Chapter 1
The Storyboard's Beginnings

The film industry's current use of *storyboards* as a preproduction, pre-visualization tool owes its humble beginnings to the original Sunday comics. Pioneers like Winsor McKay, whose *Gertie the Dinosaur* (see Figure 1-1) and animation of the *Sinking of the* Lusitania (1915) established him as the true originator of the animated cartoon as an art form. He paved the way for Disney and others.

The concept of telling a story through a series of sequential drawings actually goes back to Egyptian hieroglyphics, even back to the cave men's drawings of stampeding cattle. The Bayeux Tapestries (1050), woven on linen and depicting with brutal narrative action William the Conqueror's invasion of England, is still awe-inspiring and has its own claims to being some of our first "storyboards."

Charles Solomon's *History of Animation* begins much later with the traveling magic lantern shows of the 1600s and takes readers from the optical illusion of *Phantasmagoria* in the 1800s to the contemporary animated cartoon: from *Felix the Cat* and Mickey Mouse in the 1920s up to *Jurassic Park* and *The Lion King* in the 1990s. Lately, we've had the brilliant 3D effects of The *Incredibles* (2004), *Shrek (2001)* and *Madagascar* (2005).

STORYBOARD: The storyboard is the premiere preproduction, pre-visualization tool designed to give a frame-by-frame, shot-by-shot series of sequential drawings adapted from the shooting script. They are concept drawings that illuminate and augment the script narrative and enable the entire production team to organize all the complicated action required by the script before the actual filming is done to create the correct look for the finished film.

Even with our concentration primarily on film in this new edition of *Art of the Storyboard*, we still have to recall a late-19th century major contributor to cinema – George Méliès, the French conjurer, illusionist, theatrical set designer and magician whose films projected optical tricks and fantasies. His *Trip to the Moon* (1902), with its stunning imagery of a rocket going "splat!" in the eye of the moon, is still used for documentaries and commercials. His other films include *Cinderella* (1899) and *Joan of Arc* (1902), and generation after generation continues to be fascinated with Méliès' inventive film spectaculars. Other artists who paved the way for animation were Felix Messmer, whose mischievous *Felix the Cat* (1914) became the world's most popular cartoon character, and Max Fleischer, who is best known for his still popular Betty Boop character.

Let's not forget Ub Iwerks, credited by many as being the original concept artist for Mickey Mouse, who bore a striking resemblance to Ub's Oswald Rabbit. 1929 was the beginning of the so-called "Disney Era," which reigned through the early 40s, when the entire world fell in love with Mickey Mouse (now just a corporate icon), Donald Duck, Pluto and *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* (1938), the first full-length cartoon, brilliantly Technicolored and a giant money maker for Walt Disney.

Figure 1-1 Hart's sketch of Winsor McKay with Gertie the Dinosaur, the ancestor of the animated cartoon. McKay's hand-drawn style is still influencing Disney's animators.

Unless you want to be chained to a computer, digitally rendering a *Madagascar III*, the bigger reward would be to connect with the world of film. You could be creating great storyboards while working with directors in the tradition of Griffith, Fellini, Hitchcock, Truffaut, Selznick, Welles, Hawks, Spielberg, Scorcese, etc.

The use of the storyboard is the premiere tool in preproduction on any project. Whether you work in animated or live-action film, the storyboard artist must still arrange the story in a logical narrative sequence. Eric Sherman states in *Directing the Film*, "The storyboard consists of making a series of sketches where every basic scene and every camera set up within the scene illustrated – it is a visual record of the film's appearance before shooting begins." In my book "Lighting for Action," written for the still photographer moving to video and film, I describe the storyboard as a tool designed to "give you a frame-by-frame, shot-by-shot, organized program for your shooting sequence (or, the shooting script)." Christian Metz, author of "Film Language," refers to the shot (the basic component of the storyboard) as the "basic unit of film meaning."

Artists who created those original Sunday funnies drew their cartoon in a logical narrative sequence; this, essentially, is still the task of the storyboard artist. The use of the storyboard is a premiere aid in planning a filmed live action or animated feature. In "The Film Experience: Elements of Motion Picture Art" (1968), Ron Huss and Norman Silverstein elaborate on the storyboard artist as one who, "guided by the Director, captures the actions and passions that will be translatable into film," that they involve "a continuity reminiscent of comic strips," and that they remain "primarily pictorial."

Working from the original story idea, storyboards enable the entire production team to organize all the complicated action depicted in the script, whether being rendered for live action films, animation, or commercials. They will illustrate what action each lifted shot contains. By doing one's own storyboards carefully and thoroughly, you know exactly what is going to be done before the actual filming begins – every shot and every camera angle, along with what lighting, sets and props will be used.

Memorable scenes and sets don't just happen. You need talented people to create them. And, on a live action project, every section of lumber and each pound of plaster used in the building of sets, every performer, every costume, and every crew member, has to be accounted for and paid. Germs of ideas and creative conferences involving the director, director of photography, set designer, and costume designer are part of this necessary preproduction process.

Dozens of other creative people are involved in the extremely complicated preproduction process. The producer acquires the story property in the first place and raises the money to produce it. Producing it requires actors, costumers, composers of the

soundtrack, grips, and other technicians like the carpenters, painters, even traffic managers and drivers. The entire production enterprise can be quite mind-boggling long before it is shot, edited, promoted and distributed to local movie theaters. The whole operation is doubly impressive when one considers the logistics of getting together this group of people to decide what will be the "look" of the film to be produced. What will be its tone, and how will it be visualized – in other words, how will the film appear in its final form. Exactly to what created images will its target audience relate and respond?

Audience response has been record-breaking for many leading cinematic examples of film's recent digital revolution, including *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy, the *Harry Potter* series, *Spiderman*, and *Superman Returns*. These are all digital treasures, live action films that contain awesome, visceral entertainment values that continue to enthrall a world-wide movie audience. They are primary examples of developing *computer graphics imaging (CGI)* and its influence on *special and visual effects (SFX/VFX)*.

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COMPUTER GRAPHICS IMAGING (CGI): Imagined and executed scenes or elements created on a computer and often combined with live action film.

SPECIAL AND VISUAL EFFECTS (SFX/VFX): Interchangeable terms to indicate effects that are not real. These effects can be computer-generated elements or live-action elements shot over a greenscreen.

All the above cinematic treasures share another primary element that must be noted. Each and every film started not only with the germ of an idea, but also with a small thumbnail sketch – a concept sketch that provided for the production team the visual possibilities of those first written works/descriptions.

It can't be stated too many times that the storyboard artist is an integral part of the visualization process, often coming up with concept drawings that illuminate and augment the script narrative. Everyone benefits from the storyboard artist's talent: the director, producer, director of cinematography and the production designer. Often a script starts with a few sentences, a concept or a hook to grab a producer's attention.

With *Pirates of the Caribbean*, producer Jerry Bruckheimer was sold on the fact that *Pirates* wasn't just going to be a film based on a Disneyland ride, but rather a live action film that added the effect of the supernatural to the typical pirate story line. The film was intensely involved with greedy pirate ghosts that appeared human in daylight but became skeletal horrors at night.

Storyboard artists were put to work immediately to visualize for the Disney production team exactly what the lead characters and setting/backgrounds and sets were to look like. The lead characters were drawn in detail then were sculpted by model makers and made into *maquettes* (three-dimensional figures) for all to see. Illustrators, matte painters, model makers (for sets and characters) and concept artists added to the artistic milieu, creating, often by hand, the "look" of the film with their presentation sketches and drawings.

Later, the computer crowd from ILM (Lucas's industrial light and magic) moved in and used CGI to give the narrative its added dimension of supernatural horror. ILM created computer-animated pirates and SFX/VFX. Computer artists gave tremendous

graphic adventure to the pirate plot. Casting also played a major role in realizing the final live action film – Disney's biggest selling ever, until topped by the grosses for the second film, *Dead Man's Chest*.

The digital revolution seems to have re-vitalized the film industry. But, you still have to have the initial, individual creative input of the storyboard artist, "hecho a mano" (made by hand). The storyboard artist is the one who makes sense of the initial creative mayhem involved in getting a film produced. The storyboard artist's contribution to the creative team's effort is to help in visually evaluating and synthesizing the narrative flow of the screenplay.

The storyboard artist's job is to give cohesion, interpretation and illustration to the visual spine, the "flux of imagery" that will constitute the screenplay. He or she will render or sketch, when requested by a particular director, all the necessary action in each key sequence or shot. Working with the producer, director, director of photography, and often the production designer, the artist will create a vital blueprint that will be referred to by all of them during the entire shooting schedule of the production and frequently right into the postproduction editing process.

> **In a 1998 interview in VISFX with editor Bruce Stockler, Ray Harryhausen responded to a question on how he learned about storyboarding:**
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> **"I learned storyboarding from Willis O'Brien. He storyboarded everything. He started a film before *King Kong* called *Creation* (1931) at RKO. When Merian Cooper took over, he put the gorilla in it, and they added parts of *Lost World* and they built that up to be *King Kong*. It was a great experience to work with him. He would make 20 or 30 drawings a day, little ones, about the size of the [indicating a napkin] . . . then he would paste them up and write captions underneath and we would do each scene that way. They were all numbered, so you knew when the close-up was coming, the camera angle and the framing, and whether you needed a rear-projector or a split screen or whatever."**

Basically, the same structural techniques were used by Peter Jackson in his 2005 remake of *King Kong*. The big difference being that Jackson's compositing frames set-up (putting as many as 20 or more computer generated images together in one shot) were created especially for Kong by his own company, WETA Digital Effects.

Earlier, WETA Digital had composited such elements as real location shots, matte paintings, 3D miniatures and live actors to create his Oscar winning trilogy *Lord of the Rings* in 2001–2003 (Figure 1-2). *Rings* was followed by *Chronicles of Narnia* (2005) for Disney. Howard Berger, the head creative designer and supervisor for *Chronicles,* relates in the Official Illustrated Movie Companion to *Chronicles of Narnia*, "When I first met [director] Andrew Adamson at his modest office in Burbank, he showed me the presentation room where hundreds of preproduction drawings for the *Narnia* movie hung. These drawings [storyboards] by the preproduction artists
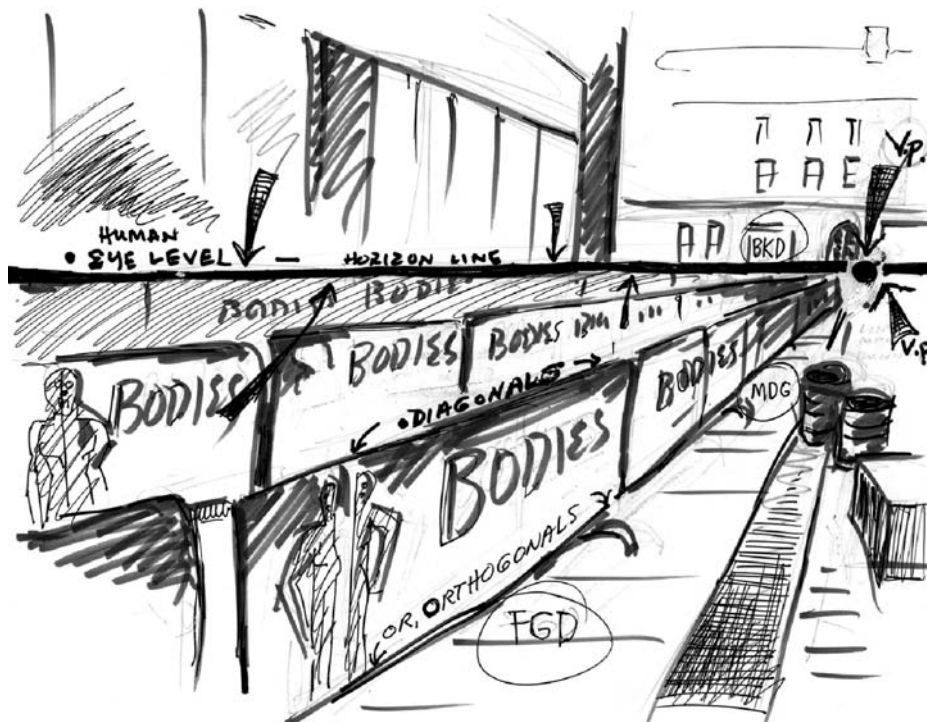
Figure 1-2 Hart's composite sketch of the characters from Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy.

Figure 1-3 Hart's example of a quick concept sketch drawn on a paper tablecloth in a restaurant. Notice the use of basic geometric shapes and shading.

Figure 1-4 This is a structural sketch of the entrance to the anatomical bodies exhibit at the South Street Seaport in Manhattan. Notice the one-point perspective with the vanishing point in the upper righthand corner of the picture.

were presented in the order of the film as Andrew envisioned it, then we watched his early version of the animatics of the final battle." It seems like old times, because his preproduction artists were following the same pre-visualization procedure Disney introduced 50 or 60 years ago on films like *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* and *Song of the South*.

Tutorials

1. Buy a sketchbook and fill each page with drawings of everyday objects. Then work up to sketching people in action – pay attention to the basic geometric construction of any object or figure (Figure 1-3).

2. Purchase a good book on anatomy and study the skeletal and muscular structure of the human body (Figure 1-4). Suggested texts are: *Art Students' Anatomy* by Edmund J. Farris, Dover Books; and *Wall Chart of Human Anatomy* by Thomas McCracken, Anatographica LLC.

3. Compare the original *King Kong* (1933) to Jackson's 2005 version. Make basic structural sketches of key scenes for comparison.