheet has on it over 1000 symbols [divisions, armor, etc] . almost all of which are useful to the gamer.)

Now apply the factor numbers. Use Franklin Gothic if your units have only two digits (total) for factors; use Franklin Gothic Extra Condensed if there are three or more digits. Draw in the hypens with the rapidograph and T-square. If your counters are mostly of two or three types with identical factors you would be wise to make only five of each and then have good Xerox copies made. Using rubber cement, paste up the Xeroxes in position on the master grid. If desired, apply unit designations using the 8 point Futura Medium type. If, however, unit identification is important to the play of the particular game, use a larger type size: 12 point Univers No.57 (No.1662-12).



If counters on the same master are to be colored differently be sure to group them by common color and also separate each group with a blank row of boxes. Spray the finished master with a light coat of Crystal Clear.

STAGE 2: PHOTOSTATING THE MASTER

Mark up your master with the following jargon; "1 GLOSSY- FIRST AND SECOND PRINT (NON–FERROTYPE) AT 3 to 2 REDUCTION, CENTERED ON 8½ x 11 SHEET, WASH WELL". It is extremely important that the photostats be WASHED WELL to eliminate all "hypo" residue which would otherwise interfere with the dyeing process. Write the above instructions in blue pencil directly on your master and include your name and phone number. The "first print" is your negative intermediate master. The "second print" of your original master is your final counter sheet in a positive form. Use the negative as your master for any additional positive copies you may require. When using the negative as a master ask for " 1 SAME SIZE FIRST PRINT, GLOSSY (NON FERROTYPE) WASH WELL". Each print will cost about $1.00. Get your stats at a commercial photocopying shop. Notice that the light blue guidelines will not appear in the photostats? Tricky, tricky?

STAGE 3: DYEING

Tape the positive stat to a piece of rigid, scrap cardboard. Use the continuous strips of masking tape to completely seal all edges of the stat. Wet a wad of cotton about the size of a golfball, squeeze off the excess water and then wash down the entire stat using a gentle circular swabbing motion. Set aside to dry on a flat surface. Don't be alarmed when the stat wrinkles as a result of this preparatory washing for as it dries it will flatten out again. Mix your dyes in small Dixie cups. Put a half ounce or more of clean cold water in a cup. Add 4 or 5 drops of the desired color dye and stir using a bent-out paper clip or a toothpick. Never use the same stirrer or cup for mixing two batches of different color and never stick the eye-dropper cap of the dye bottle into the mixing cup. Even when diluted, your colors will appear very intense. Dampen a fresh wad of cotton in clean water, squeeze out the excess and dip the end of the cotton in the color cup. Test the color by swabbing a small quantity on a blank area of the stat. The color should appear to be a pale version of the color desired. Apply the dye in a circular swabbing motion to the test area until the desired intensity is obtained. Unlike paint, dye does not change its color as it dries. If it takes a great deal of swabbing to reach the desired intensity, add a little more dye to the color cup or if the color goes on dark and streaky, add a little more water. You can always increase the intensity of color on the stat by going over the same area; decreasing the intensity after application is almost impossible (minimal decrease in intensity can be achieved by swabbing the still wet area with clean water.) Don't apply too much dye or rub too hard since this will break the emulsion of the stat and ruin your job. If a great deal of water builds up on the stat, set it aside and allow it to dry out.

Many of the colors available (42 in all) are suitable as counter colors without modification. Some special colors require mixing two or more dyes. Always mix special colors into water since in concentrated form it is very difficult to discern just what color a dye is. Always mix more color than you'll need. Here are some suggested colors and possible uses;

GOLDEN BROWN (26B): Used in different intensities, will produce golden yellow or a medium brown, good for British, Italian or Russian units.

SLATE BLUE (22B): German parachute units or Union Civil War counters.

BLACK (14A): Confederate grey or add a little MOSS GREEN (24B) to get the German feldgrau (field grey).

OLIVE GREEN (25B) plus a little MAHOGANY (27B): Gives you a great olive drab for US units.

The dyes come packaged in sets of 14 colors as well as being sold in individual bottles. A set lists for about $9.50 but will often be found on sale for $6.50. The "B" set contains just about all the colors a wargamer would need except BLACK which you could purchase separately. There is almost no limit to the number of beautiful and distinctly different colors that can be obtained with these dyes. With a little practice, anyone can produce a good looking,even color. When dyeing your counter sheet, it is best to have the stat a little damp to begin with. This is conducive towards allowing the strokes of dye to blend. Cover the entire area each time you add a coat to insure an even build-up in intensity. Swab away any puddles of dye which may form in the wrinkles of the stat.

STAGE 4: MOUNTING AND CUTTING

After your stat is completely dry, remove it from the dyeing board. Cut a piece of the smooth finish mat board about an inch larger than the stat. Mix two parts Elmers glue with one part water; brush a thin coat of glue on the mat board and a slightly heavier coat on the back of the counter sheet. Place the stat on the center of the mat board, smooth out any wrinkles, and place on a hard flat surface. Cover with a piece of wax paper and place several heavy books on top, making sure that the entire surface is weighted. Let the whole thing dry for about an hour. This type of mounting is much more permanent than the usual rubber cement job. After the glue has dried, take a wad of clean, dry cotton and briskly rub the face of the dyed stat. This will remove any dried dye residue. Now give the counter sheet three or four light coats of Crystal Clear to increase service life. Use the Matte Finish if you want a non-reflective surface.

Tape down the sheet to a piece of scrap board and line it up with the T-square, make your horizontal cuts with the T-square as your guide. Four or five light knife strokes will cut more cleanly than one or two heavy strokes.

If you want to, it is possible to make "backed up" (ie double sided) counters utilizing this system: When laying out your master, draw a line through the center vertical row of boxes. This leaves you horizontal rows of six boxes on each side of this vertical divider. Counting outward from the center, label the boxes from one to six using blue pencil.

THUSLY: 6 5 4 3 2 1 (center box) 1 2 3 4 5 6

When making the master, do your primary counters on the left hand side of the sheet and their "back-ups" on the right hand boxes of the same horizontal rows, matching them up by the blue pencil key numbers. If 108 or fewer counters are all you need, get only one positive stat, dye it, cut it down the middle through the unused vertical row and then mount one of the pieces. Take the mounted sheet and make pin holes all the way through the board at the four corners formed by the intersections of the outer grid lines. Make similar pin holes in the unmounted half sheet. Paint the back of the unmounted sheet with glue and seat four straight pins in the holes. Using the top two pins, locate the holes in the mounting board and push the sheet down the pins onto the board. Do the same with the bottom two holes. The two half sheets will then be perfectly "in register" back to back. Set aside to dry thoroughly and then cut out using a VERY sharp blade. If more than 108 counters are required, get two positives. The entire sheet can be used to back up "itself" without splitting the sheets down the middle.

When specific brand names of products have been used in this article they are intended as recommendations of quality and/or ease of use (and not because the author has stock in any of the corporations of manufacture.) For those readers who are not familiar with artist's materials, it would be advisable to obtain a free catalog from a large art store and thereby open the doorway to the Wonderful World of Graphic Equipment. Go ye, and be counterproductive! (I'm a sucker for bad puns. Sorry.)