THE ART OF CLINT LANGLEY

Dark visions from the grim worlds of Warhammer
CREATURES IN THE BUSHES...

Clint Langley is a man of vision. It is a dark and twisted vision that he beholds, one fraught with the grim simulacra of arcane battlefields and shattered futurescapes, of the dark milieu of the Warhammer world. What's more, we love it...

As one of the Black Library's most prolific science fiction and fantasy artists, this visionary has breathed real life into dozens of characters. From stern inquisitors, rooting out the seeds of heresy; to the stalwart soldiers of the Imperial Guard; to daemons that would devour a man's very soul, Clint has envisioned them all quite beautifully.

Over fifty novel covers and more than a hundred collectible card game images for Sabertooth's WarCry and Dark Millennium series, and Clint doesn't show any signs of letting up. Given his heritage, and his single-minded determination to articulate the daemons and heroes of his imagination through his art, it's hardly surprising really.

As far back as I can remember, I was always drawing monsters, warriors and spaceships. My parents were both artistic and encouraged me to draw what I liked, but it was when I first saw 2000AD that I realised I wanted to be a comic artist. From that point, I wasn't interested in doing any other job.

Clint's grandfather, too, had a role to play in the evolution of this nascent desire to illustrate far-future gladiators and nightmarish horrors.

'He was a kind of a weird inventor, who collected scrap metal. I grew up on a farm and spent a lot of time scratching around for machine parts that I imagined might be a ray gun or a piece of a space ship.'

To an extent, this is a childhood practice that Clint still maintains to this day, procuring various textures to help apply the detached reality to his work, and a grit so real you can taste it.

'Now, the pieces of scrap become a Space Marine shoulder pad or a bionic eye. Bark from a tree can become a Nurgle wart — it's about drawing inspiration from everyday objects.'

Before Clint's foray into the madness and carnage of his art proper, he trained at Hastings College of Art and Technology.

'I turned up two months late for my interview but, somehow, I managed to wing my way into an Exhibition Design course. Much to the frustration of my tutors, I managed to stick it out by incorporating a fantasy or sci-fi element to most of my assignments.'

'I turned a simple exhibition hall into a Warhammer 40,000 Imperial hardware show by cutting out and sticking down Rhinos, Land Raiders and Dreadnoughts onto an isometric floor plan. There was also the odd off-duty Space Marine and swaggering hive ganger, and it would have been rude not to have a charging lunatic with a chainsword.'

The conventional art route wasn't for Clint, it seemed, and following a Foundation Art Course, he decided to go his own way and set about creating a portfolio of work for the fantasy art and comics industry, taking sole in the inspiration of his predecessors.

'My early influences came from great fantasy artists such as Frank Frazetta, Boris Vallejo, Jim Burns, John Blanche, Ian Miller and Peter Jones who all created incredibly detailed works of imagination and skill.

'As for comic artists: Kevin O'Neill, Don Lawrence, Ron Smith, John Hicklenton, Simon Bisley, Mike McMahon, Glenn Fabry and Massimo Belardinelli. They all produced highly stylised work that appealed to the direction I was looking for in my own art.'

Clint's career started out with British cult comic 2000AD, after which he was able to branch out and work for US RPG companies like White Wolf and Wizards of the Coast but this relationship was not to last.

'I put comic work on hold in 1997, just when my work was getting popular. I burned my bridges, so to speak, and went off travelling to South East Asia for six months.'

Upon his return, Clint found it hard to get picked up for more comic book work but found diversity in doing some storyboarding for a notorious television commercial for Metz schnapps, during which time he created 'The Judder Man,' a kind of Jack Frost figure.

With the comic opportunities few and far between, it was at this point that Clint approached Games Workshop and the Black Library.

'I'd read White Dwarf as a kid; I loved all the imagery. I even did sketches of some Space Marines at college, but it took me ten years to get in touch with Games Workshop. It was strange that I hadn't done so before, because I love the worlds and the imagery. I suppose I was a little scared that they'd turn me down.'

Clint need not have worried. Through author James Wallis, Clint got in touch with BL Publisher Marc Gascoigne and was put onto his first novel. This happened to be Nightbringer, Graham McNeill's authorial debut, and it heralded something of a shift in stylistic direction for Clint.

Arguably, in most recent times, Clint is best known for his fantastically real computer rendered art but he didn't start out down the CGI route.

'I painted professionally for ten years before switching to computer. It resulted in a shift from the real to the kind of hyper-real. My work had a more stylistic feel to it. It was edgier and possessed a life of its own.'

Nightbringer was the beginning of this change in direction.

'I would sketch in pencil then paint with the computer. Within a year of finishing this piece, though, I didn't really sketch after that.'
I find that my work evolves without me really having much control over it. Often the picture I have in my head at the start will be completely different to the finished piece. It's why I prefer not to do sketches. Using the computer is liberating; I'm not beholden to a sketch anymore. It allows me to create the image I've got in my head that I'm happy with, by moving it around, creating a different angle or zooming in. Once you've done a sketch, you're pretty much stuck with it.

Clint cites several pieces in the evolution of his craft. 

'With The Daemon's Curse there was something new. I really started to get to grips with using textures: steel, lizard skin and the environment all came together. Before this piece, where I'd tried this technique before, the elements were fighting each other.'

'Back from the Dead is another piece that really works. It looks like it's about to step out of the page.'

Being prolific is one of Clint's defining characteristics. He churns out hordes of illustrations, including the many novel covers for the Black Library, entire graphic novels for 2000AD, whole collectible card sets for Sabertooth, not to mention all the other material he produces. How does he do it? His answer is a simple one.

'Lots of coffee and late nights.'

'I think mainly, I'm just driven by creating this work. Creating the Games Workshop art is always interesting. I have such an affinity with all the different factions and races from these worlds and I throw myself into interpreting them.'

In creating imagery for such well-loved universes as those envisioned by Games Workshop there's the inevitable fan base to consider and with that comes pressure.

'One of the most difficult pieces was the first Gaunt's Ghosts omnibus because, at the time, there was Adrian Smith's interpretation, which most people associate the character with. Gaunt is very popular, plus as I'd already illustrated Ciaphas Cain, I already had my commissioner, as it were.

'There's always pressure; but especially when you get to the second or third character cover, I find.'

It was different for another of the seminal Black Library characters that Clint illustrated.

'When I was given Darkblade it was great. In my head this would be the ultimate, cool shot of Malus mounted on his beast. The first of these covers is actually my favourite but it wasn't until Reaper of Souls, I think, that I brought the evil out in him combined with an imperious quality.'

Clint clearly exhibits real assurance when he's dealing with the less salubrious denizens of Black Library fiction.

'The anti-heroes, I find, are a doodle. I've grown up with them and rooted for the bad guy every time. For me the worst kind of brief you can give me is a heroic, good-looking character. Ask me for a Space Marine or anyone who's got attitude – that's what leads my work.'

'Attitude is a key factor in Clint's compositional preferences, too.

'I'm confident when I'm creating characters that are standing there, looking like they mean business. I'm happy to do the action shots, but for me that's my favourite kind of imagery – the iconic shot.'

'This sense of the 'iconic shot' that Clint engenders in his work stems from his love of film and given the hyper-real quality of his pieces it's not difficult to imagine the art as merely a still from a live-action movie. The use of the lone figure or icon is characteristic of Clint's work, too, that or the duel. Surprisingly, though a fan, it wasn't movies of the Fantasy and Science Fiction genres that developed Clint's sensibility towards the icon; this came from a different milieu.

'I was really influenced by the Spaghetti Westerns growing up. Clint Eastwood was my namesake. I grew up in the 70s and I just loved the cool of the Spaghetti Westerns: the long drawn-out shots, the gunfights and the music and that inspires my work.'

With over fifty covers under his belt and counting, we'll be seeing lots more of Clint in the future and his wonderfully dark and macabre renditions of the Warhammer worlds will doubtless continue to amaze and disquiet us. Even if he tried, it's unlikely that he'd be able to do anything regarded as conventional, by his own admission.

'When I'm old and grey, I might start painting landscapes. That's what I'd like to do, though I know I'll end up doing something nightmarish, with creatures in the bushes.'

All that remains now is to turn the page and enter this world of mayhem and carnage, of nightmares and as Clint puts it, 'creatures in the bushes'.

CLINT LANGLEY was talking to NICK KYME
Brighton, England 2007
Clint's artwork has a great deal to commend it, on many different levels, but for me it has one outstanding quality; the books of mine he's done the covers for have sold appreciably better than the ones he hasn't. Trust me, for an author, that's more important than anything I might have to say about his technique, or his eye for a dramatic composition, or anything else technical I don't really understand.

That said, his style is distinctively his own; there's no mistaking a Clint Langley piece for a painting by anyone else, whatever the mood or subject matter. Few other artists are quite so adept at capturing the feel of a book in a single, well-chosen image, redolent with richly textured detail and vividly realised characters. He's confident and sensible enough not to take the descriptions in the text too literally, changing things to make a more dramatic picture wherever necessary, creating a kind of snapshot of the book as a whole rather than trying to render a particular scene in exhaustive detail.

Which may be why his covers for the Ciaphas Cain series work so well, capturing both the tongue-in-cheek tone of the novels and the action-packed set pieces that punctuate them. The illustration he did for Caves of Ice is a particular favourite of mine, managing to capture both Cain's swashbuckling charisma and the blazing energy of the battle scenes in one perfect image. It also includes what I consider to be the definitive depiction of Jurgen, Cain's faithful and repulsive sidekick. Up until this point I had only the vaguest idea of what he looked like, but now that's the picture I get in my head whenever he wanders onto the page.

I'm also particularly pleased with Clint's depiction of Cain on the cover of the omnibus volume, Hero of the Imperium, which, I feel, does an excellent job of capturing the character's sardonic personality.

Unusually for a cover artist, Clint can claim the distinction of having actively influenced the content of at least one of the novels he's illustrated. While we were chatting at a Games Day signing session a couple of years ago, he happened to mention that he'd like to do a parody of the classic Conan covers, with Cain standing on a pile of dead orks, preferably surrounded by scantily-clad women. This sounded like a good idea to me, so having already determined that the antagonists in Death or Glory would indeed be orks, I made sure I included plenty of hand-to-hand combat with the bestial greenskins. The resulting cover is a joy to behold, successfully recasting Cain as an interstellar Arnold Schwarzenegger, although somehow the scantily-clad women seem to have fallen by the wayside.

Every time I complete a new book, I find myself looking forward to seeing what Clint's going to do for the cover, and I hope he'll continue to pleasantly surprise me for years to come.

SANDY MITCHELL
Author
Some artists are superstars because of their hyper-realistic execution. Others are famed because of their wonderfully graphic and atmospheric depictions. Clint somehow manages to be both of those things at once. To tell the truth, I'm not sure how he does that. A pact with the devil? Robert Johnson style? In terms of costume, weapons, settings and incidental detail, his work is magnificently lush and evocative. But there's real character there too. Real humanity. I'm hard pushed to think of anyone who produces fantasy work that is so damn convincingly real.

Clint's style is unmistakable. The sheer clarity and precision is amazing, every last button and fringe of braid, but none of that ever gets in the way of intense atmosphere. Each of the Darkblade covers is a masterpiece of high drama and exotic flavour, figures poised at the brink of crushing violence and impact in landscapes that I'm sure Clint has somehow been to.

Though Clint's tableaux and scenes always impress (the Cephas Cain covers are wonderful examples), his greatest work, for me, has to be the vignette covers - such as Eisenhorn, Brothers of the Snake and the first Gaunt omnibus. These images have immense power: a single figure striding towards us, emblematic of all the characters and situations inside the book. They've become the trademark design for the Black Library collections, and form a wonderful gallery of complimentary images.

The cover of the Eisenhorn Omnibus has got to be my favourite. Clint has captured the character better than any other version, but it's not just the fabulous attention to detail (every item Gregor is carrying is a functioning part of the plot). It's the personality too... the ruthless confidence of the gat as he bears down on us, brooking no resistance, the sideways turn of the head, suspicious and wary, scanning the shadows for ambush.

There's a scene in the movie Stranger Than Fiction when an author, played by Emma Thompson, comes face-to-face with her novel's central character in flesh and blood form. She is stunned to the point of speechlessness. Looking at the Eisenhorn cover, I know exactly how she feels. The Eisenhorn Omnibus is a bestseller. Let's be honest, you're all buying it for the cover, aren't you?

DAN ABNETT
Author
So far, Clint’s done three covers for me: Nightbringer, Storm of Iron and Dead Sky, Black Sun. I still remember, back when I was a young, wet-behind-the-ears, wannabe author who was just embarking on his first novel, when I was handed a piece of paper with Clint’s cover for Nightbringer, I was blown away by the vividness of the imagery and the crispness of the detail, two traits that have remained constant joys to me in Clint’s work since then.

I hung that cover above my desk as I was writing Nightbringer and it’s a habit I’ve gotten into over the years whenever I’m writing a book. The fact that my characters are suddenly right in front of me, a (more or less) three dimensional rendering of something plucked from my imagination really makes it that much easier to keep going. To see someone else’s vision of that character come to life on the page and in colour is a thrill I don’t think I’ll ever tire of. I thought Clint’s rendition of Uriel looked like a cross between Jack Nicholson and Bruce Campbell having a really angry day — and that’s an evocative image that’s stuck with the character ever since.

In addition, Clint’s covers have inadvertently helped in the creation of some of my favourite supporting characters. When I first saw the cover of Nightbringer and noticed the Space Marine with the flamer behind Uriel, I just knew I had to put him into the book. And, just like that, Veteran Sergeant Pasanius was born, fully formed and ready with his deadpan wit. Likewise, when the cover of Storm of Iron came through, I saw that Chaos Terminator and knew, just knew, that he was going to be one of the baddest dudes in the book.

Dead Sky, Black Sun was a cover that deliberately wasn’t all-action, bullets and explosions, conjuring up the image of a lone warrior in the midst of a deathly wasteland. It captured the grim, desolate hinterlands of the daemon world of Medren-gard and had a perfect stillness to it that was a great counterpoint to the covers that preceded it.

GRAHAM McNEILL
Author
I didn’t see Clint’s cover for Rogue Star until after I'd turned in the first draft of the manuscript, but I was immediately taken by how well he'd captured the three main characters, without even knowing their full story.

The central figure and hero of the book, the Rogue Trader Lucien Gerrit, is pictured as the proud individual I imagined him to be. The other two characters, Lucien’s son Korrane and daughter Brielle, stand on either side of their father. Brielle is turned away from the other two and wears a typically haughty expression, a foreshadowing of the path she takes throughout the book. Korrane appears more formal, even reserved, which again, is a perfect representation of his character. Clint imagined these two individuals in far more detail than I did, and in many ways this image has gone on to shape how I think about, and write about, them.

What I like most about this piece, though, is the overall tone. I’m a great believer that you can in fact judge a book by its cover – if the cover artist does his job right. For me, the dominant cold, icy blue sets the tone wonderfully, and gets the reader in the right frame of mind. It’s a grim universe out there, and the rogue traders often have to make their own laws as they travel through it!

ANDY HOARE
Author

ROGUE STAR • NOVEL COVER • 2006
We're lucky to have Clint Langley. Let me try to explain why. The Warhammer 40,000 universe is a demented nightmare of a place quite different from the clean, shiny, rationalist SF settings, a weird alchemist's vat of a galaxy where the technology of science fiction meets the stylised pageantry of gothic fantasy.

As you can see it's a creative alchemy I still struggle a bit to describe, so it's handy to know that someone somewhere has managed to bottle that strange mixture and inject it into Clint Langley.

Clint has the great gift of being able to unite two visions: an eye for telling realistic details and the imagination to present these with a vivid, larger-than-life intensity. I've heard the term 'hyper-reality' used to describe the stylised, adrenaline-injected feel of certain artistic pieces, and it's a concept that fits Clint's art beautifully. He creates worlds that are lush and enticing, where the light is rich and every beautifully textured surface seems to have an unreal lustre. But they're nightmare worlds, too, prowled by monsters and grotesqueries imprinted so powerfully on your mind by Clint's art that you have no choice but to think of them as real. Fortunately, the men and women of these worlds are up to the challenge; grim and powerful heroes of the sort you've seen in your mind's eye since childhood, standing tall in these fantastic landscapes as though daring the grimness of their worlds to try and bear them down.

I've had the great good fortune to have Clint as the illustrator for all four of my Black Library book covers: three portraits of Shira Calpurnia, and one of Junktion's Sinden Kass, and all of them have done their job beautifully. The Crossfire artwork captures the thick, orange-yellow sunlight that bathes the world of Hydraphur, the intricate designs of its towers and the strength and defiance of Calpurnia herself. Legacy strikes a more ominous note, a darkened scene with Calpurnia leading a squad of sinister, armoured Arbites. Junktion evokes the desperation and claustrophobia of Sinden Kass's reluctant heroics to save his Underhive hometown. And I kept finding myself going back to look at the cover of Blind as a perfect touchstone for the baroque and menacing atmosphere I wanted to evoke in the Bastion Psykana.

We're lucky to have Clint Langley. But don't take my word for it. Look through these pages and see for yourself.

MATT FARRER
Author
I pose for a lot of my illustrations. I’m pretty much the only person around when I illustrate. My partner, she poses for a lot of the female characters — Shira Calpurinia for example.

I do it because I want people to invest in the characters and to cement their believability.

When I was illustrating by hand, as most artists do, I’d look in a mirror to try to get the angles right. But once I started using the computer, early in my Games Workshop career, I progressed to a Polaroid camera. It had terrible definition but that was perfect as it really allowed me to work on the shots.

It’s actually something I do less and less of now, and I’ve not used any new photography for a while. I have a file of limbs, heads and that kind of thing, and I put them together in a kind of Frankenstein way. It’s quite grim really — I’m actually working in flesh.

CLINT LANGLEY
CURRENT INFLUENCES

I’m pretty much influenced by anybody who’s producing good work in the genre. Paul Dainton’s work is just in a league of its own, in that he really has understood the look and feel of the Games Workshop worlds far beyond what I could. Of all the artists I’m influenced by, though, I never seek to emulate them. I find that my work, especially over the last five years, almost influences itself.

I think it has its own identity. It goes in the direction it wants to go, and I’m almost a passenger.

Often, when I finish a piece, I’m quite surprised at what I’m looking at. It’s like I’m seeing it for the first time.

CLINT LANGLEY
I was unfamiliar with Clint’s work prior to being brought on board to write the first Kal Jerico novel, Blood Royal, but I became an instant fan. One of my happiest days during Blood Royal was when I received my cover flats (and not just because they had my name on them). I took one look at Clint’s cover art and knew the book would sell well.

His covers capture the grim, urban landscape of Necromunda well. I especially like the city-on-fire feel of the background for the Blood Royal piece. Yet, at the same time, the heroic way in which he depicts Kal Jerico in these pieces harkens back to images of Conan created by Frank Frazetta, elevating Kal to almost godlike proportions. I’m certain Kal would be quite happy with his portraits.

My absolute favourite cover art on any book I have been associated with has to be the one Clint created for Lasgun Wedding. I was lucky enough to get a copy of this piece while still writing the novel. When I got to the wedding scene depicted on the cover, I tried very hard to capture Clint’s amazing image in the text as closely as possible. I even had Kal and Yolanda destroy their previous wedding attire because they wanted something that suited their particular styles more closely. In the end, when they get to the altar, Kal and Yolanda are wearing the clothes imagined for them by Clint Langley.

WILL McDERMOTT
Author
My initial reaction to Back From The Dead was ‘wow!’ As I look back on it now, nothing has changed. I’ve long been a fan of Clint’s work; his edgy, realistic style really strikes a chord. The colour contrast he employs is also very appealing. Take this piece for instance: the stark bright blue hues of the background juxta-posed against the dark and gritty zombie characters give the piece life and balance.

The imagery is wonderful and I found it very useful to draw upon during the writing process. I actually incorporated the idea of zombie gangers carrying guns into the plot (specifically, the three seen here), whereas before seeing the art I’d not had any. They possess dynamism and a character that I think had been previously lacking, too. Oddly, it’s one of the strongest scenes in the book!

NICK KYME
Author
Authors often bite their nails and fret about their book covers with equal measures of anticipation and dread. If you're lucky, you get an artist that really understands your story and can find a way to bring your characters to life in a single, evocative image.

If you're really lucky, you get an artist like Clint Langley. Clint's covers for the Darkblade series have been an inspiration to me as the series progressed; he really brings the character to life in all his dark and twisted glory. Clint says a lot just with the way he composes his images — the way he pairs Malus with his cold one. Spite, says a lot about the character in subtle, understated ways. When I first saw the cover for The Daemon's Curse I was blown away by the image of a slight, pale figure in ornate armour on the back on an enormous, dinosaur-like cold one. The contrast between the two figures couldn't be greater; at first glance Spite seems to completely overshadow its rider. So the image begs the question: how fearsome does this guy have to be in order to master a monster like that? You get a sense of Malus's indomitable will in his upright posture and the hard look in his dark eyes. He's not a muscle-bound barbarian; he triumphs by virtue of being harder and meaner than anyone else around him. That crystallizes the essence of the character for me in a single image, and I kept that book on my writing desk every single day as I continued to tell Darkblade's story. Whenever I found myself wondering what Malus might do next, or how he was going to get out of the next fix he'd found himself in, I'd drag out The Daemon's Curse and look my antihero in the eye.

Clint may also be one of those cover artists out there whose illustration actually directed the course of the story it was created for. He completed the cover for Reaper of Souls well before the book itself was done. At the time the plot was pretty well set in my mind, but when the Black Library showed a poster-sized copy of the cover at UK Games Day my editor sent it to me afterwards with a quick note: make sure you put a burning city in the story! With an incredible cover image like that, how could I argue — and so I gladly changed the end of the book to match Clint's image.

What can I say? Clint knows how to tell a story.

MIKE LEE
Author
When I receive a brief, as soon as I read it, I can imagine the image in my head. To a certain extent I’ll hear the soundtrack and see the image moving. I’ll often stand around and move into poses to put myself in that moment. For instance, as soon as you mention Chaos Space Marine, I’m beginning to see the sky boil and a Khorne Berserker charging over the hill.

Generally, I imagine an illustration like a film and that’s what I try to capture on the page.

I start from back to front. The landscape comes first, which I’ll either just create using a photograph of some sky or by using something I photographed on my travels. I never use a photograph directly, though – there’re normally lots of layers.

A mood will happen then. Once I’ve got that mood, the character almost steps into shot.*

CLINT LANGLEY
SHADOWS OF THE WARP AND WARCry

Here at Sabertooth Games we have had a long and great relationship with Clint Langley. As an artist, his dynamic and stunning pieces have added a lot to many of our projects. With epic versions of Tecus, Malus Darkblade and Count Theodric Gausser for WarCry, Clint established himself as one of our favourite artists.

In some conversations with him he floated the idea of possibly doing all of the art for a whole set of our Dark Millennium card game. We thought this was a great idea and promptly set Clint to work. Throughout the process, Clint sent us sketches and we were blown away with his imagination and ability to convey atmosphere and emotion.

Clint is obviously a huge fan of Warhammer 40,000 and it shows in his work. Cards such as Victus, a Black Templar’s Emperor’s Champion; Sergeant Hirsch, a Space Marine squad leader and Farseer Bethaneal, an Ulthwe eldar psyker, are easily highlights of the set and they really reinforce the power of Warhammer 40,000’s imagery.

This set also introduces the Hammers of Dorn, a brand new Space Marine Chapter created just for the game. Much like Kaelor before it, getting to run with a heretofore-unexplored group image gives the artist more room to be creative and really shine.

Tackling a whole set of cards at once is a pretty Herculean task but luckily for us Clint was more than up to the job!

DAVID FREEMAN
Sabertooth CCG, Dark Millennium Line Developer

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VICTUS - EMPEROR'S CHAMPION • PROPHECIES PERL CCG ART • 2007
Pathos - Shadows of the Warp CCG Art - 2007
Paralyser - Shadows of the Warp CCG Art - 2007
Malady - Defiler - Shadows of the Warp - 2007
For Nanny Trot – C.L.

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