

Layout and Composition for Animation

Ed Ghertner



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Focal Press is an imprint of Elsevier



Focal Press is an imprint of Elsevier
30 Corporate Drive, Suite 400, Burlington, MA 01803, USA
The Boulevard, Langford Lane, Kidlington, Oxford, OX5 1GB, UK

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Application submitted

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

ISBN: 978-0-240-81441-4

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visit our website at www.elsevierdirect.com

10 11 12 13 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in China

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For Jana, Sean, and Amy

Acknowledgments

The journey to bring this book to reality is a long one and my purpose is to pass along the knowledge that was given to me. I wanted to explain and show that the Layout Artist's contribution to the animation process is extremely important and that 2-D Animation, as an art form, should not be thrown away like an old shoe for the sake of progress. I know that each step of the animation process, from story to final color, will change due to progress and innovation; however, knowing and passing on the history and evolution of those processes are important to the future of this great art.

There are many friends, colleagues, and neighbors who inspired me and supported me along the way in creating this book. There are a few I'd like to acknowledge in print: my parents, Elliot and Carole; my wife, Jana, whom I haven't seen much of while writing this book; my kids, Sean and Amy; the rest of my immediate family, both here and gone. I also want to thank the artists who taught me: the great Ken O'Connor, Don Griffith, Maurice Noble, Mike Maltese, Bill Moore, Vance Gerry, and last but not least, Eric Larson. Without their selfless characters, I would have lost hope. To my friends Brian Efron, Mark Kirkland, Brian McEntee, Krista Bunn, and Karen Bunn, thank you for being there and for your support.

A special thank you to Karen Bunn who took on the daunting task of helping me lay out the book, and without whom I would have never made the schedule. THANK YOU!!!!

The information in this book is dedicated to those who wish to learn and advance themselves in a truly beautiful art form.



Long Live Animation!!!!

--Ed





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Intro

Once Upon a Time...



Intro

Once Upon a Time...

In this book, I will begin with the premise that all things have a story. You, me, the chair I'm sitting in, the tree outside my window, the squirrel in the tree, the nuts in the squirrel's cheeks. All things have a story, and all stories of all people, places, and things interact and influence each other.

In animation, while it might seem to some that the interaction between characters drives the story of the film, the characters are also constantly interacting with the world in which they live. They walk through it, they touch it, it can hold them back, and it can propel them forward. That world and its story are what layout artists create. To do that properly, it's important to recognize that since all things, animate and inanimate, have a story, they must also have their own unique composition and perspective. The nuts and bolts of how to do this are the primary mission of this book. However, there is a deeper reason — a storied reason.

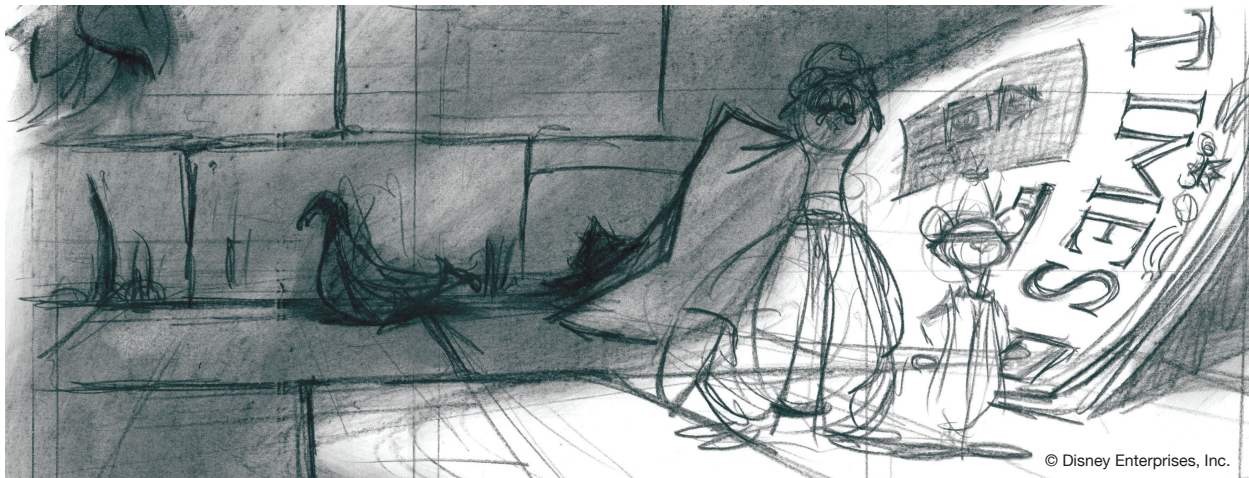
In the last decade, the business of animation has changed its composition and perspective. It has gone from a small centrally located industry with a few major players, to a worldwide industry with many producers of animated product, both small and large scale, 2-D and 3-D. Young kids at home can create their own animation and post it online. Television and feature animation is designed in one place and animated in another far across the planet. Art that was once meticulously drawn by hand with paper and pencil is now created directly in a computer environment that can

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be set up to employ artists who will work together, but never meet face-to-face. Artists move from one production company to another, sometimes spending only mere days or weeks in one place. The entire industry and its older, experienced artists have been decentralized, scattered to the winds, making it less possible for them to interact with and mentor young up-and-coming artists as was done years ago. While I applaud and hope always for the growth of this industry, I often feel sorry that this mentoring process has become a relic of time past.

It is precious to me. It is part of my story:

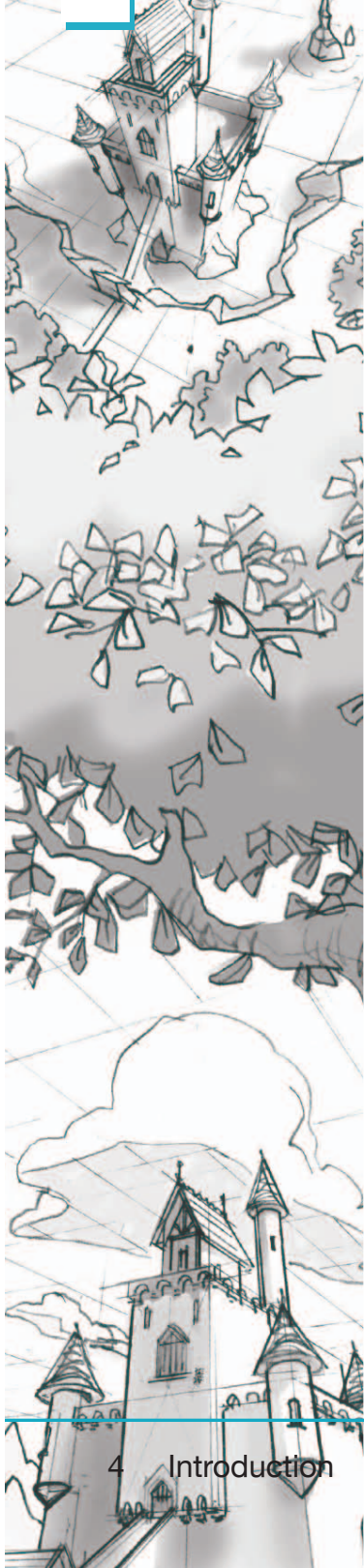
Once upon a time, I was a tall, gangly teenager being raised in the North San Fernando Valley. I had been drawing almost from the moment I could hold a crayon. This was a while ago, in a time before videotape or DVDs were available; however, my family was privileged as my grandfather worked at The Walt Disney Studios in the transportation department. For my sisters and me, he was able to borrow a 16mm print of one of the Disney features to show at each of our birthday parties every year. This added to the obsession. All I wanted was to work in the animation industry.



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Intro

Once Upon a Time...

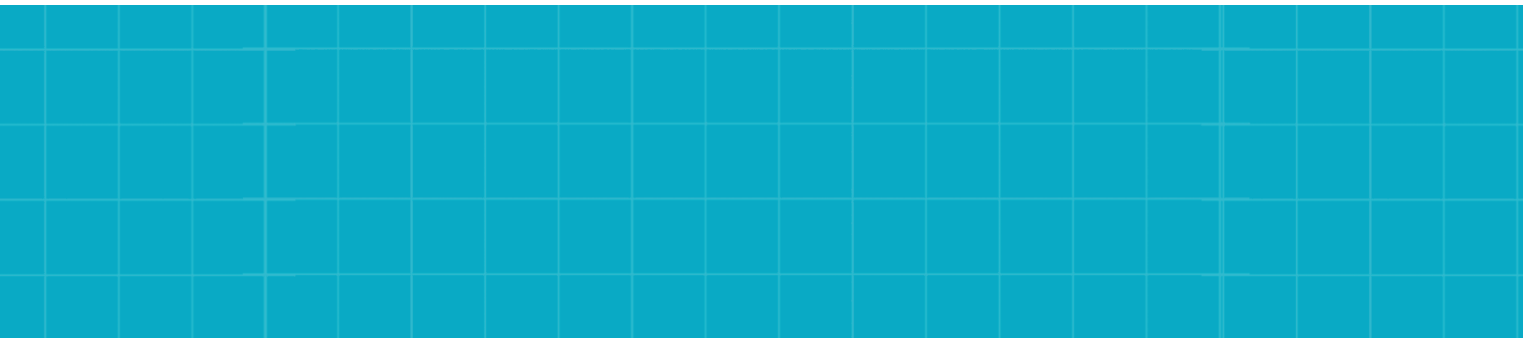


When I was a freshman in high school, I made a call to Don Duckwall, the man in charge of Disney Animation, and was soon introduced to an animation wizard named, Eric Larson, who said he help me put together a proper portfolio.

Knowing full well who Eric Larson was (his name was all over the movies and books I adored) and shakily armed only with a satchel of disorganized quick sketches, I found myself sitting face-to-face with him one afternoon. Eric asked me to show him my drawings. He took one of my sketches, threw another piece of paper over it on top of a light table, and began to draw explaining what he was doing as he went. It was magic.

I watched how his hand moved over the paper. He had such flair with the pencil. In just the first few movements, my weak drawing became a strong, sculpted pose. Then Eric cast his spell on another of my drawings, and another, and another, and with each subsequent drawing my work came more to life. After two hours of this, my brain hurt. I was overwhelmed, but what he'd shown me sunk in. It is well known that Eric was not only a master artist; he was an incredibly gifted and generous teacher.

At the end of our time together, Eric said he thought I'd be a good candidate for CalArts, which was an art school established by Walt and Roy Disney in 1961. He said that when I turned in my portfolio there, to tell them that the Studio recommended me for the animation program. I was in seventh heaven. For a year and a half,



I worked on my portfolio using all the tools Eric had given me that day. I turned in a very respectable portfolio to CalArts for review and was not only accepted, but was given a scholarship to enter the program. This was not due to just my talent alone, but also, I believe, to the sage advice I'd received from Eric Larson that afternoon a year and half before.

In school and throughout my career I've had the opportunity to work with and learn from Ken O'Connor, Maurice Noble, Mike Maltese, Don Griffith, Marc Davis, Ward Kimball, Joe Grant, Jules Engel, and, as you already know, the great Eric Larson. I am indebted to them all.

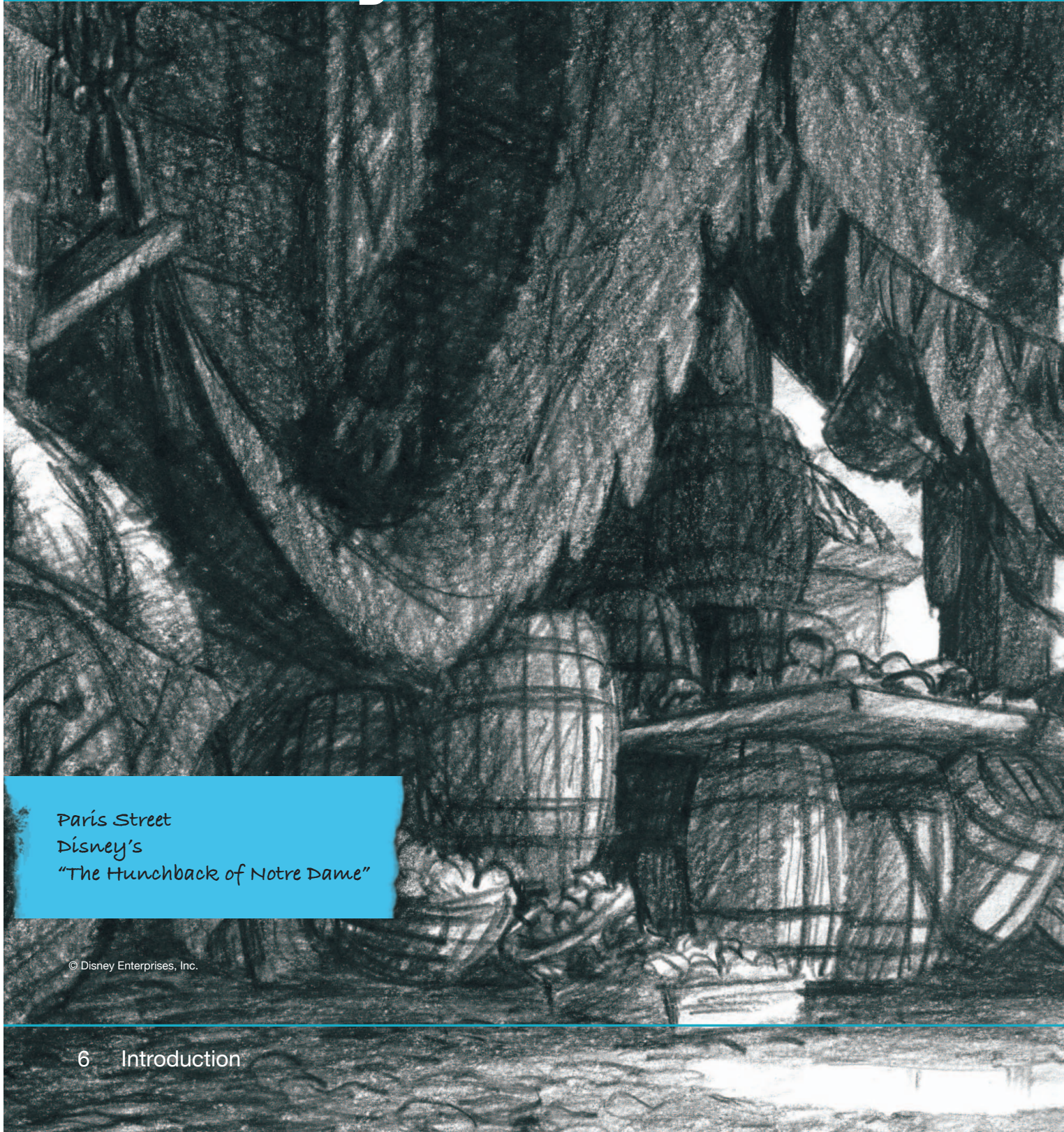
There are many naturally talented young artists working in the industry today. I meet them all the time. But for all their talents, certain skills regarding composition, perspective, and camera movement are sometimes lacking, perhaps because they haven't had the kind of mentoring I was so privileged to receive. I've found that if I take just a little time to sit down with them and show them the secrets I've learned in my career, they quickly become much stronger in their craft.

So this teaching book is my opportunity to do for those artists what was done for me. To pass on what I know from my experience and from the magic of some rare and wonderful mentors. It is the only way I know how to pay them back for their contributions to my story.

I hope this book contributes to yours.

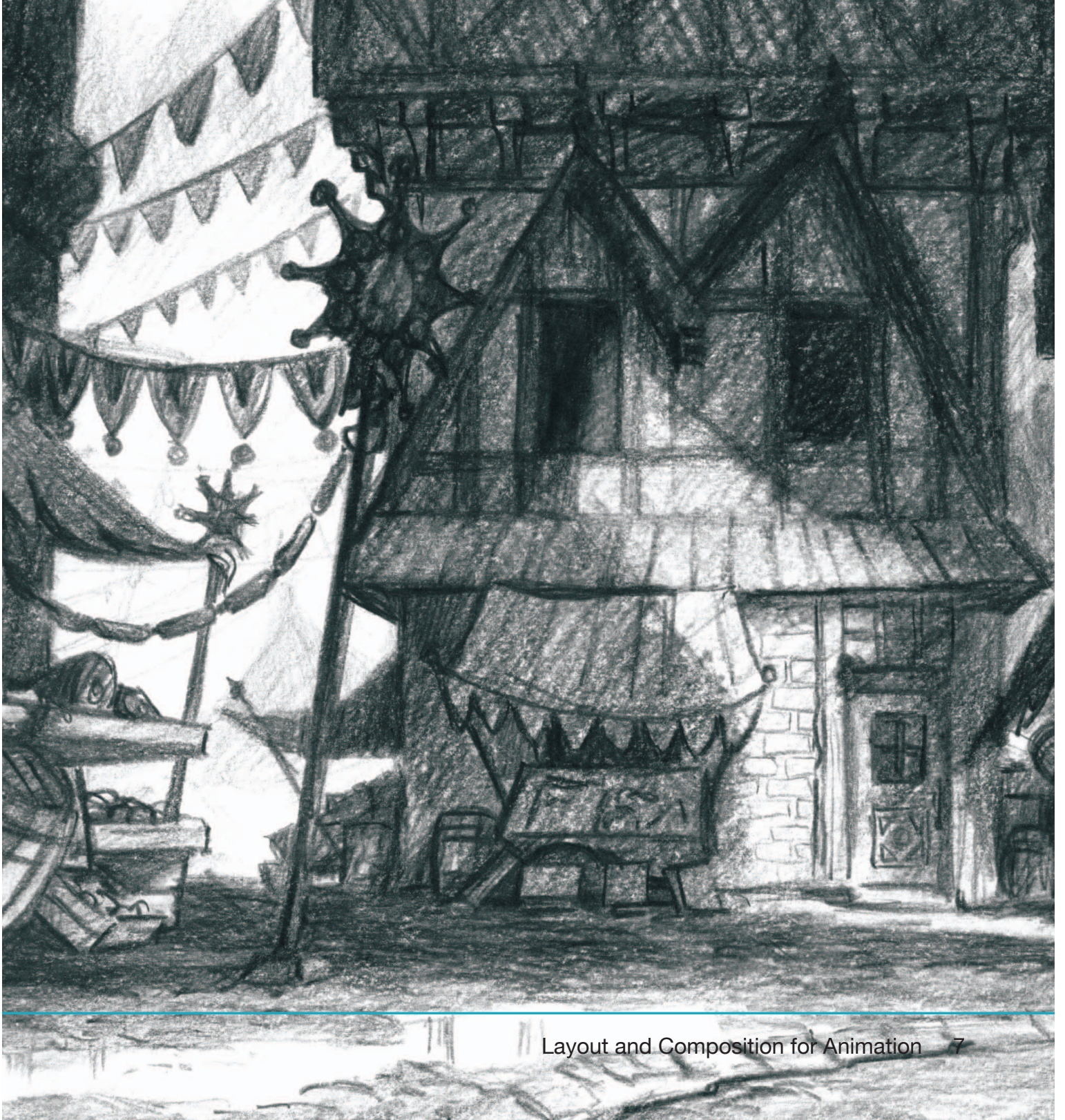
--Ed Ghertner

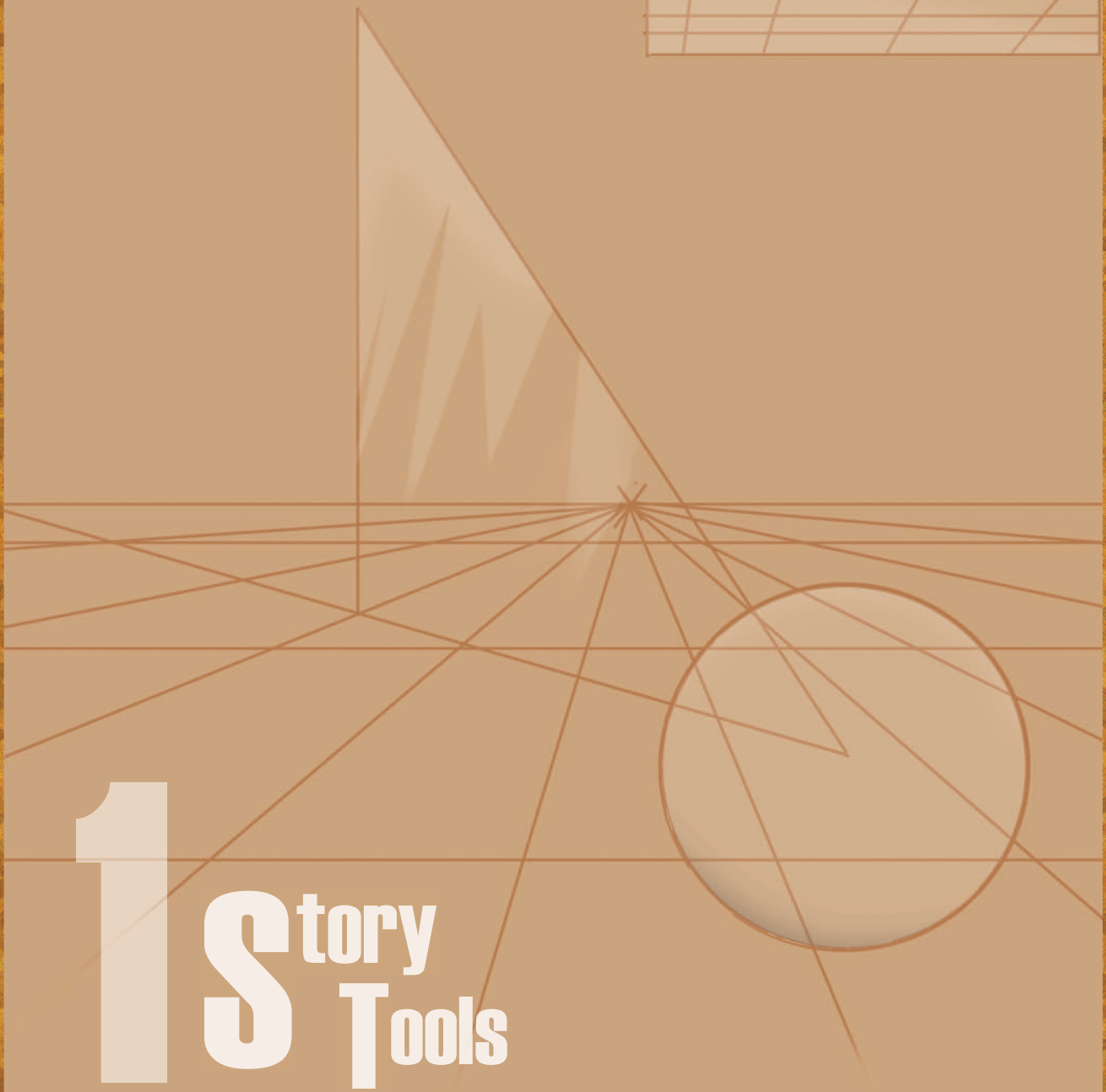
Chertner's Gallery



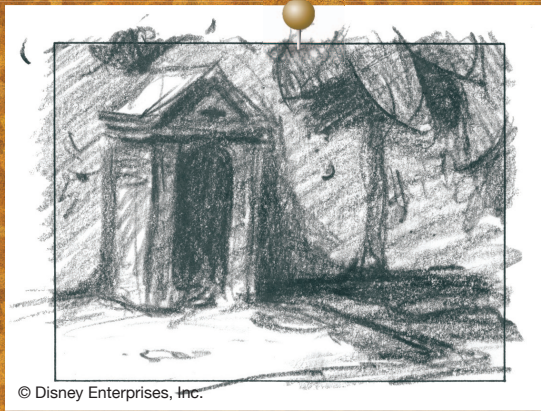
Paris Street
Disney's
"The Hunchback of Notre Dame"

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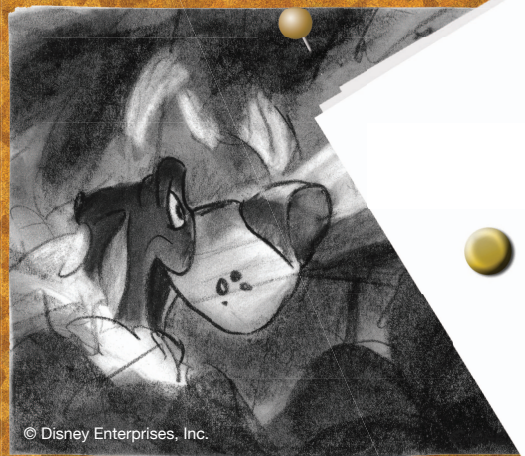
1 Story Tools



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- Scene/Sequence
- Script Breakdown
- Workbook
- Thumbnails
- Research

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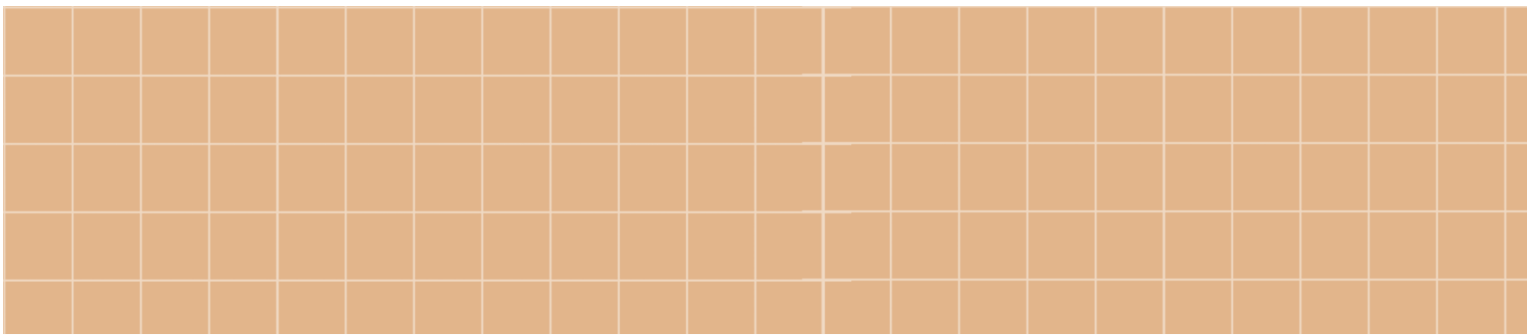
ONCE UPON A TIME

by
Joe Screenplay Writer



This chapter

gives you some insights about how to manage the thought process behind supporting a story artistically. It discusses how to break down a script into its major action or plot points and then pair those with technical and the storytelling needs in your artwork and show why it's important to research, research, research!



Once upon a time

Scene Sequence

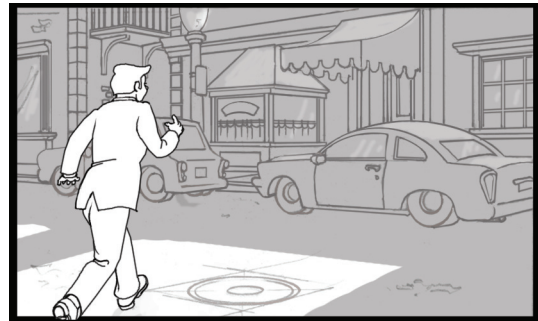
A scene is made up of visuals that tell a specific piece of a story. It is an element, which along with other scenes in an orderly progression become a sequence. Multiple sequences make up the entire picture or show.

In example 1, the script would read, “Bill walks across the street away from camera, stops by a car, reaches into his pocket and suddenly remembers that he left his keys in the restaurant.” The following examples show a series of storyboard panels that represent one scene.

Alternatively, the scene could be done with cuts inserted (example 2), which would change the final pace of the final product by making multiple scenes. In animation, these multiple scenes form a sequence, and a series of sequences strung together form a movie.

1

Scene 1 | A



Bill walks across the street away from camera...

Scene 1 | B



...stops by a car, reaches into his pocket and...

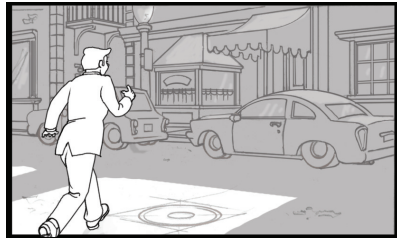
Scene 1 | C



...suddenly remembers that he left his keys in the restaurant.

2

Scene 1 | A



Bill walks across the street away from camera...



Scene 1 | B



...stops by a car, reaches into his pocket and...

Scene 1 | C



...suddenly remembers that he left his keys in the restaurant.



Script Breakdown

First, read the script! Read the whole thing, not just the scene at hand. While this might seem an obvious step, you'd be surprised how often this is not done. It's important to have a comprehensive view of the entire story so your work remains consistent throughout.

After you've read the script, break it down. Storyboard artists will do this for story and action, but layout will not necessarily follow that breakdown exactly. As a practical matter, if you're working as a freelancer, you'll certainly want to answer these questions about the artwork so you can provide an accurate quote. If you're on staff, you'll need to know this so you can estimate the amount of time art production will take. You'll want to take a view of the entire story so your work remains consistent throughout. I draw quick thumbnails in the margins of the script so I have a rough count of how many and how challenging each layout might be.

