

Journey of the Dark Emissary



Local sculptor Chris FitzPatrick, master of the changing hair color, talks about the life cycle of his most recent project, the Albion Dark Emissary, from first thoughts and ideas through the entire process that created the beautiful piece we see in the Dark Shadows worldwide Warhammer campaign.

Getting Started (Day 1)

This figure is going to be based upon some concept sketches by one of the Studio artists, Dave Gallagher. Dave has put lots of ideas down, so I've got a whole lot to work with here.

All miniatures begin with an armature, a simple skeleton upon which the figure is built. The armature needs to be strong enough to hold its shape while you are sculpting on top of it and strong enough to survive the molding process. I use a pre-cast armature, which is basically a simplified human skeleton that I twist into the pose I want. For beginners I'd suggest using brass wire to make your skeleton -- it's very strong and durable. However, you'll likely need a pair of needle-nosed pliers to get it into shape...brass is too stiff to bend with your fingers and get the proper proportions for a 28mm figure.

I'll use a cork as the figure's base, available in most craft stores. This provides a nice "handle" to hold on to while you work, and it keeps you from getting your fingerprints all over the figure and ruining the work you've done.

After I've bent the armature into shape, I'll roughly block out some of the major masses of the figure to build a firm base to work from. I'll also start by sculpting their feet -- once dried, the putty will help to hold the figure onto the base.



Day 1: Building up the mass of the figure as a base to work upon

Day 2

The first step is to start working on the robes of the figure. This guy is really wide and could easily end up looking kind of stiff and clumsy. Since I usually try to get my figures to suggest movement, I'll make the folds on his robes "lean" slightly to the right, following the angle of his staff (the brass rod). This should give the feeling that he's scooting along on some mission for his dark master, leaning heavily on his staff for support. You can't really see this yet, but you have to plan ahead.

I made the "folds" in the putty with the blunt end of the Wax #5 (see WD 256, p. 57) with the raised area pulled down to the top of the cork, and cut off (while still wet) with the Spatula Tool.

Day 3

Day 2: Sculpting the robes of the figure with the Wax #5 tool

The next step is to add the next layer to the figure, a tunic with a tattered hem. I'll work directly on top of the robes, and smooth the putty out as best I can. The folds in the fabric are added now, with the round edge of the Putty Tool. Then, once the bottom edge is nice and smooth, (and while it's still wet) I'll use a sharp hobby knife to cut up into the hem to get a jagged, tattered look. The razor edge of the hobby knife will cut into the wet putty better than one of my tools. They are too blunt and will not make a sharp indentation because of the high surface tension of the Kneadatite. Then, I'll use the Spatula to 'pull' the tatters down a bit, one by one. This will help to clean up any minor mistakes I made. Now I'll use a needle tool to poke a few holes in the cloth. This helps to give the feel that the cloth is rotten and worm-eaten, a look that is all the rage with the forces of evil.

After this is dried, I'll go back and use a scalpel to gently "scrape" the smooth surfaces of the tunic. This is done by holding the blade at a 90° angle and gently scraping the area a few times. If done correctly, this will shave off the very top surface, cleaning up any uneven bits that there may be. This was helpful around the tattered hem, as it looked a little messy.



Day 3: Sculpting the tatters and holes into the hem of the tunic

The third step of the day is to build the base for his big trenchcoat. This piece of clothing is large and is going to cover most of his body, so I need to make sure I have a good foundation to work upon. So the basic shape is blocked in, and I'll worry about adding details later.



Day 4: Only the parts of the face that will be shown are detailed

Day 4

Today I'm going to start working on the head of the figure. Since only a small part of his face is going to be showing, I'm not going to bother rendering the parts that will be covered up in his overhanging shroud.

Sculpting a head is a very complicated process, so I'll just go into the basics of it here... I start out with a smooth, egg-shaped oval for the face. The first step is to cut the eye sockets in, leaving them empty. Next, I use the Spatula Tool to coax a tiny bit of putty up from the face to build the bridge of the nose (a simple raised line will do for now). Then the mouth is cut into the lower half of the face. I clean up the whole thing with my Spatula Tool, gently shaping the putty beneath the eye sockets into cheekbones, and the putty beneath the mouth into a chin. Finally, I gently pull some of the putty

above the eye sockets down, giving a scowling look to the forehead. All this is done in one sitting, while the putty is still wet.

After the face dries, I go back in with a tiny bit of putty, and build the nose onto the thin bridge I built beforehand. This bridge will help to keep the shape of the nose -- a nose should look firm, not soft. After this is done, I add a tiny bit of putty to the eye socket, for the eyeball itself. I'm not really worried about this guy looking too normal, so I give it a slight slant.

Day 5

It's time to start working on his coat. This will be a rather elaborate piece, and I'm going to try to get the basics all down in one sitting, so I get it all planned out beforehand. I mix up a bunch of putty and cover the whole area of the coat with a thin, smooth layer. I make the edges crisp and clean with the Spatula Tool, simply following the lines I blocked out beforehand. Gentle folds are added with the blunt end of the Wax #5. I then add a line of dots along the hem, to give it a rough-stitched leather look. Now I'm ready to start adding the detail.

I want this coat to look like leather, embossed with some kind of mystic, celestial charts and symbols. I cut the designs into the coat with the point of the Spatula, occasionally making a large hole in the line with the point of the Wax #5. These holes are sockets for gemstones that will represent planets and other celestial bodies -- I'll add the gems after the coat has dried, and then I'll clean up here and there on the coat.



Day 5: Details of the Emissary's coat adorned with spiral designs

The Spiral is the symbol of the Dark Emissaries, and I'm going to incorporate this prominently into the miniature in the center of the back. Just for kicks, I'll make this out of a different kind of putty: a metallic bronze stuff called "Gas Tank Repair." I occasionally use this putty for sculpting metal, horn or stone bits, as it's easy to get a hard edge with it, and it cuts better when dry than the green Kneadatite. I make it very large and heavy-looking to assist the stooped feeling of the figure's posture.

A little bit of putty is added to the arms of the figure today, just to give me a feel for the sort of mass they are going to have. I also remove the brass rod for the staff, and I'll start working on this separately and add it later once it's finished.

Day 6



Day 6: More detail applied to the coat in order to add definition

More detail work on the coat today. After a weekend away from the figure, I come back and realize that the detail on the cloak is too subtle. After the figure is cast, it will hardly even be noticed. I have 2 choices: either cut the coat off and start it over or try to salvage what I've done with some sneaky touch-up work. I decide to try to salvage the coat and spend most of the day adding tiny bits of putty along the celestial lines to increase their definition. At this point I also add some swirls on the shoulders -- these will help to gracefully accentuate the round shape of his massive shoulders.

Day 7

Now that I have the basics of his body done, it's time to start working on the cool stuff -- his head and weapons. I'll be giving him a big weird staff in his left hand, but I'm not sure what to do with the right. But I'm not going to worry about it now, as I have lots of other parts to work on. To be honest, I'm not too happy with this figure currently, as it's just not really coming together like I want it to.

When finished, the head is going to be very elaborate - long twisted horns and a shroud that hangs down. I want the head