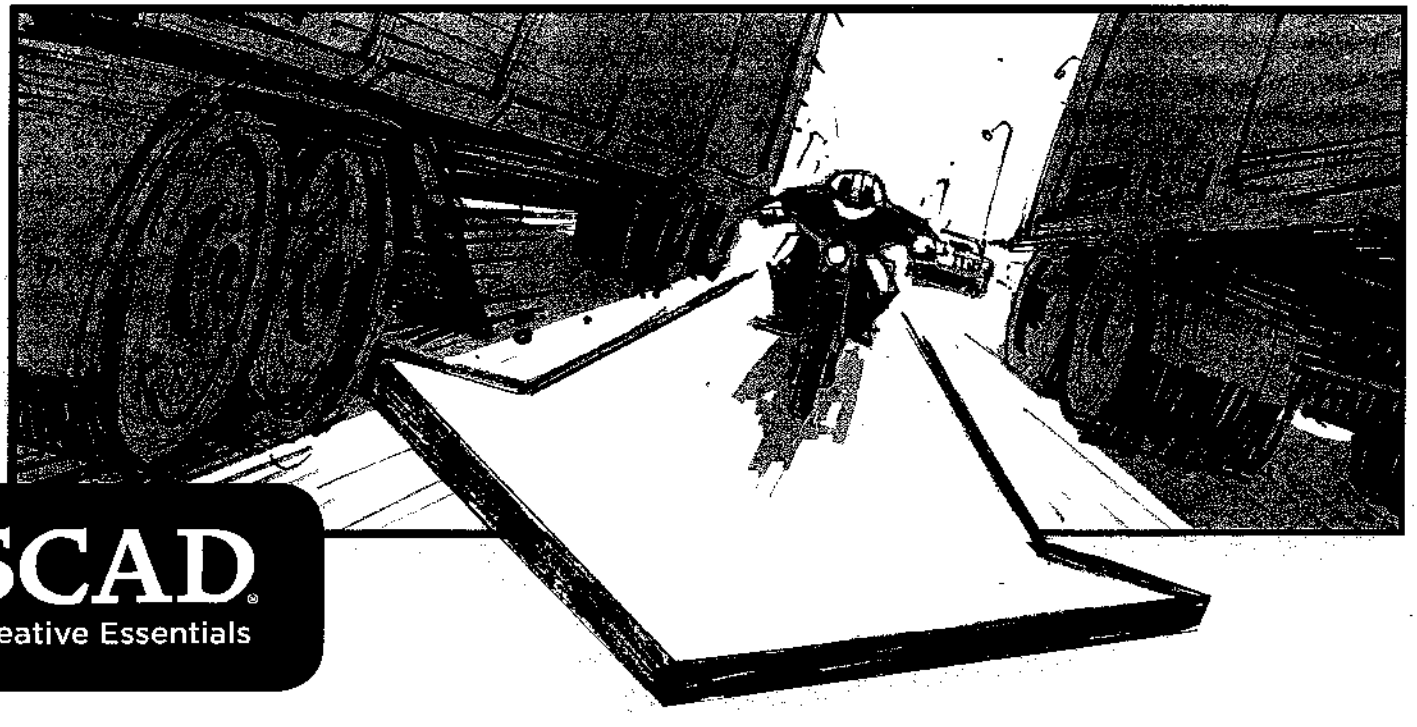
David Harland Rousseau and Benjamin Reid Phillips

STORY-BOARDING ESSENTIALS

How to Translate Your Story to the Screen for Film, TV, and Other Media



SCAD
Creative Essentials

Script Basics

While this is not a book on screenwriting, it is important for every storyboard artist to be able to identify the elements of a script and to be able to interpret the written word.

Let's start with the basics. Every script has five fundamental elements:

1. Slugline
2. Action
3. Character
4. Dialogue
5. Wryly

Each one of these components provides essential information to everyone involved with the film or episode, from the director on down to the production assistant. A good storyboard artist should be able to glean information from each of these elements.

EXT. CITY HALL – DAY — slugline

The crowd gathers along BAY STREET as drivers and engineers tune up their racers.

DAHLIA steps out of her roadster. She moves toward JACK, who is working on his car.

DAHLIA
(softly)
Hey.

Jack pulls his head from under the hood. He wipes grimy hands on his coveralls. — action

Dahlia stands with arms folded. Jack is uneasy.

A PORTLY man waddles up to Jack. He tips his hat to Dahlia, who lowers her gaze.

PORTLY
Jack, my boy, a lot of folks are counting on you-

JACK — character
Thank you, sir.

PORTLY
I dare say we've got a good bit of money on you, son. Play your cards right, and you'll be very comfortable.

Portly places a heavy hand on Jack's shoulder. Jack winces.

PORTLY — wryly
(Leaning in, whispering)
Just take it easy, lad. Think of it as a leisurely drive through the countryside.

Portly slaps Jack hard on the back. He gives a tip and a nod to Dahlia, and waddles off.

Jack stands with clenched jaw.

DAHLIA — dialogue
I'll tell you later.

JACK
What?

Dahlia kisses Jack on the cheek and climbs back into her Buick. She puts the car into gear and motors off, leaving Jack in the dust.

Spec Script Example: Storyboard artists would look for cues that would help them determine framing height, angle, and movement, as well as setting and time of day.

Slugline

When looking at the *slugline*, the reader notices three vital pieces of information:

1. The relative location of the camera (interior or exterior)
2. The physical location of the scene itself
3. The relative time of day

The slugline is expressed in this simple fashion—and always in all CAPS:

```
EXT. CITY HALL—DAY
```

What can a storyboard artist glean from this simple line of text? We know from this master scene heading that the scene is to be shot outside, in front of city hall, during the day. That's a lot of information provided with less than a half-dozen words.

Tip

It is interesting to note that script formats follow very rigid conventions, from the typeface (12-point Courier) to indention and spacing between elements. There is a reason for this: when properly executed, one page of script equals one minute of film.

Action

The *action*, written in the present tense with quick beats, gives the artist a bit more information:

```
Jack pulls his head from under
the hood. He wipes grimy hands
on his coveralls.
```

That provides a lot more information, but it still gives the storyboard artist a great deal of leeway.

Character, Wryly, and Dialogue

Finally, we have *character*, *wryly*, and *dialogue*, expressed in this fashion:

```
                PORTLY
(Leaning in, whispering)
Just take it easy, lad. Think
of it as a leisurely drive
through the countryside.
```

Here, you learn who is speaking, how he is to deliver the line, and what he is saying. While the dialogue is not essential for the storyboard artist (this isn't a comic book script requiring word balloons, after all), the dialogue might just provide a clue for the artist with regard to body language and posture. With the parenthetical directions provided by the wryly, you can tell that Portly is trying to intimidate Jack.

You can find storyboard examples from this screenplay excerpt on pages 28–37.

Terms

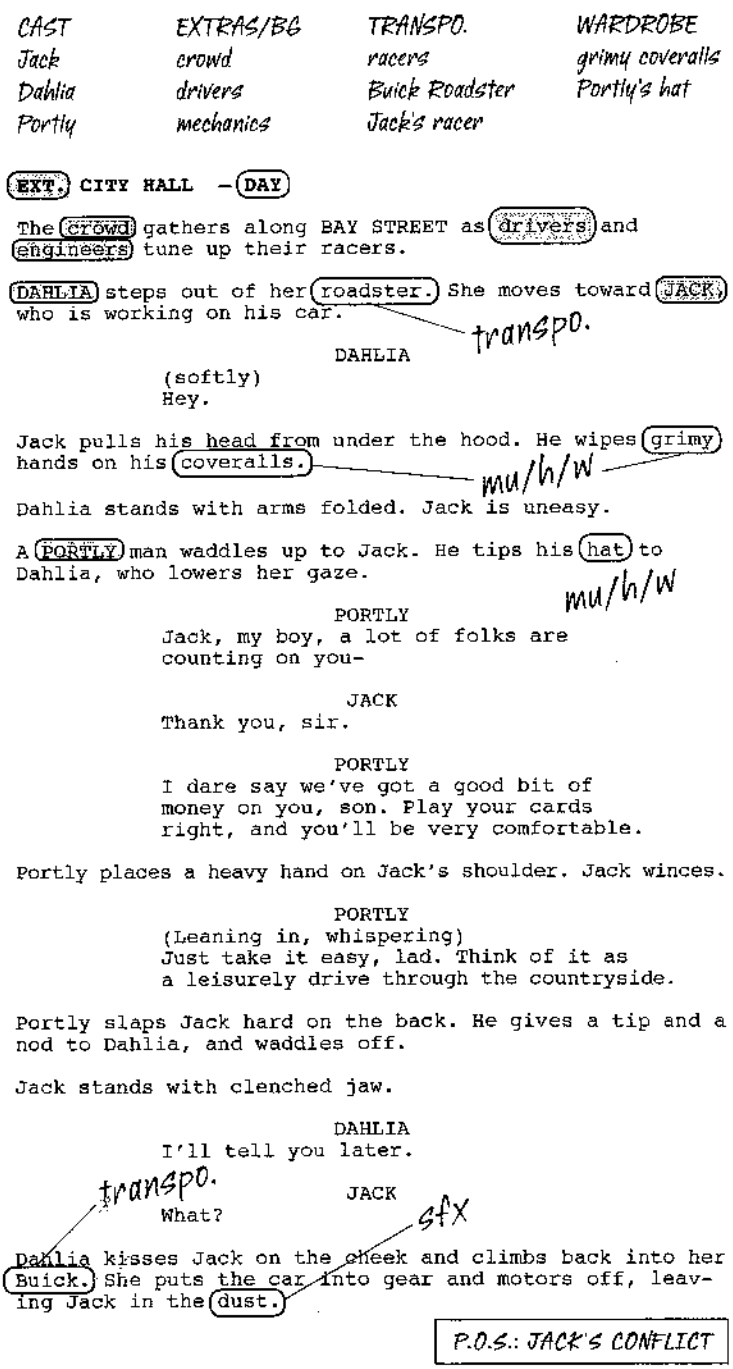
Action: Also ***description.*** This is a brief narrative of what can be "seen" or represented on screen.
Character: This subheading denotes who is speaking.
Dialogue: This indicates what is being said.
Slugline: Also ***master scene heading.*** This tells us where the scene is shot and indicates the time of day.
Wryly: Also ***parenthetical.*** This suggests a direction for the actor.

Script Breakdowns

The storyboard artist can take full advantage of the screenplay or script by breaking it down. In his outstanding course Production Assistant Training Seminar (PATS), taught throughout the United States to those interested in breaking into the film business, Ken Chaplin (see pages 38-39) provides an excellent introduction for breaking down the script. With his permission, we've adapted this simple-yet-effective technique for the storyboard artist.

The assistant directors (ADs) or department heads will take their copy of the script and go over it with a fine-tooth comb, making clear and obvious notations on things they find essential. Here are some things to look for in every script:

- Interior (INT) or exterior (EXT)
- DAY or NIGHT
- Cast
- Extras
- Transportation
- Props
- Set dressing (S/D)
- Special effects (SFX or FX)
- Animal wrangler (A/W)
- Makeup, hair, and wardrobe (MU/H/W)



CAST
Jack
Dahlia
Portly

EXTRAS/BG
crowd
drivers
mechanics

TRANSPO.
racers
Buick Roadster
Jack's racer

WARDROBE
grimy coveralls
Portly's hat

EXT. CITY HALL – DAY

The crowd gathers along BAY STREET as drivers and engineers tune up their racers.

DAHLIA steps out of her roadster. She moves toward JACK, who is working on his car.

transpo.

DAHLIA
(softly)
Hey.

Jack pulls his head from under the hood. He wipes grimy hands on his coveralls.

mu/h/w

Dahlia stands with arms folded. Jack is uneasy.

A PORTLY man waddles up to Jack. He tips his hat to Dahlia, who lowers her gaze.

mu/h/w

PORTLY
Jack, my boy, a lot of folks are counting on you-

JACK
Thank you, sir.

PORTLY
I dare say we've got a good bit of money on you, son. Play your cards right, and you'll be very comfortable.

Portly places a heavy hand on Jack's shoulder. Jack winces.

PORTLY
(Leaning in, whispering)
Just take it easy, lad. Think of it as a leisurely drive through the countryside.

Portly slaps Jack hard on the back. He gives a tip and a nod to Dahlia, and waddles off.

Jack stands with clenched jaw.

DAHLIA
I'll tell you later.

transpo.

JACK
What?

sfx

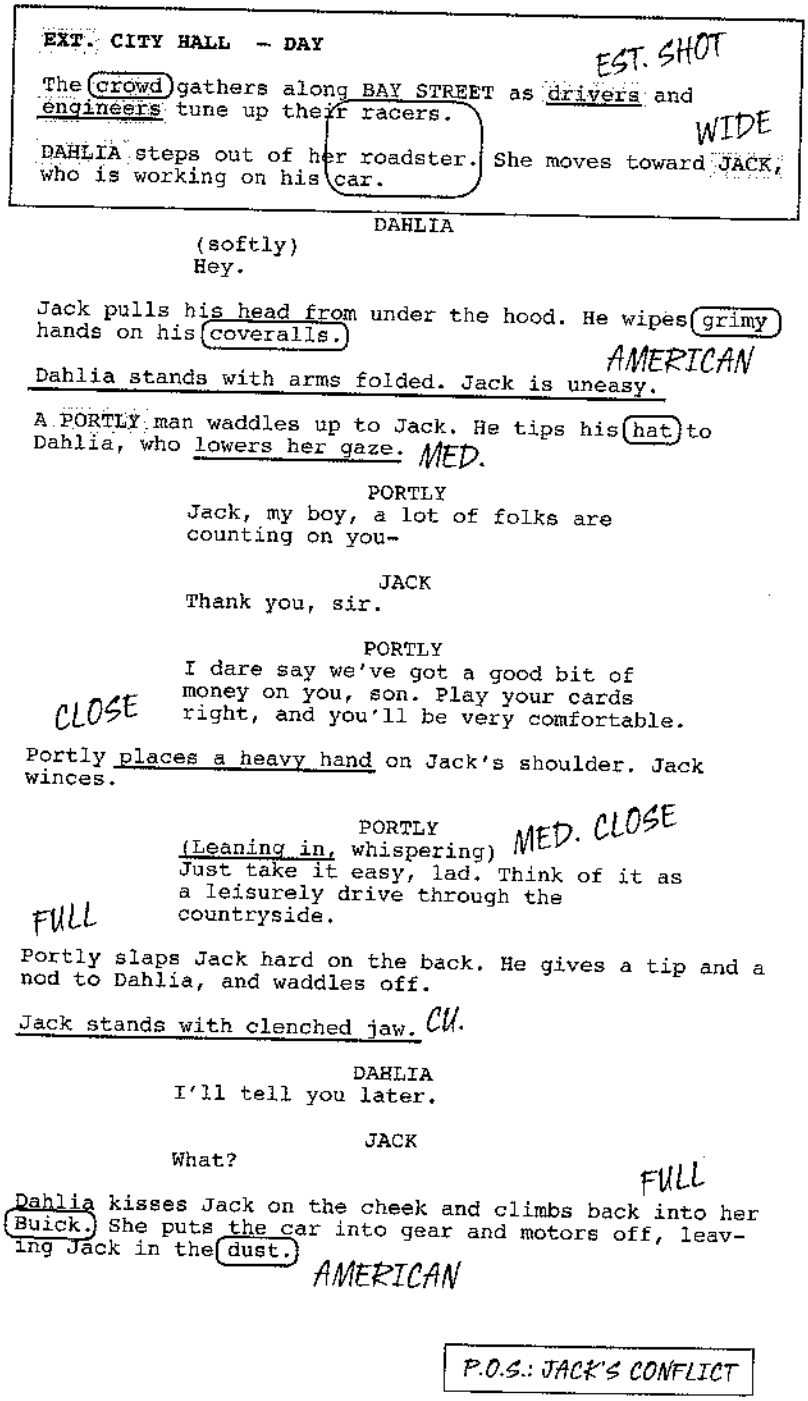
Dahlia kisses Jack on the cheek and climbs back into her Buick. She puts the car into gear and motors off, leaving Jack in the dust.

P.O.S.: JACK'S CONFLICT

This is an example of how an assistant director sees a script. Assistant directors are responsible for thinking of everything the director needs in order to pull off the shot.

The AD may also wish to define the *point of the scene* (POS), in order to abstractly define mood and setting. The POS is often written on call sheets as a reminder of which scene is being shot; however, most storyboard artists rarely, if ever, see call sheets.

The storyboard artist should build on this technique in order to discover cues and clues as to body language and expression, appropriate framing, angle, and movement.



EXT. CITY HALL – DAY

EST. SHOT

The crowd gathers along BAY STREET as drivers and engineers tune up their racers.

WIDE

DAHLIA steps out of her roadster. She moves toward JACK, who is working on his car.

DAHLIA
(softly)
Hey.

Jack pulls his head from under the hood. He wipes grimy hands on his coveralls.

AMERICAN

Dahlia stands with arms folded. Jack is uneasy.

A PORTLY man waddles up to Jack. He tips his hat to Dahlia, who lowers her gaze.

MED.

PORTLY
Jack, my boy, a lot of folks are counting on you-

JACK
Thank you, sir.

PORTLY
I dare say we've got a good bit of money on you, son. Play your cards right, and you'll be very comfortable.

CLOSE

Portly places a heavy hand on Jack's shoulder. Jack winces.

PORTLY
(Leaning in, whispering)

MED. CLOSE

Just take it easy, lad. Think of it as a leisurely drive through the countryside.

FULL

Portly slaps Jack hard on the back. He gives a tip and a nod to Dahlia, and waddles off.

Jack stands with clenched jaw.

CU.

DAHLIA
I'll tell you later.

JACK
What?

FULL

Dahlia kisses Jack on the cheek and climbs back into her Buick. She puts the car into gear and motors off, leaving Jack in the dust.

AMERICAN

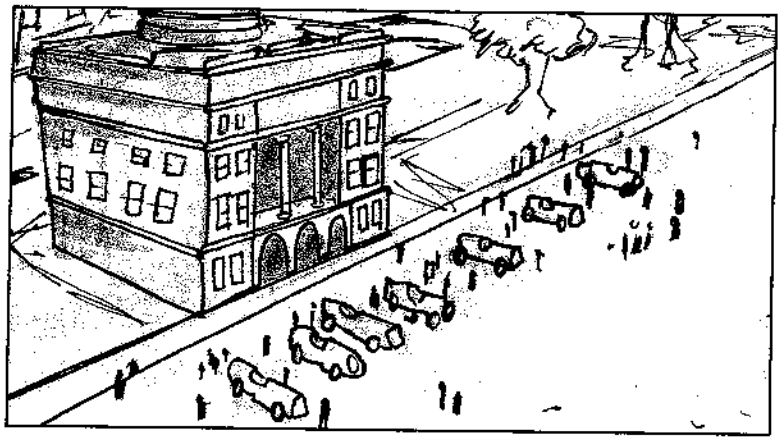
P.O.S.: JACK'S CONFLICT

This is an example of how a storyboard artist sees a script. The illustrator is concerned with conveying the POS through well-composed drawings that help the crew understand framing, angle, and movement. Other notes, such as thoughts on wardrobe, help the illustrator set the mood and tone for the crew.

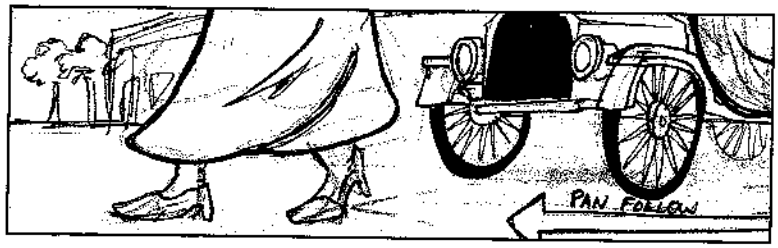
A Difference of Opinion
The Great Savannah Race

In this installment of "A Difference of Opinion," Joshua Reynolds, an up-and-coming sequential artist, and Katrina Kissell, an up-and-coming illustrator, give their take on the excerpt from *The Great Savannah Race* from page 20. The whole process took each artist about two days from script breakdown through approval to finished boards.

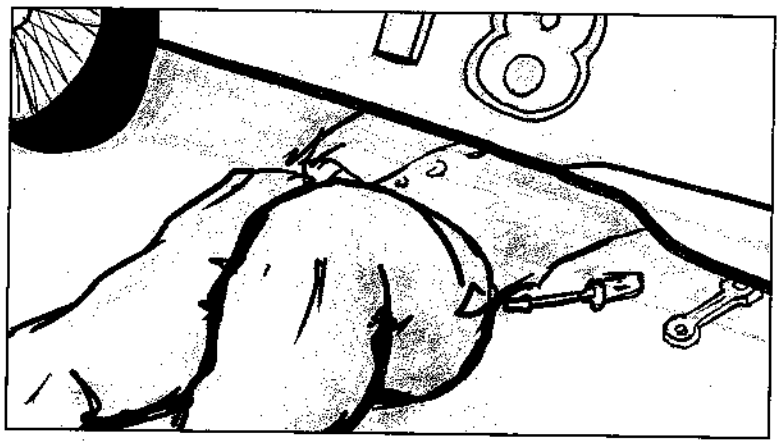
Joshua Reynolds's Version



In his establishing shot, the artist, Joshua Reynolds, sets up a Down Shot to introduce the location and the general action of prepping for a race.



Reynolds sets up some initial mystery as we see only the legs of a woman step out of a car and walk as the camera pans to follow her action.

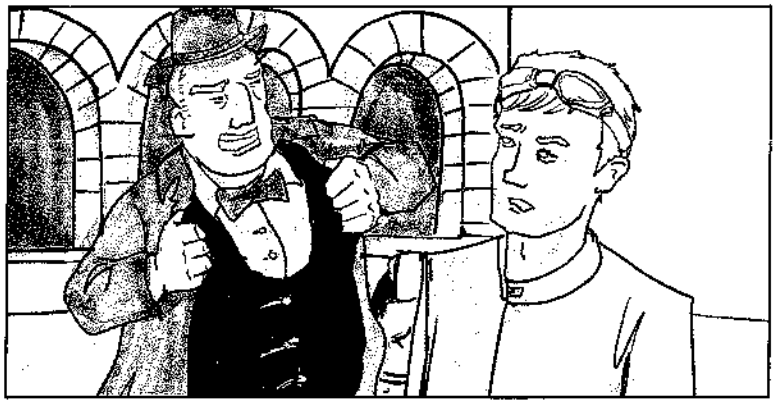


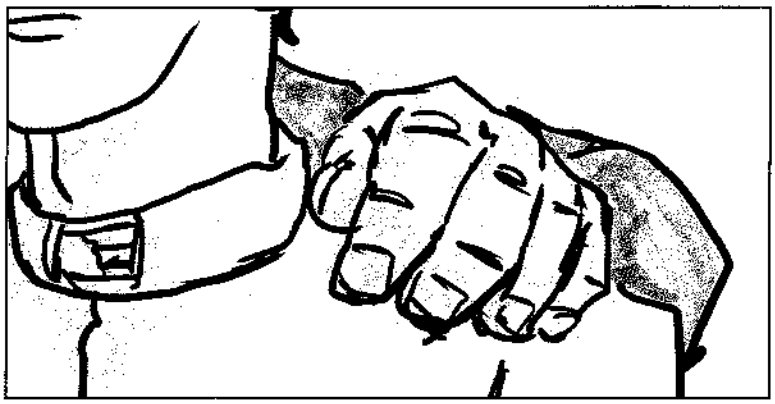
Again, the artist keeps a sense of mystery as he frames only the lower half of a character whose face is obscured underneath a car.

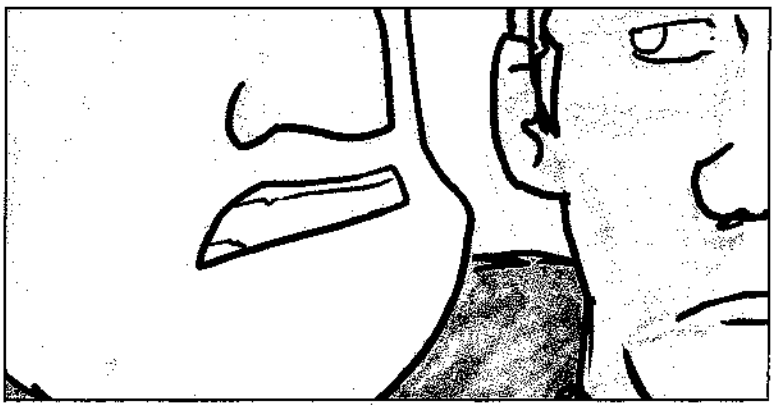
Over the next two shots, Reynolds reveals the faces of the characters and establishes that they know each other.

Framing up a simple Over-the-Shoulder Shot, the artist is able to introduce a new character to the scene. This allows the audience to clearly see that this man is approaching our two previously introduced characters.

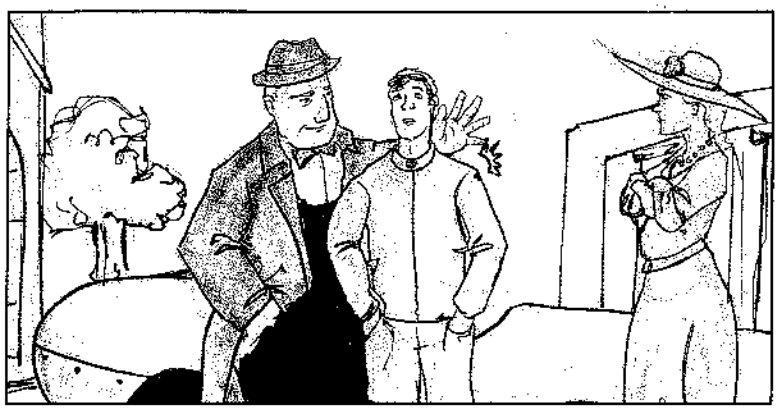
Reynolds then uses a Medium Close-Up Shot to show us the woman's reaction to this interruption.





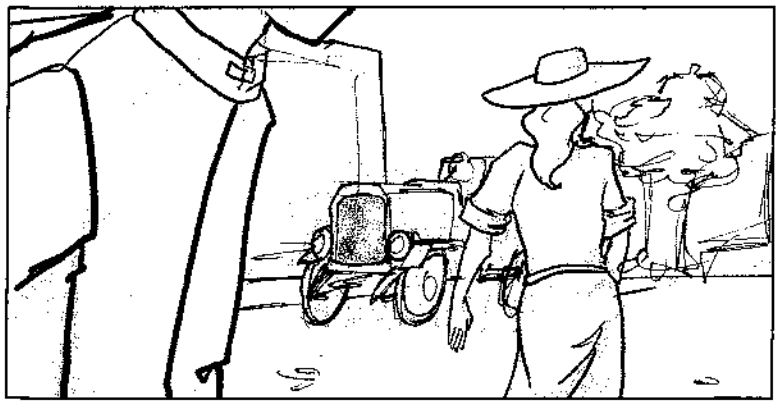


Over the next four shots, Reynolds pulls the camera closer and closer to the action. This helps to draw the audience into this uncomfortable exchange.



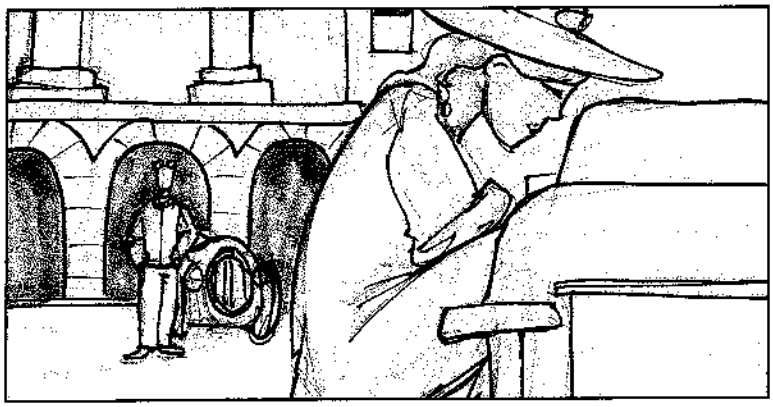
Reynolds pulls the camera back out to reestablish the general location and the three characters.

With a Medium Close-Up, the artist shows the audience that the main racer is focused on the menace the man poses.

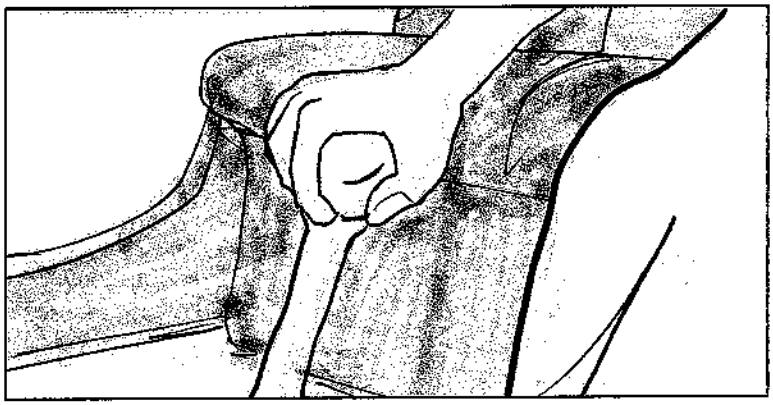


This focus helps to add the sense of surprise as the artist cuts to an Over-the-Shoulder to see that the woman is heading back to her own car.

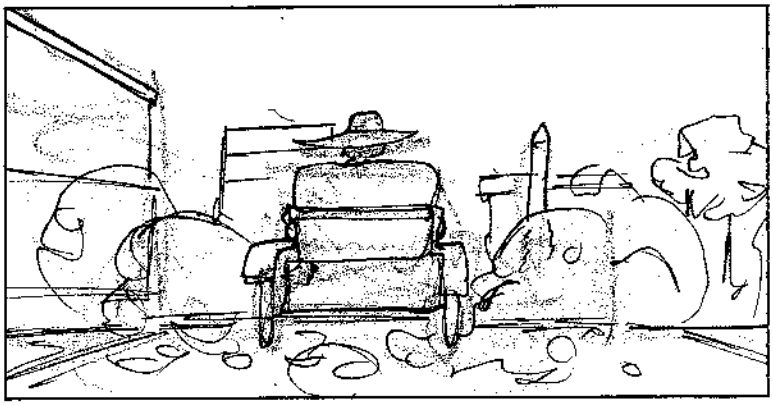
Next, Reynolds uses a series of tighter shots: a Medium Shot to show a quick kiss for luck . . .



. . . another Over-the-Shoulder to show the woman stepping into her car . . .



. . . and, last, a Close Shot of her hand putting the vehicle into gear.

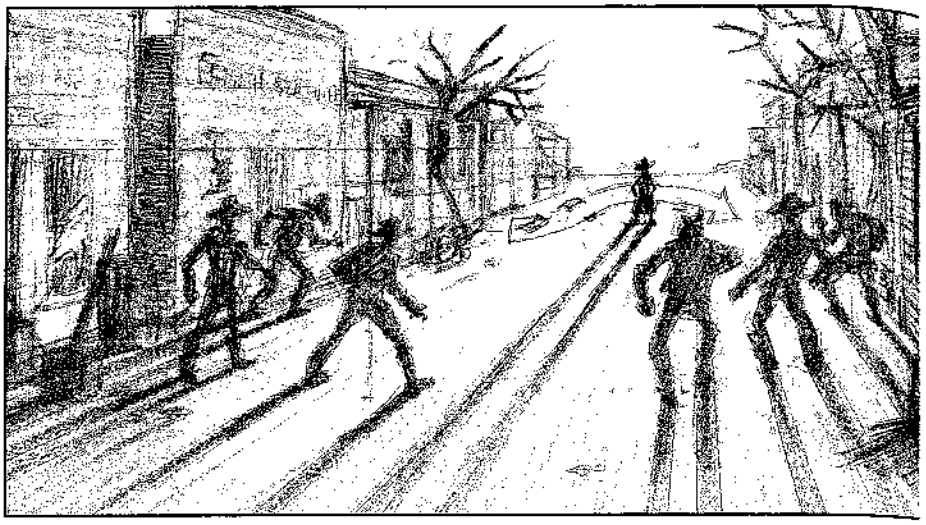


Employing a Full Shot of the car driving away helps to set up the sense of a Point-of-View Shot . . .

. . . which is confirmed with the last shot of the scene as Reynolds frames the racer looking off screen in a Knee Shot. This second shot helps to motivate the Point-of-View from the previous shot.

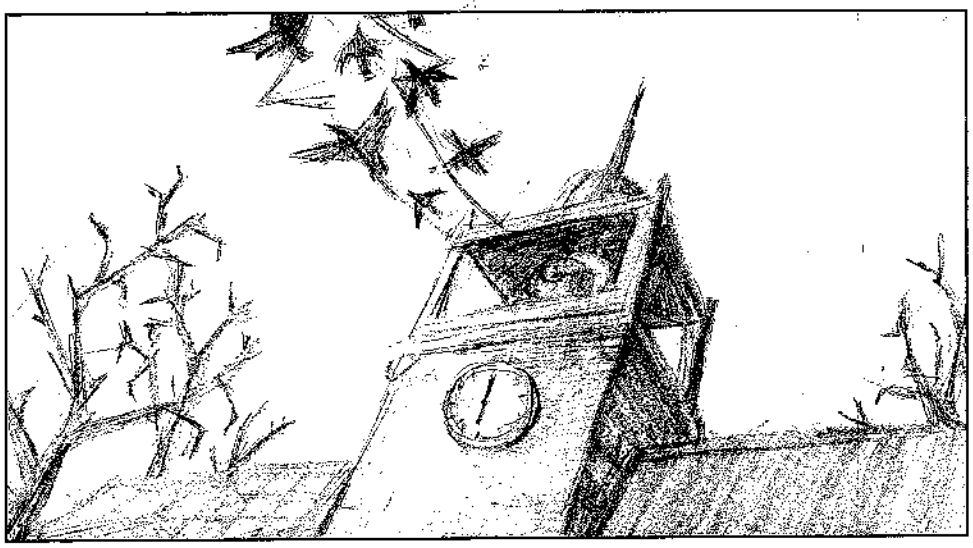
Sam Reveley's Version

RIGHT: Sam Reveley employs a high-angle Wide Shot to establish the location and characters in her establishing shot. While this approach may not build as much suspense, it shows the audience more of the space these characters occupy.

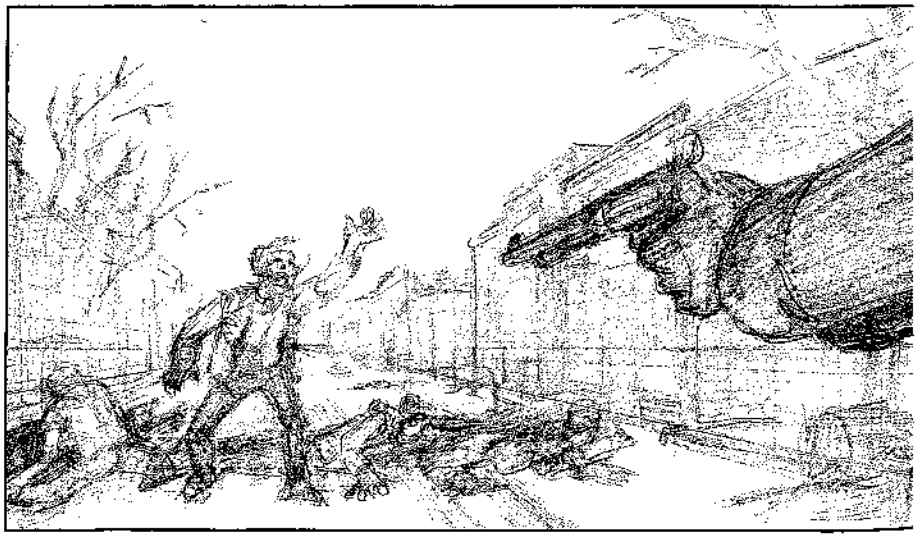


BELOW: The camera comes in for a Medium Close-Up.

BOTTOM: This is followed by an Extreme Close-Up on our hero gunslinger. Note the subtle performance difference in Reveley's boards.



A classic variation of the Over-the-Shoulder Shot is used. The "Hip Shot" has long been a staple of cowboy films.



TOP: A clearly staged Medium Shot shows the gunslinger open up with his six-shooter.

MIDDLE: As a canted shot helps to reinforce the chaos, bullets fly through the pack of zombies.

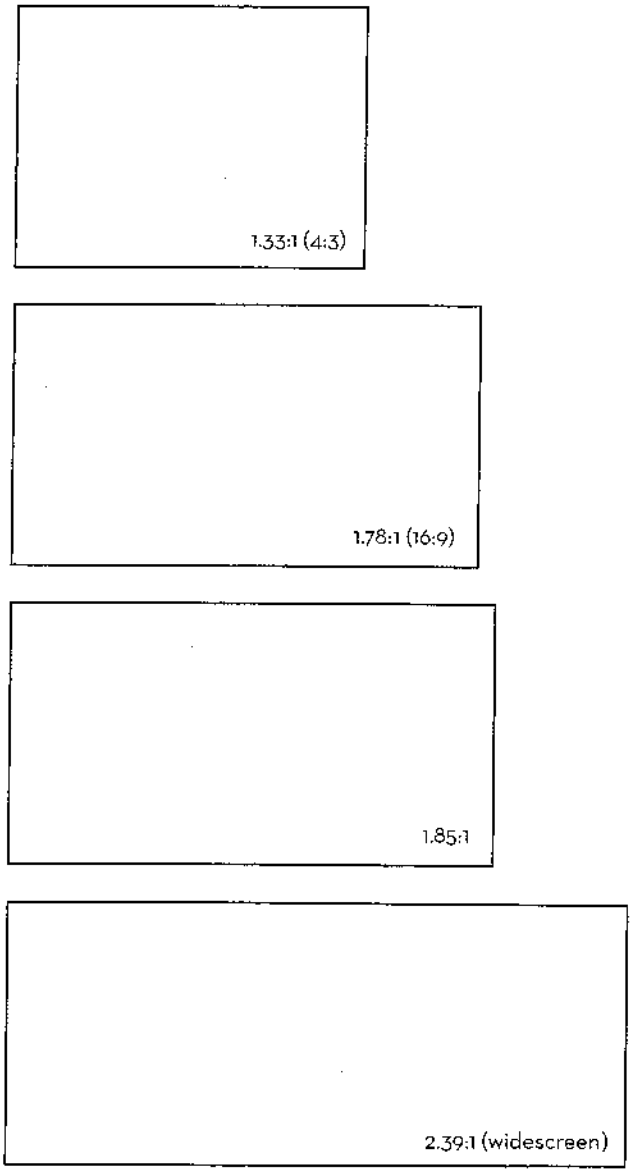
BOTTOM: With the hands in the foreground as the gunslinger takes aim at the last fiend standing, the artist is clearly indicating a POV Shot.

LEFT: Reveley places the camera low and lets the action play out as a bullet hits the final zombie and she crashes back toward the camera's position.

MIDDLE AND BOTTOM: With the final Medium Close-Up, the artist chooses to play the character with more bravado as he blows the smoke from his pistol.

Aspect Ratios

The creation of any form of motion media, such as film, television, video games, and webisodes, requires the use of a system to capture images (for example, cameras or computers). The presentation of any form of motion media requires the use of a system to display those images (for example, televisions, projectors, or monitors). Due to the constraints of these types of systems, it is necessary that standard image dimensions be employed. These standard image dimensions are known as *aspect ratios*.



Aspect ratio is an expression of width relative to height. Width is always listed first; height is fixed and always expressed as a unit of 1.

Modern aspect ratios have developed alongside emerging technologies. As a result, certain aspect ratios no longer exist. Because aspect ratios are set by the limitations of the era, at least one aspect ratio discussed in this chapter will be phased out with the advent and acceptance of new technologies, such as HDTV.

Remember, aspect ratios correspond directly to the formats used by the production team. They reflect what the camera "sees." Boarding in the wrong ratio causes confusion, creates compositional issues resulting in cost overruns, and damages the reputation of the storyboard artist!

What Aspect Ratio Is Right for You?

Someone once asked, "Which aspect ratio is best?" The answer is simple: whichever one is right for the job!

The storyboard artist doesn't have much of a say when it comes to choosing the appropriate aspect ratio. This decision is made by the director and cinematographer, and it is often influenced by the chosen medium (film, television, or the Internet). Therefore, it is vital that the illustrator confirm the aspect ratio before drawing a single thumbnail sketch.

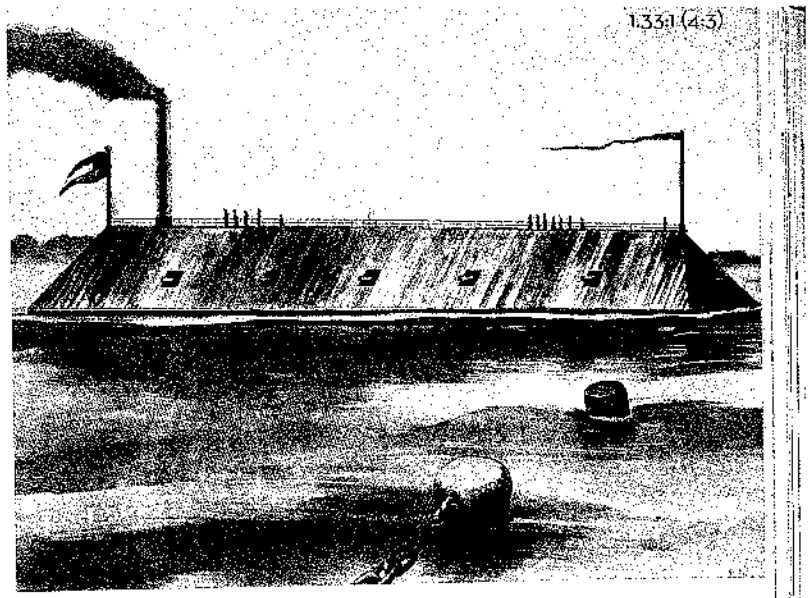
Once the aspect ratio has been chosen, the illustrator must understand the compositional limitations of the format.

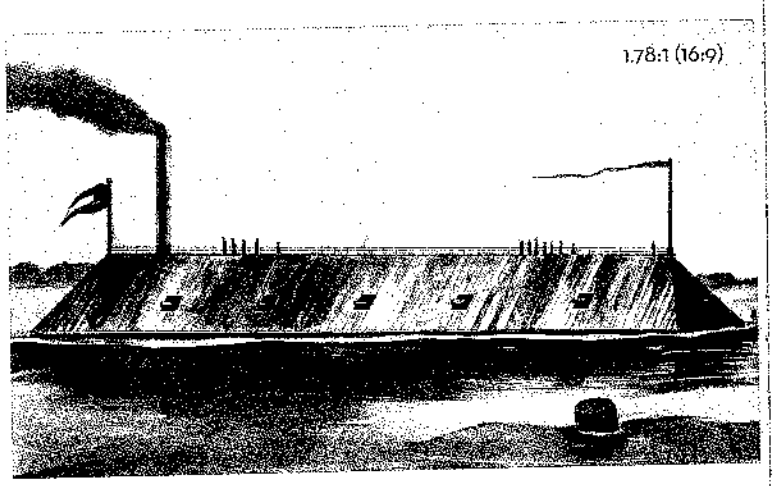
Let's take a look at these storyboards featuring the *CSS Georgia*, an actual ironclad warship, now scuttled and rusting off the coast from Old Fort

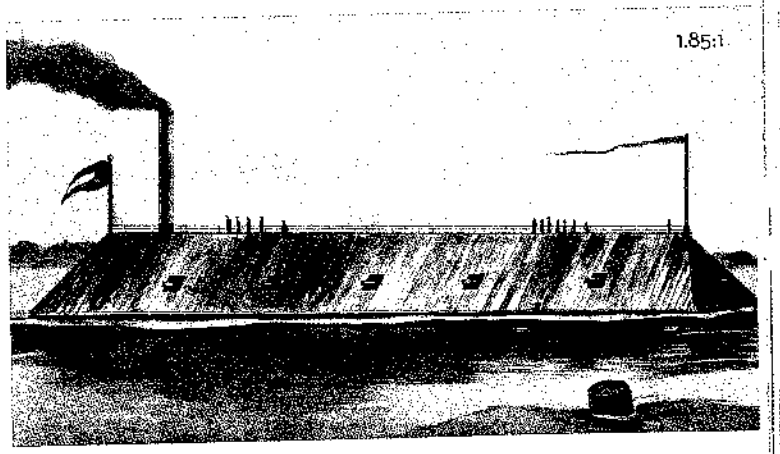
Jackson near Savannah, Georgia. The ironclad is seen in the storyboards floating on the Savannah River. It shares compositional space with a fair amount of sky and water. From the visual cues presented in this illustration, the audience understands that the environment is just as important as the ship itself. This choice was made because of the limitations associated with the Academy aperture of 1.33:1.

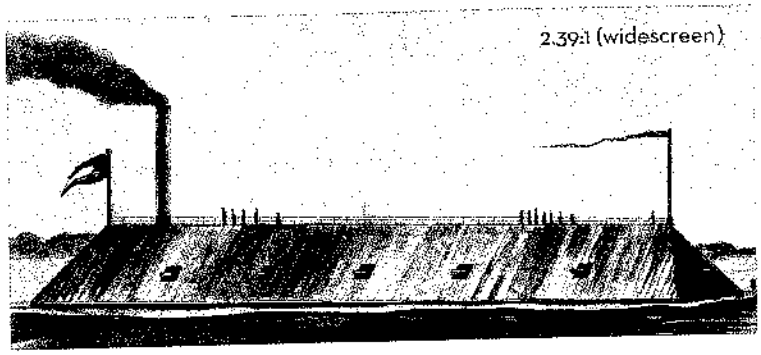
As we progress from Academy to widescreen apertures, sky and river diminish as the warship increasingly dominates the frame. On the silver screen, with the widescreen aspect ratio of 2.39:1, one might even be able to count rivets on the metal plating or clearly witness the activities of the soldiers milling about on the deck.

Is one better than the other? Hardly. Each composition works within the literal framework of the appropriate aspect ratio.









> **Tip**
>
> To help speed things along, some illustrators create storyboarding templates in various aspect ratios. Templates of four common formats can be found in the Appendix on pages 176–183.

1.33:1 (4x3): For nearly a century, this was the standard format of television programming. Adapted from the ratio of film stock used in the silent era, this ratio is no longer the only standard for television.

1.78:1 (16x9): This has become the standard format for high-definition displays, such as modern televisions and computer monitors.

1.85:1: This widescreen format has been the predominant film ratio since the mid-1950s. It is still widely used decades after its introduction.

2.39:1: Typically used for big-budget blockbusters, this aspect ratio has been the standard anamorphic widescreen format since the early 1970s. Prior to 1970, this ratio was 2.35:1.

What Is Continuity?

Continuity is defined as an uninterrupted sequence without significant change.

Motion mediums, whether live action or animation, rely on the basic principle of continuity in order to engage the audience and retain the attention and interest of the viewers. As one might imagine, the successful storyboard artist will be able to establish an uninterrupted sequence that connects with the audience. A needless or careless shift in the succession of images breaks this connection.

While animation and live action strive to maintain continuity, animation tends to be less susceptible to obvious mistakes. After all, animation is planned in great detail and reviewed every step of the way, from storyboards to the final cuts. With live action, the tight deadlines, compressed shooting schedules, and limitations set by shooting permits exert enormous pressure on the cast and crew. If the crew has to pick up a shot on the fly and has been "runnin' and gunnin' " without the aid of a competent continuity director or (even better) a handy set of storyboard sides, they may find they have earned the enmity of both director and editor.

Competent storyboard artists and cinematographers will have a strong understanding of the axis and the 180- and 30-degree rules. They will always have a couple of tricks up their sleeves to neutralize a transition. Above all, successful sequences will never "cross the line" or "break the action" unless it is an essential change required by the script or called for by the director for dramatic purposes.

Terms

180-degree rule: Rarely, ***rule of right.*** Characters in the same scene should have the same right/left relationship regardless of camera position. The camera should never "cross the axis"—an imaginary line determined by the position of the characters relative to the position of the cameras. Violating this rule is also called ***crossing the line*** and ***breaking the action.***

30-degree rule: The point of view must shift at least 30 degrees around the axis, while still abiding by the 180-degree rule, in order to avoid the inadvertent creation of a jump cut.

Axis: Also ***180-degree line.*** This imaginary line is established by the position of two subjects that determine camera angles for a given scene.

Jump cut: Also ***shock cut*** or ***smash cut.*** This is a sudden and often jarring cut from one scene, shot, or sequence to another without benefit of intervening devices or transitions such as a ***fade, dissolve,*** or ***wipe.***

Sides: Commonly, sides are excerpts from scripts used by actors to audition for specific roles. With regards to production, sides are reduced, photocopied script pages that are distributed daily to key personnel by the staff of the assistant director (AD). ***Sides*** may also refer to reduced, photocopied storyboards that are also distributed to key personnel.

Screen Direction and Visual Logic

To best understand the anticipated continuation of movement, let's take a moment to understand how we process the images flickering before us on the silver screen.

In Western culture, reading occurs from left to right, top to bottom. From the moment readers acclimate themselves to this process, they inherit certain expectations; their eyes unconsciously scan the screen in a similar manner.

Does this mean that viewers tend to be more comfortable and at ease if the action enters the screen from the left and exits on the right? Not necessarily. But understanding this phenomenon provides illustrators and cinematographers with the ability to create dynamic compositions, build tension, and avoid confusion.

Certainly, adherence to the 180- and 30-degree rules goes a long way to avoiding confusion and maintaining the visual contract with the audience—but one should also consider movement. In short, if the action enters the frame from the left, the viewer half expects the action to continue and exit right. If the action exits right, the audience fully expects the action to reenter the frame from the left, unless the movement is impacted by an outside force.

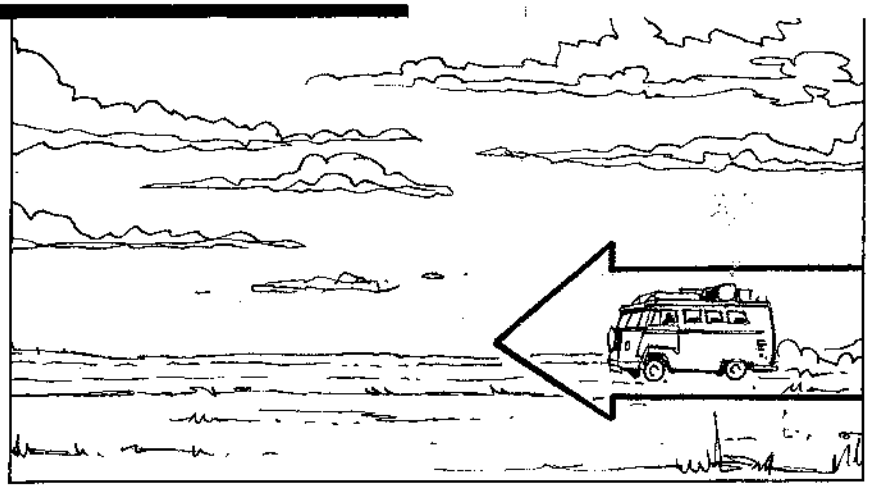
Avoiding Confusion

A couple of buddies want to take the great American road trip. They pile into their overstuffed rattletrap and begin their long drive from Savannah to Los Angeles. On screen, does the jalopy travel left to right, or right to left?

As long as the buddies keep heading toward LA from Savannah, their rust bucket will travel from right to left—but what if the scene calls for a reverse angle? How does the storyboard artist address this challenge?

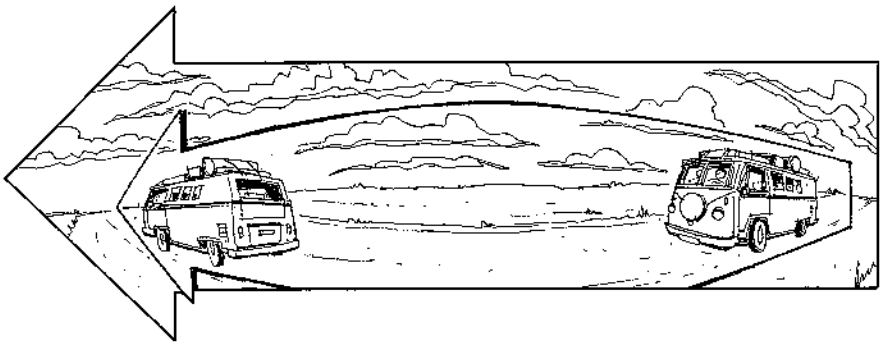
There are three basic ways of accomplishing this: rounding a corner (thus changing the direction of the action); using a cutaway (such as a shot of the speedometer, a rearview mirror, or a street sign); or using a neutralizing shot (such as a head-on follow shot of the truck). Note the simple frames depicted, illustrating the variations that reinforce the audience's awareness of the journey from East Coast to West Coast, including neutralizing shots, transitions, and cutaways.

HIPPIE ROAD TRIP: Look at a map of the United States. Savannah rests on the East Coast, which is situated on the right of the map; LA sits on the West Coast, which is situated on the left of the map.

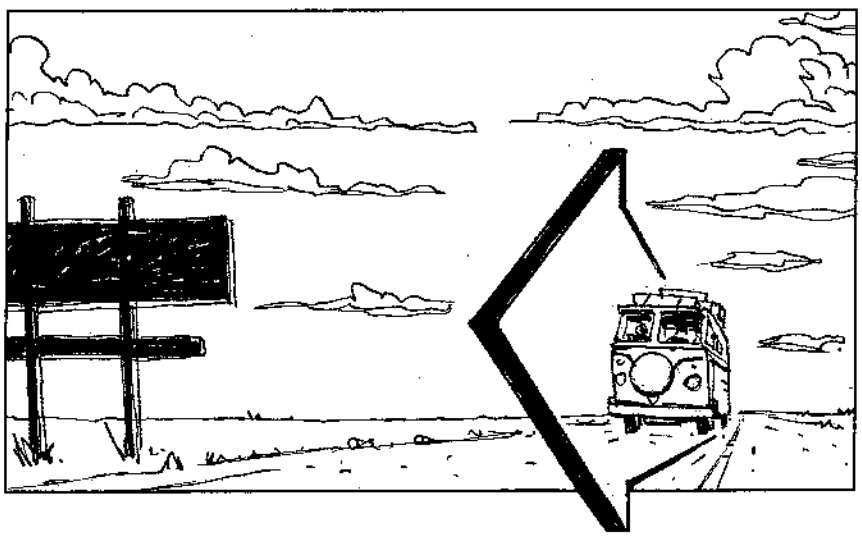


Since the road trip is running east to west, the director has the beat-up, old van enter the frame from the right, moving left in this ***Extreme Long Shot*** (ELS).

Here is a cozy Two-Shot of our hapless heroes.



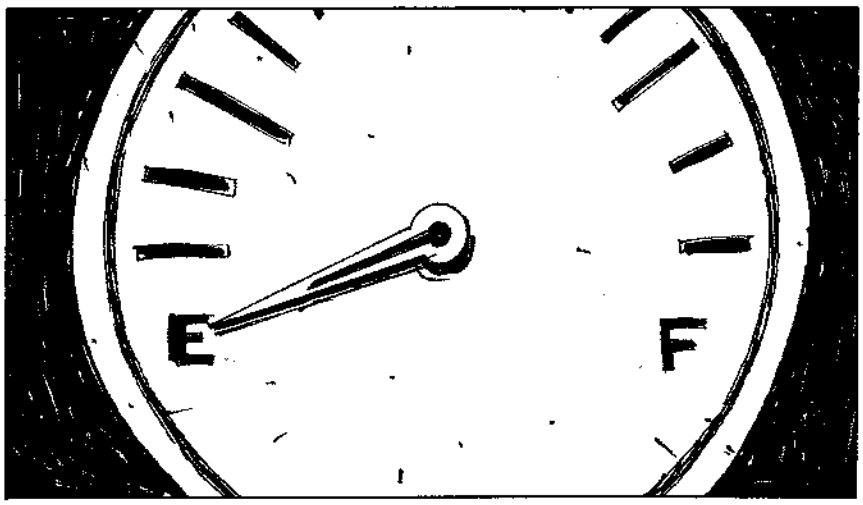
In this distorted panoramic (pan), the illustrator fantastically captures the movement of the van as it rounds a corner.



This steady Wide High Hat Shot serves as a neutralizing shot that helps the viewer transition from the pan in the previous shot and prepares the audience for . . .

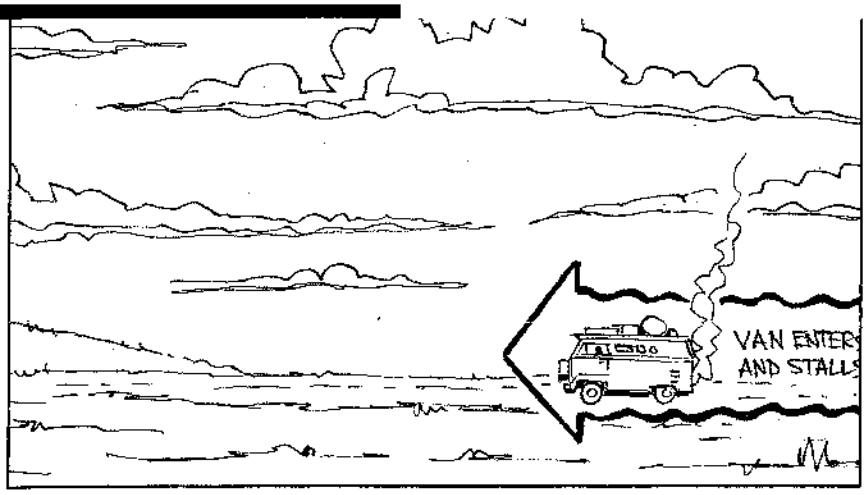
. . . the ***reverse angle***, which is the setup for a gag.

This Two-Shot brings the audience back into the van with the overconfident compadres and prepares the viewers for the payoff . . .



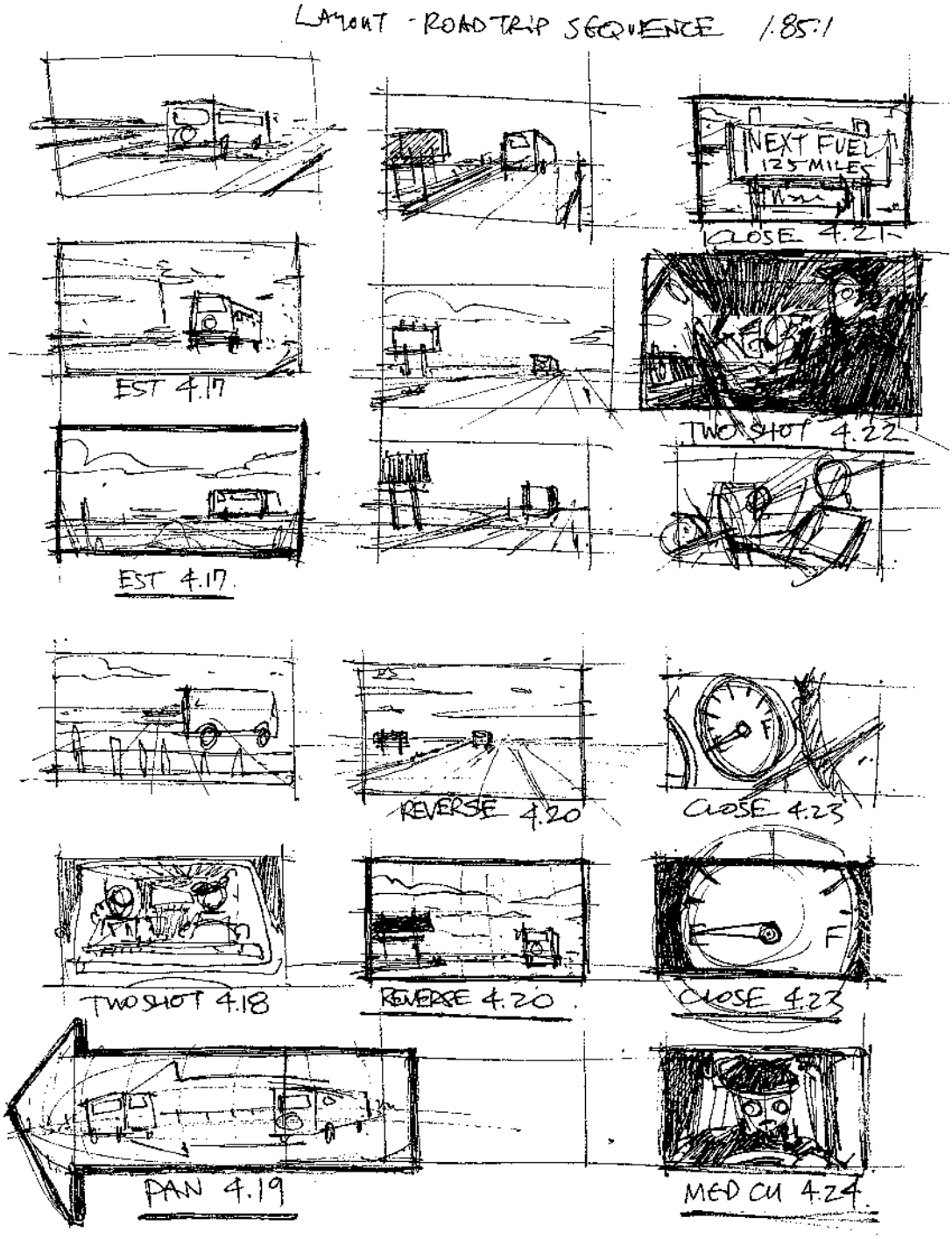
. . . which is a ***close*** on a fuel gauge reading empty..

The Close-Up (CU) Shot shows that our dim-witted driver is not too happy.



LEFT: And with this Long Shot, we can see why.

BELOW: Thumbnail sketches for the road-trip storyboards. Note the concern for composition, camera position,and clarity. Secondary concerns such as lighting and rendering technique are not important at this stage and therefore not developed.



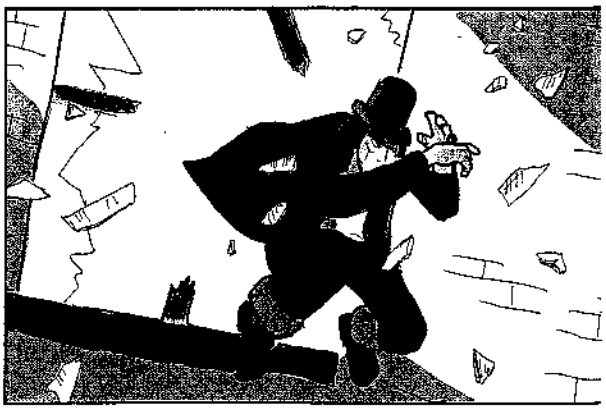
A Difference of Opinion
Hyde from Jekyll—the Chase

In this installment of "A Difference of Opinion," up-and-coming sequential artists Nicky Soh and David Balan give their takes on a scene from *Hyde from Jekyll*.

Nicky Soh's Version

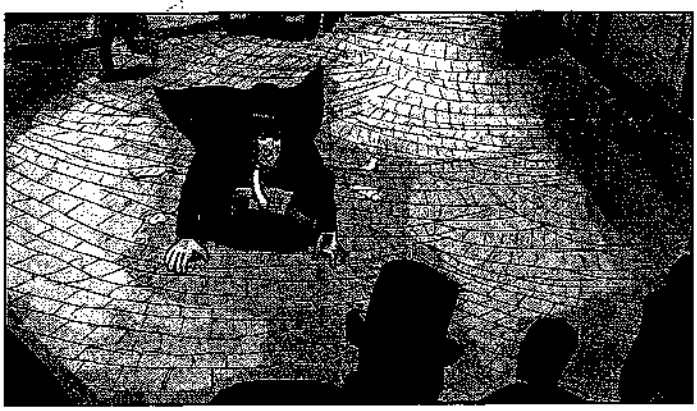
LEFT: In his establishing shot, Nicky Soh sets up the main location for the scene's action and uses value to be sure to draw the audience's attention to the two constables in the foreground.

BOTTOM LEFT: By emphasizing those constables in the previous shot, Soh is able to focus the audience's attention in order to react to an off screen scream. It is easy to follow the action.



TOP RIGHT: Cutting to a reverse angle and going to a canted angle help to dramatize the action and allows the audience to turn with the characters.

RIGHT: The artist stays with the canted angle as Hyde bursts through the glass.



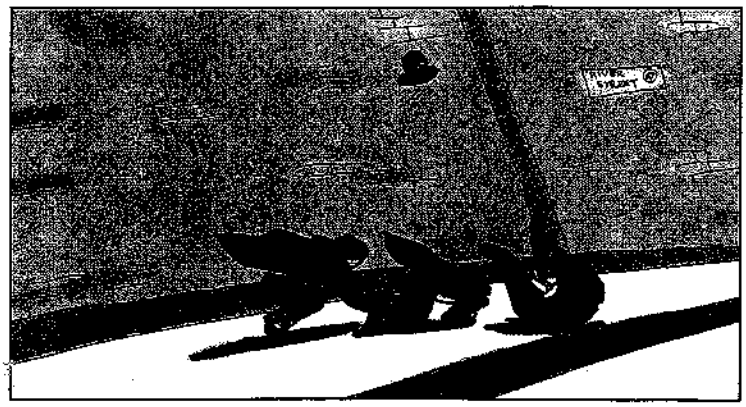
ABOVE AND LEFT: Here, Soh goes with a high angle shot framing the full action of Hyde's landing on the cobblestones and bursting through the crowd.

While changing the shot to a flat shot from the side and framing it at the knees, the artist is careful to maintain his screen direction as left to right.

Even as Hyde moves through the previously established location into the next, the artist still keeps the action moving in the same direction. Note the use of a "ghost" image to indicate that Hyde enters through the archway and runs up to the rail.

A Close-Up reveals Hyde's sinister grin; it also cues the audience to the ground below.

The artist has the camera cut back to its previous position as Hyde leaps over the railing.



Soh ends the sequence with a canted High Hat Shot as Hyde hits the ground and rolls.

The Camera

Ken Chaplin, DGA/DGC (see pages 38–39), often describes storyboards as road maps for the crew. But what if storyboards were more like mile markers and street signs? After all, both tell you where to turn, how fast to go, when to yield, when to stop, and whether to expect a detour. Both convey the "rules of the road" using a kind of visual shorthand that makes it easy to navigate.

Storyboarding is all about the camera's position relative to the framing of the action. Does the scene call for the camera to be perched on a crane high above the crowd? Or is it to be nestled between two sandbags on the ground? Is the camera positioned several blocks away from the action? Or is it barely inches from the actor's nose?

KEY COMPONENTS FOR DETERMINING THE APPROPRIATE SHOT

1. Framing height or shot length
2. Camera angle
3. Movement

A Short List of Framing Heights

American: Also ***Cowboy Shot;*** sometimes ***Hollywood Shot.*** This is a Medium Full Shot of a group of characters arranged so that all are visible to the camera. Because it's generally shot from the knee up, it is sometimes called a ***Knee Shot.***

Close: This is a direction for the camera to close in on an object or action for emphasis.

CU: A ***Close-Up*** (CU) ***Shot*** is a direction for the camera to capture an actor's expression, generally framing the head, neck, and maybe shoulders.

EST: An ***establishing*** (EST) ***shot,*** also called an ***Extreme Wide Shot*** (EWS) or ***Extreme Long Shot*** (ELS), "establishes" the setting.

ECU: An ***Extreme Close-Up*** (ECU) ***Shot*** is a more intense version of a CU, most often showing only the eyes, for example.

Full: A ***Full Shot,*** or ***Long Shot*** (LS) is a direction for the camera to be placed some distance away from the action in order to capture the full height of the actor.

MED: The ***Medium Shot*** is the most common shot used in western films, and it depicts half of the subject.

MED CU: The ***Medium Close-Up*** (MED CU) ***Shot,*** as the name implies, is halfway between a Medium Shot and a Close-Up Shot. It generally captures the subject from the chest up.

OTS: The ***Over-the-Shoulder*** (OTS) ***Shot*** calls for shooting over someone's shoulder from behind.

WS: The ***Wide Shot*** (WS) captures as much of the setting as possible and is often used as an establishing shot.

Deep and Wide

Terms used in film and television can be quite literal. To a cinematographer, the terms *wide* and *long* imply the type of lens used for any given shot; *Extreme Long Shot* implies the use of a telephoto or zoom lens.

For the illustrator, Wide Shots (WSs), Long Shots (LSs), and Extreme Long Shots (ELSs) are used to introduce a setting and are therefore considered "establishing shots." Because of this, there is understandable confusion as to whether a difference truly exists between the different framing heights.

The storyboards to the left are broad generalizations intended to clarify the difference between the three framing heights typically used for establishing shots.

TOP: ***Long Shot (LS):*** Wider than a Full Shot, the subjects depicted take up maybe a third of the frame. By and large, Long Shots are used as transitional devices to set up a scene within an already-established location. In this example, the viewer has already been introduced to the western town.

MIDDLE: ***Wide Shot (WS):*** Wide Shots may be used to establish a setting, or they may be used as transitional devices, which creates an opportunity to move the action to a different setting.

BOTTOM: ***Extreme Long Shot (ELS):*** This is the framing height most folks think of when asked to identify an establishing shot. In an ELS, we see as much of the town as possible. Because the figures seem to blend in with the environment (therefore negating the need for principle and lead actors to be on set), Extreme Long Shots are typically picked up by the second unit director and his or her team.

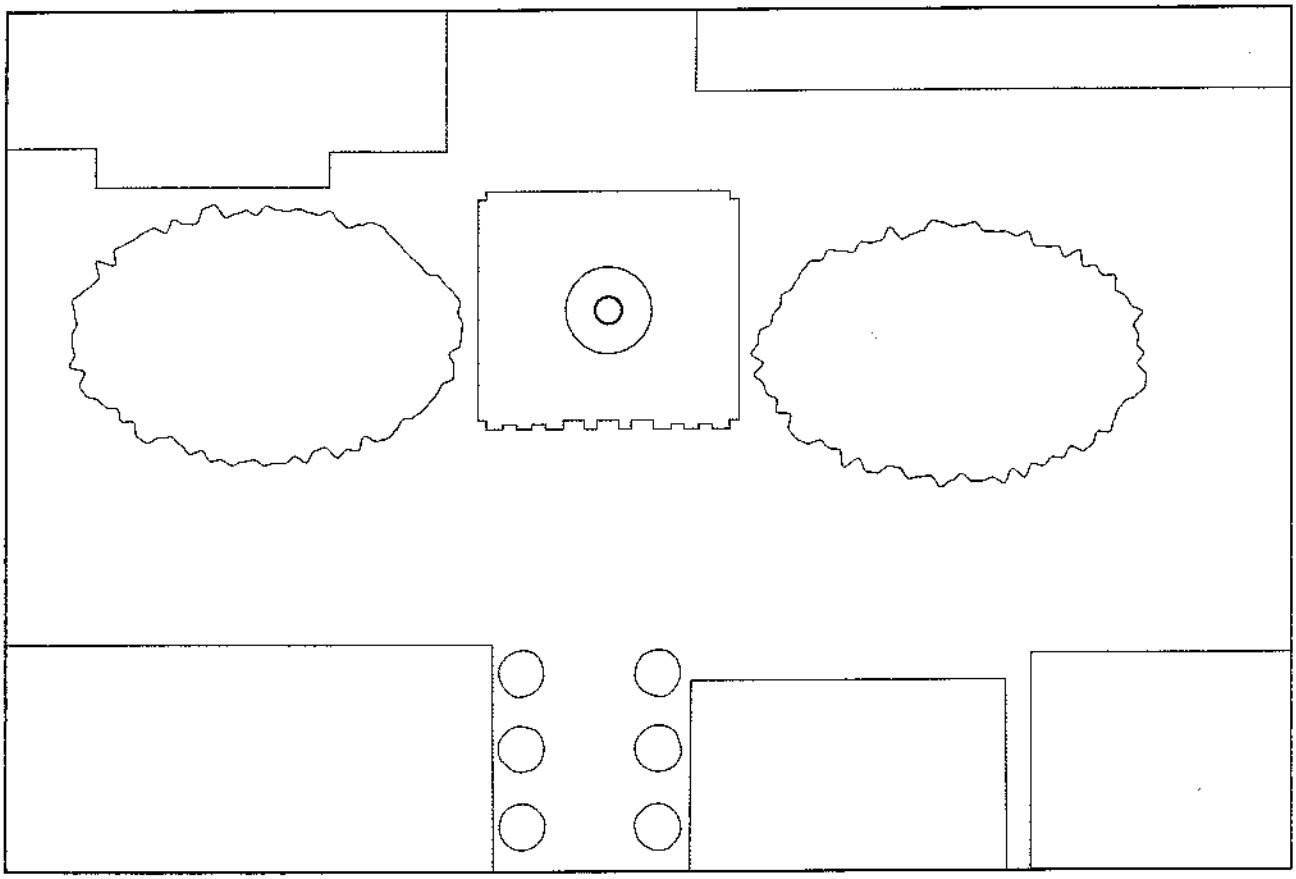
Terms

Camera angle: Also ***camera height.*** This is the position of the camera relative to the ground plane and/or eye level, which determines framing. There are six basic camera angles: ***bird's-eye view,*** or Extreme Down Shot (***XDS***); high angle, or ***crane;*** eye level, which is assumed; low angle, or ***high hat; worm's-eye view,*** or Extreme Up Shot (***XUS***); and ***Dutch,*** or ***canted.***

Framing height: Also ***shot length.*** This is the amount of space occupied in the picture frame by the subject, often related to the proximity of the camera relative to the action. While there are numerous camera angles, there are really only seven framing heights: ***wide,*** or Extreme Long Shot (ELS); ***full,*** or Long Shot (LS); ***American,*** or ***cowboy; medium*** (MED); ***medium-close*** (MED-Close); ***close; extreme close-up*** (ECU). These directions help the cinematographer determine the appropriate lens (for example, anamorphic, zoom, or telephoto) for the shot.

Shooting on Location

When filming, each location presents particular challenges, so it is important to take a moment to understand the environment. Take note of any possible hindrances to shooting, such as trees, power lines, signage, buildings, or technologies that are clearly not appropriate for the setting. While the location scout has already discussed these impediments with the director and production designer, the storyboard artist, too, may need to note these in some way—or at least be aware of their existence.



A Plan View of City Hall on Bay Street in Savannah, Georgia: Note the placement of trees and buildings, as well as the width of the street. These are all factors used to determine and set shots.

Term

Plan view: A graphic representation or drawing of an object when seen from above.

In this example, the story takes place during the Great Savannah Races in 1911, where rugged men of derring-do pushed their roadsters to the limit in a Grand Prix auto race that took them out along Savannah's rural roads.

The scene (from the spec script on page 20) takes place in front of Savannah's city hall, where a crowd gathers to greet the racers.

The visual breakdown follows:

EXT. CITY HALL—DAY
The crowd gathers along BAY STREET as drivers and engineers tune up their racers. DAHLIA has just stepped out of her Buick and is talking with JACK. He is distracted and eager to get back to his roadster.

As a storyboard artist, here is the moment when you need to start taking notes and asking questions:

- What elements are needed for this scene?
- What is the most logical way to depict each of these elements?
- Which framing height and angles are most appropriate for setting the mood of the shot or scene?

Just as in creating a script breakdown, make a list of the things you will need to illustrate. At a minimum, this scene calls for the following:

- A specific location (Savannah's city hall)
- Extras (a large crowd gathering on the street)
- Background performers (mechanics, drivers, passersby)
- Props (various race cars)
- Two specific vehicles (the 1911 Buick Touring, Jack's roadster)
- Two principal characters (Jack and Dahlia)

By making this simple list, you can already imagine a variety of simple-but-effective shots. You may choose to use some of these shots:

- Bird's-Eye View Shot to show the crowd gathering
- Wide Shot to introduce Jack and Dahlia and the racers
- Full or American Shot to bring us closer to Jack and Dahlia
- MED Two-Shot—perhaps with an OTS—to indicate a sense of intimacy
- Close-Up (CU) to allow for a reaction

A Short List of Camera Angles

Aerial: Also ***Helicopter Shot.*** This shot is made from a great height, perhaps from a helicopter. The differences between this shot and ***Bird's-Eye View Shot*** are that the Aerial Shot angle need not be looking straight down, and it allows for a range of movement.

Bird's-Eye View: Also ***Extreme Down Shot (XDS).*** As the name implies, this is an unnatural and extreme shot looking down from a considerable height.

Canted: Also ***Dutch*** or ***Oblique.*** This is a shot with a tilted horizon, generally used to indicate instability, unease, or a moment of transition.

Crane: This is similar to an Aerial Shot, but it is less extreme and closer to the action. It affords a greater range of movement.

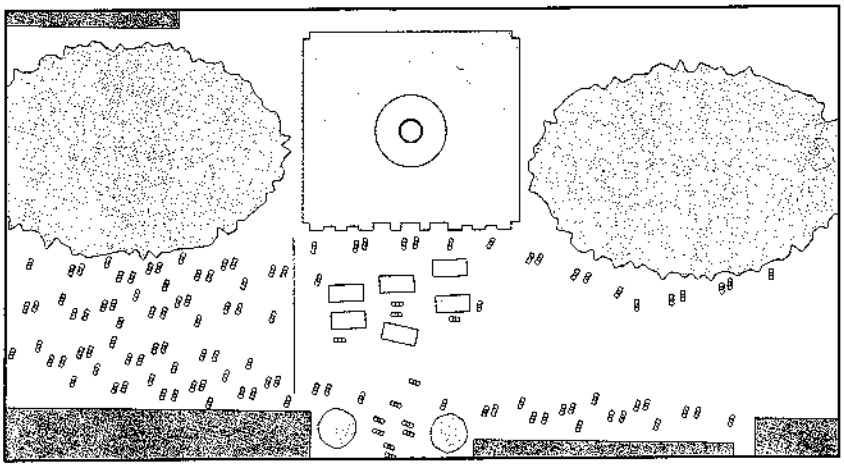
Eye level: This is the most natural looking shot. Because it is so common and so obvious, its use is almost always assumed.

High Hat: A low camera angle shot a few inches above and parallel with the ground.

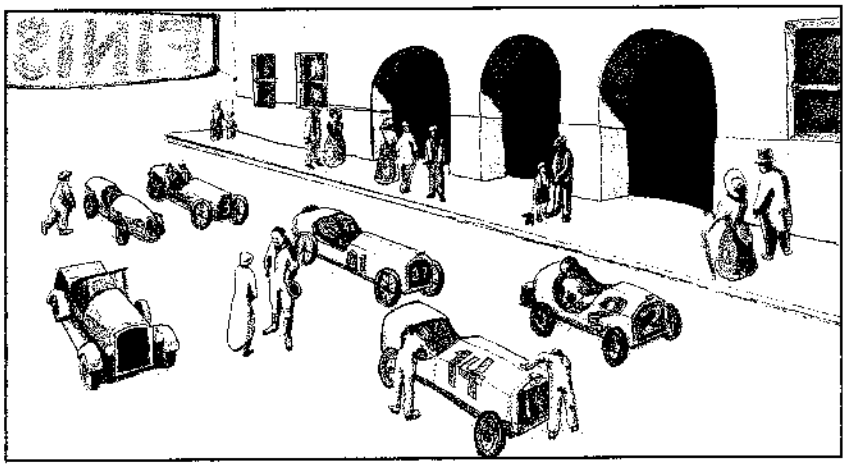
Worm's-Eye View: Also ***Extreme Up Shot (XUS).*** This is an unnatural and extreme shot looking up, generally from ground level.

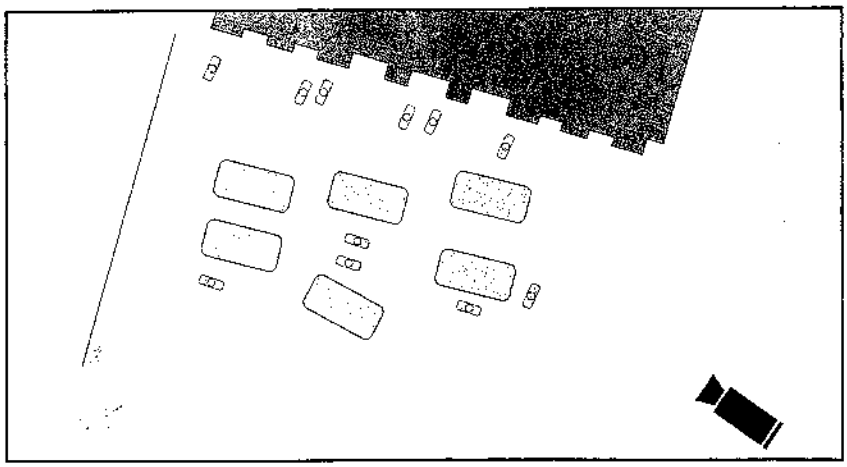
Framing Heights and Angles

Let's take a look at some of the framing heights and angles covered previously, starting with the Bird's-Eye View Shot and ending with a Close-Up Shot. To enhance understanding of camera placement, diagrams have been included with most panels.

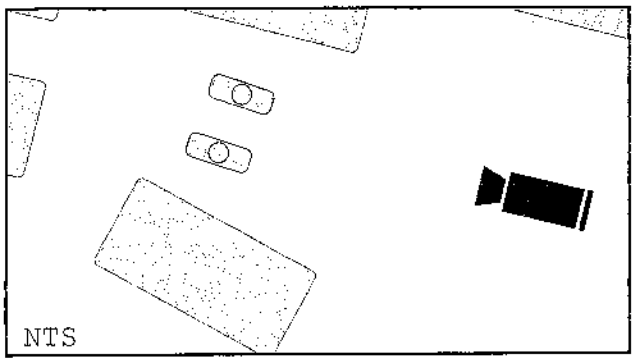


Bird's-Eye View or Extreme Down Shot (XDS): Notice that this image was rendered digitally, using a vector-based program, which allowed for the rapid creation of a gathering crowd. It also allowed for accurate placement of buildings and trees, which gives a realistic understanding of street width.

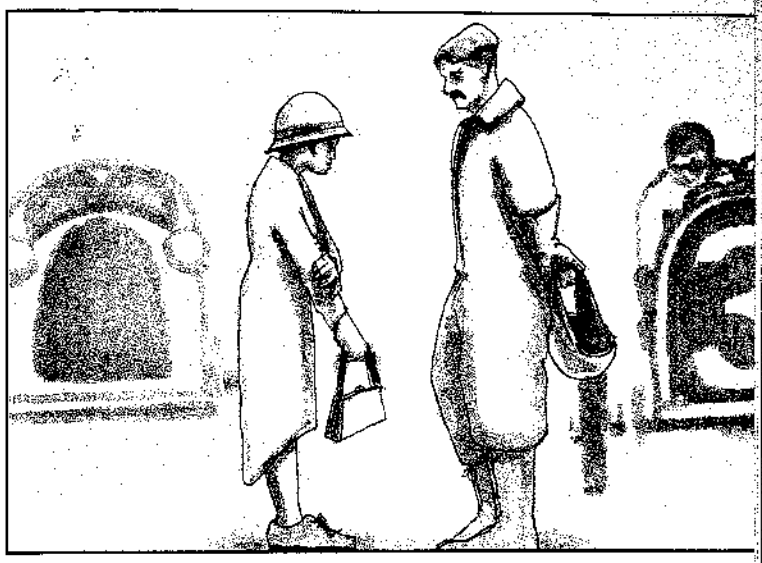




Wide Shot, Crane: This shot calls for a number of elements: city hall, cars, background performers, and two principle characters. It's a tough shot to get, so the decision was made to use a high angle.



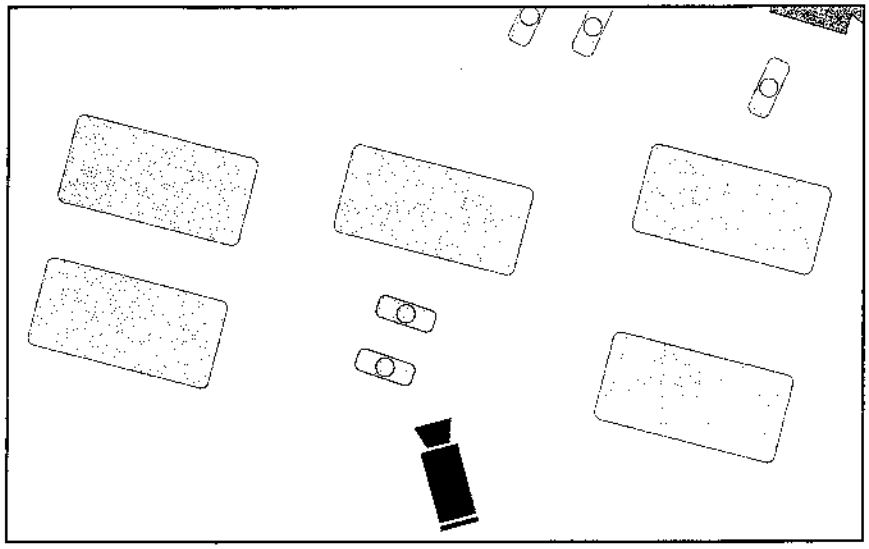
Full Shot, eye level: Here, we finally see Jack and Dahlia. Notice in the diagram how at least one of the cars and two of the background performers have been "removed" from the set. In filmmaking, it is important to know what is not seen.

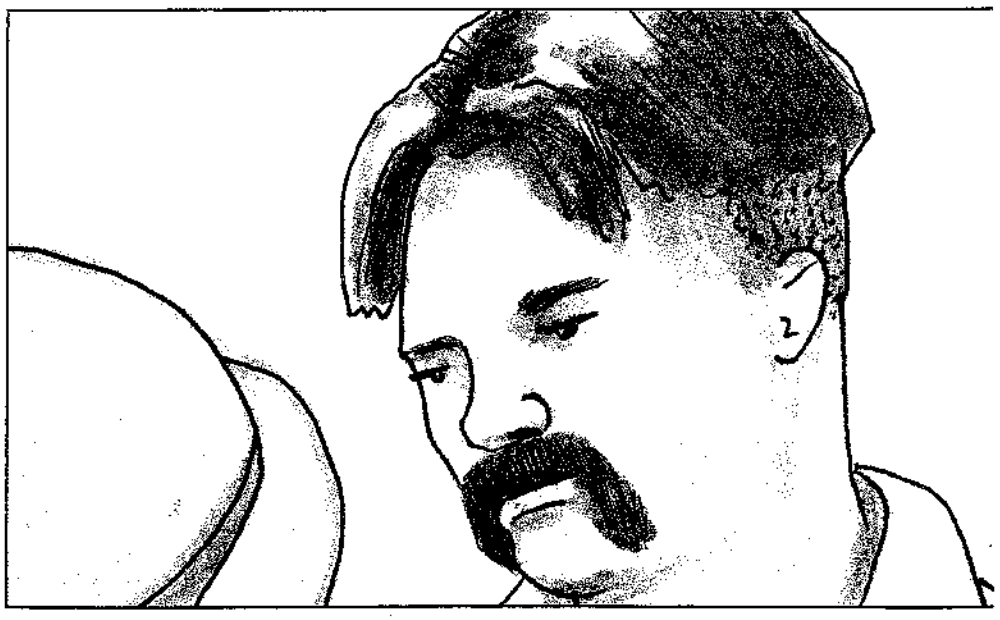


American Shot, eye level: There is a little more intimacy here. This shot gives enough room for the actors to move, but it still gives the DP an opportunity to capture subtleties of action and reaction.

MED Close: One of the beautiful things about storyboarding is that it enables people to analyze a shot before it's shot. This Two-Shot loses something in translation, so we change the position and . . .

MED Two, OTS: . . . this over-the-shoulder shot gives us a better sense of intimacy and allows the camera to capture the reaction of the actor. Note in the diagram how another car had to be moved out of the shot in order to allow for placement of the camera.



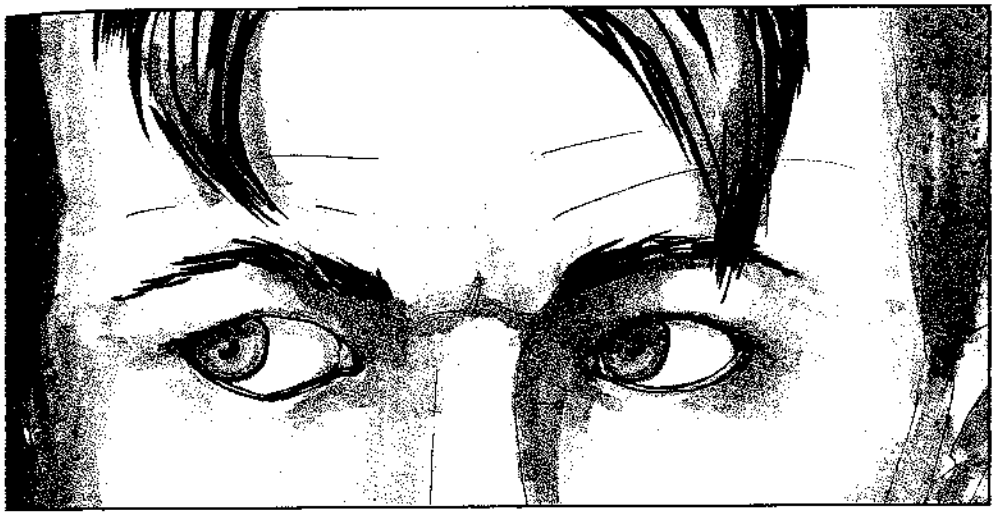


Close: This Close-Up Shot can be picked up by the same camera that covered the OTS Shot.

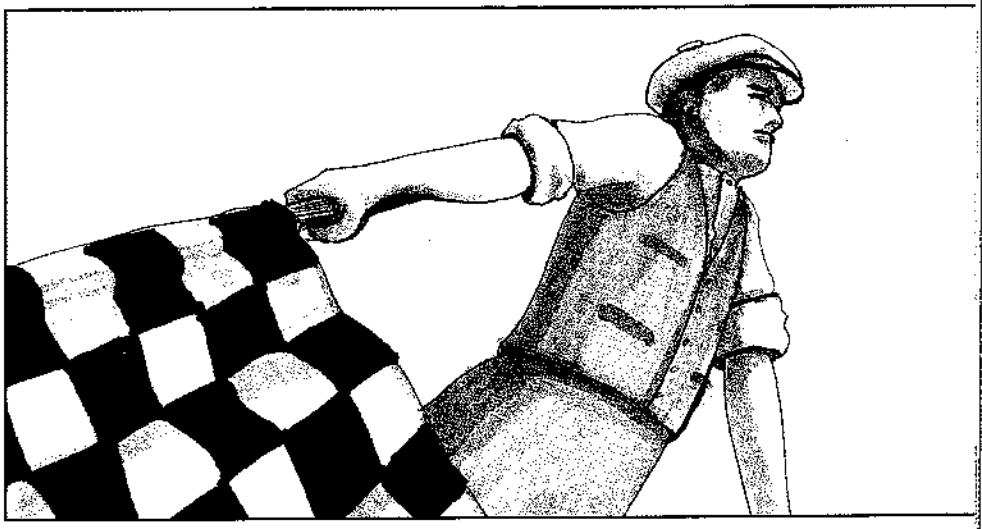
Other Shots to Consider

Of course, other shots may be considered. These should be used sparingly:

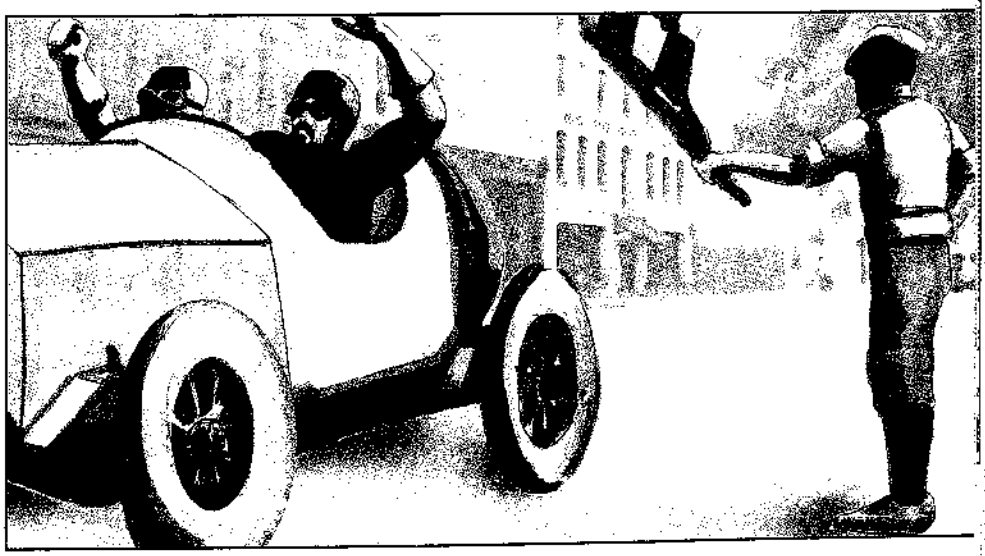
- An Extreme Close-Up (ECU) Shot, perhaps used to indicate an interior monologue, or subtle reaction
- A low angle, Worm's-Eye View Shot to emphasize a dramatic or pivotal moment
- A High Hat Shot, to dramatize the action



Extreme Close-Up (ECU): Out of context, a viewer has no idea whether Jack is lost in deep thought, reacting to something said by Dahlia, or distracted by an action off screen. Whatever it is, it must be important.



Worm's-Eye View (XUS), Canted: The canted, oblique, or Dutch angle usually indicates a sense of imbalance, but in this case, it could very well suggest a transitional moment for the main character because crossing the finish line is always a dramatic moment, win or lose.



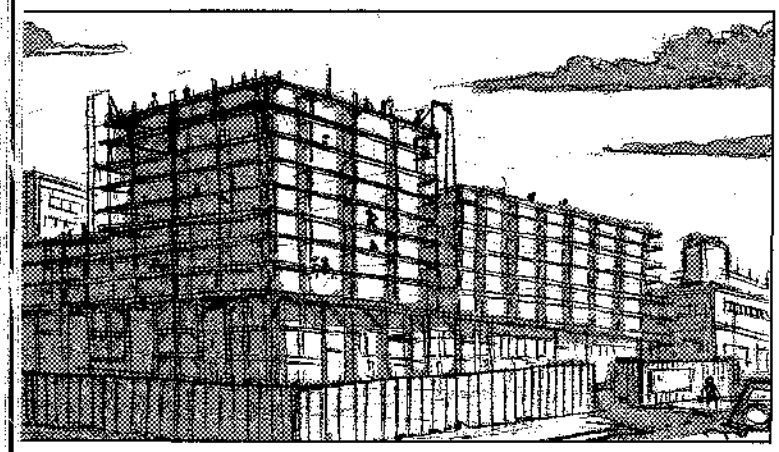
High Hat: Placing a camera in a low position gives the subject a grand and heroic (or sometimes, intimidating) presence. Here, the hero crosses the finish line, blowing past the camera that had been placed low to the ground in order to get images that would emphasize the power and speed of his roadster.

Cut to the Chase

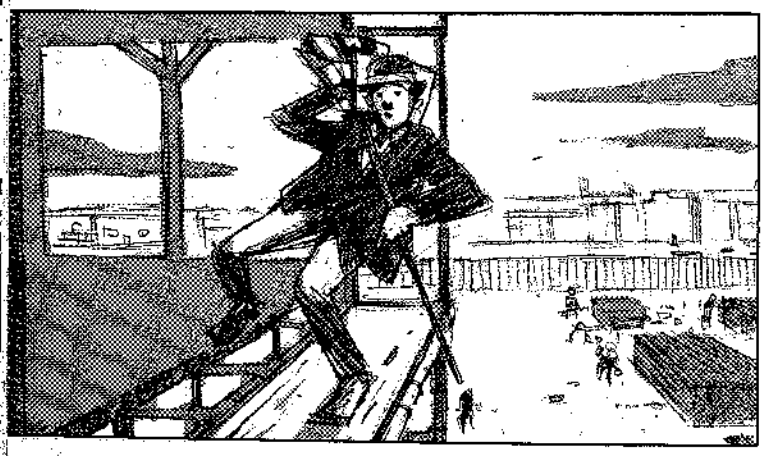
Oddly enough, the phrase "cut to the chase" has its roots in the silent movie era, when the audience and filmmaker alike were eager to get right to the action.

Most directors will flat-out tell you that there is no need to storyboard a Two-Shot, as the camera placement is obvious. However, it is important to include these simple shots in the context of an action sequence, or a scene involving a crowd or an audience.

In this section's homage to the silent movie era, a lovable scamp struggles to rise in the world, carrying a hod (a three-sided box on a pole used to carry bricks and other supplies)—but he seems a little too attached to his favorite derby. Mayhem ensues when the wind blows his hat off and our rascal attempts to retrieve it with little regard for his own safety—or that of others. As you review the panels of the action sequence, see if you can identify the key components (framing, angle, movement) used to determine the appropriate shot.

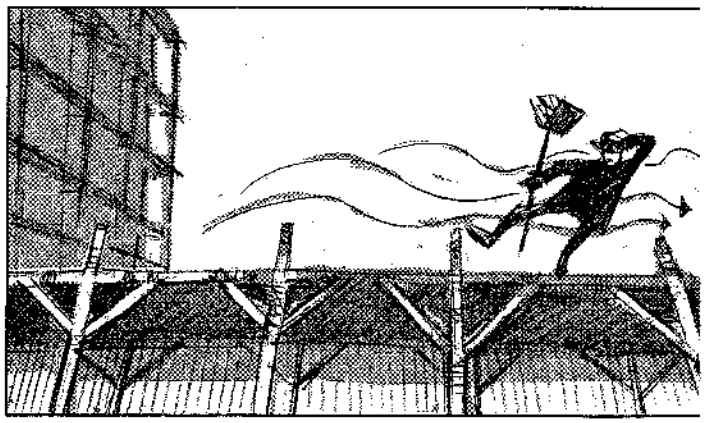


In this establishing shot, we see construction of a new building taking place.

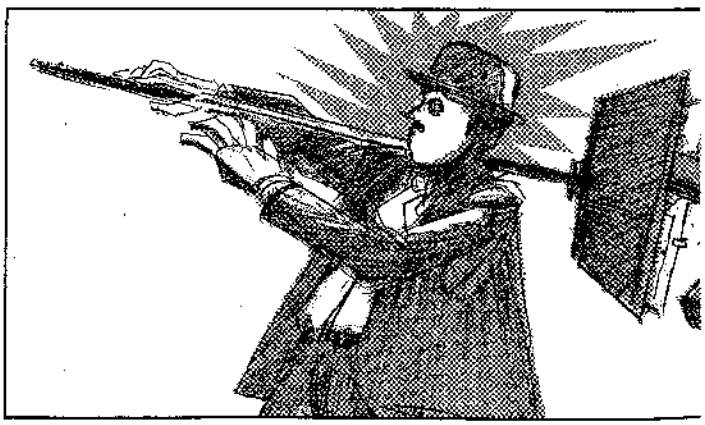


Then we reveal, with a Full Shot, our lovable Rascal precariously balancing a hod of bricks.

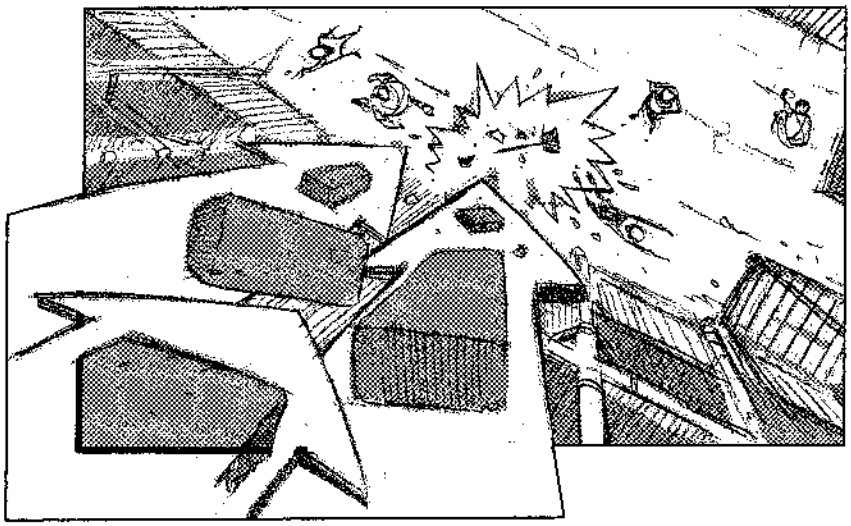
The wind picks up and throws him off balance in this Worm's-Eye View Shot . . .



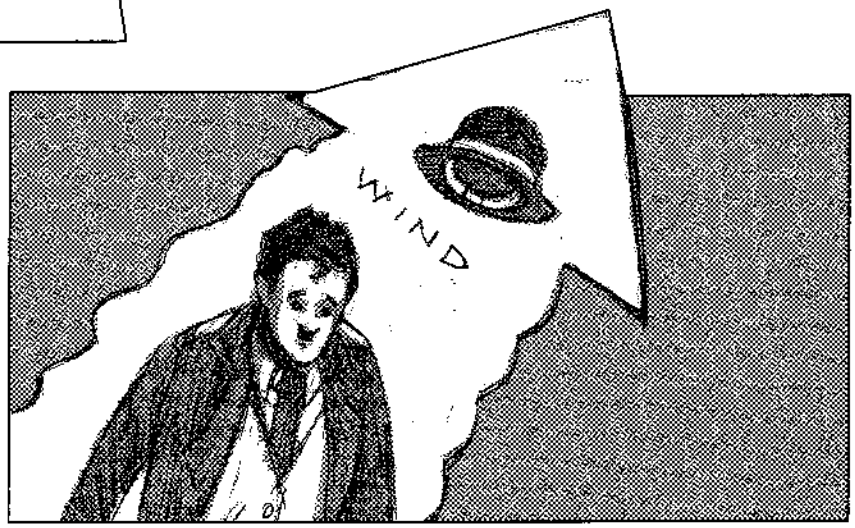
. . . and as he regains his balance in this Knee Shot . . .



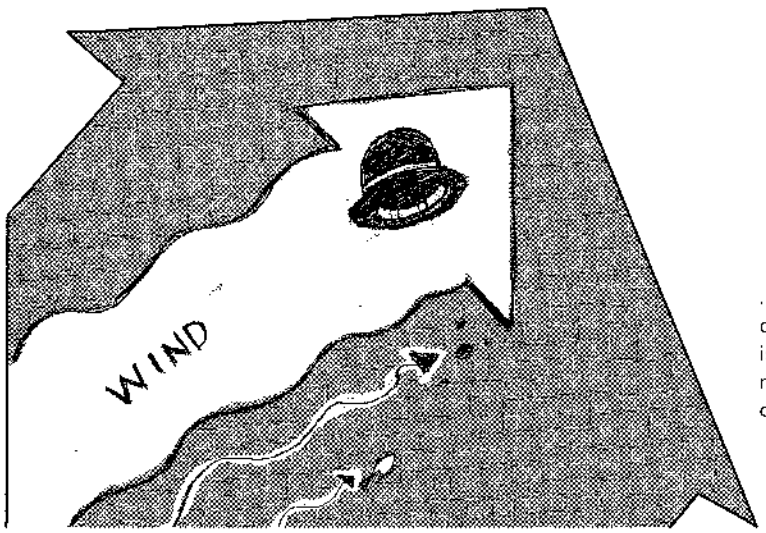
. . . we pull out to a Wide Shot to see the hod tip over the edge of the roof.



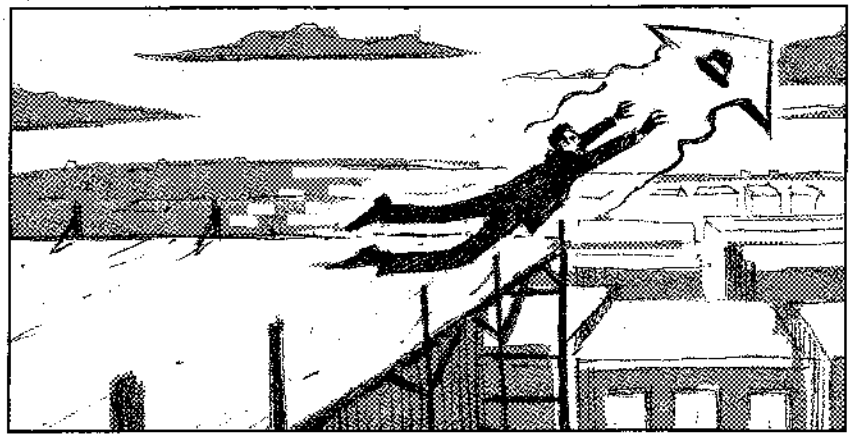
Bricks crash down to the ground below in this Extreme Down Shot, which also motivates our next shot.



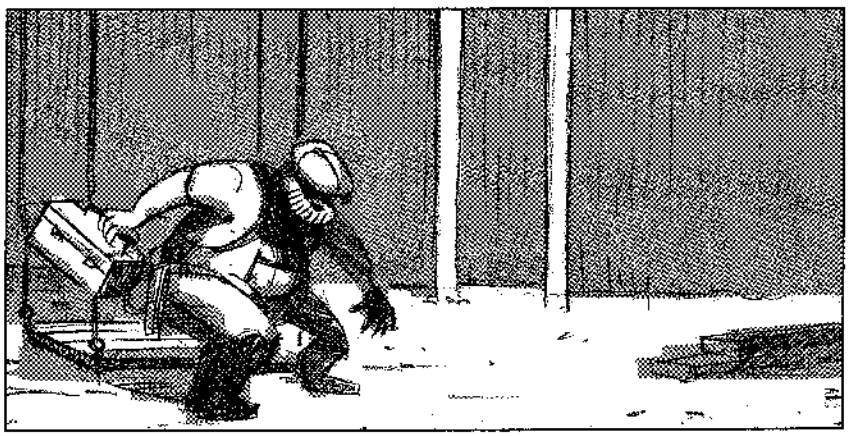
And that shot is a Medium of our Rascal looking down; we now understand that the previous shot served as his POV. But the wind picks up again . . .



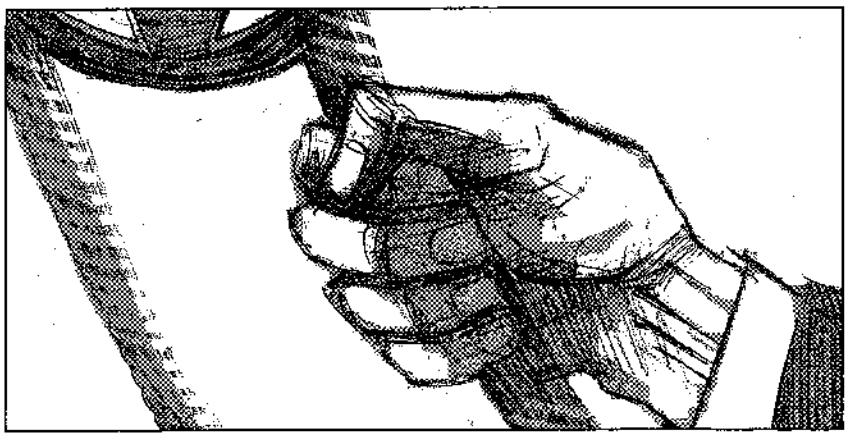
. . . and we crane up to see his beloved derby blowing away. Note how the arrow is used previously to show an object moving, but in this shot it indicates the camera moving.



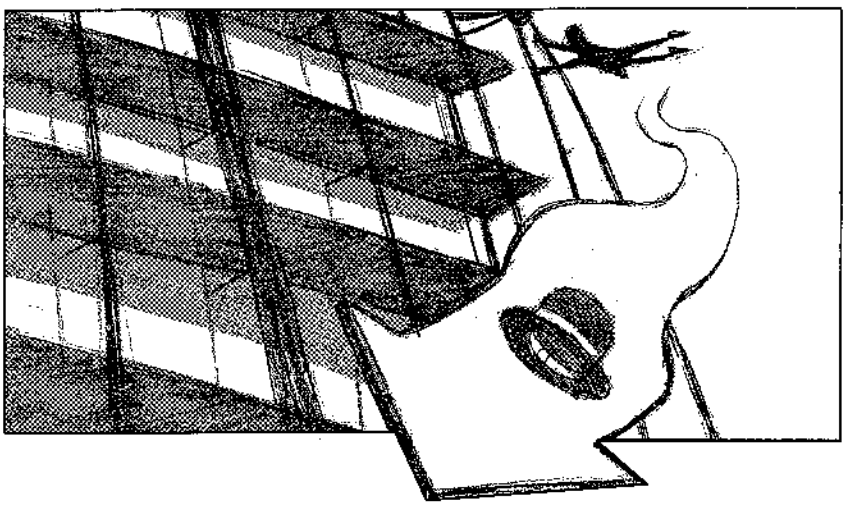
With no regard for his own safety, he leaps out to retrieve his derby in this Wide Shot.



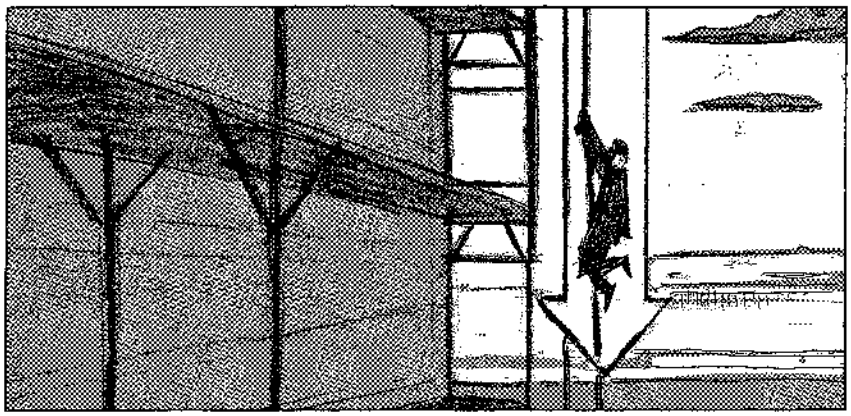
We cut away for another Wide Shot of a tired construction worker getting ready to sit down on a lift to enjoy his lunch break.



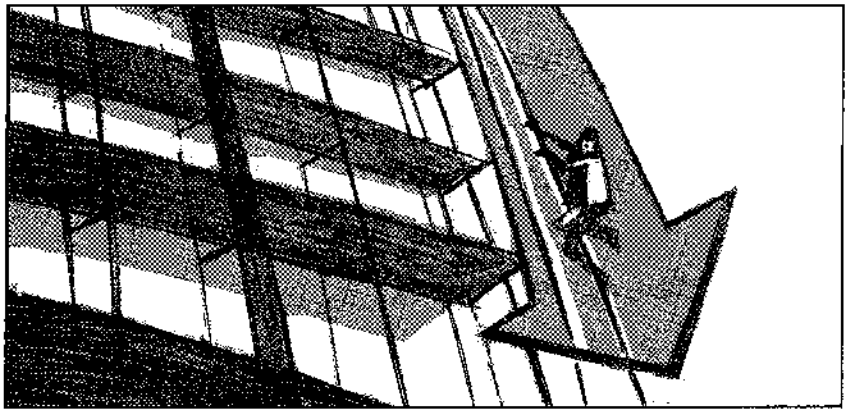
We go close on a hand grasping the rope on a pulley . . .



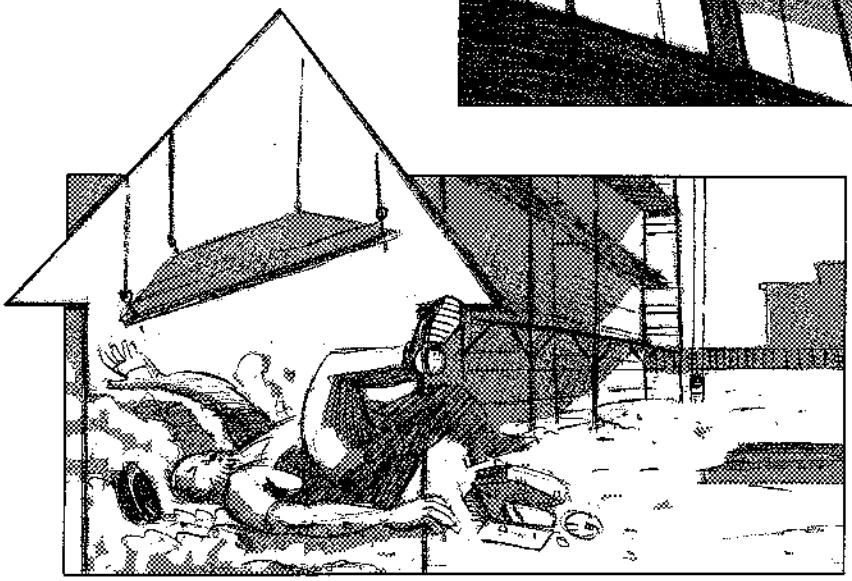
. . . and we cut wide with an Extreme Up Shot to reveal that our Rascal has saved himself by grabbing hold of the pulley. Again note how an arrow indicates that his derby floats past the camera and off screen.



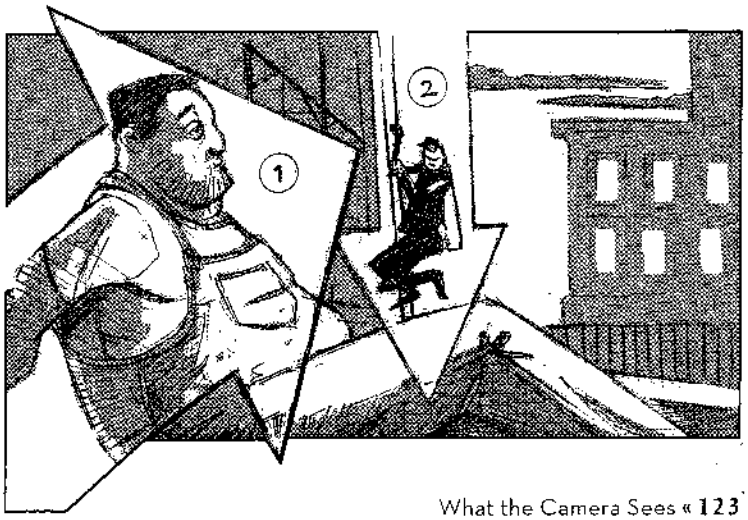
The camera goes wide but at eye level this time as our Rascal zips down the rope.



Then we cut back to our previous Wide Extreme Up Shot. Once again the arrows are used to indicate movement within the frame.

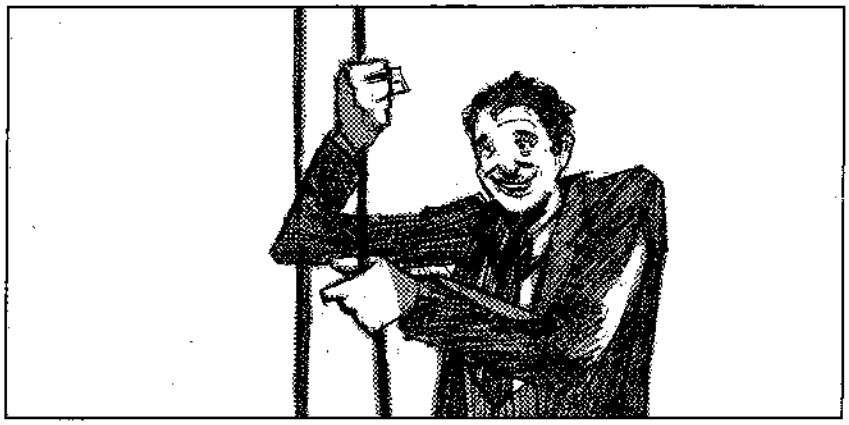


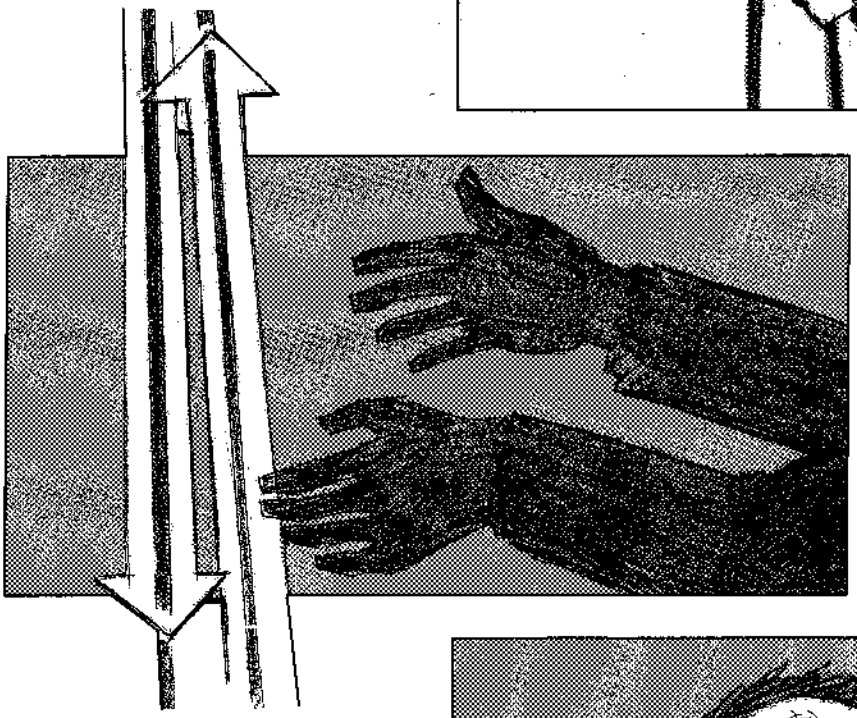
In a Full Shot we cut back to the tired construction worker. Just as he's getting ready to sit, the lift takes off and he crashes to the ground.



In this low angle shot, the arrows have been numbered to indicate the order of the events. First we see the construction worker rise up very confused. Then we see our Rascal reach the ground. We now understand that he's responsible for the lift going up.

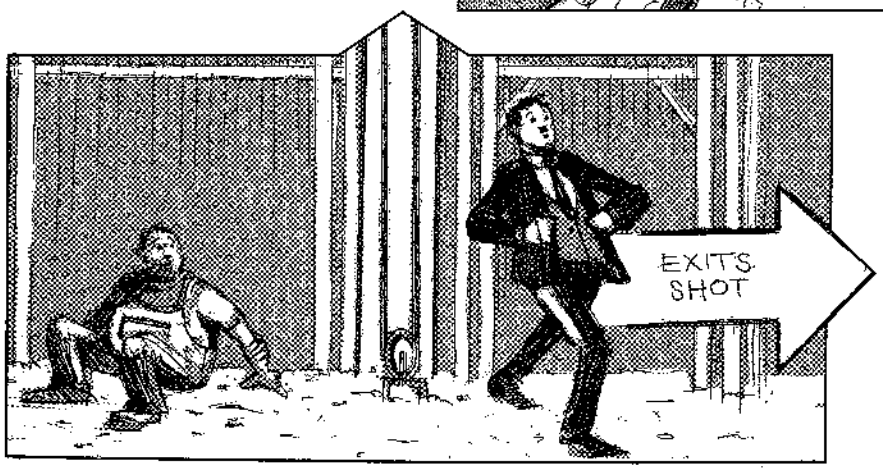
A Medium Shot reveals our Rascal looking rather sheepish.



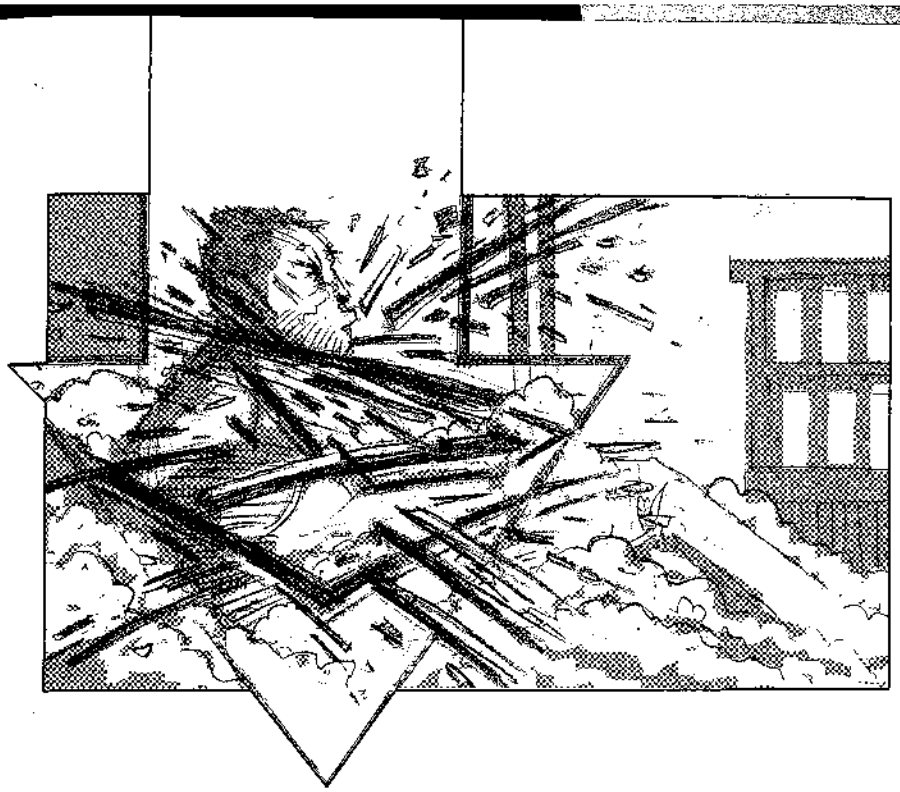


ands as he lets the rope go. Once again the arrows are used to indicate motion in the frame.

The construction worker looks on confused in this Medium Close-Up.

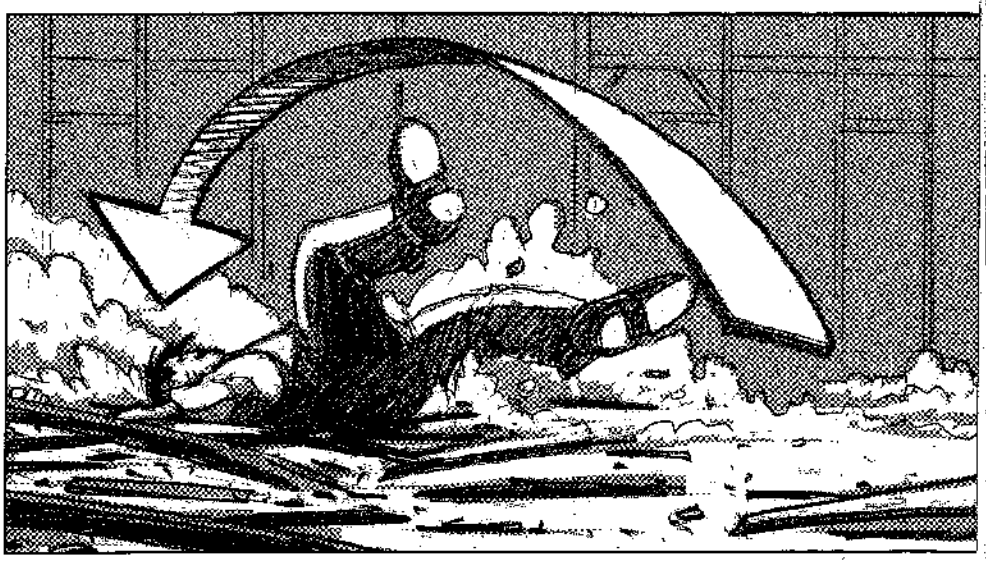


We cut out wide to see our Rascal whistling as he walks out and exits frame. Meanwhile in the background the arrow still shows that the pulley ropes are still moving . . .



. . . and as we cut back to our previous low angle shot, we see that the lift comes crashing back down upon the head of the confused construction worker.

With a final Close-Up we enjoy a comical moment of dazed confusion . . .

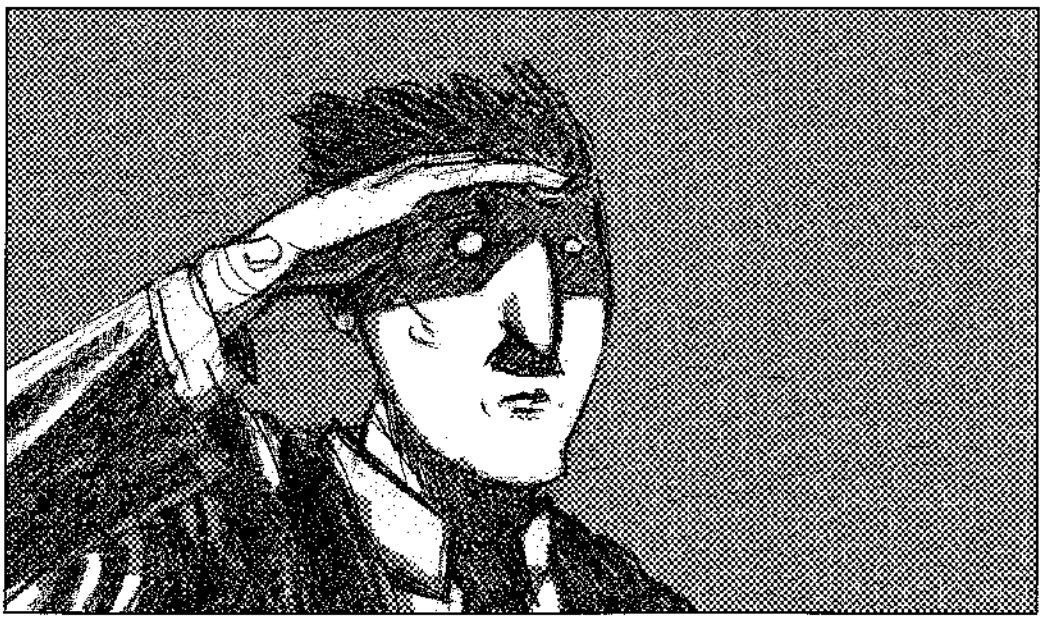


. . . before we cut to a Full Shot to see him fall over backward, knocked out. An arrow emphasizes his motion.

Order Out of Chaos

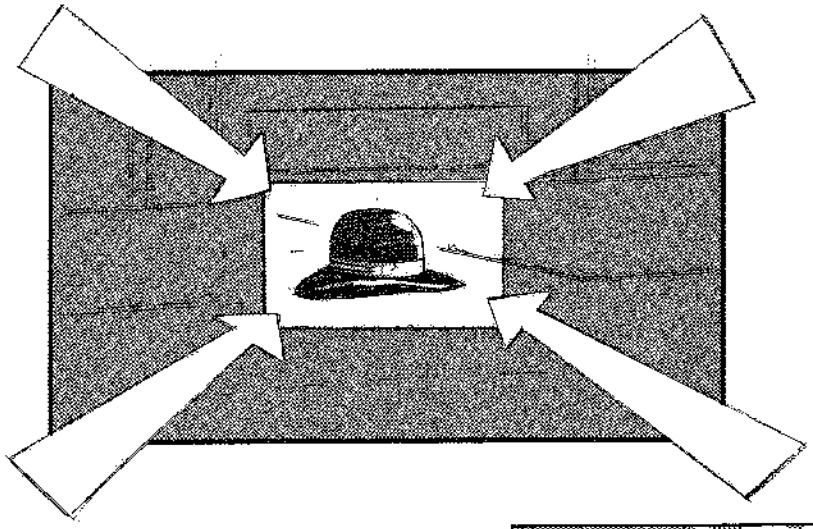
As you review the panels of this action sequence, see if you can identify the key components (framing, angle, and movement) used to determine the appropriate shot, and pay particular attention to the use of directional and notational arrows.

In this Wide Shot, the Rascal strides down the street . . .



. . . and searches for his derby, as shown in this Close-Up.

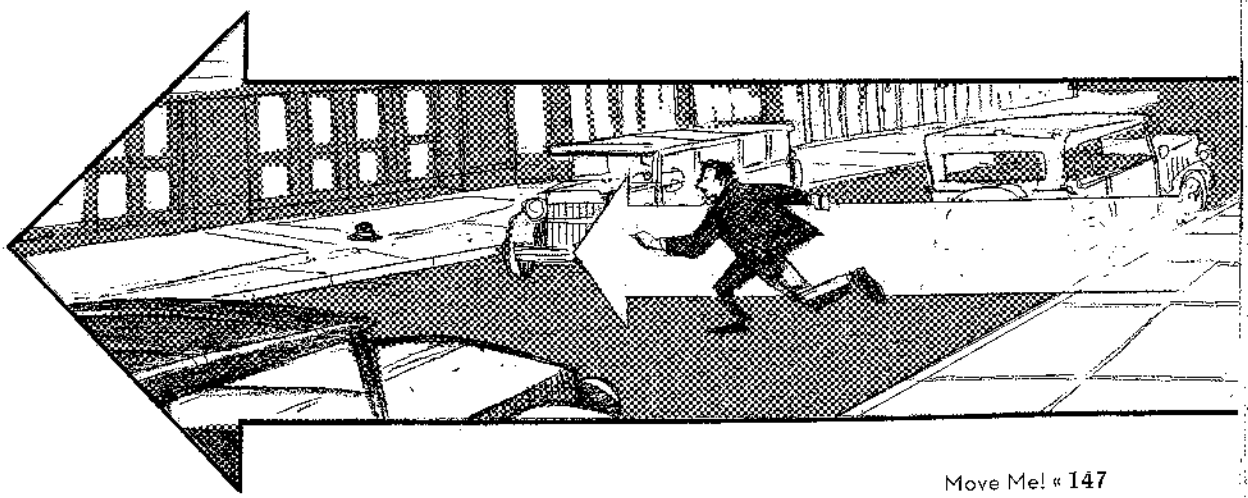
This pan also serves as a POV for the Rascal . . .



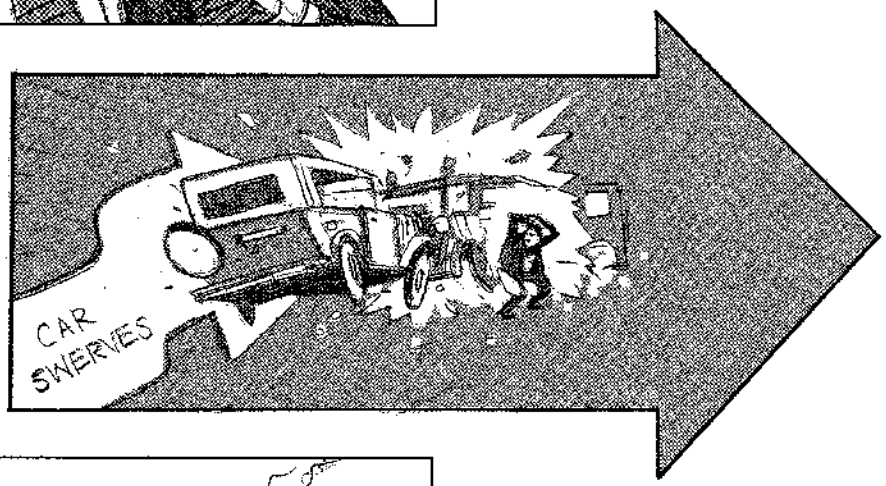
. . . and we see the object of his desire in this snap-zoom.

This Close-Up reveals the excitement felt by the Rascal.

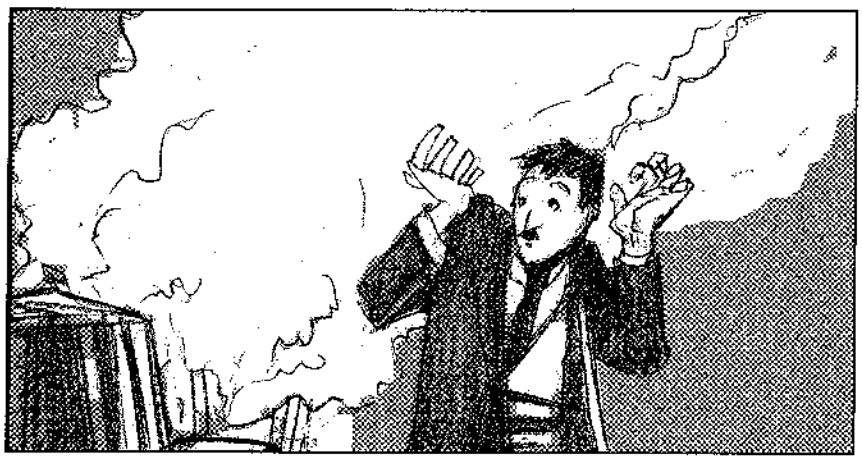
The Rascal darts into oncoming traffic. Notice both the notational *and* directional arrows in this tracking shot.



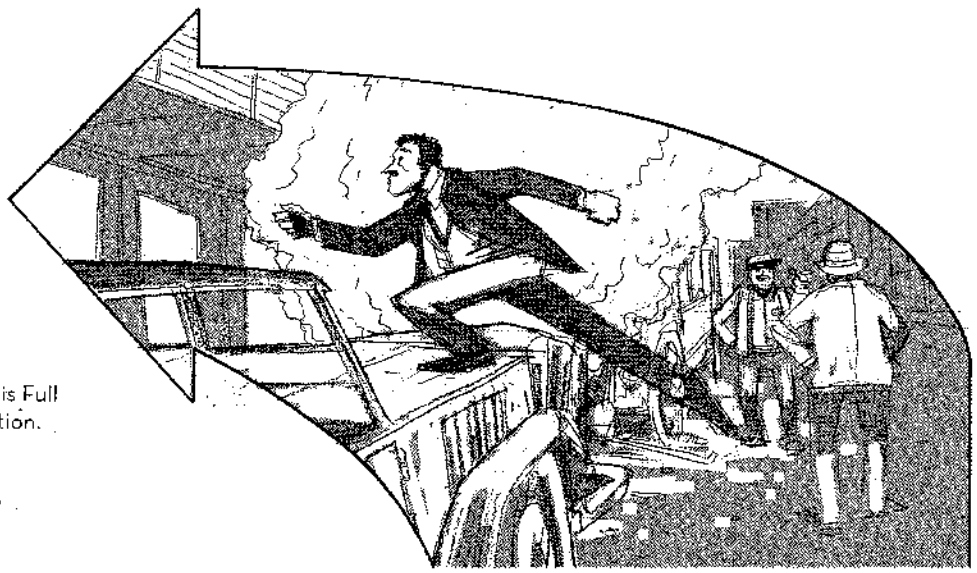
This Close-Up of the panicked driver serves as a cutaway, which allows us to continue the action . . .



. . . of a head-on collision between two cars. Again, note the directional and notational arrows.



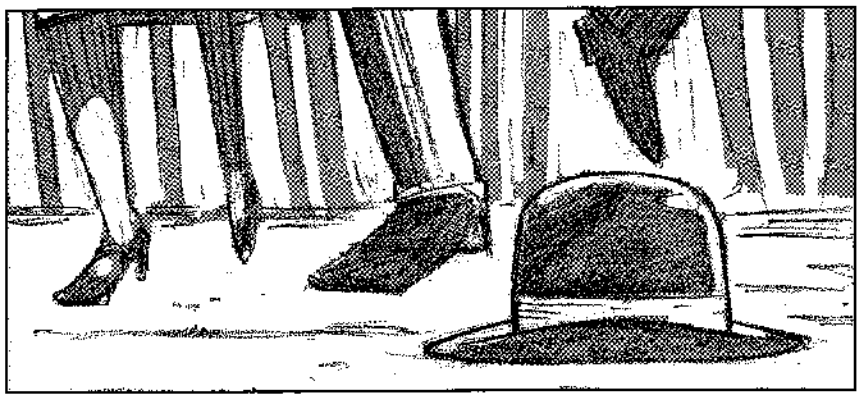
In this Medium Shot, our hapless hero has no idea that he is the cause of such mayhem.



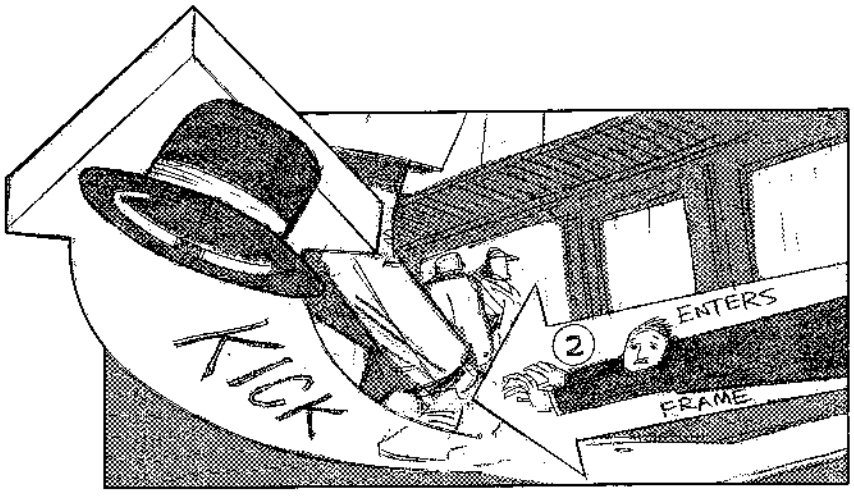
So he continues on his way in this Full Shot. A pan/tilt captures the action.

This High Hat Full Shot places the object of the Rascal's desire front and center.

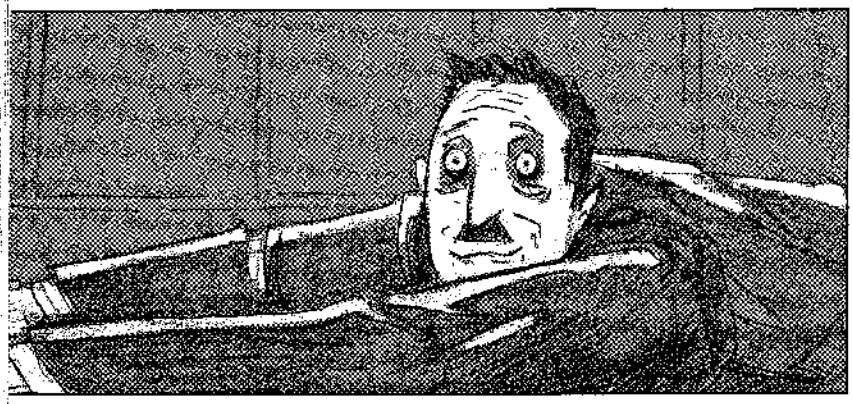
In this reverse angle, we see the doors to the theater open wide. Things aren't looking good for our hero.



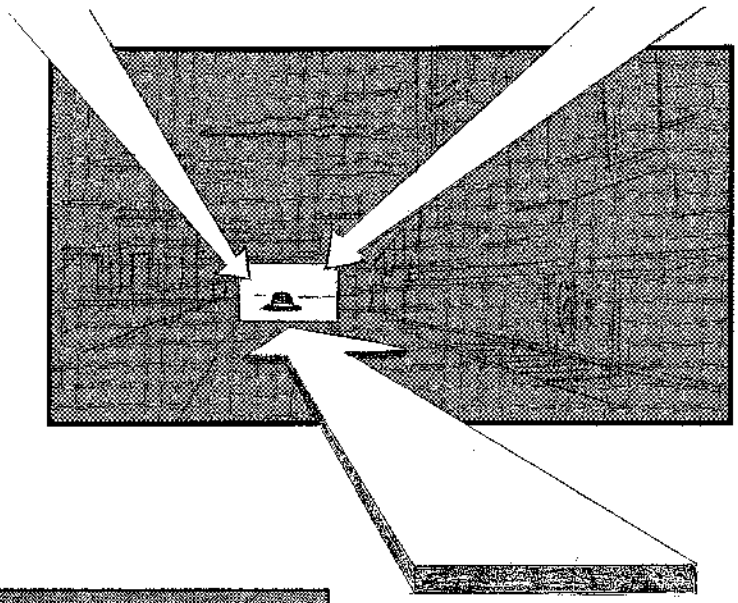
The hustle and bustle of moviegoers is captured in this High Hat.



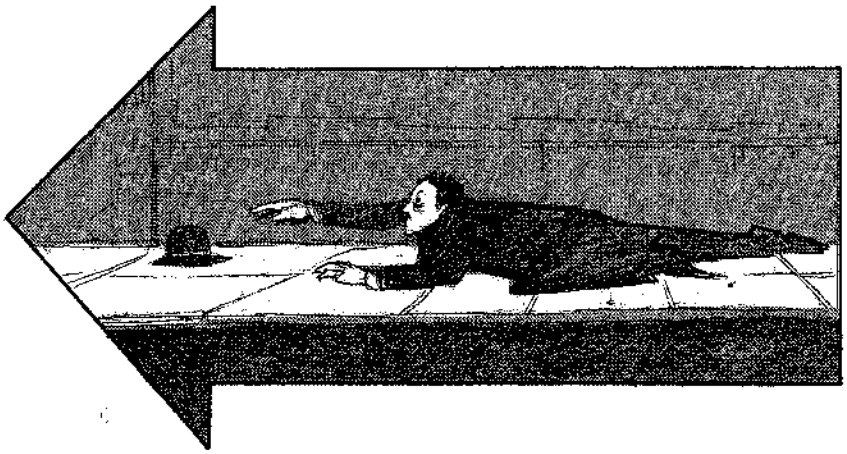
The action is picked up in this low angle. Note the arrows indicating the movement of the hat as it exits the frame as well as the movement of the Rascal as he enters the frame.



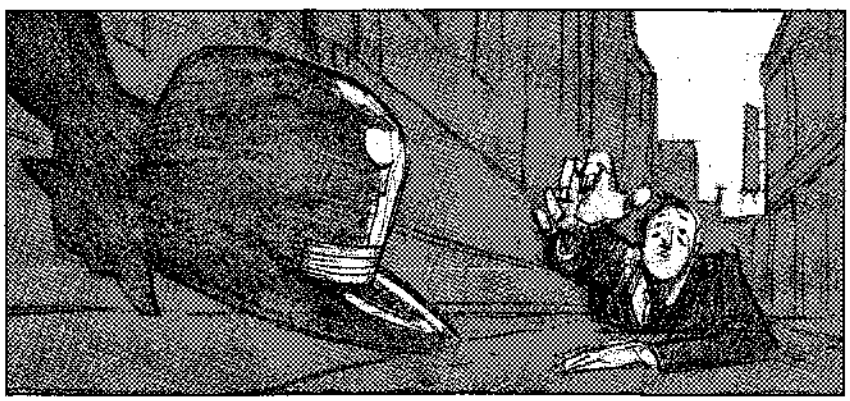
This low angle Medium Close Shot captures the confused expression of our rascal. Do his eyes deceive him?



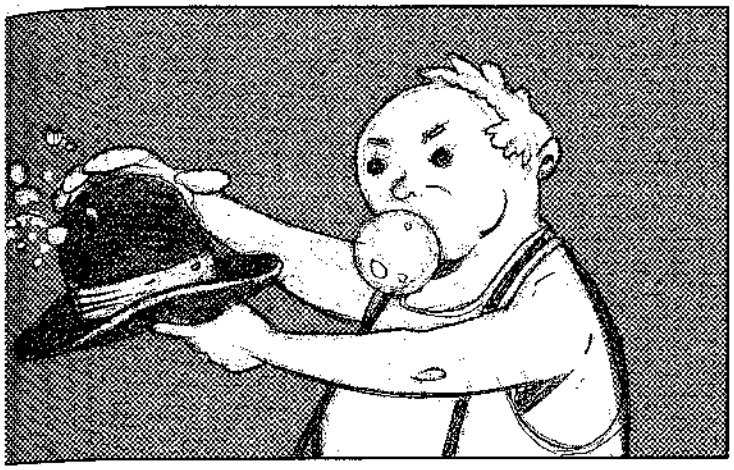
In this zoom-in, we again see the hat, tempting him, teasing him.



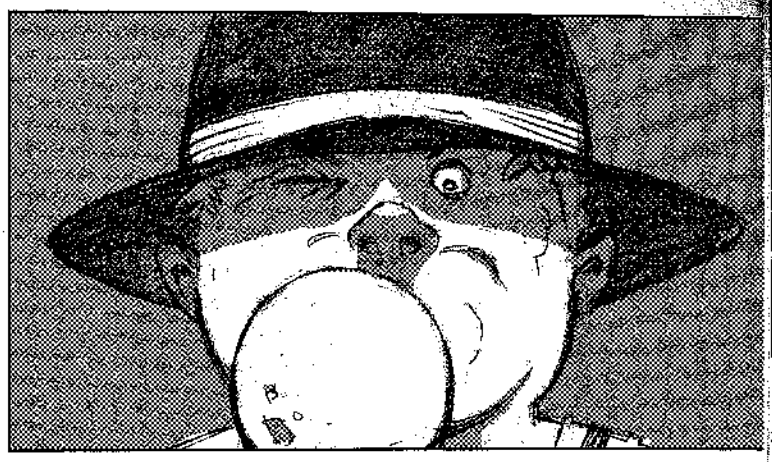
Battered but not beaten, the Rascal crawls toward his favorite hat.



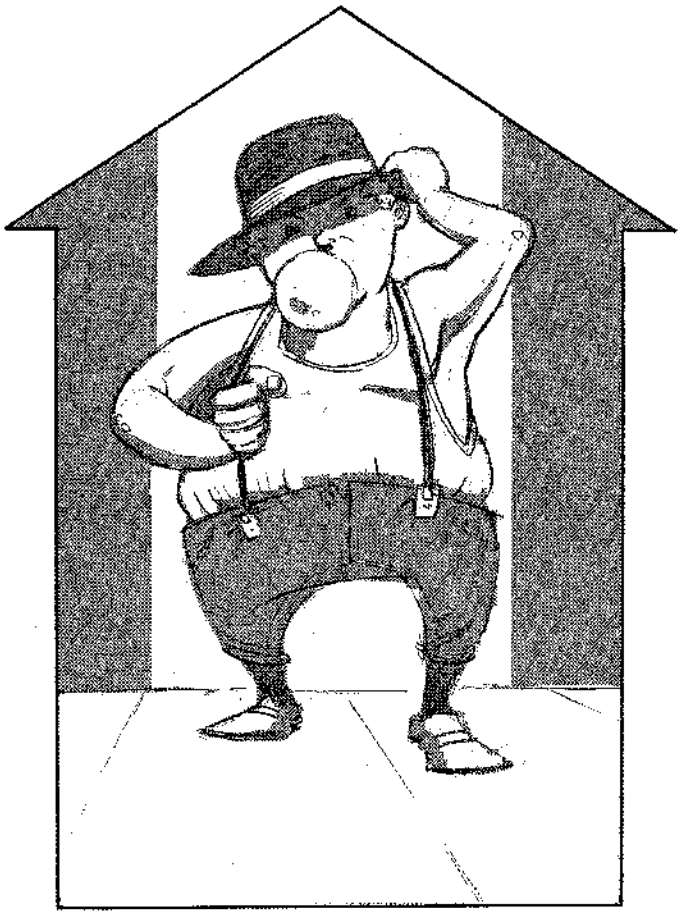
Could this be the hand of a Good Samaritan in this High Hat?



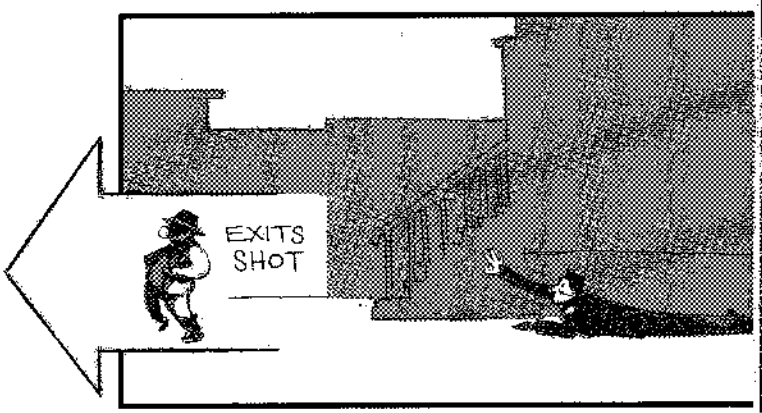
The chunky child dusts off the derby.



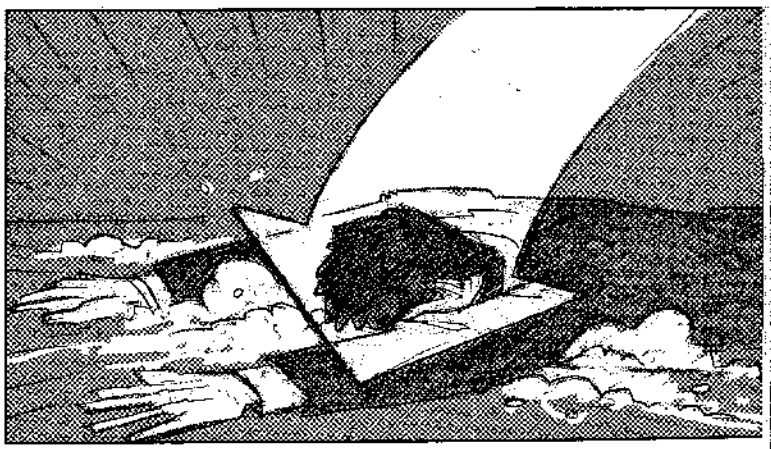
. . . for the Close-Up on the bubble-blowing boy . . .



This slow tilt sets us up . . .



. . . who seems quite proud of his latest acquisition as he struts off in this Wide Shot.



Our Rascal just can't take it anymore, as shown in this Medium Close Shot.