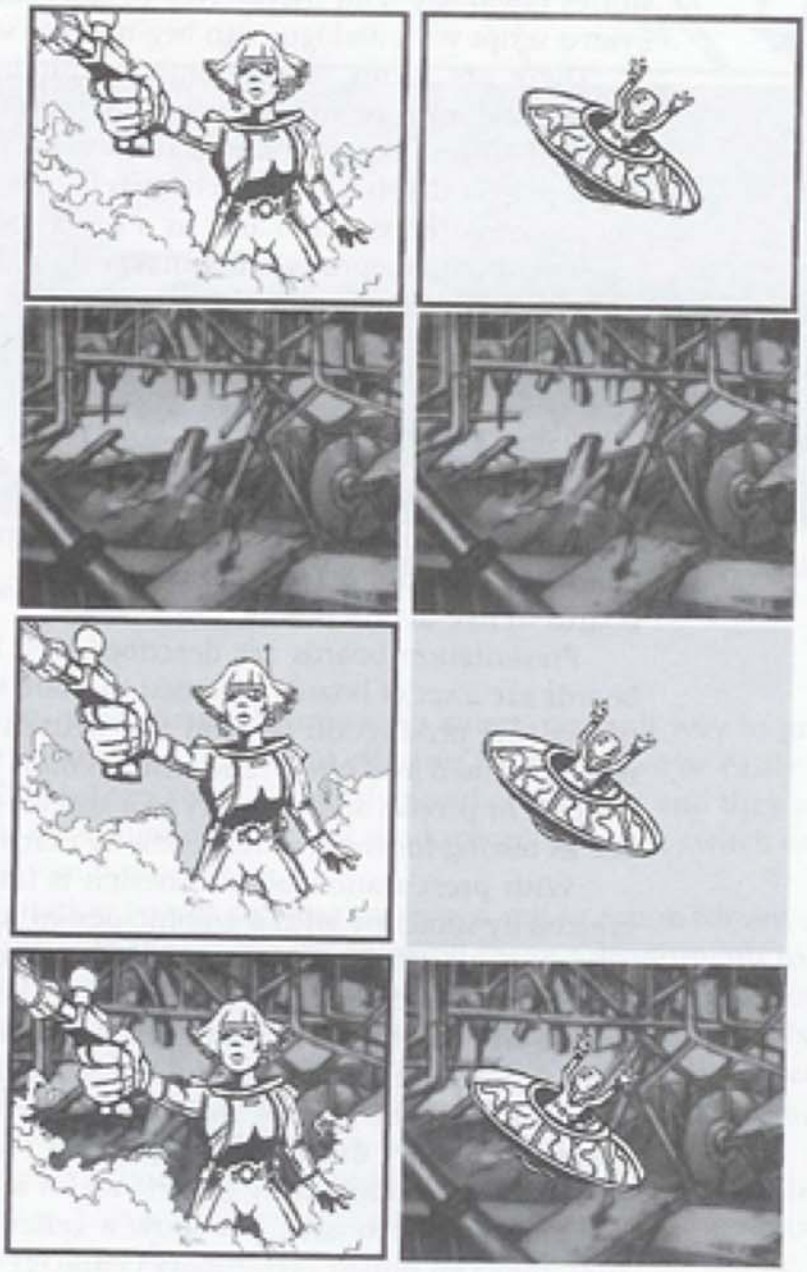
CHAPTER

8 STORYBOARDING



Storytelling Through Animation
by Mike Wellins

Since film and animation are anchored in the visual, a logical first step is developing storyboards. Storyboards are a series of comprehensive drawings, rough or refined, that create a template for how a production will ultimately play out visually. They are also the stand-in panels for the visuals yet to be filmed or animated once the boards move to the animatic phase.

Storyboards are often based on a completed script, but starting with a script isn't essential, especially for animators who focus on the visual. For them, the storyboard is the perfect place to draw the story. Nonverbal stories obviously lend themselves to storyboarding without a script, but even a script with dialogue can begin in the storyboard phase.

There are forms of experimental filmmaking that do not require boards, animatics, or anything else and they are perfectly valid, important forms of art and entertainment. However, in telling a story or creating a visual project that has specific characters, acts, and other technical aspects, storyboards are essential. Just as a contractor wouldn't start to build a house without blueprints, a filmmaker shouldn't start making a film without storyboards or a script; this is even more of the case for an animator.

Presentation Boards versus Production Boards

There are many types of boards that serve various purposes. Two major categories of boards are presentation boards and working production boards (see Figure 8.1). Production boards are also known as shooting boards in live-action production.

Presentation boards are described well by their name. Presentation boards are a set of boards designed to share with others the basic concept of a visual production beyond the written word. These boards can be more polished and often rendered in color. They are designed to sell the concept or project and the story to a specific group, client, company, or to use as testing for focus groups, among many other uses.

With presentation boards, design is important, so they are usually created by someone with a graphic-design sense or drawing skills. Generally, presentation boards are more visually evolved compared to production boards, because they are meant to be viewed and understood by people who might not be savvy to the production process. By creating defined and well-executed images and using color and design, presentation boards bridge the gap for nonindustry people who could have trouble grasping roughly drawn or complicated technical boards that are more aimed at informing a crew gearing up for a given production.

Presentation boards can show a general sense of timing. In animation, they can hint at preliminary character and production design, which can be crucial to creating a project. They usually do not contain the important minutiae that go into working production storyboards. Early on

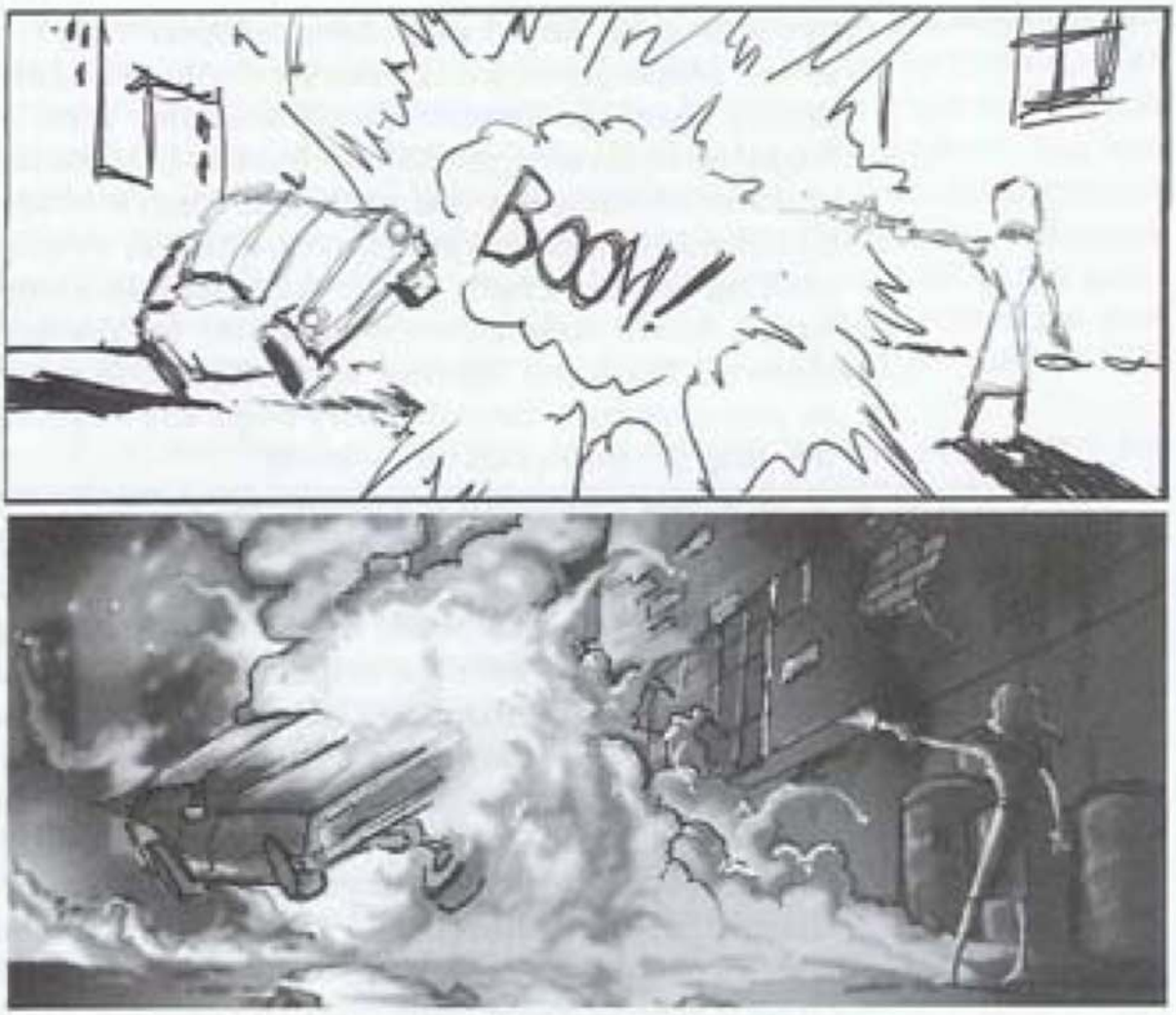


FIGURE 8.1 An illustration of the clear difference between working production boards and presentation boards.

in a project, presentation boards are a smart, no-fault way to present all the ideas at once in a simple but effective form that can be easily changed and modified. They serve to solidify proof of concept, and they represent the initial beginning of an actual production—the first switch over from writing to visual production.

Presentation boards can also serve as a call to action for anyone who will contribute to the project, by allowing various departments to start assessing their role and workload. Animators can roughly see how many characters and scenes they'll have, live-action crews can roughly start to evaluate how many filming setups they'll have, special effects people can get a feel of their involvement, and on down the line including everything from sound design to day-to-day planning of workloads.

Presentation boards rarely contain specifics like frame counts and direction notes. This is because none of that has been established concretely and it has little to do with getting the visual story. They can be just eye candy that specifically features all the visually interesting scenes or elements while glossing over other ideas that haven't been fleshed out.

Often, these are large in size, designed specifically for visual presentations so that people across a room can see them. In this case, they often read as picture boards or graphic novels, and they wind up being redrawn or recreated to become production boards. In presentation boards, a scene might be illustrated by one panel, but when it winds up going to production boards it might become several dozen or even a hundred panels, depending on the length of the scene and its complexity. Presentation boards should make an overt attempt to tell the story clearly in pictures. Elements like color, lighting, and composition are important to creating an environment where the story lives, and anything to clarify the story will help the project on many levels.

Working production storyboards are decidedly different from presentation boards. The fundamental difference is that presentation boards are a sales tool, while working production or shooting boards are a detailed map of the entire visual production that show how the story will be told visually.

In conjunction with the script and a working animatic, production or shooting boards by their very nature are always changing. They can be drawn very well, they can be stick figures, or they can be extremely rough sketches, just as long as everyone who uses or needs them understands the direction. As a production goes along, the quality of production storyboards drawings often gets rougher and rougher, as shots are changed, inserted, moved, and tweaked. The storyboard artist, no longer worried about the quality of visuals, but now concentrates on finding and creating new working shots.

Using Storyboards as a Working Tool

Storyboarding and cinematography go hand in hand. Storyboarding is essentially the planning of the cinematic angles and is extremely important in helping tell the story. Pay attention to the standard rules of cinematography so that the foundation of a flow can begin. Establish locations with wide establishing shots, use close-ups to see faces, move the camera when appropriate, and hold the camera still when necessary. Consider interesting compositions featuring props or characters. Changing scenes should always be motivated, just as cuts are during editing.

Pay attention to the line of sight and give characters room to perform. Choosing the angles for filming or animating as well as planning the motion of all moving elements are some important decisions. Alfred Hitchcock regarded boarding as the actual creating of the movie, and once completed he thought the actual filming was quite dull and mechanical.

Shooting or working boards, if not drawn by the director, are closely watched by the director working in conjunction with the storyboard artists. Unless the director is making his own work, he often receives input about the storyboards from the writer, client, producer, art director, cinematographer, and anyone else whose input could change the visual layout of the translation from script to visuals.

Some directors will hand a storyboard artist quick thumbnail drawings, basically asking for not much more than a cleaned-up redraw. A director will often have concrete ideas about how certain sequences are laid out and roughly sketch those scenes. The director may not have clear and immediate ideas about all the other scenes and will look to the storyboard artist to interpret the script for those sequences; the director delineates key images he has visualized and lets a storyboard artist fill in the gaps. When working with a good storyboard artist, the director can often give the artist as much or as little input as he wants, and can get another take on the visual production.

Good storyboard artists often have a much broader or different art experience than a director and can perhaps create angles and setups that the director hadn't considered. Ultimately, however, the director decides and picks the best of all the ideas that are presented. He then sells his view to the writers or clients, while trying to work within the producer's parameters of time and budget.

When there are several people working on a production, it's rare that there is an immediate consensus on the storytelling's proper direction. The writer might feel that a director's take on a scene isn't right, or the director has made too many changes to the initial idea. The producer may have comments regarding budget restraints, special-effect limitations, or countless other issues. In working with creative individuals, a difference of opinion is almost always guaranteed as visual entertainment, and storytelling relies on personal taste and subjectivity.

Working through challenges like writing considerations, art direction input, styles, angles, and budgetary issues is one of the important functions of the storyboarding phase; this is precisely where plans of this nature get sorted out. Visual and technical types of details and other certain considerations never clearly come across in a script alone. Style, set design, props, lighting, blocking placement, and staging are rarely considered on the written page, but are supremely important.

All of the elements that fall into the visual world can and should be addressed in the storyboarding phase, which can work in conjunction with changing and modifying the script to reflect the leap from written words to visuals. A simple line in a script can create a nearly infinite number of visual treatments. The line, "Two characters have a silly comedic fight," could be created in countless ways and could last a few seconds or several minutes.

It's easy to change words and easy to change drawings. This solves many problems upfront and sets the upcoming project to function efficiently, because knowing what is coming up and true preplanning are invaluable in film and animation.

Scenes can be erased, cut, and edited, all with a stroke of a pen. It also allows the director to focus on the flow, or the "harmonious structure" that F.W. Murnau recognized. Mechanical details are tested and technical issues like hookups in the action that flows from one scene to the next

are hammered out, only to remain flexible later on. A visual flow isn't just cutting on the action, but it's cutting on the action in the right place so that the scenes naturally hook up with each other. Although the exact timing of the hookups won't come until the animatic phase, the director can seriously start to plan angles for each and every shot and still know that a final commitment to a specific shot or angle treatment is still several steps away. Working production boards usually have all the information about each specific shot, including the dialogue track or line.

Using rough boards and a stopwatch, you can make a surprisingly accurate timing of the whole project. Because of the cost of animation, boards and animatics have always been integral to the animation making process. This process wasn't always used in live action, although feature film is becoming so expensive that it almost warrants doing some form of boards. Plenty of live-action productions are still filmed without boards, and instead have scene and shot breakdown lists. There are standard ways to film standard scenes; however, making even the simplest storyboards or animatics for any animated or live production can create an obvious level of organization and comfort, unless the production is profoundly simple or purely experimental. When working in the storyboarding and animatic process it is immensely liberating to be organized.

Even on small solo projects, when creating a piece that has more than a couple of shots, each new panel of shooting or production boards compounds the possibilities exponentially. Going through the storyboarding process in great detail serves several purposes. It forces the director to figure out all the scenes, not just the pivotal or exciting ones. It also makes the director focus on the film as a whole, so no scene is treated as mundane or as just a connector between two interesting scenes. From an editing point of view, storyboarding presses the director to examine how all the shots work in conjunction with each other. It also makes the director create a fit between the dialogue and the picture, either by extending shots, spacing lines out, editing lines completely, or going back to the writer for different lines.

Storyboarding brings all the theories and principles of composition, screen direction, and cinematography to bear, so that many paramount decisions are beginning to be made and tested. The working storyboard is unlike the presentation boards as it is meant to be a very close representation of the final angles, where objects, characters, and landscapes are in space and have a sense of lighting. The aspect of the storyboard panel in a real sense is the first defining of the two-dimensional space where the visuals will exist. If a story is going to be created in a specific aspect, then the board frames need to reflect it. The National Television System Committee (NTSC) television aspect ratio is 4:3 or 1.33:1. The Academy flat aspect ratio is also the high definition (HD) ratio of 16 × 9 or 1:85.1. It is the dominant ratio for theatrical films and has been in use since the mid-1950s. To make the theatrical presentation more dynamic, CinemaScope or anamorphic was developed and its aspect ratio is 2.35:1; it is also

known as Panavision and has the widest standard aspect ratio of all. Illustrations of each ratio are shown in Figures 8.2 through 8.4.

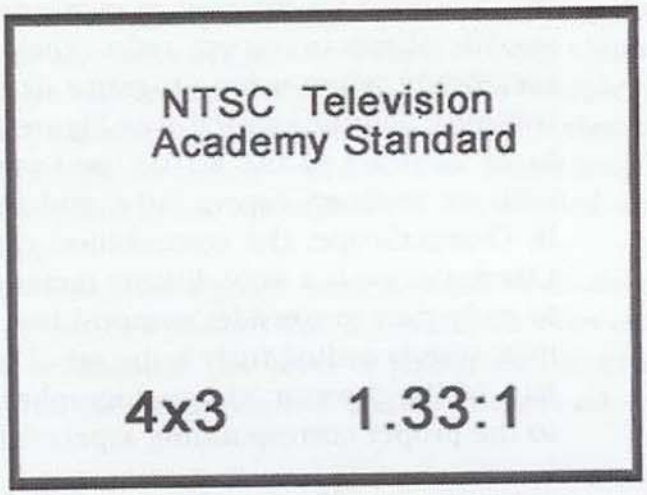


FIGURE 8.2 The NTSC television standard aspect ratio.

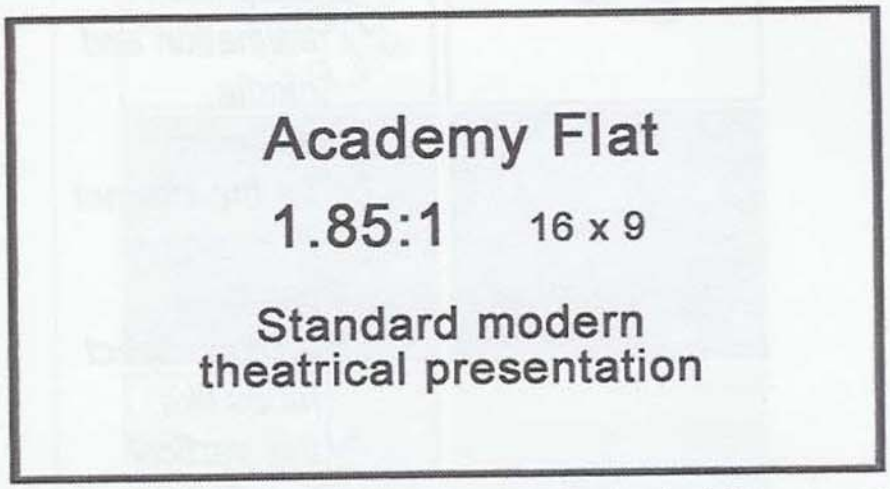


FIGURE 8.3 The Academy flat aspect ratio or the standard film presentation.

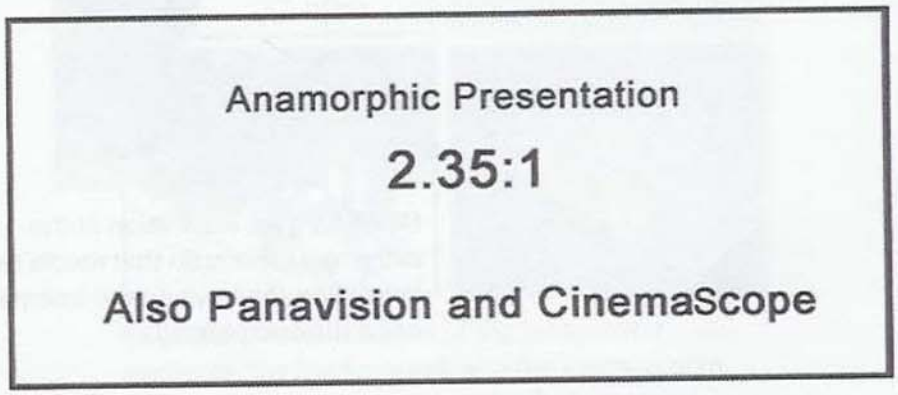


FIGURE 8.4 The CinemaScope or Panavision widescreen aspect ratio.

Video-game cut sequences often use an academy flat aspect ratio similar to 1.85:1 that plays cut sequences in the letterbox-type scenario, but its exact aspect can vary from game to game. The Internet and projects destined for Internet or computer play don't need to be tied to any specific shape or aspect ratio. They can be completely experimental, specifically when using programs like Flash where an aspect ratio like a column could be created (see Figure 8.5). Storyboard aspect ratios need to be accurate to the actual used aspect ratio. If storyboarding is done with an arbitrary aspect ratio, and the actual production is going to be in CinemaScope, the composition can't really be thought out, because CinemaScope is a very distinct rectangle and needs to be treated as such to truly start to consider composition. In animation, and often in live action, storyboarding truly is the act of composing the shot and wearing the hats of the director, cinematographer, and the director of photography, so the proper corresponding aspect ratio must be considered.

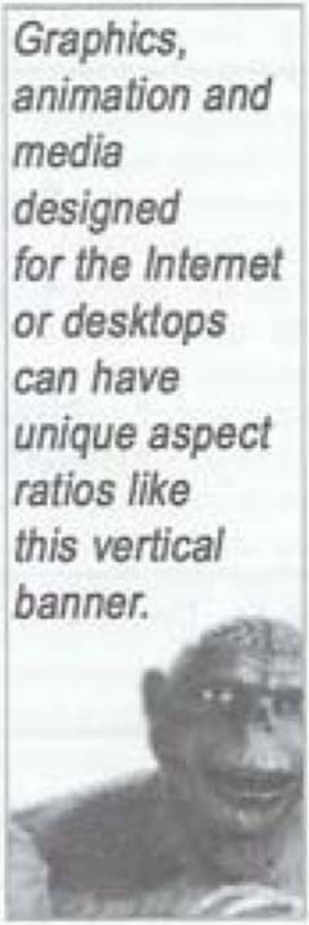


FIGURE 8.5 An illustration of the extreme aspect ratio that media and animation can have on the Internet or on the computer.

Prepping for Animatics

In creating complex moves or storyboards where parts are moving or some type of motion is ultimately going to be added, it's important to run through the animatic software to know how to prep elements. Making a rough matte on an element of storyboard is not a complex job. However, if many have to be made, it's wise to define how the elements are treated quickly and efficiently. In certain software the easiest way to create floating elements is to paint in the areas that are not needed with a consistent chroma key color.

Once an element is on a green screen, it can be easily manipulated in an animatic that features motion that is required for developing timing or for background separation. The level of polish on the artwork in Figure 8.6 is for presentation animatics and boards. Images on a chroma keyed

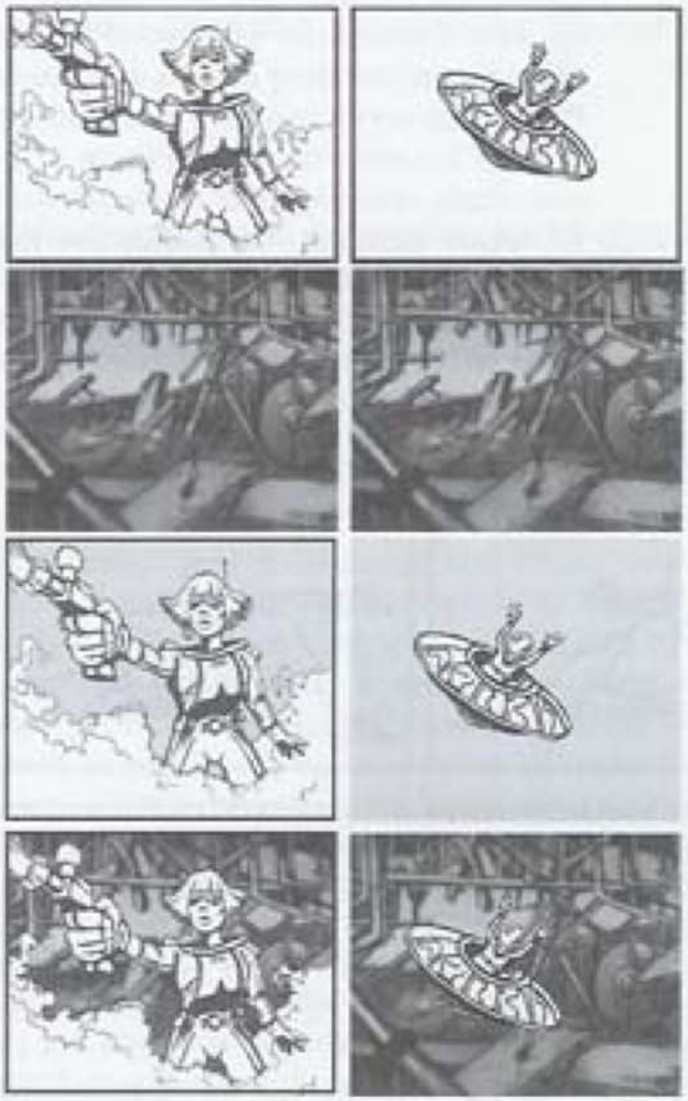


FIGURE 8.6 An illustration of the foreground elements, the background, and the element on a green-screen layer, and then the final combined elements ready for movement (see Color Plate 14).

color background are easily keyed out and also tell the editor exactly what is and isn't an element by its obvious color. Other software works quicker with an alpha channel. Depending on the software, the alpha channel can be embedded in a 32-bit targa file or saved separately. Other software doesn't recognize 32-bit targa files and instead requires a 24-bit image file and an alpha channel to be saved separately. If many drawings are being boarded and prepped to create some sense of movement, it's important to set up a system of creating and saving files so the many files do not have to be converted or reexported.

Storyboards and Photoshop

When drawing or creating storyboards, Photoshop or similar digital manipulation software can be extremely effective in creating additional panels with a minimum amount of work. Creating true working storyboards often means creating dozens and dozens of individual drawings, but being Photoshop savvy can help eliminate redrawing and can easily create clear timings for movement. In Figure 8.7, the storyboard panels started from one single drawing. The character drawing is the same and is duplicated. To create gestures, the hands are erased and then redrawn directly in Photoshop, or as a simple element, and then inserted in the storyboard panel. This creates panels that can be incredibly precise and that clearly show movement without having to draw the character over and over.

FIGURE 8.7 Panels have been altered in Photoshop to create new panels without having to redraw each one from scratch.

If eye moves or expression changes are essential to timing, they too can be quickly altered in Photoshop or similar programs. The *Shards of Death* storyboards, all of which are contained on the CD-ROM saved as Figure **8_21.jpg**, illustrate this technique, as do the animatic versions that are also on the CD-ROM. The creatures' expression change is essential to the scene, and one initial drawing is modified several times to create those changes; the panels don't have to be redrawn from scratch. In the

upcoming animatic phase, these types of changes appear very smooth to the eye. This is because the original panel isn't altered and the background doesn't move at all, which can help to create a clearer read.

If the panels are redrawn from scratch, then background elements move from panel to panel, creating visual bumps. These shifts aren't detrimental to the project. However, being able to utilize Photoshop can not only speed up the process, but can also improve the dynamic level of the boards, which is faster than redrawing panels from scratch. Taking that process to another level, storyboard artists short on time can draw templates and then create parts that are then brought together in Photoshop to create panels.

Like the animatic, storyboards are one step in a process designed to eliminate or minimize problems while allowing the filmmaker to concentrate on telling the best story possible. Storyboards shouldn't be the first time drawings or images come into existence on an animated production. They should begin once characters have been established in some form.

The Language of Storyboards

There are all kinds of systems and descriptions for labeling and indicating movement on storyboards, and these techniques can change from studio to studio and from artist to artist. There are no ironclad rules. Suffice it to say that the indicators and descriptions should clearly and concisely describe what it is the storyboards are meant to represent when it comes to turning the boards into animatics and ultimately animation.

In classic film storyboards, symbols were often used that reflected directions that were derived from analog film cutting, but those symbols were somewhat archaic. Normal language and simple words are clearer and don't require a working knowledge of outdated film techniques.

A panel that has a smaller box, inside often indicated by a dotted line, with arrows aiming in or out, describes a push in or pull out. An arrow with the description of whether the move is a push, pull, or zoom is labeled inside the arrows. If a dolly or pan move begins and ends with two distinctly different images, an arrow with the respective label can stretch across two or more panels if necessary. Panels do not exclusively have to run in a column down a page. If dialogue or other direction fills the page, then the pan or dolly indicating arrow can be broken with a clean broken or "torn" edge. This indicates that the move continues on the panel above or below the panel in question. Figures 8.8 through 8.10 show these concepts.

Boards often have to deal with movement in dimensional space, because depth is an important part of staging and composition. If a character or camera move starts close to the camera, rounds a tree, and disappears over the horizon, then the character, camera, or object is moving in depth and the boarding needs to reflect that. Creating arrows and indicators that

show depth does this. Tapered arrows go a long way toward conveying 3D movement in a single drawing. Curved or tapered arrows, as shown in Figure 8.11, can indicate action or character moves or erratic camera moves. If there is confusion as to whether or not an indicating arrow is for a character or for the camera, a simple label written in the arrow can delineate what it is that is moving.

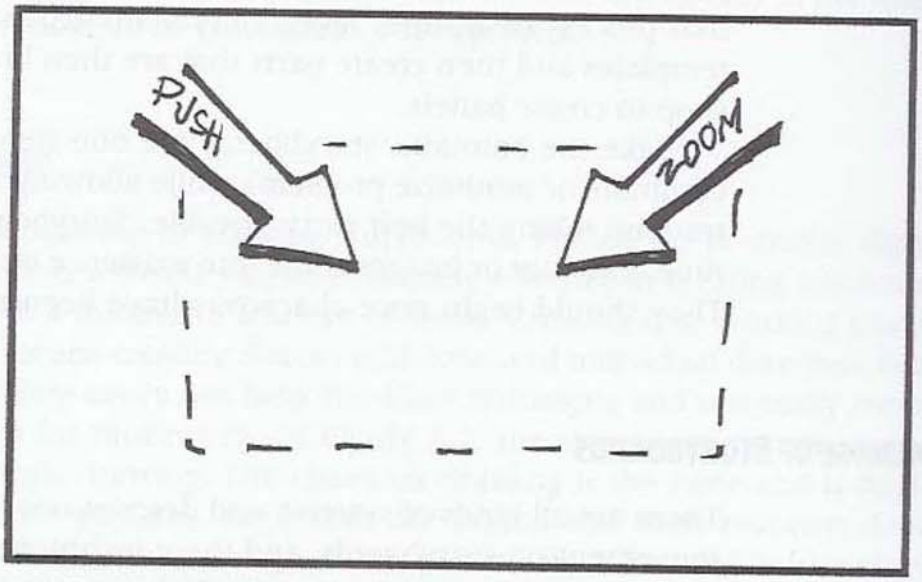


FIGURE 8.8 A move in, or a zoom into a specific element.

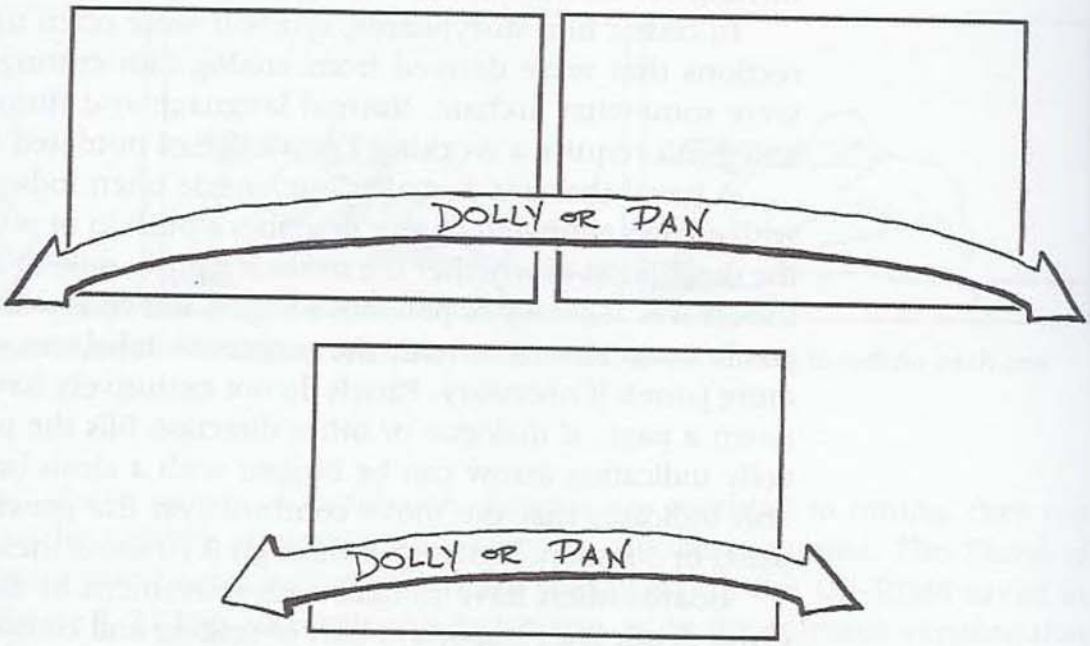


FIGURE 8.9 A pan or dolly move across a single panel or two board panels.

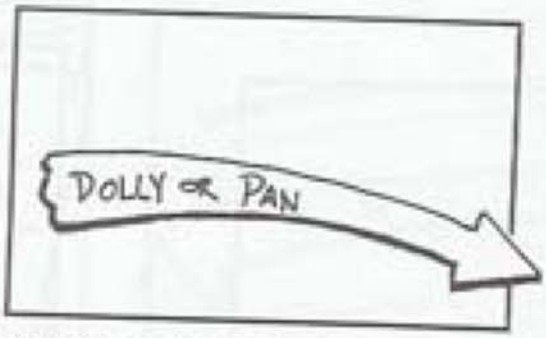


FIGURE 8.10 A broken arrow can show a move on boards that are drawn in a column or a move that continues on the next page of the storyboards.

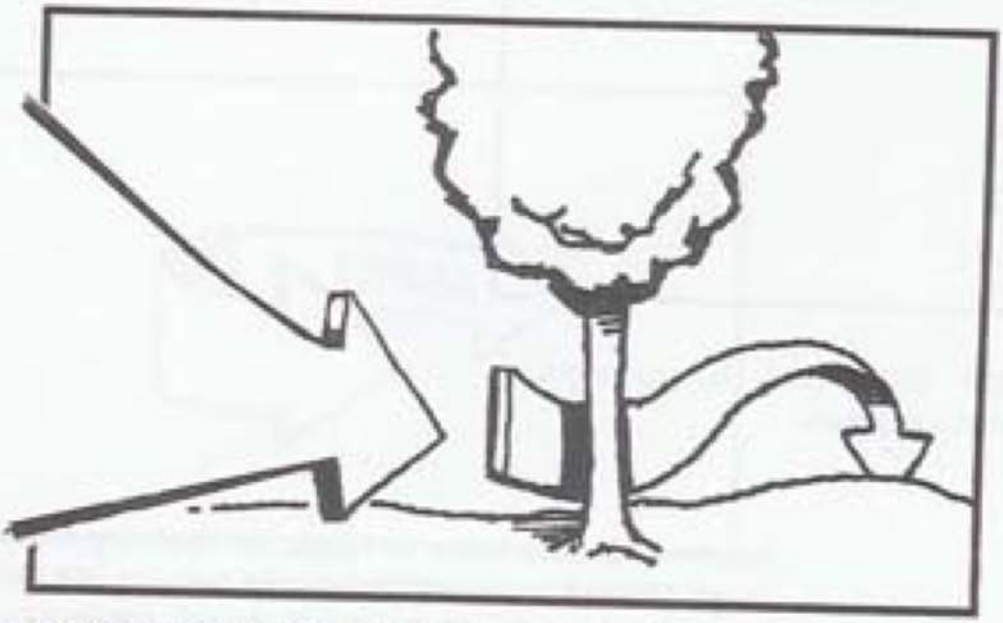


FIGURE 8.11 Curved arrows indicate turns either by characters, objects, or the camera and are labeled to clarify.

Similar to the pan or dolly move crossing multiple panels, a tilt or crane up or down can move across several panels if different information is required in each. If a pan down or up or a crane down or up also moves in or out simultaneously, a tapered arrow can indicate this compound move. Camera shake or vibration can be simply indicated by putting action lines around a panel. A camera that is dutched or set off level can be easily represented in storyboards by simply drawing the panels with a nonhorizontal line. If a whip pan or a camera moves from one place to another very quickly, then a panel is created with a double-ended arrow with a notation that reads "whip or zip pan" added inside the arrow. This concept is illustrated in Figure 8.15. In traditional film, a diagonal line indicated wipes and dissolves across the board, but now the transitions are usually just labeled between the panels. Black frames or FTB (fade to

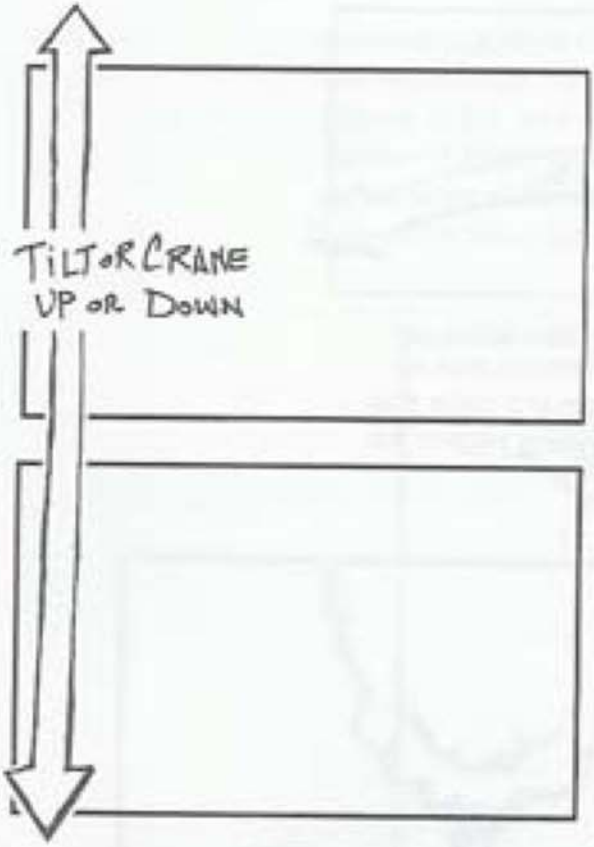


FIGURE 8.12 Tilt and crane shots can move across multiple panels.

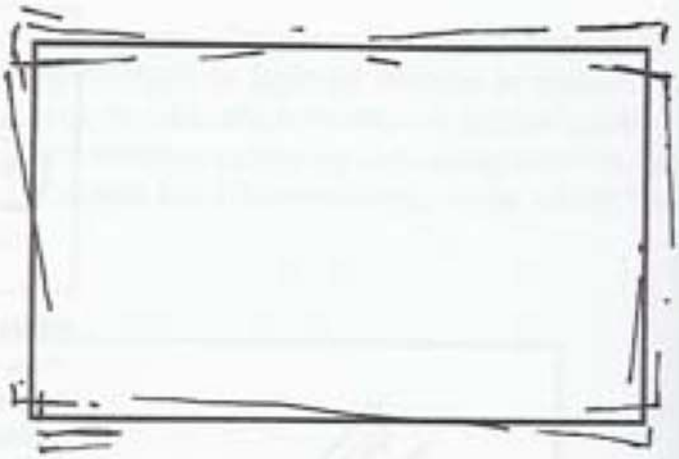


FIGURE 8.13 An illustration of camera shake when drawing a storyboard panel.

black) indicates fades to black. In drawing storyboards, often a complex angle is hard or too time consuming to draw even for a skilled animator, and it's acceptable to use scrap, photocopies, or traces of images with specific angles. Elements that will be added later can be indicated by simple text in the panels. These concepts are shown in Figures 8.12 through 8.19.

Frames from existing films or videos can be used—anything that will clearly convey the idea to anyone who has to bring elements to the shot that is being created. Just as a costume designer can grab swatches of fabric, storyboard artists are free to use angles and images as composition references. Of course, using other artists' footage and artwork beyond inspiration is potentially copyright infringement (see Figure 8.20).

ON THE CD

Among the films on the companion CD-ROM are the two films *Shards of Death* (**Shards.mov**) and *Grime Shoed Diaries* (**Grime.mov**). Both these projects began with dozens and dozens of designs, a few animation tests, and one working scene or two and then went into an extensive storyboarding session once a script was in place and the designs were done. *Shards of Death* (see Figure 8.21) was very straightforward as a talking film

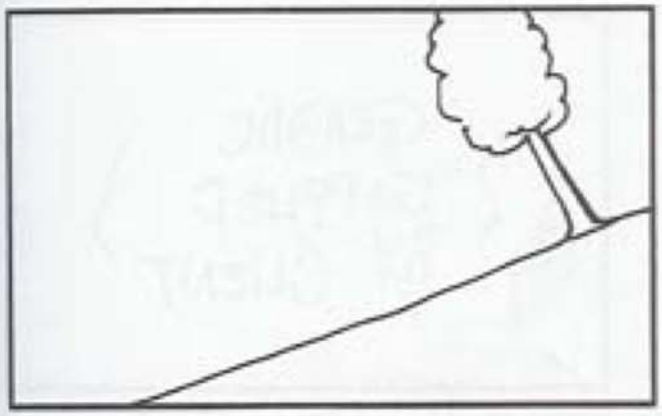


FIGURE 8.14 How to illustrate a dutched camera angle.

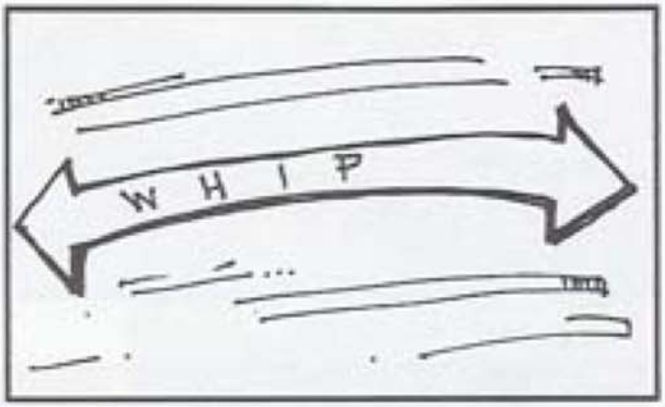


FIGURE 8.15 The standard panel to illustrate a whip pan or quick movement.

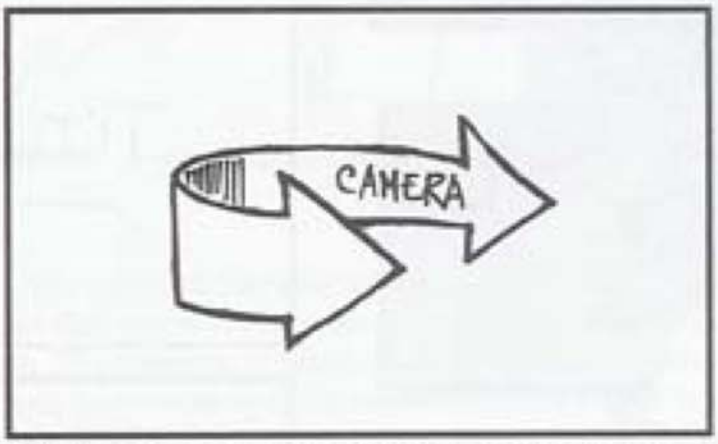


FIGURE 8.16 Curved arrows that have a level of depth to them indicate character turns or camera turns. A label is added inside the arrow to delineate between the two.

with mostly subtle movements and dialogue. *Grime Shoed Diaries* was far more complex in its scope, with camera movements, and visual layering.

Boards for the *Grime Shoed Diaries*, as shown in Figure 8.22, were made up of extensive pencil sketches. Drawings were done far more elaborately than needed, especially for a film that was a solo project and had no input from others. Working in detail on the boards enabled a level of focus that allowed the development of many ideas and visual gags and allowed for the creation of another layer of subtle humor. Boarding was truly the point where all the cinematic choices, camera placement, and moves were established. Unlike *Shards of Death* that played out on one singe set, *Grime Shoed Diaries* had many backgrounds as the character moved from scene to scene. In an attempt to create the feeling of a huge

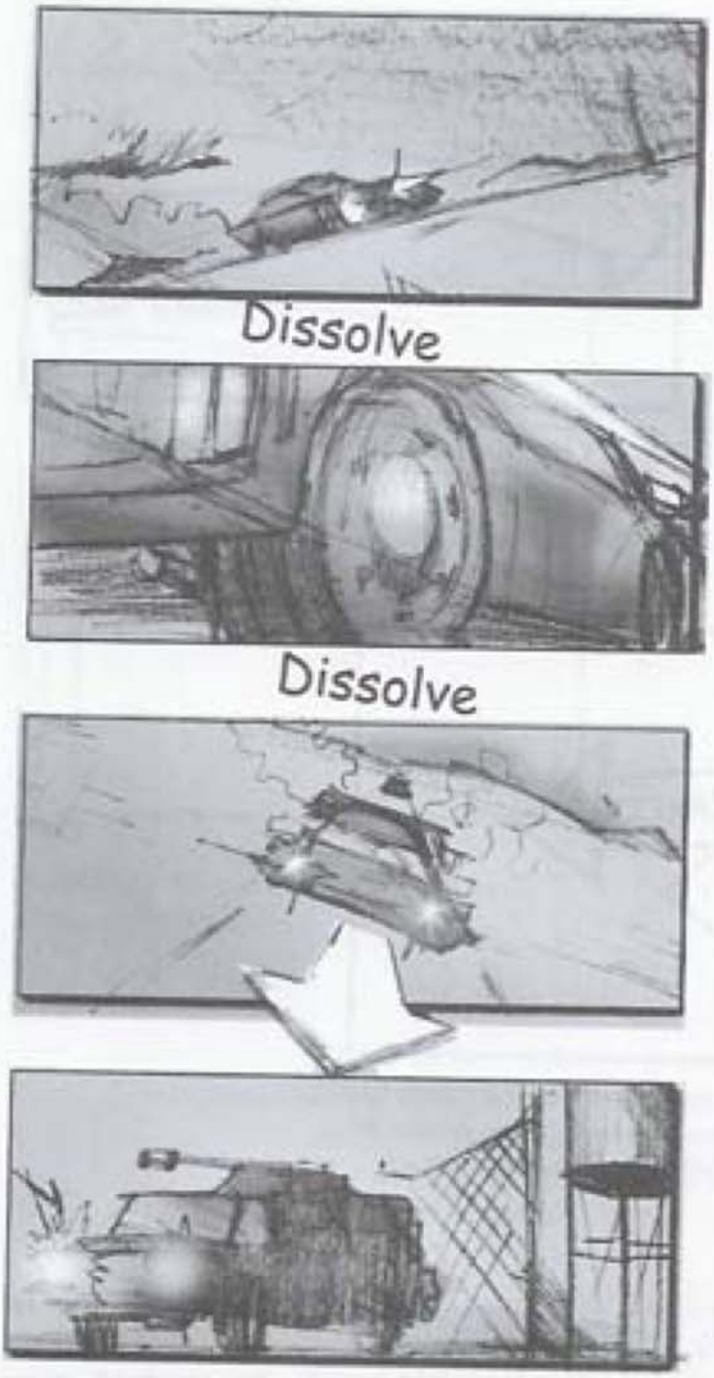


FIGURE 8.17 Dissolves are simply labeled between panels.

FIGURE 8.18 A placeholding panel for footage or artwork to be supplied by others.

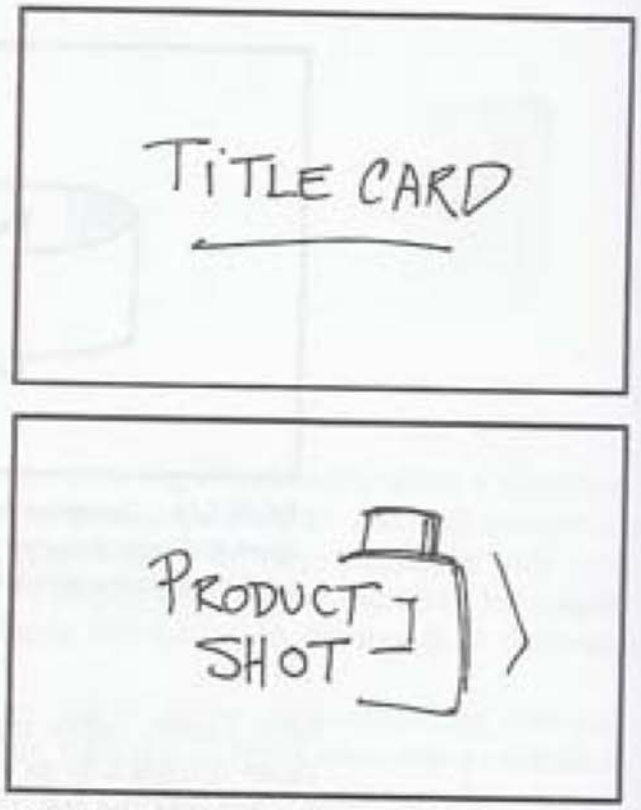


FIGURE 8.19 A placeholding panel for product shots and titles.

faceless city, it was necessary to create many shots of the detective small in frame or not in frame, with just visual texture shots of the city. Angles from high in the air give the sense of huge vertical spaces. Buildings always stretch out of frame and seemingly into infinity.

FIGURE 8.20 A vacation photo is used to create a storyboard image.

The style of the animation is still flat, like a comic book, and combines flat layers with extensive camera moves that reveal more information. The camera is integral in the film because it delivers many joke punch lines with specific reveals. The opposite is true of *Shards of Death;* punch lines came from the characters and not the camera. With voice-over narration, the camera reveals visual jokes that run contrary to the dialogue. Close-ups are used in contrast to the huge wide shots and allow the camera to focus on the facial expressions. With animation, it's possible to create shots that are impossible or nearly impossible, such as being able to go underground to see inside a coffin (see Figure 8.23). *Grime Shoed Diaries* features a quick scene where the shot zooms into the microscopic bacteria on an eyelid. Animation is made of extremes and when used correctly, inventive shots can have tremendous impact. Ultimately, boarding and cinematography are nearly one and the same thing. *Grime Shoed Diaries* is complicated visually with many moving layers, while *Shards of Death* is a comedy that is based on performance, so the camera placement plays it very straight.

In *Shards of Death,* humor developed from using ideas of opposites and awkwardness—at its root, the comedy is anchored on the well-used "fish-out-of-water" setup. Awkwardness comes out of pauses, silence, and discomfort. These elements come out of performance, and this idea informed the boarding so that the shooting is very conservative and minimal and the shots should be very unobtrusive and normal.

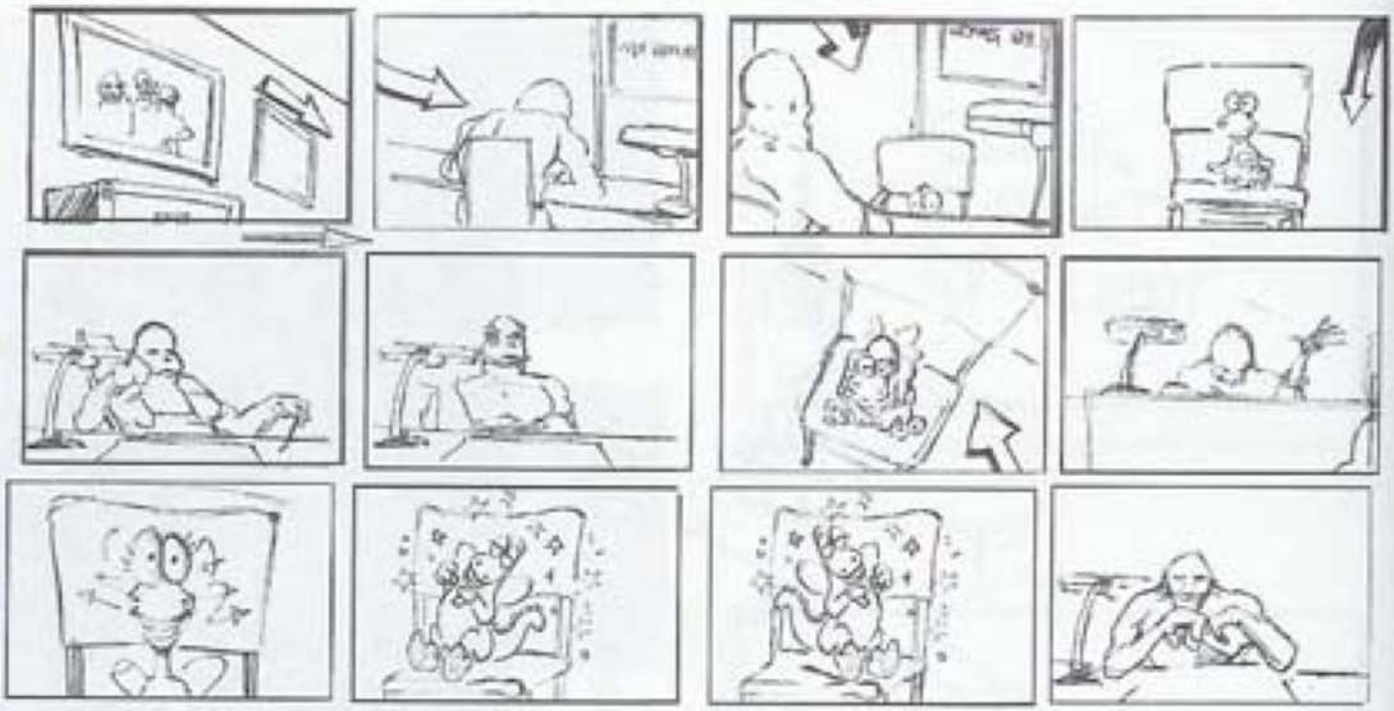


FIGURE 8.21 A series of storyboards from the short animated film Shards of Death.

Specific emotions call for specific treatment. *Grime Shoed Diaries* attempts to be epic in scope and parodies a gritty detective story, with many shots that attempt to create a gritty, dirty world in which the character barely gets by. The film is also a parody of a suspense film and is laid out that way, with long shots with characters moving in the shadows and lurking around in the foreground and background elements.

The story starts on a large scale, showing an entire city, and then focuses down to a single person: the detective in his office, where he works and lives. The majority of the film takes place in the city, so it was essential for the city to have the detail of the genre it parodies. The opposite is true of *Shards of Death* where if anything were going to come out of the two characters' interaction, then the camera needed to be there capturing it, silently and cleanly. With the exception of the first panning reveal of the fairy character, the camera's use of effect is minimal. It works better than wild shots, which could possibly detract from the performance. Every shot was considered and shots of the fairy character were photographed from above the creature and angled down to reinforce the character's size both in real size as well as in significance. The green monster, on the other hand, always had a desk in front of it, to keep the character feeling very standoffish, serving as a fixture of authority. The fact that he is a hideous monster at a bland desk is another absurd level of humor. The tables are turned because in a sense, the fairy is actually the straight man in the humor world, because he's acting consistent with his

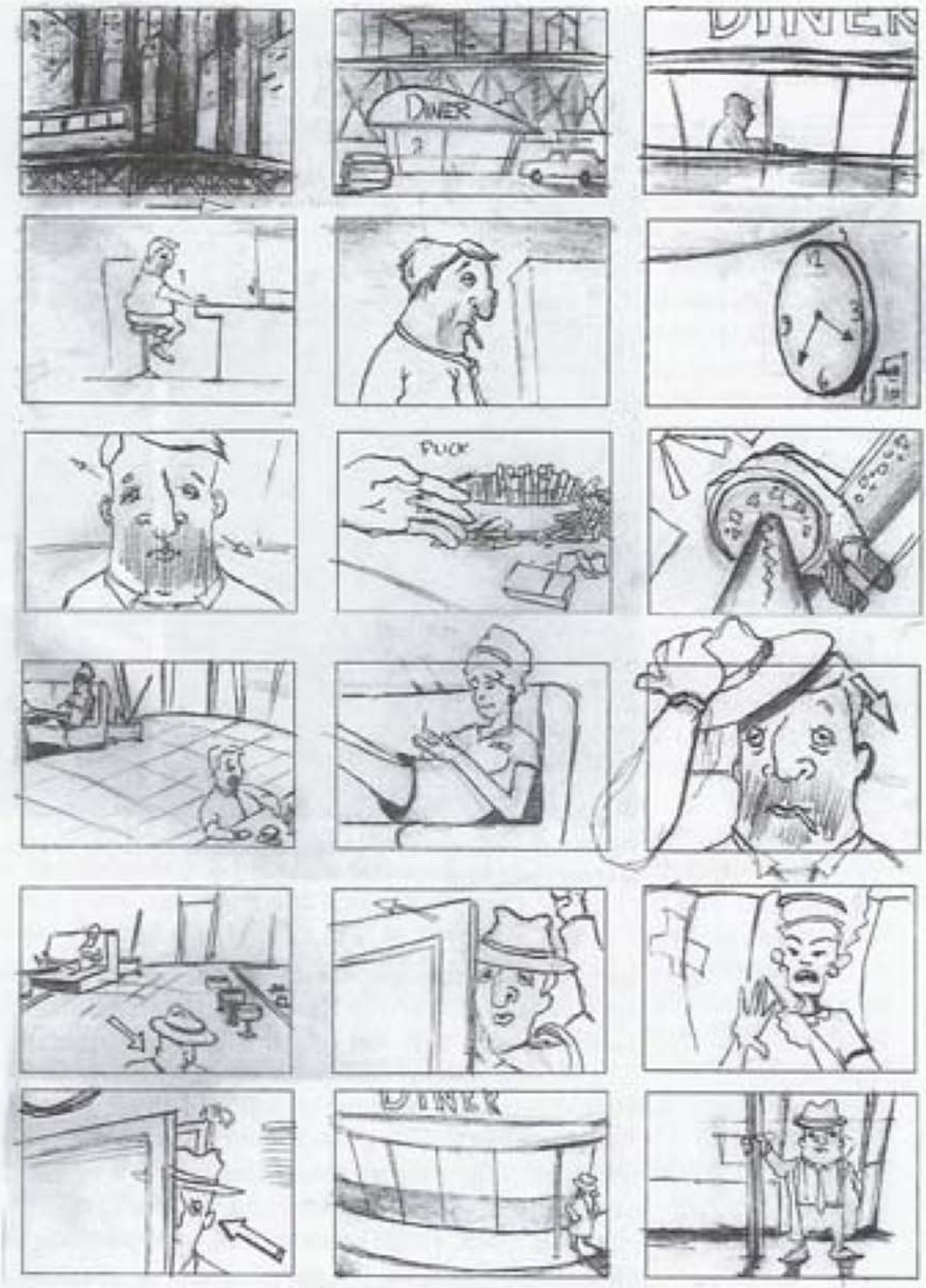


FIGURE 8.22 A panel of storyboards from Grime Shoed Diaries.

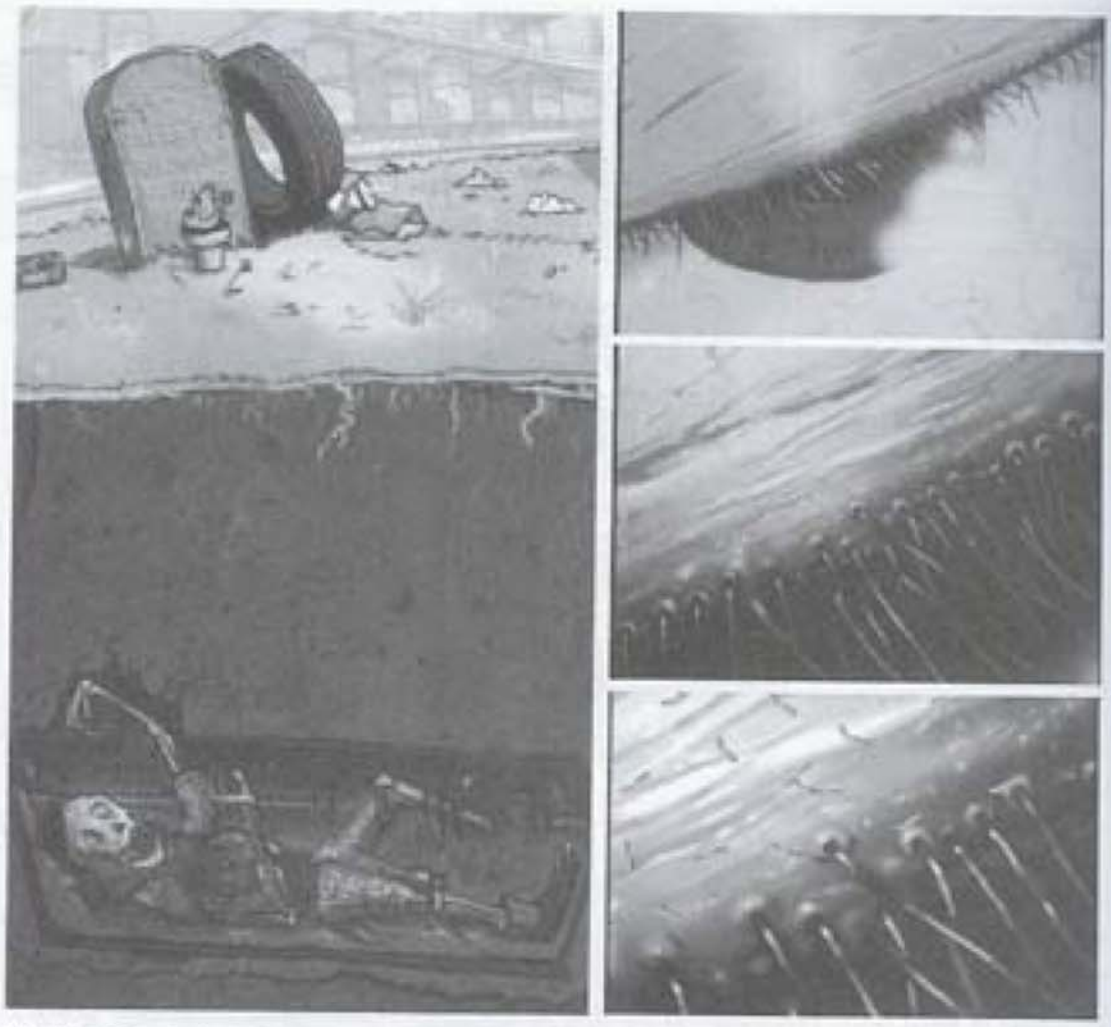


FIGURE 8.23 Animation cameras can go to impossible locations, even underground and microscopic.

nature. The monster, however, is more of the comic character because he's acting contrary to how a horrible creature or monster usually behaves, all of which was sorted out in storyboarding.

From a mechanical point of view, *Grime Shoed Diaries* had more potential editing problems, which had to be addressed in the boards. The film is almost purely a voice-over, making the visual sync-up very critical to visual gags and to animation frame lengths. The detective tells his story, and it's important for certain elements to sync-up with the running dialogue track, either by extending or shortening visuals or adding or cutting lines. Creating too few frames or too many frames is extremely wasteful, and the boarding and animatic should guard against that in addition to all their other functions.

In many instances, a set of storyboards is established, but the boarding process itself often goes on well into the production if necessary, making revisions and changes to deal with unforeseen circumstances. Much of the information on the reboarding comes from a true give-and-

take process with the animatic; in modern animation production, boarding and animatic production are one process.

Tips for Future Projects

Follow the Rules of Cinematography to Establish a Flow

In live action, a cinematographer doesn't like to have all his shots handed to him in the form of storyboards. He often wants to consider the location and the lighting, and offer his own artistic input. In animation, figuring out the shots literally decides a multitude of factors of cost and time. For the storyboard artist in animation, all the issues are addressed simultaneously, but the actual rules of cinematography—cutting on action, line of sight, and staging—cannot be overlooked and need to be adhered to. Directors and animators have the flexibility of bending the traditional rules of visual storytelling. However, it's often a good idea to make the story work visually with the tried and tested standard that is cinematography before trying to establish a new look or style.

When in Doubt, Let the Story Decide

When boarding a film or animation or other project, the story weighs in on every decision. A simple process is to go from the large concepts to the small. What are the basic fundamental ideas going on? Using that notion, distill the story to its basics, distill the scenes down to their basics, and distill the characters down to their basics or motivations.

Once the main ideas and the emotions in the film or animation have been established, it becomes easier to make crucial decisions about everything from costumes and animation poses to lighting and camera positions. Is your story or the part of the story you're boarding frenetic and chaotic? Perhaps using a handheld camera would help tell that story. Is your story somber and dramatic? If so, smooth dolly moves and tracking shots can create a link with the viewer, who will feel as if he is a silent observer in the scene. If there is physical comedy, are the shots wide enough so that slapstick can play out? If the story is suspenseful, are there close-ups to show the fear or anxiousness of the characters? Boards, cinematography, and everything else should go through the "how-to-help-tell-the-story" machine.

Consider Props and Other Objects in Helping Tell the Story

A desert is a desert, but if an alien skeleton sits baking in the middle of it, it instantly becomes another planet or barren world. The playwright Leo Tolstoy said to the effect that if you show a gun in a play you'd better use it. This is true when describing the power of certain props that an audience has a level of expectation of. Props are excellent storytelling tools.

Consider Locations

Considering locations is important. Is the location normal or exotic? Does the location play a significant role in the story, such as someone being lost in a foreign city? Can a unique world be created? If so, then use it to your advantage; someone lost in a foreign city would be dwarfed against gothic cathedrals, buzzing foreign cars, or strange alleys. Perhaps angles from high up could be used as the lost person crosses old city squares. If the project is more like *Shards of Death*, then the backdrop is really mundane and bland and there is no reason to feature it. How can backdrops or sets be utilized to enhance the story and focus performance?

What Are the Boards For?

There is a huge difference between presentation boards and working boards. Presentation boards need to be well-done, colored, and well-drafted. Working production or shooting storyboards are a tool used to create a performance from a very technical point of view.

Move Quickly

The single most important idea when creating boards is to not get bogged down in any one element, drawing detail, or sound design. Block in the shot first and work from large to small. A danger occurs when too much time is spent with an element or segment; then it seems like a waste to change solely because it took too long to get to that point. Do the quickest thumbnails, be ready to do hundreds, and be ready to throw out a lot of ideas. The panels that survive can be cleaned up to show others. Be flexible; it can be helpful to physically cut out panels and have the flexibility of restaging scenes simply by reordering panels.

Focus on Clarity

At least at first, try to explain the story as simply as possible. Boarding is at many levels cinematography and photography picking and composing shots. All the rules of depth of cinematography and photography apply, from lens to composition. Boarding cannot leave important staging and positioning of characters to animatics. It must be figured out: the mechanics of where characters will be and where the camera will move to.

Boards Aren't the Place to Create Characters

Boards are often the starting point of a project, but characters need a design phase, and it should be separate from boarding.

Don't Get Hung Up on Pre-Conceived Ideas—Be Flexible

If a filmmaker has a clear idea that works and couldn't work any better, then there is no reason to work things over. However, in most cases scenes aren't so cut and dry, and experimentation often yields improved results.

Prep for Animatics

Don't draw too light so that scanning is difficult; use storyboard paper that is conducive to scanning. Try to do a run-through of what the editing software is expecting as far as size, how the files are saved and their format, aspect ratio, and any other editorial or art issues.

Photoshop and Boards Work Well Together

Using Photoshop to duplicate and manipulate panels is very effective and is an indispensable tool in the modern animation process.

In the Worst-Case Scenario, Go Back to the Writer

Because of the writing culture it's not always possible to go back to the story and have it changed. In animation, however, the process should have that flexibility. If something just doesn't work on the boards, then maybe it needs a fundamental rewrite.