■ THREE TOOLS FOR PREVISUALIZATION

The Shooting Script

The ultimate goal of the visualization process is the realization of a shooting script. The **shooting script** expresses the director's visual strategy for every scene in the film. It shows you what shots are used to cover a scene and how they connect together as an edited scene. Camera angles, shot sizes, and camera moves are marked right on the script itself. Not only does the shooting script clearly communicate the director's aesthetic approach, it also shows, at a glance, many practical and technical details, especially the coverage required for each scene. It's important to remember that the core creative team (cinematographer, art director, sound mixer, etc.) each get a copy of the shooting script on which they make their own notes. This is why you must be sure that all major revisions are completed. From the details in the shooting script, you will then devise the logistical strategy for your shoot—the organization of the order in which scenes will be shot. Considerable time, effort, collaboration, and creative attention are required at this stage, because the shooting script functions as both the creative and the technical blueprint for the entire shoot.

Creating the Marked/Shooting Script

1. The first step in creating a shooting script is to number each scene in the script sequentially by placing the scene number in the left margin next to each scene heading.

2. Next, indicate how every action and line of dialogue will be covered by **marking the script** (also called **lineup**), which means drawing a vertical line through the action and dialogue covered by a specific shot. The line represents the anticipated duration of the shot—where the camera starts rolling and stops (which is always longer than the anticipated edited shot). Each line is labeled with the type of shot desired (i.e., CU or MS PAN WITH or MLS, etc.). When you have finished marking a script, you should be able to see at a glance the anticipated coverage for each scene; you'll also easily see if you've inadvertently left any actions or dialogue uncovered by a shot. Keep in mind that some actions may be covered more than one time (drawn through with multiple vertical lines), allowing for options in the editing room. Also, keep in mind that actions on which you anticipate editing should be duplicated in each camera take to allow for a matched action edit (see **action overlapping** pages 71–72). The concept of starting a shot well before the anticipated edit point is known as **shooting with handles**.

3. Finally, give every shot a letter identifier. Shots are labeled with capital letters and in alphabetical order beginning with (A) in every scene. Each new scene begins with (A) again. For example, scene #1 will have shots 1A, 1B, 1C, etc., and scene #2 will have 2A, 2B, 2C, etc. One caveat is that we usually skip over the letters I and O because they can look like a one and a zero, especially written on a slate (e.g., is scene #5O scene five-O or scene fifty?). When you are done, every shot in every scene has a unique identification number and a basic shot description. This information will become very important when it comes time to organize your shot list and shooting schedule (see later, "Creating a Shot List").

The **marked shooting script** (Figure 5-1) for several sample scenes from the film *Kiarra's Escape* will serve to illustrate how we visualize and indicate some of the cinematic concepts discussed in previous chapters: especially 180° line of action, POV sequences, and moving characters through space. *Kiarra's Escape* is about Kiarra (Jessica Krueger), a skilled freelance undercover agent who discovers sensitive military surveillance footage she wasn't supposed to see. As a result, she is being hunted by the CIA and the corporation who hired her. Her principle nemesis is the capable, but sleazy, Vogler (Robert Youngren) who, along with his sidekick Smith (Rick Varela), is always just one step behind her.

In these six example scenes (scene #13 through #18), every action and line of dialogue has been marked through and is covered by at least one shot, and every shot is now identified with a scene number and letter. Notice also that for the POV sequence in scene #13 that shot 13C continues right through shot 13D, even though there will obviously be an edit from the looking shot to the POV shot. It doesn't make practical sense to separate the looking and reaction shots into two different shots when you can easily shoot the looking and reaction in one shot and then insert the POV shot later (see Figure 4-15). Also notice how scene #16 is covered first by a master shot (16A) and then again by the CU reverse shots of each character in the scene (16B an 16C); this is a typical coverage strategy for simple dialogue exchanges and gives you great flexibility in post to determine the pace of the exchange or cut around less than perfect acting. There is similarly duplicated
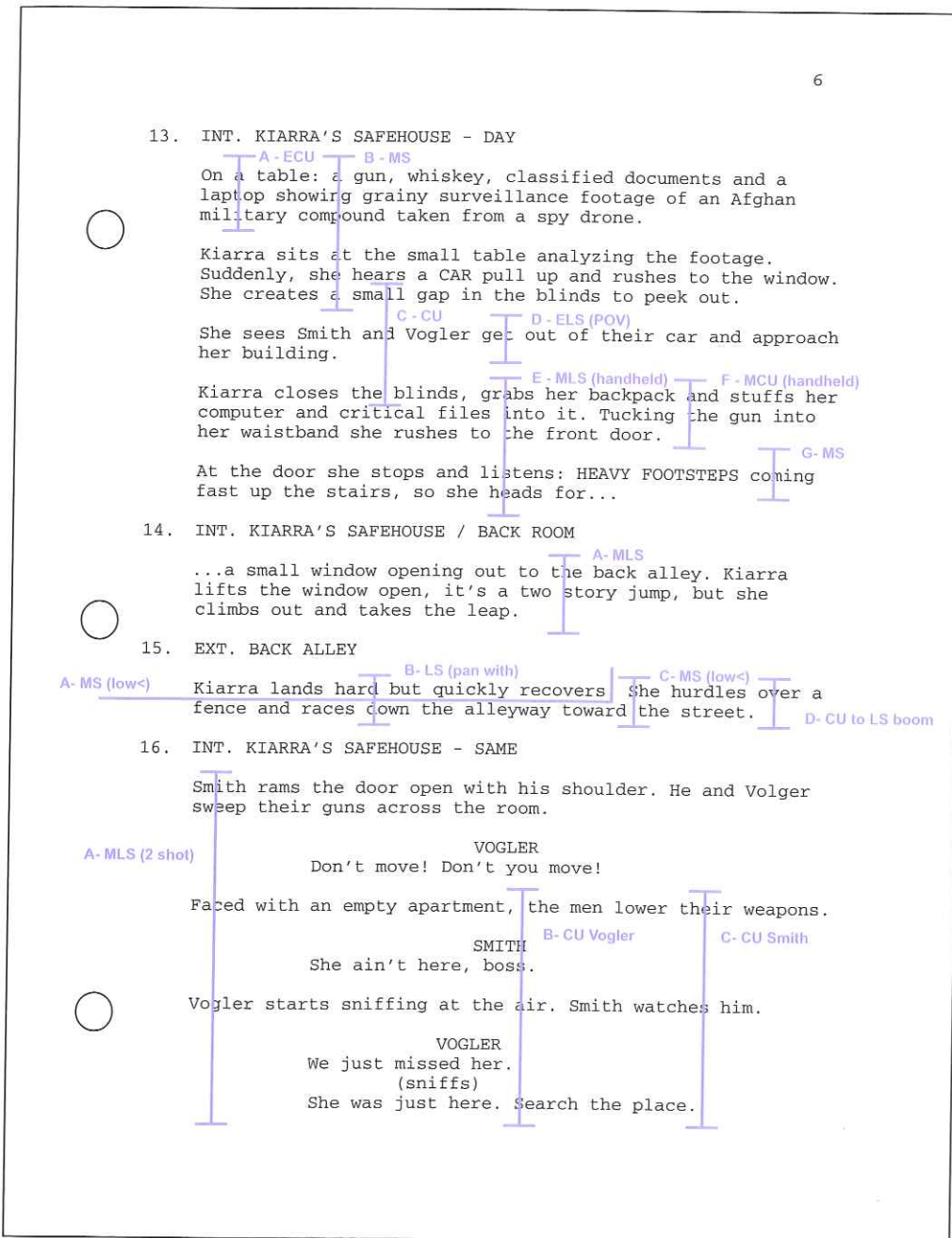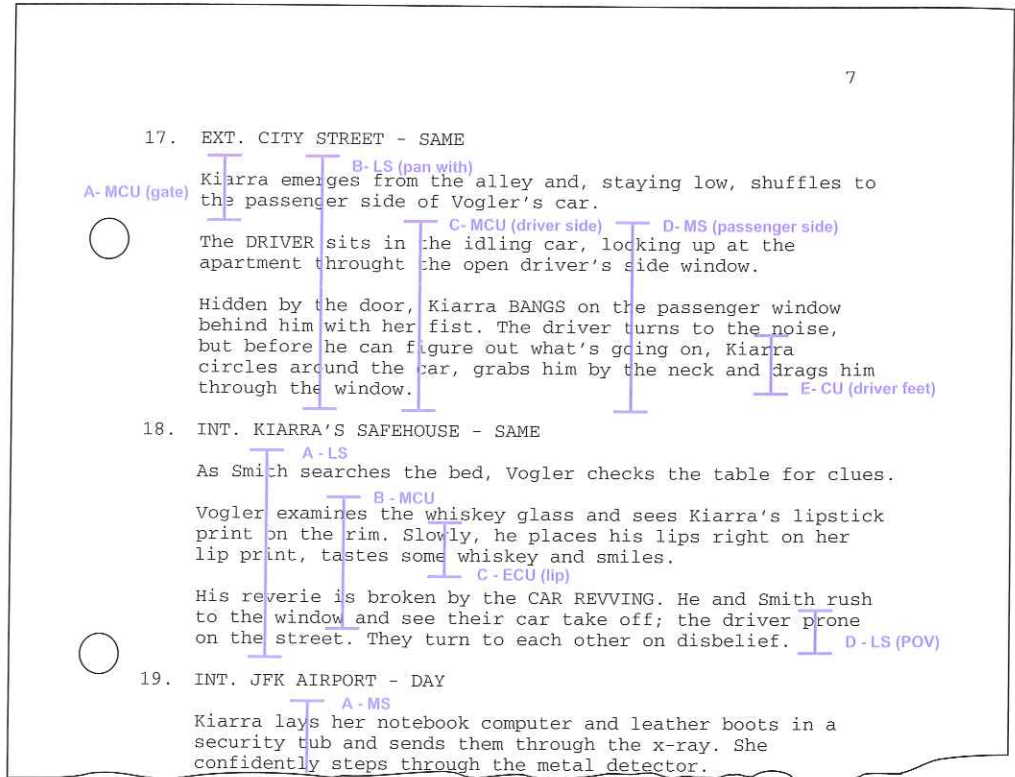

■ Figure 5-1
Marked shooting script. By drawing vertical lines across dialogue and action on a script to indicate shot coverage, the director can visualize how they will shoot the film. Scenes must be numbered and individual shots identified with letters.
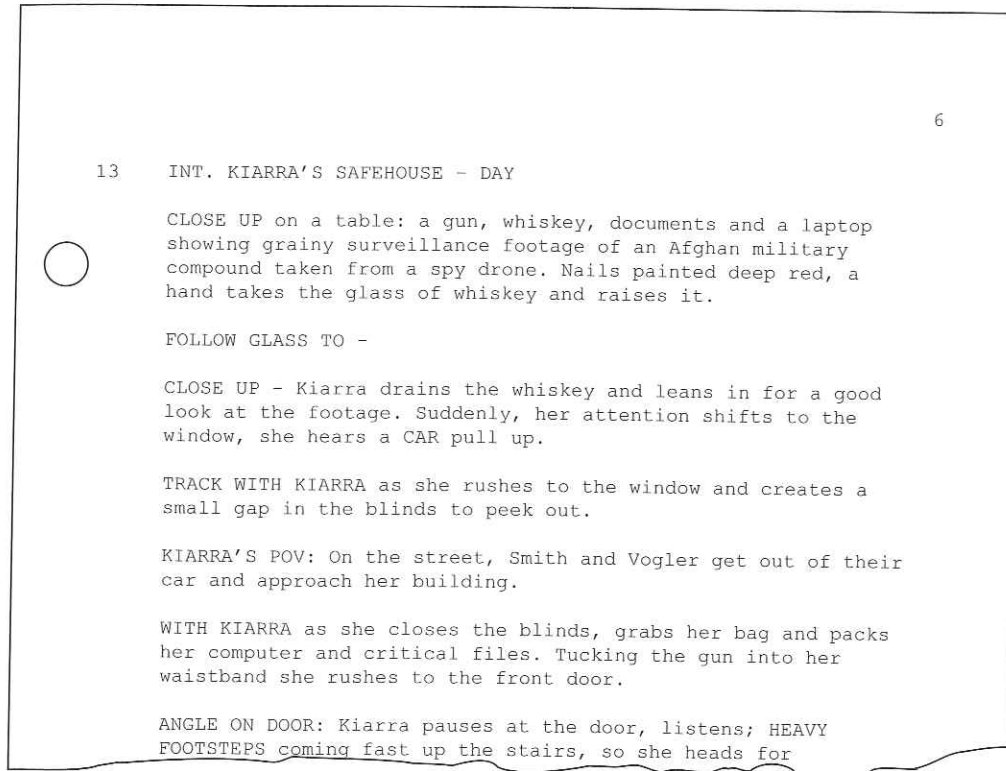
6

13. INT. KIARRA'S SAFEHOUSE - DAY

A - ECU   B - MS

On a table: a gun, whiskey, classified documents and a laptop showing grainy surveillance footage of an Afghan military compound taken from a spy drone.

Kiarra sits at the small table analyzing the footage. Suddenly, she hears a CAR pull up and rushes to the window. She creates a small gap in the blinds to peek out.

C - CU   D - ELS (POV)

She sees Smith and Vogler get out of their car and approach her building.

E - MLS (handheld)   F - MCU (handheld)

Kiarra closes the blinds, grabs her backpack and stuffs her computer and critical files into it. Tucking the gun into her waistband she rushes to the front door.

G- MS

At the door she stops and listens: HEAVY FOOTSTEPS coming fast up the stairs, so she heads for...

14. INT. KIARRA'S SAFEHOUSE / BACK ROOM

A- MLS

...a small window opening out to the back alley. Kiarra lifts the window open, it's a two story jump, but she climbs out and takes the leap.

15. EXT. BACK ALLEY

A- MS (low<)   B- LS (pan with)   C- MS (low<)

Kiarra lands hard but quickly recovers. She hurdles over a fence and races down the alleyway toward the street.

D- CU to LS boom

16. INT. KIARRA'S SAFEHOUSE - SAME

Smith rams the door open with his shoulder. He and Volger sweep their guns across the room.

VOGLER
Don't move! Don't you move!

A- MLS (2 shot)

Faced with an empty apartment, the men lower their weapons.

SMITH
She ain't here, boss.

B- CU Vogler   C- CU Smith

Vogler starts sniffing at the air. Smith watches him.

VOGLER
We just missed her.
(sniffs)
She was just here. Search the place.

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17. EXT. CITY STREET - SAME

A- MCU (gate)   B- LS (pan with)

Kiarra emerges from the alley and, staying low, shuffles to
the passenger side of Vogler's car.

C- MCU (driver side)   D- MS (passenger side)

The DRIVER sits in the idling car, looking up at the
apartment throught the open driver's side window.

Hidden by the door, Kiarra BANGS on the passenger window
behind him with her fist. The driver turns to the noise,
but before he can figure out what's going on, Kiarra
circles around the car, grabs him by the neck and drags him
through the window.   E- CU (driver feet)

18. INT. KIARRA'S SAFEHOUSE - SAME

A - LS

As Smith searches the bed, Vogler checks the table for clues.

B - MCU

Vogler examines the whiskey glass and sees Kiarra's lipstick
print on the rim. Slowly, he places his lips right on her
lip print, tastes some whiskey and smiles.

C - ECU (lip)

His reverie is broken by the CAR REVVING. He and Smith rush
to the window and see their car take off; the driver prone
on the street. They turn to each other on disbelief.   D - LS (POV)

19. INT. JFK AIRPORT - DAY

A - MS

Kiarra lays her notebook computer and leather boots in a
security tub and sends them through the x-ray. She
confidently steps through the metal detector.

coverage for the action sequence in scene #17 when Kiarra sneaks up on the driver and drags him out of the car. Large chunks of this scene are covered by different angles so that the rhythm and energy of the attack can be precisely modulated through editing. Finally, look at scenes #14 and #15. Both are very short moments, but #14 is covered with one fairly neutral shot while #15 is covered by *five* very different and dynamic shots. This gives you a sense for which scene the director felt was more important or was doing more 👆 for developing the character, narrative, or tone (see these scenes from *Kiarra's Escape* at www.voiceandvisionbook.com).

For short films, the marked shooting script is certainly all you need to take your film into production. The marked script suffices as your shooting script. Feature films, however, often go through an additional process of rewriting the script to incorporate the shot information into the body of the screenplay itself (Figure 5-2). On short films, this is an unnecessary, non-creative step. It's best to simply work from your marked screenplay, as it also gives you a more immediate picture of scene coverage.
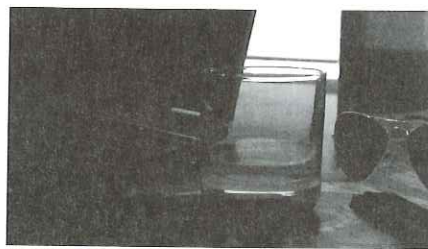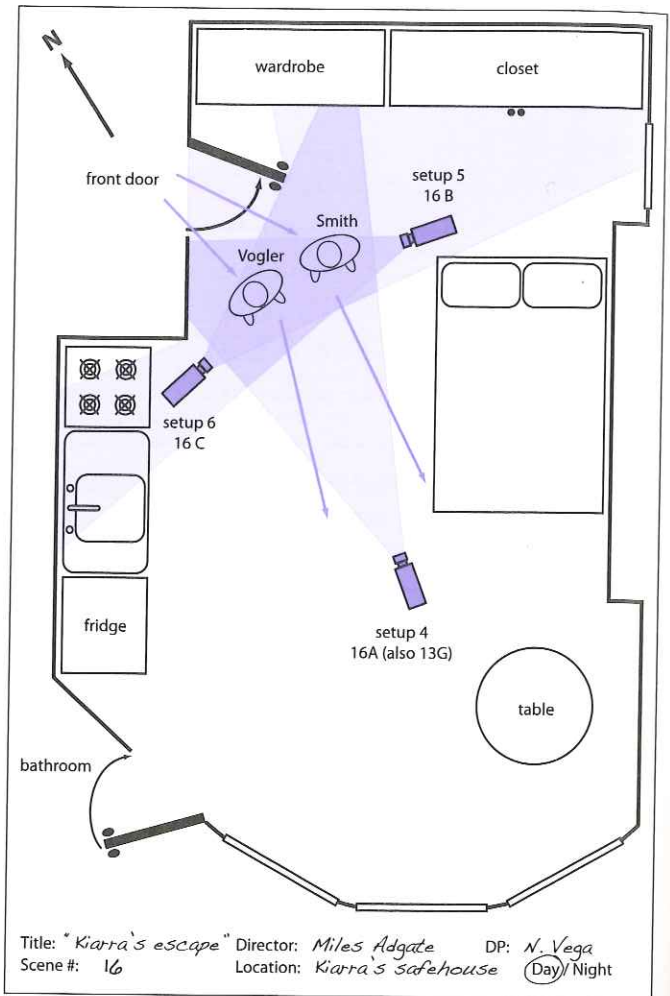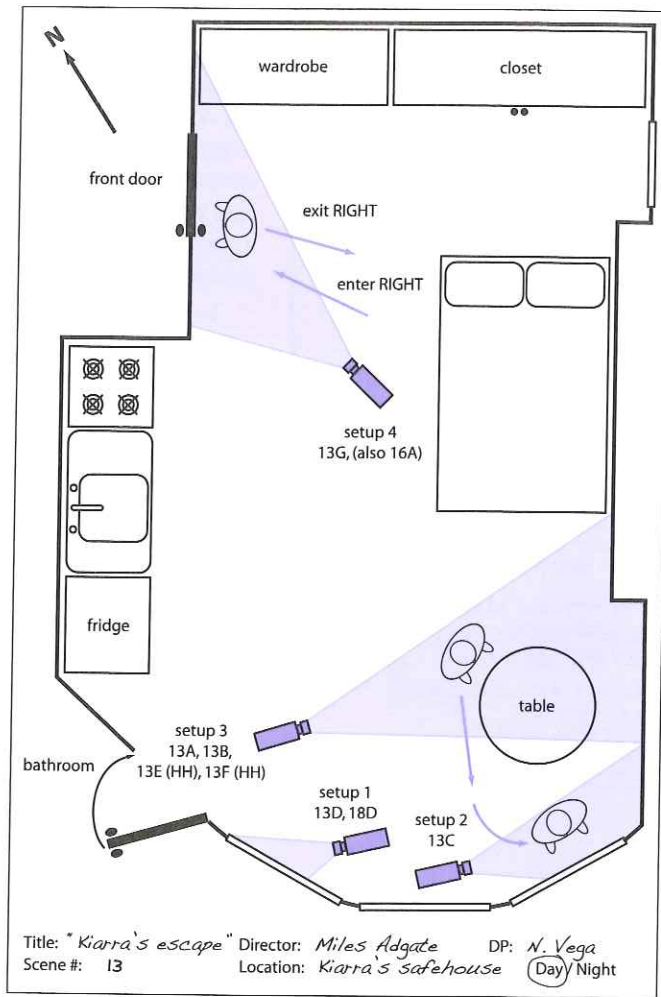
Overhead Diagrams

Overhead diagrams are essential previsualization tools worked out and used simultaneously with the development of the shooting script (Figure 5-3). **Overheads** are basically drawings of each scene from a bird's-eye perspective; they help the filmmaker figure out important details like the axis of action, camera placement, and character **blocking** (the movement of your characters in the space). Overheads are one of the most efficient methods for figuring out where the camera goes for each shot and for communicating the visual breakdown of a scene to your crew. You may

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13      INT. KIARRA'S SAFEHOUSE - DAY

        CLOSE UP on a table: a gun, whiskey, documents and a laptop
        showing grainy surveillance footage of an Afghan military
        compound taken from a spy drone. Nails painted deep red, a
        hand takes the glass of whiskey and raises it.

        FOLLOW GLASS TO -

        CLOSE UP - Kiarra drains the whiskey and leans in for a good
        look at the footage. Suddenly, her attention shifts to the
        window, she hears a CAR pull up.

        TRACK WITH KIARRA as she rushes to the window and creates a
        small gap in the blinds to peek out.

        KIARRA'S POV: On the street, Smith and Vogler get out of their
        car and approach her building.

        WITH KIARRA as she closes the blinds, grabs her bag and packs
        her computer and critical files. Tucking the gun into her
        waistband she rushes to the front door.

        ANGLE ON DOOR: Kiarra pauses at the door, listens; HEAVY
        FOOTSTEPS coming fast up the stairs, so she heads for
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■ **Figure 5-2** Shooting scripts for feature films often involve rewrites that incorporate shot angles. This is usually an unnecessary step for short films that can easily use a marked script as the shooting script.

sketch and throw away many preliminary overheads as you work and rework a scene during previsualization and rehearsals, but in the end you should always generate polished overheads of your final scene strategy to accompany the shooting script on the set of your film.

Each camera symbol represents a **camera setup**, which is the basic location and angle (e.g., angle on table) of the camera from which we shoot one or a number of similar shots from the shooting script. Camera setups communicate to the entire crew where equipment needs to be roughed in from shot to shot and which areas will be in the frame and therefore must be lit and prepped. Notice in Figure 5-3 *(left)* that four different shots are being taken from setup 3 (angle on the table: 13A, 13B, 13E, and 13F). By referencing those shots with the lined script, you'll see that the shots are of different sizes, but they all share the same basic angle and therefore the same lighting setup and mise-en-scène details. Camera setup 2, on the other hand, is used for only one shot, 13C. So in the end we are covering scene #13 *(left overhead)* with seven shots, but we have only four setups. One additional detail to note is that there are, in fact, *nine* shots on the overhead. This is because two shots from other scenes (16A and 18D) share these camera setups, so we'll also grab those shots while we're already lit and ready to go with those angles (see setup 1 and setup 4 in left overhead). Remember, a film shoot is usually organized for maximum efficiency. This idea of multiple shots taken from the same camera setup will be an important consideration in organizing your shoot (see later, "Creating a Shot List"). You'll also notice the indication of character movement in both overheads. This ensures that continuity of action is consistent and that, even though we're shooting out of sequence, it'll all cut together smoothly in the edit.

Scene 13 diagram

N

wardrobe | closet

front door

exit RIGHT

enter RIGHT

setup 4
13G, (also 16A)

fridge

setup 3
13A, 13B,
13E (HH), 13F (HH)

bathroom

table

setup 1
13D, 18D

setup 2
13C

Title: "Kiarra's escape" Director: Miles Adgate DP: N. Vega
Scene #: 13 Location: Kiarra's safehouse (Day) Night

Scene 16 diagram

N

wardrobe | closet

front door

setup 5
16 B

Smith

Vogler

setup 6
16 C

setup 4
16A (also 13G)

fridge

bathroom

table

Title: "Kiarra's escape" Director: Miles Adgate DP: N. Vega
Scene #: 16 Location: Kiarra's safehouse (Day) Night

13A (setup 3) | 13B (setup 3) | 13G (setup 4)

16A (setup 4) | 16B (setup 5) | 16C (setup 6)

■ **Figure 5-3** Overhead diagrams are simple bird's-eye views of locations with camera positions and actor movement sketched in to allow everyone on the crew to know the basics of each setup.

For his film *The Miracle* (read the script in Chapter 2), George Racz managed to obtain permission to shoot in a famous toy store in New York City (scenes #1 and #2). But he was allowed only one hour (from 9 to 10 a.m) to get all of the shots he needed. To save time, George scouted the location 10 times before shooting day! He went alone and with his D.P. He imagined shots, actions, and character movements. He took copious notes and digital photos. He was aware of where all of the toys were and how many shoppers were usually there at that hour. Before production day arrived, he drew overheads of the toy store so that everyone on the set could see where the characters would be, how they would move in the space, and where the camera would be set up for every shot. George had eight setups (12 shots) to do in one hour, but he was so well prepared that he got what he needed on the first take, every shot (**Figure 5-4**).

One small note: Although scene #3 also takes place at the toy store, some of this scene was in fact shot in a studio, since the real location wasn't necessary and more time could be taken for lighting and shooting in a more controlled location.

■ **Figure 5-4** George Racz's thorough research, marked shooting script, and overheads for his short *The Miracle*, allowed him to be efficient and precise while shooting under extreme time pressure.

These examples should make it clear that in order to make accurate overheads, you need to have a good sense of the layout of your location, so it's important to do your location scouting ahead of time (see Chapter 6). Because overhead scene visualization involves character placement and movement, overheads often reflect work accomplished during rehearsals with the actors as you work out the blocking of the scene. Also, if it's available, this can be done in the actual location, but often blocking is done in a mockup location (see page 158). Finally, overheads can also incorporate rough lighting placement ideas for each scene and electrical distribution at each location as well (see figure 18-13). I think you can see how, once given an overhead with basic camera placement and character movement, the D.P. can start to sketch in a lighting scheme for each setup.

Storyboards

The third previsualization tool commonly used is storyboards. **Storyboards** are drawings of shots, arranged on paper in the order they appear in a sequence. Storyboards are always drawn in frames with the same aspect ratio as your camera frame. Written under each drawing is a description of the shot and the actions or lines of dialogue it covers. Usually, each frame of a storyboard represents one central moment within a single shot; however, long moving shots, which include different framings, might be represented by a number of frames. As the storyboards for *Kiarra's Escape* (scene #15) illustrate, the movement of characters within the shot is indicated with arrows inside the frame, and movement of the camera is indicated by arrows outside the frame (Figure 5-5).

Storyboards are the most direct way to see what your film will look like before you shoot it, but it is by no means necessary to storyboard an entire film. In the professional world, storyboard use is quite idiosyncratic. Some people base their storyboards on the shooting script; other people do just the opposite by previsualizing with storyboards first and then transcribing the results into the shooting script. Some people create storyboards with detailed and intricate renderings of costumes, sets, facial expressions, and lighting, to establish the style of the film, while others use bare bones sketches to do nothing more than figure out shot size, screen direction, and sequencing. Some people use storyboards for every scene, while others use them only for sequences that involve an intricate interplay of movement, action, and composition. It is true that once you get the hang of shot/reverse shot technique, you really don't need to storyboard these scenes; however, sequences that require tricky graphic or movement matches from shot to shot might require drawings. Several computer programs are available to help you create storyboards, including Frame Forge 3D or Storyboard Artist, but hand drawing is still by far the preferred method, especially with short films produced on tight schedules.

It's Only on Paper, Not Written in Stone

Once you have completed previsualization, resulting in a marked shooting script, overheads, and perhaps storyboards, then you have, in fact, already made your first, fairly complete, visualized version of your film—on paper. Now you are ready to go into production because you know exactly what shots are needed to tell the story of your film. For some directors the production process is mostly the realization of the creative decisions they've made in preproduction. For most filmmakers, however, the previsualization process is just the next step in the development of the film's visual strategy. It's not uncommon for a director to rethink choices made in preproduction based on the energy of production: being in the real location, looking through the camera, interacting with the actors, seeing the lighting, negotiating logistical problems, and seeing how the movie is actually coming together. It's common to hear a director on the set say things like, "Let's combine these three shots into one with a slow pan left and a tilt up" or "Lose

the close-up and let's stay with the two shot; I prefer to keep the tension between the two of them in the same frame when he says that line" or "Look at those trees in the background! Instead of a medium close-up here, let's use a long shot to get them in the frame." This is the importance of having thorough and detailed previsualization. When you go onto a set knowing exactly what you need to realize your movie, you actually gain for yourself the freedom and confidence to respond to the moment and improvise with your camera from time to time.
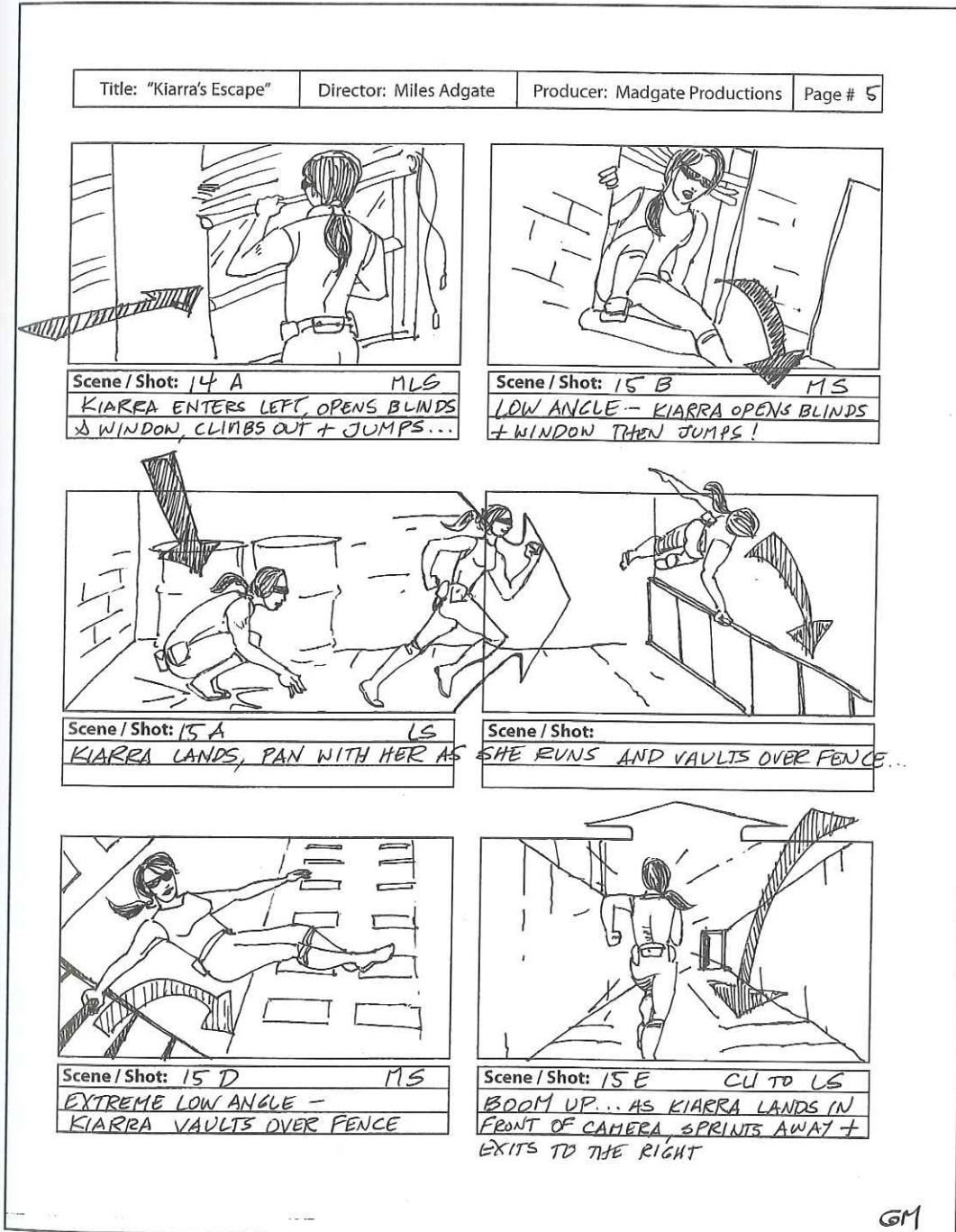

| Title: "Kiarra's Escape" | Director: Miles Adgate | Producer: Madgate Productions | Page # 5 |

Scene / Shot: 14 A — MLS
KIARRA ENTERS LEFT, OPENS BLINDS & WINDOW, CLIMBS OUT + JUMPS...

Scene / Shot: 15 B — MS
LOW ANGLE — KIARRA OPENS BLINDS + WINDOW THEN JUMPS!

Scene / Shot: 15 A — LS
KIARRA LANDS, PAN WITH HER AS SHE RUNS AND VAULTS OVER FENCE...

Scene / Shot:

Scene / Shot: 15 D — MS
EXTREME LOW ANGLE — KIARRA VAULTS OVER FENCE

Scene / Shot: 15 E — CU TO LS
BOOM UP... AS KIARRA LANDS IN FRONT OF CAMERA, SPRINTS AWAY + EXITS TO THE RIGHT

GM

Figure 5-5 Storyboards for *Kiarra's Escape*. Storyboards are a useful tool for previsualizing the composition and editing of a film. They usually depict a central moment of a shot and include arrows to show actor movement or camera movement.

in practice

The award winning short film *The Black Hole* by Phil and Olly (a.k.a. The Diamond Dogs) is a little gem of a story. Told in less than three minutes, the narrative revolves around a bored office clerk who discovers the magical powers of a black hole bizarrely printed out by a photocopier. Since the film was so short and involved absolutely no dialogue, the directors decided to eschew the screenplay process altogether and work directly from detailed storyboards (**Figure 5-6**). Although the storyboard sketching itself is fairly simple, they have included every shot in the film, right down to the exact angle. They also include the basic actions contained in each frame and even little exclamations like "?" "OMG!" and "Realizes what it can do" to provide the running internal thoughts of the main character (Napoleon Ryan). There is also a technical aspect to these boards, as you will see small notes to create the hole edge in postproduction for the inside-the-hole POV shot or how to shoot the green screen effect shots. What is especially remarkable about these storyboards is that, despite the simplicity off the renderings and the inclusion of technical information, the filmmakers managed to capture the style, tone, and spirit of the film (see *The Black Hole* film and storyboards at www.voiceandvisionbook.com).
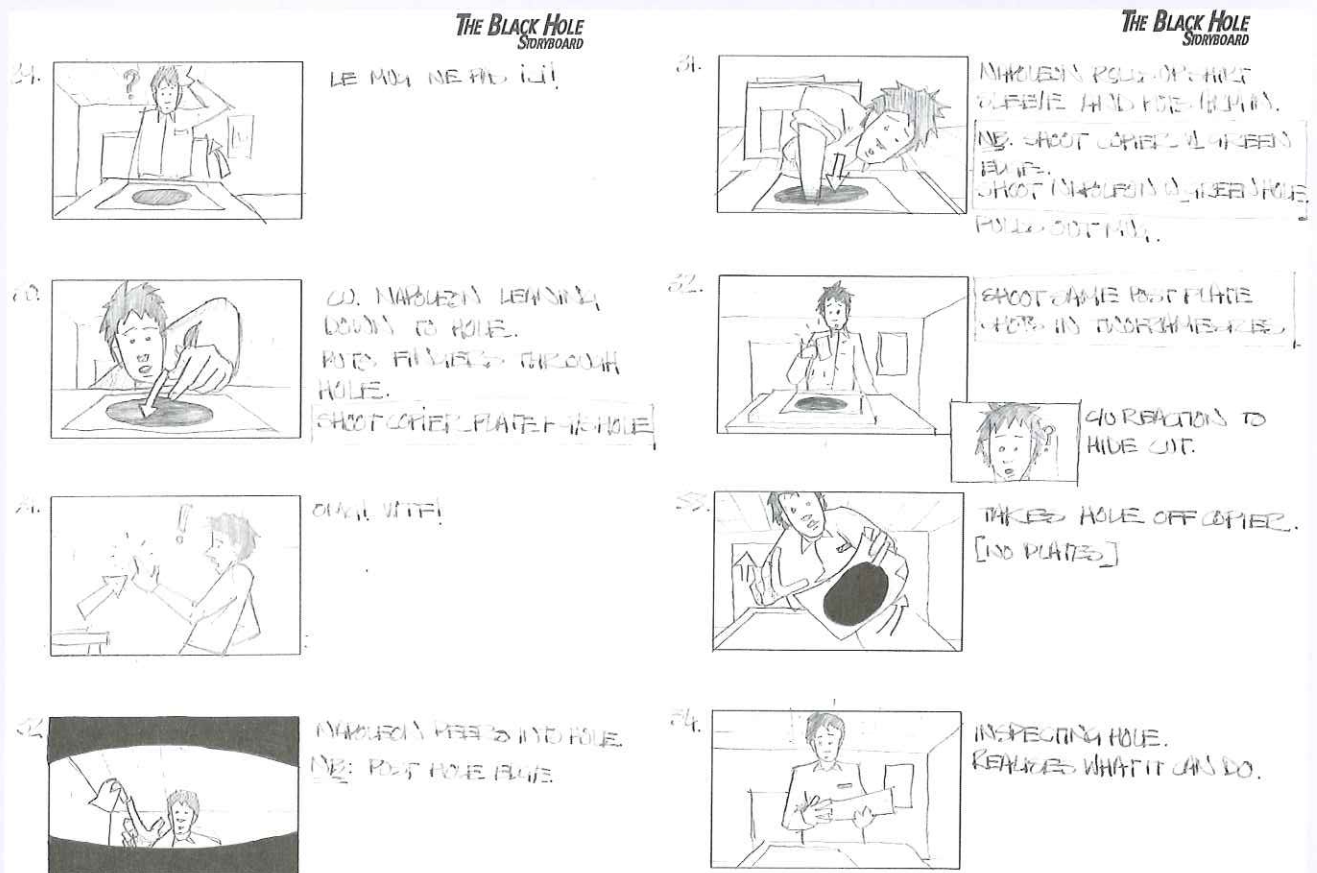
■ **Figure 5-6** Phil and Olly's three-minute film *The Black Hole* (2008) was shot using storyboards in lieu of a screenplay (Storyboards courtesy of Phil and Olly and Nicola Doring.).