

Dark Alliance - 1/72nd Fire Demons Sets 1 and 2

by Jonathan Aird



Some more figures from my recent latest dive into 20mm plastic figures for fantasy gaming. These figures again come from the Ukrainian based Dark Alliance figure manufacturer, who really have revolutionised what's available for the fantasy gamer. It's no more the case of just substituting historical figures into fantasy settings or making use of the very nice, but small, ranges from Caesar (and a few from MARS).

The Fire Demons will be very familiar to those who have seen *The Fellowship of the Ring* film. Yes, Fire Demons are Balrogs!

Each set comes with two poses of Fire Demon and each set also has two separate wing styles, which means that there are 16 possible combinations with the two sets, which should be more than enough for anyone. Tolkien, by the way, said there were no more than seven Balrogs at any one time.

The pictures are not as clear as I'd like, due to the slightly glossy texture of the plastic and the rather garish colours chosen. It should be possible to make out that there is actually some quite nice sculpture here – the faces are very expressive and the poses are lively.







The wings are attached to the figures with a couple of lugs, which are a little bit big for the holes in the backs of the Fire Demons, but this shouldn't prove a difficulty. A little carving and the use of a metal pin as well as glue should make for a sturdy assembled item. Some do interpret Tolkien's Balrogs as being wingless - in which case the holes could be easily filled with a flexible modelling material.



The figures are just under 7cm tall and so they tower nicely over human sized opponents (or look great with a crowd of orcs at their feet!). I've tried these figures size-wise with some of the Games Workshop Lord of the Rings figures and I don't think they look too bad together at all. These Fire Demons could, at a pinch, be used either as a Balrog or perhaps as some lesser form of Evil Spirit with the Games Workshop figures. This would make what is a very Army Point- expensive figure a lot more cash affordable - the Games Workshop Balrog is, of course, much, much bigger, but it also retails at £40, whilst the Dark Alliance figures are £8 for a 2 figure box set.

Now £4 per figure is, in my mind anyway, still quite a lot for a large but not so very large, plastic figure and reflects the scatter gun pricing that Dark Alliance have adopted across this whole fantasy figure range. All the boxes are priced at £8 but one might get 40 or more human foot, or 8 pretty big trolls or maybe only 4 trolls (there are multiple troll box sets and the value for money varies across them), or 32 minotaurs (very generous!) or 24 Centaurs (again great value!) or just 10 human cavalry.

You may now be expecting more reviews of figures to come and you may well be right!. Bluntly, some sets are better value than others. On the other hand, few are the gamers who need more than 4 Balrogs in an army. With all the box sets Dark Alliance makes that are Lord of the Rings inspired, all one really needs is a set of the GW rules and just a few (or even better lots!) boxes of Dark Alliance figures to get going in Middle Earth. And, since Games Workshop has issued their rules at least five or six times, there are masses of "old edition" copies out there in the second-hand market.

There are of course plenty of other Middle Earth wargaming rule sets that could also be used - go very Old School and get a copy of the Skytrex Middle Earth Rules. I bought a brand new spare copy of these a couple of years ago for about £5, but you can also (and I kid you not) find them on eBay for £150!

There are naturally other non-Middle Earth rule sets and settings and these figures really are perfect for many other fantasy settings - Robert E. Howard's Hyboria was full of demons and the endless Chaos tide of Michael Moorcock's *Elric* series would welcome these monsters as well! An evil abyss in *Dungeons & Dragons* would be empty without a few winged demons. At the price - £8 (about \$11.00) - these are reasonable value and maybe one set would be sufficient; there's only one Balrog in Moria, after all. I'll repeat my previous word of warning from the review of the Dark Alliance Cimmerian Boxes - I got my examples from Hannants and I would recommend using a similarly reputable plastic kit specialist. I have seen these figures on Ebay and on Amazon at more than twice the standard price - so, buyer beware.