

MEDUSA TURN TO STONE

Steve Parke tangles with a mythic creation from BlackHeart Enterprises

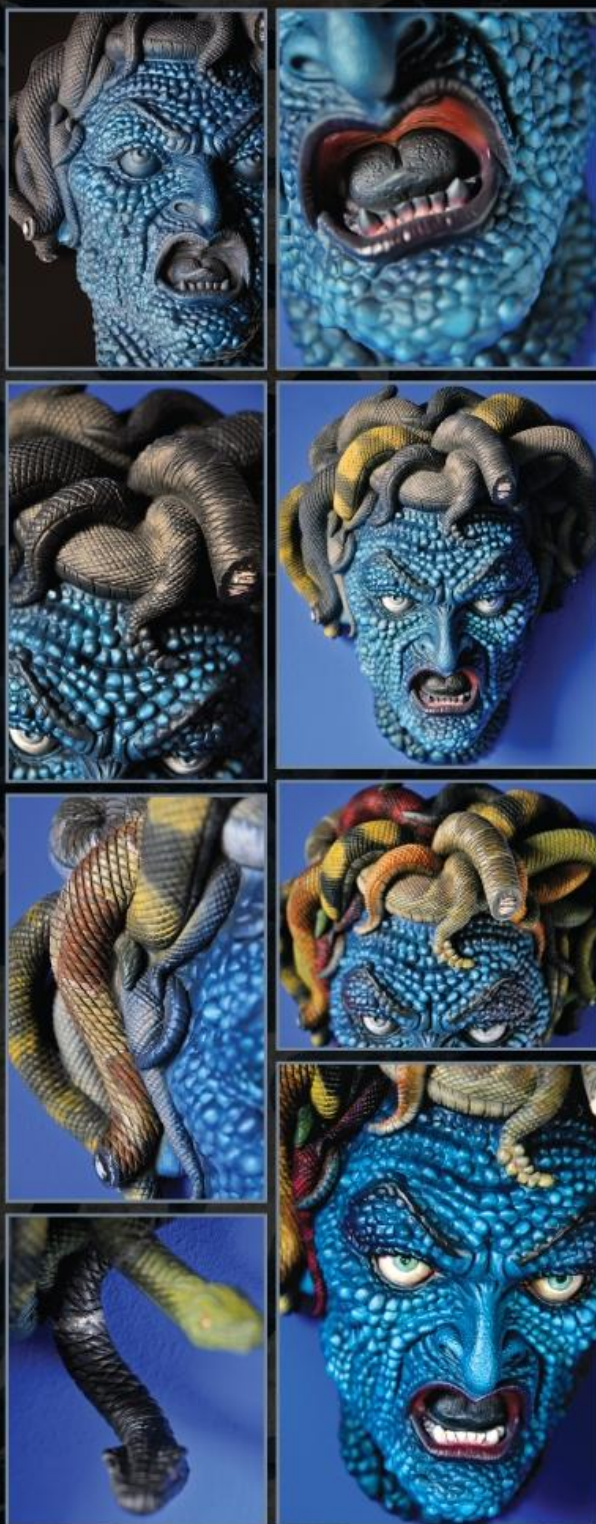


Greek mythology is ripe with characters that permeate our imagination and storytelling; the perfect breeding ground for Ray Harryhausen's movie, *Clash of the Titans*, which I marveled at on the big screen back in 1981. Black Heart Enterprises has brought us lucky resin-heads a life-size version of Medusa that can hang on the wall!—no more excuses of not having any shelf space! Joe Simon really tricked out the sculpture and I intend to take advantage of every scale he labored over to create a stunning enhancement to some lucky wall in my house.

I prime the entire kit with a darker gray than normal. I use Duplicolor Gray Primer which gives a great base for bringing out the raised areas of the sculpt. Traditionally, Harryhausen's Medusa is pale blue. Ph. Martin's True Blue is sprayed through my airbrush to pull out the details on her face. I spray a burst of paint on each "scale" on her skin initially, then mist a bit more over the planes of the face to pull the spots of blue together. I follow up with a Martin's Metallic Blue to make the skin glimmer a bit. Right away, I address the mouth interior with some pale flesh followed by transparent magenta and reds. While I have these colors working, I also take care of the gum line on the separate set of fangs provided. Before I move on to roughing out the snake colors and patterns, I shoot a bit of Bass Belly White through my airbrush on the orbs of the eyes. Rather than make the lips a bright red, I use a bit of my roof-of-the-mouth color on the lips, but I keep it super spare. I decide to keep the lips dark, as well as keep the tongue dark gray. I use a little bit lighter color gray over the texture on the tongue. The easiest way to achieve this is with a Prismacolor pencil which gives tight control over how much detail is brought out on the tongue's bumpy and pitted surface. These details help visualize the face better while choosing the snake colors.

Prior to starting the snake patterns, I pull up some online snake references. To be honest, the clarity of the shots is not that good so I look for a cheap color snake guide at my local book shop (sometimes a physical shop comes in handy!). For \$7, I come away with something I can look at while painting—plenty of color and detail! While reviewing the snake patterns, I realize that my rendering can only be so close to some of the choices I will make because the scales on the snake sculpt are relatively generic. This is not a slight to the kit, it just makes me realize that I will have to stay somewhat loose with my expectations of how the patterns will work with the scale shapes provided. One particular snake is a rattler - it is front and center with fangs bared, so it's important to at least address those patterns fairly accurately. In an attempt to be organized, I used white-colored pencil to make some pattern markings to see the general flow of the patterns on the snakes' bodies. To be honest, this simply became a shortcut for keeping some sort of track of the snakes as they weave in and out of the big slithery pile. This process makes it easier to be confident in applying the colors.

Once I settle on the snakes and colors I consider rendering, I lay in some base color. I start with the most neutral colors first, leaving room to add more vibrant colors at the end. This is sort of like adding accent colors and not taking too much attention away from the overall look. The last thing I want is



one snake to pop more strongly than the others. I now seal everything really well in preparation for the next step.

A problem with making patterns using paint can be overspray with airbrushes or inconsistent opacity with brush painting. The other issue is fixing and missteps, so I opt for using colored pencil (Prismacolor SOFT lead) over the initial airbrushed base colors. This is as simple as finding your pattern and drawing it out. As you draw on the head in the "nest" of snake bodies, make sure to repeat the process on the separate snake heads to be attached later. In some cases, I temporarily super-glue the snake head in place to make sure the patterns match up properly. Overall, I can just hold them in place to check. To build more color within the pattern I seal again, which makes a slight surface for the pencil to grip. The pencil can be used very tightly and really catch the specific scales, which sells the snake texture very well. The pencil can actually be erased if need be. Once done, I use transparent Ochre to tie the pencil work together. This only works on the neutral colors.

Once the initial snakes are close to completion, I look for some brighter colors to add in - lime greens, reds, oranges; it's really up to the look I want to achieve. These brighter colors are built up exactly the same way as the neutral colors. If overspray is an issue while adding richer color base with an airbrush, a piece of paper can be used as a loose mask between the surface being painted and the one behind it. Again, I seal all the work and start looking to clean up the details with a pencil.

The snakes' colors are now established and the patterns are done. Looking at them as one mass of "hair," I decide to lighten Medusa's overall face color by simply using a bit of Ph. Martin's Sky Blue misted over the face. I have also used a bit of magenta over the outer eyelids and cheeks to vary the color and not end up with a drab blue. Now I turn to address the eyes a bit more. Loading some red in my airbrush, I hit the inner and outer edges of the ball. Tightening up my line, I squiggle in some light veining. Over this I spray some transparent Ochre to take the white back a bit. I follow the ochre with thinned down Bass Belly White.

The iris is handled with a small blast of emerald green; this will be further detailed with colored pencil. Whites of the teeth are handled with a brush and some soft white. The teeth "staining" is achieved with washes of ochre and sepia, especially at the gum line.

Returning to the snake heads, I detail the eyes. Looking through my reference, I find that some snakes have slit eyes and some round. I mix these up to make it more interesting to look at. The round eyes are base coated yellow-gold and the slit eyes are base coated pale umber. Once dry, I use black combined with sepia on a liner brush for the slit and then a round dot on the other eye; it's as simple as that.

The last thing to do is glue the snakes in place and tweak the Gorgon's eyes. Gluing the snakes is easy, but precautions should be taken to keep them from accidentally snapping off. Using a smaller drill bit, I sink three or four holes into each side to be glued. Then I mix two-part JB Weld and apply it to the pieces. Pressing them together pushes the liquid "steel" into the holes and essentially creates pins holding the parts together. A few connections need a little two-part Aves to fill and then I use a toothpick to score in the scales before it completely hardens.

Now to finish the eyes; after all they are the gaze that can turn one to stone! Using colored pencil, I vary lighter colors in striations from the pupil outward to achieve what I like to think of as a lightning bolt effect; this creates an inhuman look while still generally appearing eye-like. Once done, I feel the eye orb is just too light so I start to color it back through an application of transparent yellow through the airbrush. The more yellow I add, the more I like it, so I let it get fairly bright. It adds to the vibrancy of the face and really makes the eyes pop.

In the end, there is a certain beauty that can be brought to what is supposed to be a hideous creature though vibrant and unusual color schemes. Thanks to Black Heart Enterprises and Joe Simon for realizing the unique painting opportunity offered by their first kit.