Matt Stalker
Y35.4005.001 • Thesis Previsualization • Spring 2009
February 19, 2009
“Sugarplums”

WORK IN PROGRESS

Thesis Statement/Concept - "Sugarplums" Draft 02

"Sugarplums" is a narrative live action short in which a boy dreams of his Christmas gifts. The story will be visualized primarily through the use of 2-D compositing techniques including keying, painting and rotoscoping, and color grading. Secondarily, particle effects and some 3-D may be implemented in a supporting role. Technical challenges include directing a visual effects studio shoot in a green screen environment to create viable plates, clean matte extraction and rig removal, visual effects design as relevant to the narrative, and seamless integration of all 2-D and 3-D elements.

Dream:

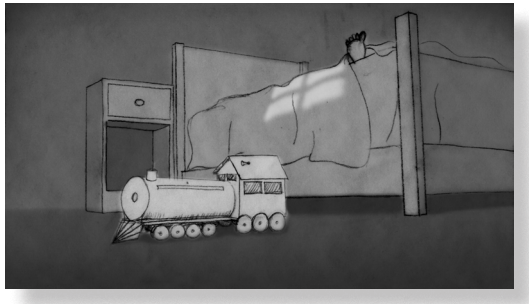
1. A succession of images, thoughts, or emotions passing through the mind during sleep.
2. To see or imagine in sleep.

Synopsis - "Sugarplums" Draft 03

In a child's bedroom a night before Christmas, a 10-year-old train enthusiast sleeps fitfully among his old toys. A slice of moonlight falls upon him, and with a sigh his dreams begin. Above his head and around his bed visions of his Christmas gifts begin to appear. An illusion materializes; a pair of ice skates dangles weightlessly, enticingly, above him. The youngster raises an eyebrow, however, seems ultimately unsatisfied. The image of the skates gives way to a bike arcing slowly over his slumbering form, pedaling magically and trailing stardust. This is not what he wants for Christmas! A confused and mildly irritated expression spreads across the child's face, as oddly the bike becomes an absurd ballerina, his younger sister, fluttering clumsily about. His frustration is now rising nearly to a point of waking as he throws his arms up in protest. An electric train appears from the shadows glowing and purring along its curving tracks as tiny lampposts and houses sprout in the air! The wall behind him disappears to reveal a fanciful scene. As the visions begin to melt away a contented and hopeful countenance comes over the boy as he sinks into his pillow, curling up comfortably under the covers.

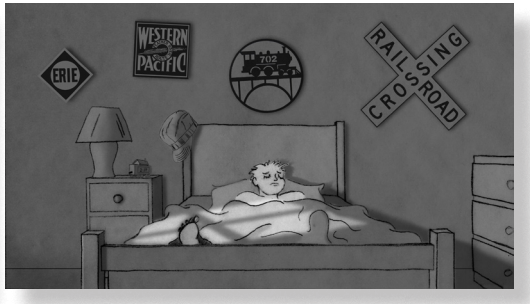
TRT	Scene-Shot	Action/Camera/Transition	Sound/SFX
00:00:00	01-01	Fade up from black. CU of toy train on floor.	Music: Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy or something similar.
00:02:12	01-02	Cut to CU of train clock on nightstand.	
00:05:00	01-03	Cut to WS of child's bedroom, moonlight falling across bed, child sleeping.	SFX: blinking lights on/off
00:09:12	01-05	Cut to ECU of boy's eyes, closed and twitching.	
00:11:12	01-06	Cut to MS of bed, boy sleeping. A pair of ice skates effects on and hovers above the boy.	SFX: mark tree, skates on ice, kids laughing
	01-07	Cut to CU of skates, then rack focus to boy's face, he raises eyebrows	
	01-08	Cut MS of bed, boy resettles, reaches to scratch his head, the ice skates melt away	SFX: bedspring or frame creaks as he shuffles

TRT	Scene-Shot	Action/Camera/Transition	Sound/SFX
	01-09	Cut to MS of bed, boy sleeping. A bike pedaling in arc over him.	SFX: bike ringer, pedaling sounds
	01-10		
	01-11	Cut to WS of bedroom, boy kicks the cover, and wrestles around. The bike melts away and becomes a child ballerina.	SFX: mark tree, same music but theme change
	01-12	Cut to CU of boys face, visibly annoyed, furled brow.	



01
Fade up from black. CU of toy train on floor.

02
Cut to CU of train clock on nightstand.



03
Cut to WS of child's bedroom, moonlight falling across bed, child sleeping.

04
Cut to MCU of boy's face, sleeping. He tosses restlessly as if in a dream.

05
Cut to CU of boy's face, eyes closed and twitching, head tossing.

06
Cut to MS of bed, boy sleeping. A pair of ice skates effects on and hovers above the boy.

07
Cut to CU of skates, then rack focus to boy's face, he raises eyebrows

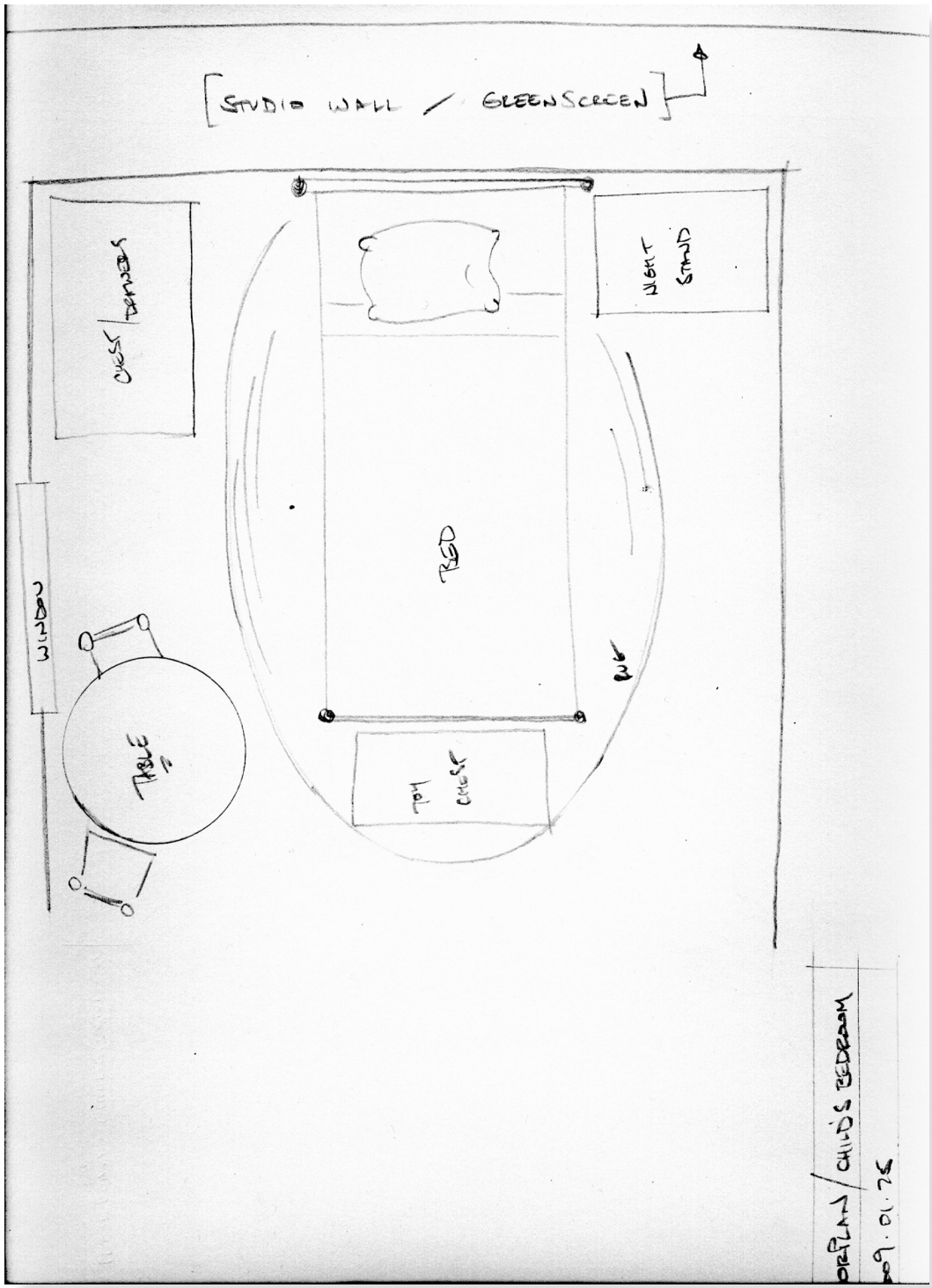
08
Cut to CU of train clock on nightstand.

09
Cut to WS of child's bedroom, moonlight falling across bed, child sleeping.

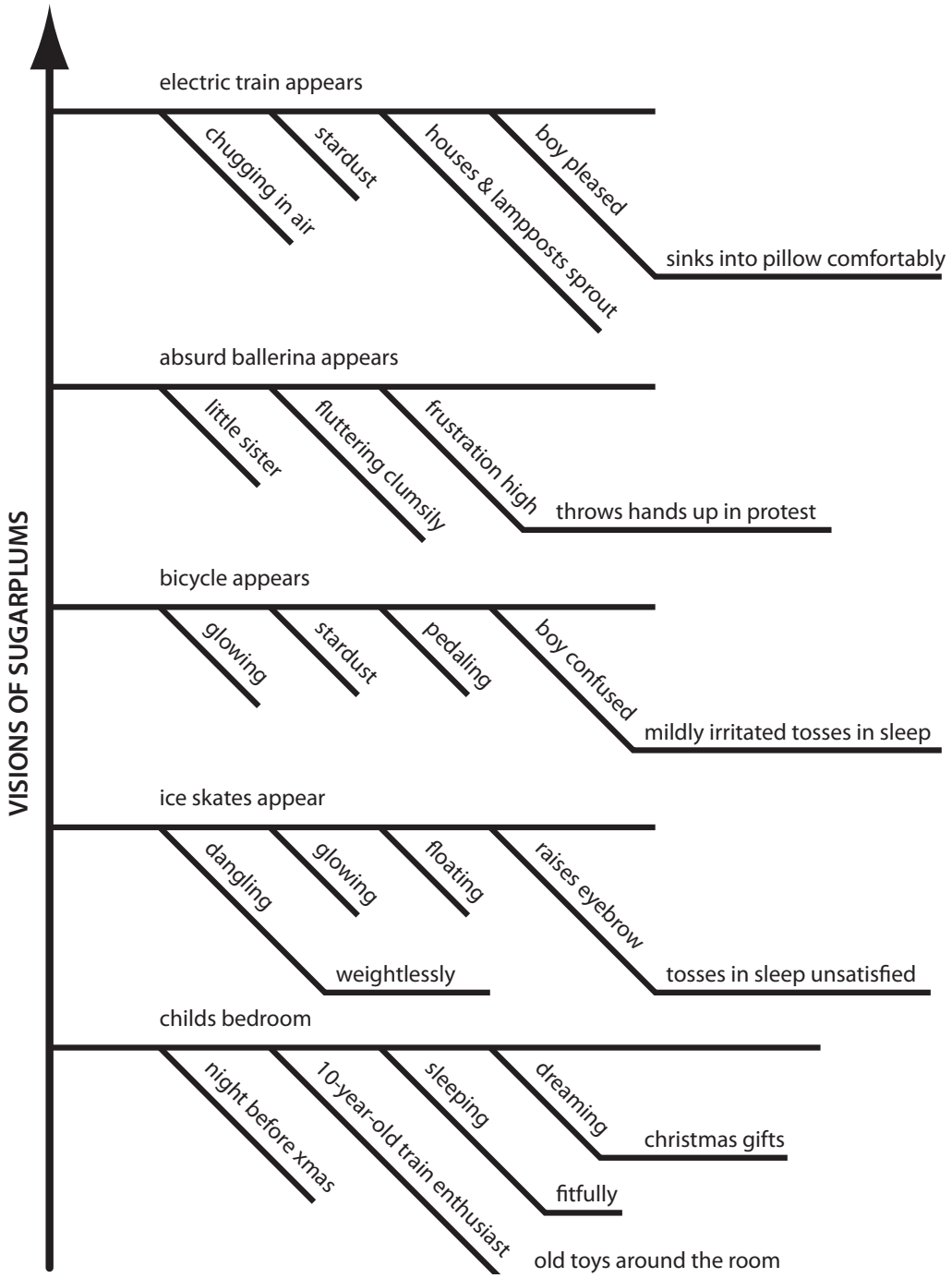
07
Fade up from black. CU of toy train on floor.

08
Cut to CU of train clock on nightstand.

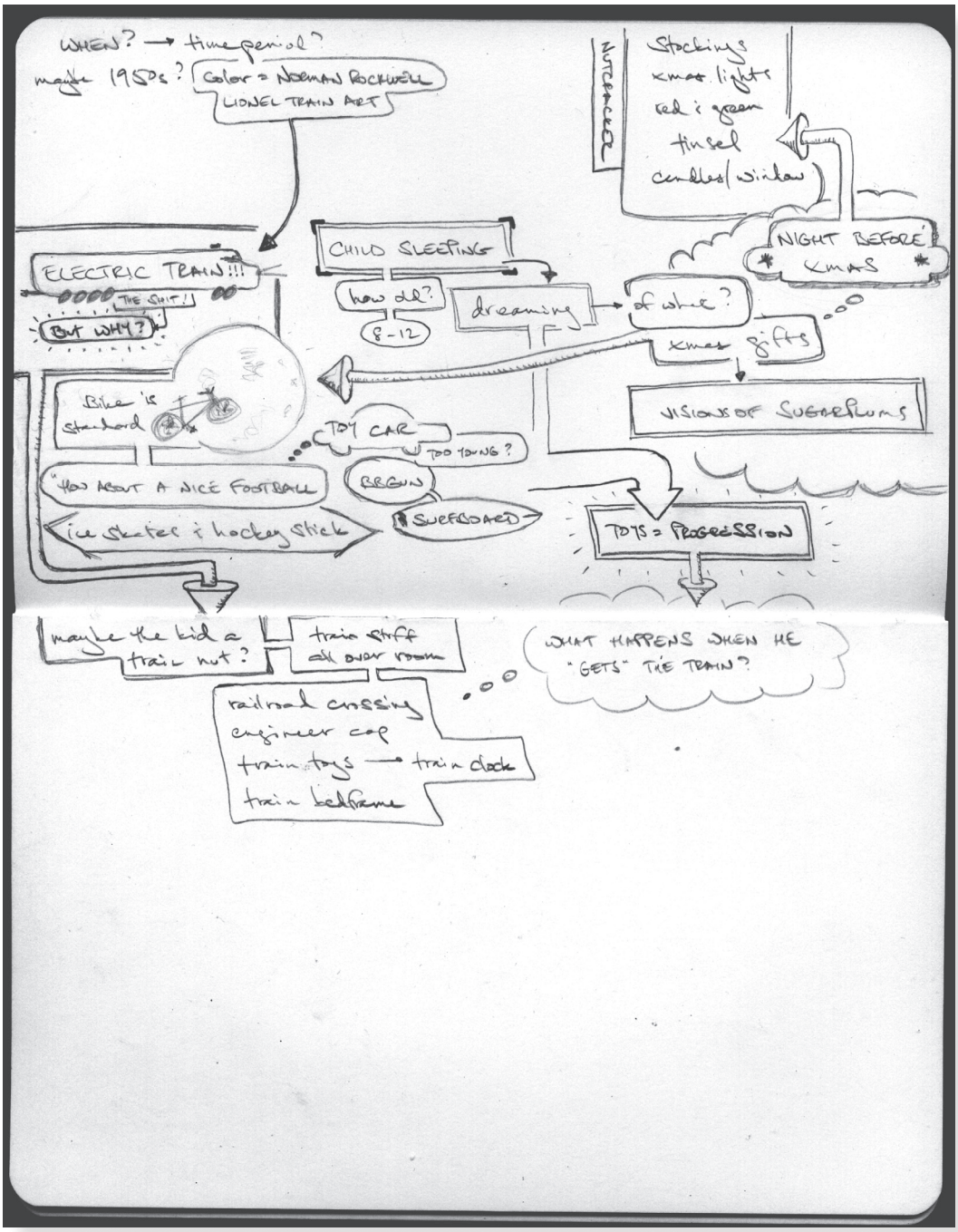
09
Cut to WS of child's bedroom, moonlight falling across bed, child sleeping.


STUDIO WALL / GREEN SCREEN
DESK / TERMINALS
WINDOW
TABLE
BED
NIGHT STAND
TV
TV CABINET
FLOORPLAN / CHILD'S BEDROOM
09.01.26

STORY OUTLINE (draft 02)



DIRECTOR/PRODUCER	PHONE	NOTE
Matt Stalker	c) 215.620.1094	committed
1st ASSITANT DIRECTOR		
Key Robbins	c) 302.530.8049	not contacted
TALENT		
John Kampmeyer		willing to screen test, need date
Ethan Perry	c) 215.535.0944	not contacted
Keegan McGinley		not contacted
Gannon McGinley		not contacted
TALENT REPRESENATIVE		
John/Jeanne Kampmeyer		
Brenda Perry	c) 215.535.0944	
Jayne/Ed McGinley		
DP		
Anthony Massey		"maybe"
(Gabe Spitale)		not contacted
(Chris Foster)		not contacted
(Dan Schwartz)		not contacted
GRIP		
Jack Wren		not contacted
Patrick		not contacted
PROPS		
Tim Stalker	c) 610.316.2932	not contacted
CRAFT SERVICES		
Megan Forrestal	c) 215.913.2118	committed
SCRIPT/CONTINUITY		
Andrea Bitai		willing, needs dates
VFX SUPERVISOR		
Mike Goldberg		willing, needs dates
VFX ASSIST		
Steve Skazenski		not contacted
(Johann Evensen)		not contacted


WHEN? → time period?
maybe 1950s?
color = NORMAN ROCKWELL
LIONEL TRAIN ART
INTERCEDE
stockings
xmas lights
red & green
tinsel
candles/window
NIGHT BEFORE XMAS
CHILD SLEEPING
how old?
8-12
dreaming
of what?
xmas gifts
ELECTRIC TRAIN!!!
THE SHIT!
BUT WHY?
Bike is standard
VISIONS OF SUGARPLUMS
TOY CAR
TOO YOUNG?
"HOW ABOUT A NICE FOOTBALL"
BB GUN
SKATEBOARD
ice skates & hockey stick
TOYS = PROGRESSION
maybe the kid a train nut?
train stuff all over room
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HE "GETS" THE TRAIN?
railroad crossing
engineer cap
train toys → train clock
train bedframe

Pre-production Journal

2009-01-22

Welcome

Welcome. The purpose of this journal is to document the pre-production development of my master's thesis at NYU CADA. While it is partially being written to satisfy coursework requirements, I intend to use it primarily as a tool for me to document my thoughts, leave myself notes, and post materials for review.

2009-01-22

Image Tests

Had a look at the photos I took in Wallingford. As I suspected depth of field in the miniature setup is a problem. I was working in an uncontrolled environment without enough light to open the iris. I'll have to retest with plenty of light so I can get the maximum iris. Of course the more the iris, the less shutter speed...And ultimately what the digital SLR does is not as important as what the various video cameras shoot.

These photos were also taken before the latest evolution of the idea; I ought to shoot some scale toys from a longer distance. Need some rough sketches before the next test...

2009-01-23

Prep

Prepped an InDesign template today for the production book. Internet speed is an issue here, and will need to be resolved...

Still not 100% committed to the "Sugarplums" idea. I realize I'll only be able to develop parallel projects for a very short time. Still, couldn't hurt to come up with a couple of rough concepts, and a synopsis for each.

2009-01-27

Week 1 Complete

Spoke w/ DP Bill Burke today regarding shooting scale miniatures, motion blur and depth of field. He confirms my concerns regarding the need to shoot a higher frame rate. Research needed.

Assignments for week one are finished.

2009-02-04

Week 02 Complete

The camera tests on Sunday yielded better results than I had expected considering my own inexperience with the Varicam. I need to make complete notes of my conclusions for the research paper. Regarding my preliminary list of people who can help, I need to finish compiling personal information, and start making some inquiries. I'm also glad to have the storyboards started, even if I've only roughed out one frame! I also need to make sure Myles has access to the blog, and find out if I can subscribe to anyone else's blog. Assignments for this week are complete.

2009-02-05

Goals Week 3

- 1st draft: screenplay, script breakout
- start gathering visual reference...clips, images
- storyboard: more frames this week! was there a book I was interested in?
- story: revise working in new idea...backstory development
- post conclusions from 2nd camera test+images
- post about endnote
- music: sample from web, talk to BobbyAudio about library
- measure studio/set...3D volumes
- references: follow some of the links in the syllabus
- 1st draft: research paper outline

2009-02-06

EndNote

Got Thompson EndNote working...Nice software for keeping track of sources to be cited in research papers. I've found all of my source books in the Library of Congress database, so I haven't even had to enter any data. Not sure if I'll have the same luck w/ journals. The program will also format your entries in any of a what seems like a million different ways. I find it to be a time saver.

2009-02-09

Studio Note

They had an alternate setup in the studio today to which I'm unaccustomed. I just wanted to make a note of it.

- studio white...this would help w/ spill
- portable greenscreen - steamed for wrinkles, need to check how clean the key
- two scoops for key & fill
- two kinos for backlights
- camera flagged off for flares

2009-02-11

Studio Test 1 Conclusions

LIGHT

- need more light generally...all kino setup wasn't enough
- remember to turn on cyc lights!
- cam gain introduced unacceptable noise

CAMERA

- 60 fps gives more frames BUT
- need to use shutter as well
- cam gain is likely unusable
- long lens flattened perspective...get closer

DEPTH OF FIELD

- pretty shallow, even @ higher fstops
- more light, not gain, the only solution
- is there a macro lens for that cam

MOTION BLUR

- wasn't horrible, but needs improvement
- need to test w/ shutter ON
- w/ shutter will lose stops

KEYING

- note: not much care was given to "keyability" on this occasion
- gain created noise which made keying tough even w/ denoise
- even small amount of mo.blur makes keying difficult

SPILL

- massive amounts of spill on black trains
- ez spill killer did a surprisingly good job
- white studio w/ green backdrop would help

NEXT TIME

- more light
- use shutter
- no gain
- shorter lens
- pay closer attention to keyability

2009-02-12

Week 03 Complete

Looking at my goals for this week...I fell a little short. Funny thing is I seem to have put in a lot of hours. Hmmm. Need to get better at my time management I think. Some key things did happen though. Set previz to scale in Maya. Narrative advanced. Camera test concluded, ready for another. I know what I've got to get done next week...

2009-02-12

Goals Week 4

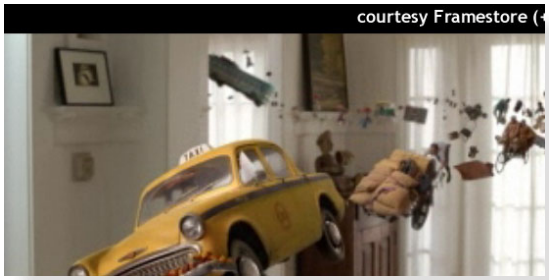
- storyboards 1st draft
- screenplay 1st draft
- post visual ref to blog
- research paper outline 1st draft
- think about screen test kid
- studio test if possible
- get maya 2009 running
- music

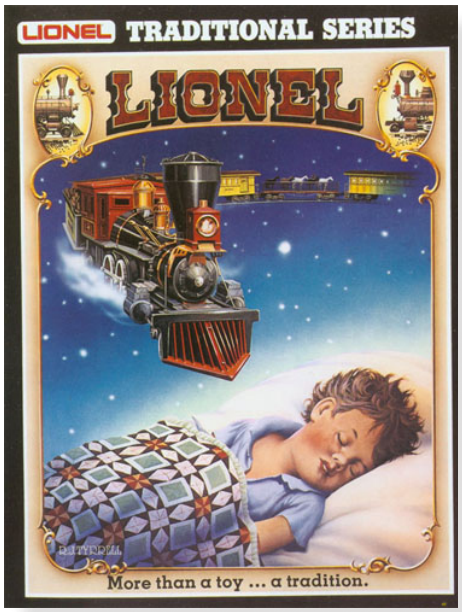
2009-02-13

Some Reference

Note: These reference images are not my creation, and are posted without permission. I have provided information to the context in which they originally appeared.

Framestore NY created a beautiful spot for HP. Good reference for compositing, scale, and pace...



I have always been moved by the images created to sell Lionel electric trains. These artists visualized beautifully the world of these toys and what it meant to own one. This one by R.J. Tyrrell communicates the same idea I'm after in my piece. I think the saturated, colorful look of this image is a primary element in capturing a moment in a dream...

Here's another that captures the same idea, a beautiful painting by Bob Byerley that appeared on the cover of Lionel Classic Trains Volume 2 2002 Catalog.