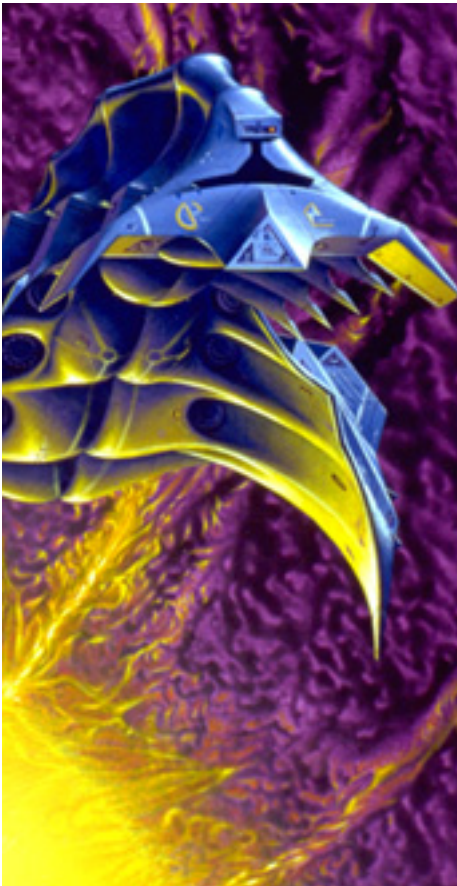


The Art of Alan M. Clark

Alan M. Clark's name may not be a household word, but his work should be familiar to fans of horror and science fiction. Since 1985, Clark has been creating cover, interior, and promotional illustrations for books by Joe Lansdale, William F. Nolan, Richard Laymon, F. Paul Wilson, Terry Pratchett, Greg Bear, C. J. Cherryh, Tanith Lee, James Morrow, David Brin, James Blish, Forrest J. Ackerman, Richard Bachman (whoever that is), Jack Ketchum, and Mike Resnick among many others. His work has also appeared in a wide range of magazines, including *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*, *Amazing Stories*, *Analog*, *Asimov's*, *Ellery Queen*, and *Weird Tales*, and he is a frequent cover artist for *Cemetery Dance* magazine. Clark's awards include the International Horror Critic's Guild Award for Best Artist and several A.S.F.A. Chesley and World Fantasy awards. Most recently, he illustrated Richard Laymon's children's book *The Halloween Mouse* for Cemetery Dance Publications.



Detail: *Cow Bone Ship*

The Spook: Thanks for taking the time to talk to our readers. I'd like to start talking about your career from the beginning: You have a Fine Arts Degree from the San Francisco Art Institute. How well do you think your education prepared you for life as a freelance artist?

Alan M. Clark: The fine arts education prepared me not at all for commercial art. With that background, I started out with some strength as well as some weaknesses. The major weakness is that my work tends to not be terribly commercial and so it was difficult at first finding freelance work. One of the strengths is that though my work has become more commercial — enough so that I now get consistent work — the individual paintings don't give up all their secrets without an audience coming back for more. They're like a painting meant to hang on the wall and be viewed for many years. The trick then is to make the work compelling enough that the audience does come back for another look. Most of the time I feel that I've pulled this off.

TS: What kind of media do you prefer to work in?

AC: Acrylic paint on hard board.

TS: Some of your pieces — I'm thinking of *Cow Bone Ship* in particular here — almost look photorealistic or perhaps computer rendered. Do you ever use Photoshop, 3D modeling, or other computer tools to create your work?

AC: I did a painting with Photoshop once, many years ago. It wasn't very good. Now I do not paint with the computer. My work is hand-painted. I use the computer to prepare images for printing or other forms of display, but the most painting I might do in the computer is a little repair to a file now and then. That is all.

TS: You have said that you have a fascination for "controlled accidents" in your work. Could you give us some insight into what these are?

AC: "Controlled accidents" is my term for the messes I make with paint — messes from which I might pull out and develop unplanned aspects of the painting. It's sort of like finding faces in wood grain, animal shapes in clouds, that sort of thing. I often begin paintings with these sorts of messes



The artist at home

— my way of introducing the element of chance that is so delightful in the real world — into my work. I push paint around with rags, tinfoil, acetate, my vacuum cleaner, etc. to create forms to work with. I look into the mess and find direction, sometimes elements of composition, certain spontaneous aspects of my subject matter.

TS: So would it be correct to say that when you're working in this way you never know what you'll end up with?

AC: Not really. For the sake of art directors I have to start with a sketch of what I'll be painting. But from there I do a lot of things that allow for discovery in the process, sort of taking advantage of, or capitalizing on, spontaneous surface textures and brush strokes. I'll make a slip of the hand and then work it in, make it make sense. This brings the painting that element of chance I spoke of, and gives, I think, the work a life and reality of its own.

TS: Do you often — or ever — use live models?

AC: Rarely, since I don't have much time. And my figures suffer for it. They are highly flawed, but I have tried to turn that flaw



into another (hopefully) charming signature in my work.

TS: You mentioned having difficulty finding freelance work early in your career. Was there a point that you'd consider to be your "big break"?

AC: When I was fifteen years old, I finished a painting. I was very excited that I had actually finished something and I never forgot the feeling. I've very nearly finished almost everything I've begun since then. Now I know this isn't really the kind of thing you're asking about, but I know there are so many creative folks out there who have never gotten to — may

never get to — this "big break." It made a difference in my life.

TS: Now that you're an established freelancer, do you feel that you have the freedom to pick and choose projects?

AC: I do on occasion. As odd as my work is, it has sort of done that for me. I tend to get work painting dark subjects, but occasionally I get to do something a bit different; a children's book, science fiction work, biology, etc.

TS: How has the growth of the Internet helped you as a freelance artist?

AC: I have a Web page that I maintain. It costs me very little and brings me thou-

sands of dollars worth of business. Through the site I sell my prints, the books I publish, and my original art, and the site acts as a huge portfolio to which I can direct anyone interested in seeing my work.

At this point, most of my business is done in digital form. The paintings are painted by hand — there's nothing to beat pushing colored goop around on a surface creating an illusion — but the production end, getting images to publishers, text, book, and art files to printers, is all done in digital form, sometimes via e-mail, but most often as information written to CD



HIV, from: *The Biology of Viruses*, by Bruce Voyles

and sent through the mail.

TS: Your art has been featured in quite a number of publications in a variety of genres. Is there one you are particularly pleased to have been involved with?

AC: There is so much — I'm proud to have my work in demand. I didn't expect it, but pursued it anyway as I just didn't have anything better to do. I'm very proud of some of the biology work I've done, particularly the covers for *The Biology of Viruses*, by Bruce Voyles and the revised edition of the same book. Then there's the two children's books I've done, *The Christmas Thing* by F. Paul Wilson, and *The Halloween Mouse*, by Dick Laymon, both published by Cemetery Dance Publications. And the work I did — color cover and six interiors (two color, four black and white) — for *The Bottoms* by Joe Lansdale, published by Subterranean Press. Also there are the books my publishing company, IFD Publishing has released: two collections, two anthologies.

TS: Having done a significant amount of artwork for genre books, do you ever feel at all "typecast"?

AC: Yes, but then I get to break out of that fairly often. I have not had a problem with it.

TS: In addition to painting, you have also published several pieces of short fiction. Is there, in your mind, a significant difference in the creative process when producing a literary as opposed to a visual artwork?

AC: I would say that there are more similarities than differences. One of the most powerful lessons from writing for me as an illustrator is the advice all writers are given early on: "Show, don't tell." For illustration this must be subtly altered to something like, "Suggest, don't define," but remains good advice.

TS: There have been two gorgeous volumes of short stories based on your artwork — *Imagination Fully Dilated* and *Imagination Fully Dilated 2*. How does it feel to have other people interpret your visions in this way?

AC: What an honor that they would want to write stories for my work! There were great writers involved in these projects. That they would be willing to spend the time and energy doing this is the best evidence for me that I am succeeding in my goal of creating compelling work.

TS: Will there be another *Imagination Fully Dilated* volume in the future?

AC: Scorpius Digital Publishing is going to do Volume 2.5 as an e-book for

Microsoft Reader. It will contain several stories from each of the preceding volumes, as well as some new material. An as-yet-to-be-titled volume of stories written for my science fiction work is in the works with an e-book version to be published by Electric Story, and a trade paperback version by Fairwood Press.

TS: You collaborated with Richard Laymon on *The Halloween Mouse*, a book which may have the unfortunate distinction of being the last Laymon worked on. What was it like to work on a children's book with someone who is better known for, to put it mildly, more mature fare?

AC: Dick was delighted with the project. He was a sweetheart of a guy, as are so many horror writers, and I don't think he thought of it as an extraordinary thing for him to be doing. Even so, it is *The Halloween Mouse*, so it is at least about a scary night.

TS: For books like *The Halloween Mouse* and *The Christmas Thing*, you needed to produce a large number of pieces relating to the same subject matter. Does this make you feel at all limited, or do you appreciate the opportunity to explore a story in detail?

AC: Actually, I don't seem to mind constraints. I have my limits, but often con-



straints cause me to become economical and deliberate in my work — whether the constraints have to do with a short deadline, subject matter, or even a job I just don't like — and that can never hurt the work. Most of the time if a job is difficult I work through it because I have the habit of finishing everything, and I end up being more proud of the results because of the extra effort.

TS: Would you like to do more children's books? Perhaps something more "mainstream"?

AC: I do enjoy working on the children's books a great deal. If mainstream means mass-market — perhaps, but what is going on in small press right now is awfully exciting. The possibilities there seem greater, more varied than in the mainstream. And when you look at the two children's books I've done this past year, I think you'll see that they rival what's being done in mass-market. They are full color hardcovers, just like the best you might see at B&N.

TS: In 1999 you opened IFD Publishing. What inspired you to go into the book publishing business yourself?

AC: I had been selling book proposals for some time and learning the digital technology involved in book production and printing. I had assembled the skills to do it and thought to try my hand.

TS: Has IFD met your expectations?

AC: I've done okay with it. It seems to pay for itself. One day I may make a profit. In the meantime, I'm very proud of the books I have published.

TS: It sounds like your career is continuing to expand. What do you hope the future holds for Alan M. Clark?

AC: I had no expectation that I would make a living with my artwork. I had no expectations for success as a publisher, and that remains to be seen. I have no reasonable expectations for my future. My card says, "Imagination for hire." That's what I am — an imagination. I have taken that ability into a lot of different situations and have been lucky to find a niche and to prosper. I sort of tumble from one thing to another, keeping my eyes open for opportunities to express my creative desires. I try to keep an open mind so as to recognize these opportunities when they present themselves, but my willingness to work hard accounts for a lot. ~

Alan M. Clark's work can be viewed — and purchased — online at home.earthlink.net/~alanmclark/



Dancing Greens by Alan M. Clark