Disney · PIXAR

THE ART OF Cars 2

By **BEN QUEEN** with Karen Paik

Foreword by John Lasseter

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THE ART OF *Cars* 2

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TO THE
AMAZING

CARS 2 CREW

JOHN LASSETER, DIRECTOR
DENISE REAM, PRODUCER

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FOREWORD

Lighting Study, **Sharon Calahan**, Digital paint over set render, 2010.

I believe there are three things you have to do to make a good film: you need to tell a compelling story with appealing characters set in a believable world. When you're making a sequel, the rules for two of those three, the characters and the world, are set for you; your main job is to tell a great new story. This challenge can't be under-estimated—coming up with the right story is the hardest thing about making movies. But for me, it's a special pleasure.

It takes four years to make one of our films. So much of us goes into them—our personal experiences, the things we find funny, the things we like and dislike . . .

there's a little bit of everyone who helped create the story in the finished film. By the time we're done, I don't think of the characters and their world as creations anymore. I know them so well, they're more like friends, or colleagues, or family members.

So for me, making another film with characters I know and love is like getting to spend time with old friends. I get to find out more about them; have the fun of seeing them in totally different places; and see them change and do things I couldn't have guessed the first time around. Because, for us, the most important thing is to tell a great story, one that will entertain and surprise us

as well as the audience—and, to do that, just as with any movie, we have to do something new; we have to go places we weren't expecting.

Lightning McQueen and Mater's adventures in this film just so happened to call for some of the most ambitious sets, environments, and characters we've ever done at Pixar. The crew on this film had a huge task in front of them, but they rose to the challenge and more. Seeing their inspiring work for this world was one of the biggest pleasures of making this film.

—John Lasseter

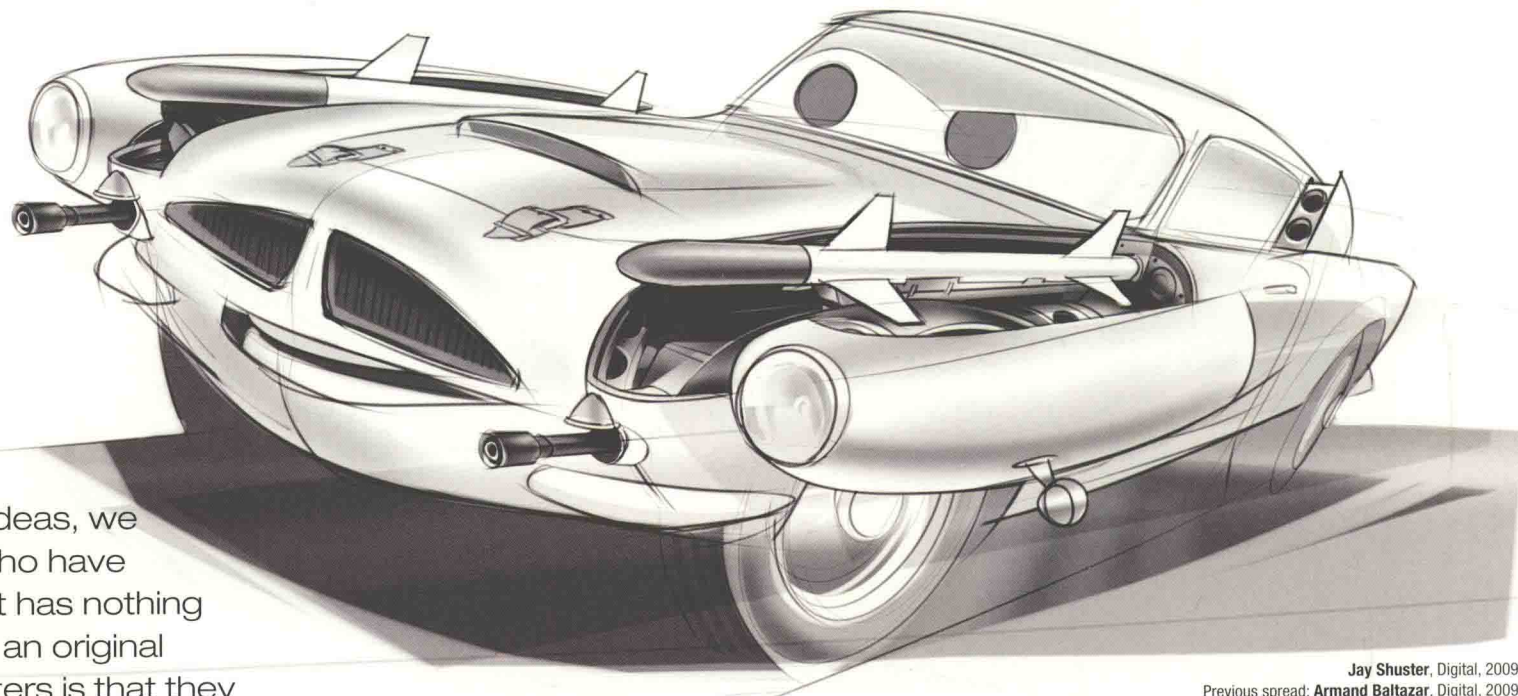Lighting Study, **Sharon Calahan**, Digital paint over set render, 2010.

Armand Baltazar, Digital, 2010.

INTRODUCTION

"We don't green light ideas, we green light directors who have a passion for an idea. It has nothing to do with whether it's an original or a sequel. What matters is that they have an idea they fall in love with. This is something we can make."

— **ED CATMULL, president and co-founder**

The prints for *Cars* had barely been struck in May 2006 when John Lasseter began to devise the idea for what would become his fifth feature film as director. Traveling around the world for the *Cars* publicity blitz, he had "vehicles as characters" on the brain: "I'm really into racing," says Lasseter. "Formula racing, rally, touring car, twenty-four-hour endurance racing—there are so many different kinds, and each one is so different from NASCAR. So this idea of an international race began percolating in my head, a race where Lightning McQueen would compete, and where we would get to see our characters in other countries."

Co-director Brad Lewis saw the potential immediately: "From America's standpoint, after *Cars*, Lightning McQueen's the best race car in the world. So the question was, 'Is he really?'"

"As we started developing this idea," Lasseter continues, "I thought about having the story become like an Alfred Hitchcock film, like *The Man Who Knew Too Much* or *North by Northwest*, where the innocent gets caught up in this spy world." The impetus for this idea—adding a spy-thriller element to the movie—originated even earlier in a discarded scene from the first film in which Sally and McQueen go on a date to a drive-in movie theater. Rob Gibbs (story artist on *Cars*) and the late Joe Ranft (head of story and co-director on *Cars*) created the "movie within a movie": a spy film with an ultracool car named Finn McMissile who dispatches bad-guy "Taxis of Death" with high-tech gadgetry and copious amounts of aplomb. "We just had fun designing this spy character," Lasseter says, "and we named him Finn McMissile, because, well, he's got missiles hidden all over him!"

Having found himself on the story-room floor in the first film, Finn McMissile was given a central role in *Cars 2*—this time not as an intertextual piece of background on a drive-in movie screen, but as a major character living and breathing in the *Cars* world.

Changing genres for a follow-up might be unusual in Hollywood, where sequel development seems to consist solely of repeating a formula over and over.

At Pixar, though, genre shifting is the norm in the sequels they have tackled to date. Although tonally similar, *Toy Story* was a buddy film, *Toy Story 2* a rescue film, and *Toy Story 3* a prison break film. *Cars* was a mix of coming-of-age drama and slice-of-life comedy. It celebrated the values of community through the prism of small-town life off Route 66. *Cars 2*, although very comedic at its heart, is a fast-paced spy thriller.

Pixar's drive for originality, its desire not to repeat itself, would seem to be the primary factor in such widely divergent sequels. But there's also a more fundamental reason: "The most important thing in our movies is to find the underlying emotion," Lasseter says. "It's something you have to plan from the beginning. It's not something you can add later. That emotion comes from the growth of the main character. And deciding how that growth happens often determines what the genre of the film will be."

So who would provide the emotion and growth for *Cars 2*? To truly complete the "Hitchcockian innocent" formula, a true innocent was needed.

Storyboards, *Cars*, (origin of Finn McMissile character), **Rob Gibbs**, Colored Pencil/Ink, 2002.
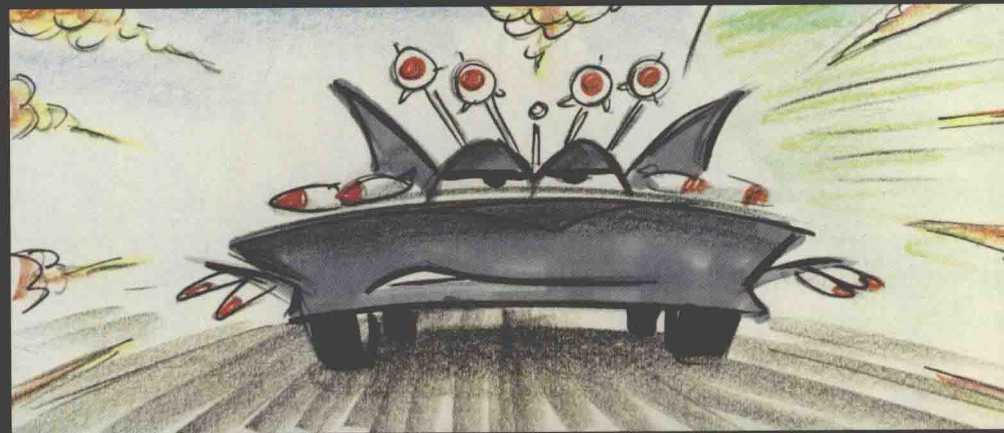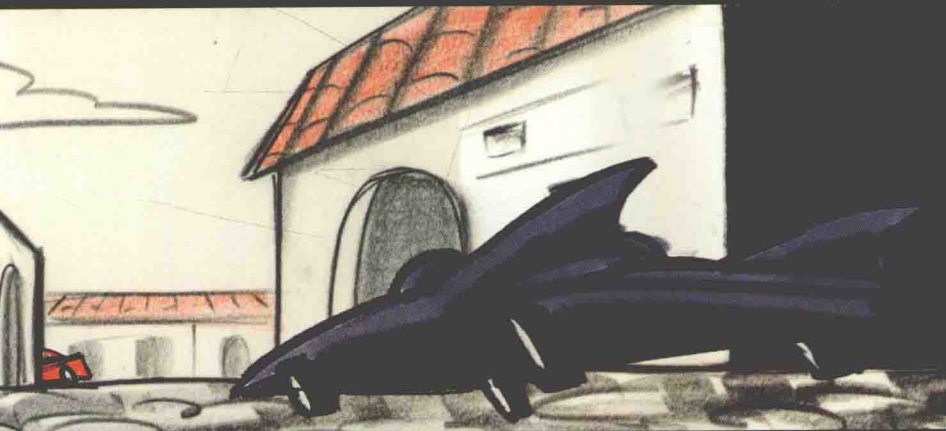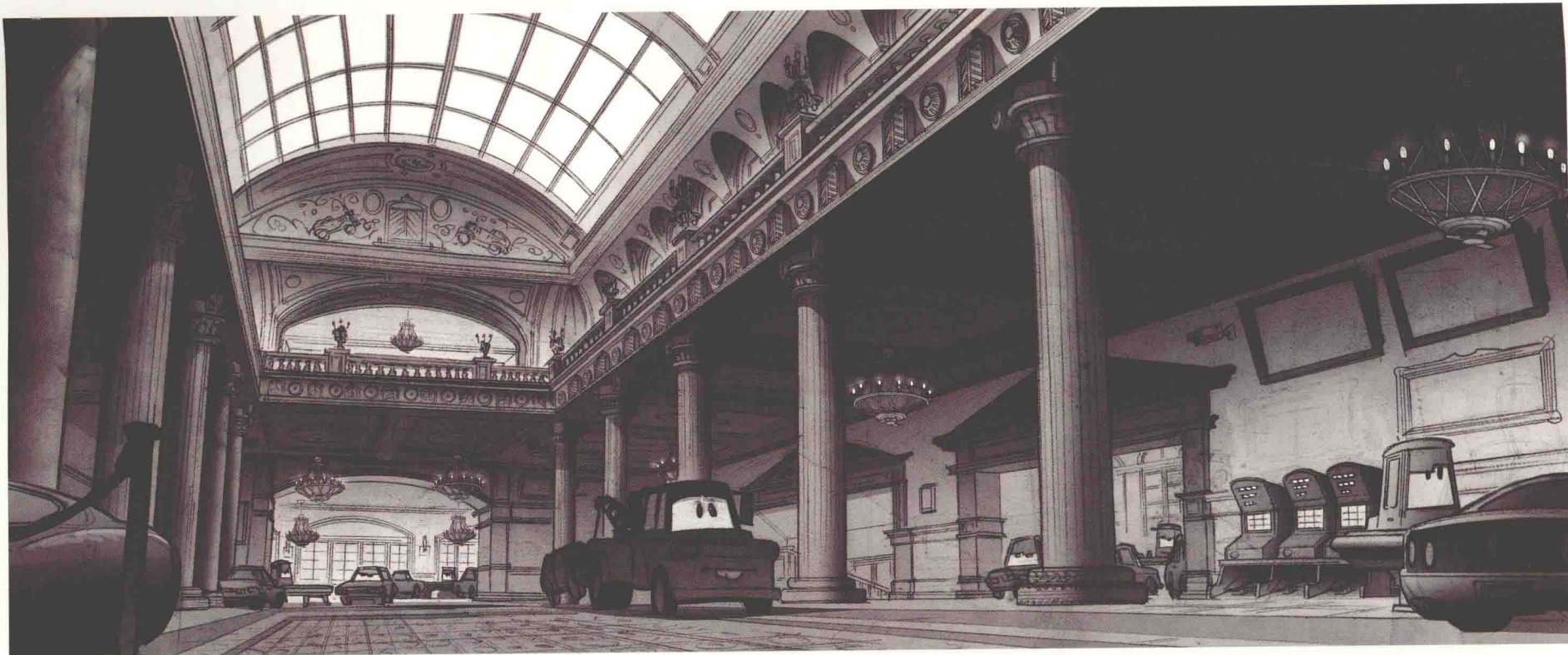
"WWMD?"

Lasseter, still on his creatively fertile *Cars* publicity tour, couldn't help but take in the experience as a fish out of water, a self-professed "bumpkin" in glamorous cities around the world. He started to feel a little bit like Mater, the rusty old tow truck who became the unlikely best friend to superstar race car Lightning McQueen in the first film. "I started looking at each country I was in, and I found myself giggling and laughing about how Mater would react to being in places that were so different from Radiator Springs."

Lasseter took in the confusing signage of the Tokyo overpasses, the intimidating ten-lane-wide roundabouts of Paris, the roads in Italy where it was explained to him that the traffic signals were mere suggestions ("something you might want to do"). In each situation, he just couldn't stop asking himself the same question over and over. It was a question that would become a mantra for the *Cars 2* creative team: "What Would Mater Do?"
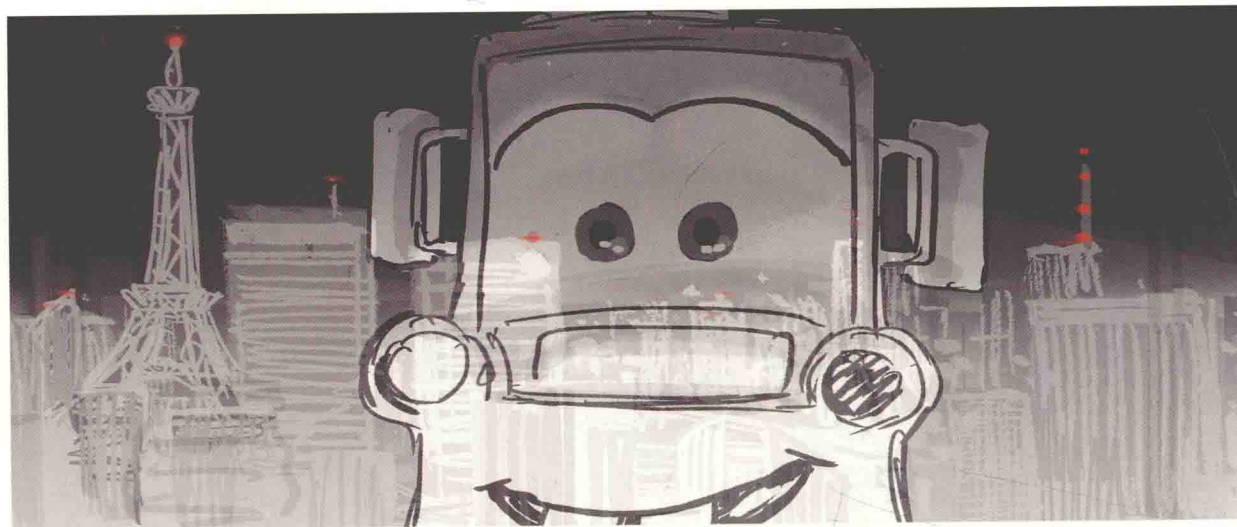
Storyboard, **Nick Sung**, **Enrico Casarosa**, Digital, 2009.

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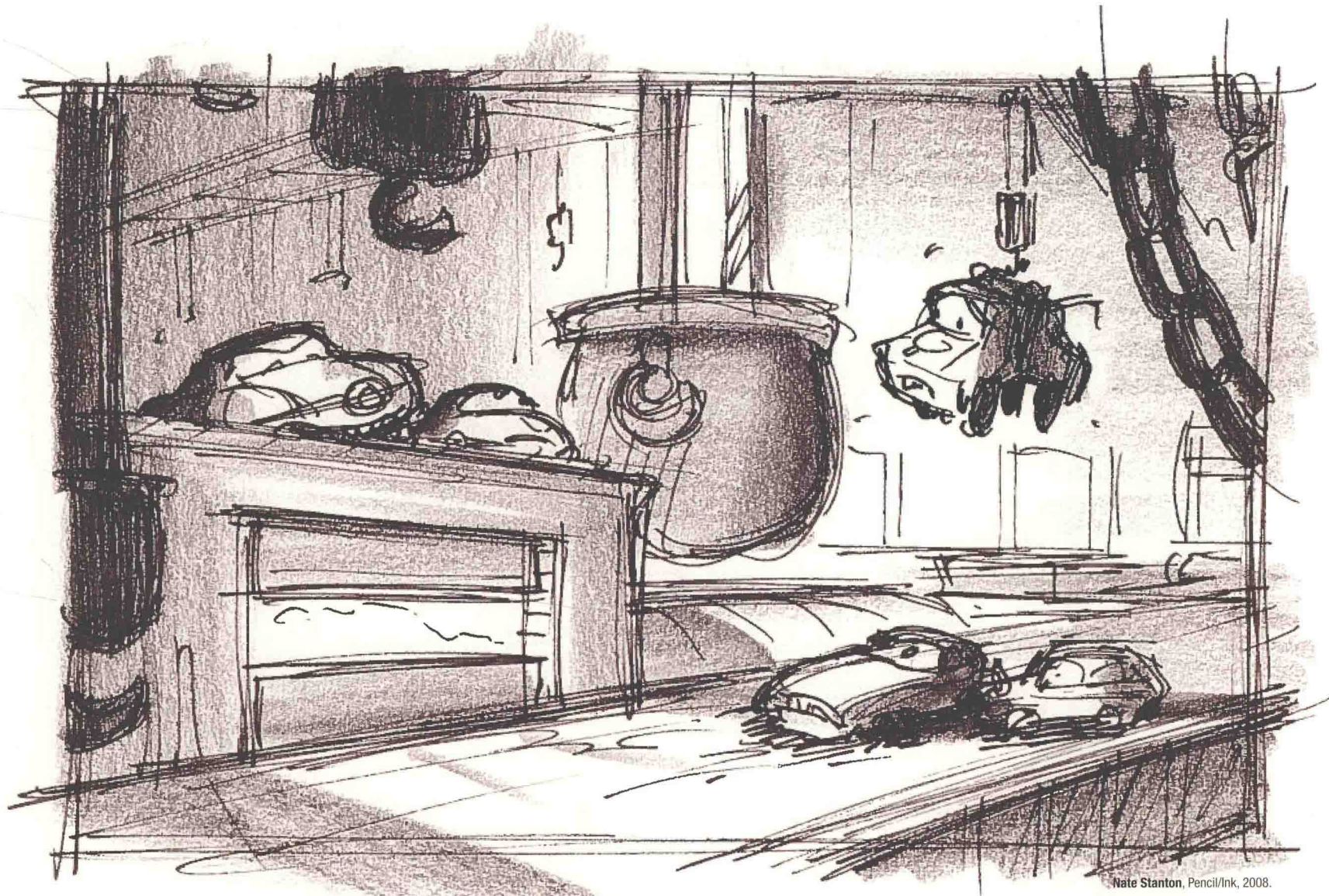
Nate Stanton, Pencil/Ink, 2008.

For Mater the tow truck to be a true unwitting Hitchcock hero like Roger Thornhill, Dr. Benjamin McKenna, or John Jones (*North by Northwest*, *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, and *Foreign Correspondent*, respectively) his importance to the story could not simply end with a piece of "mistaken identity" plotting. Like Hitchcock's protagonists, Mater is an idiosyncratic character who, though easily dismissed as an "everyman," in fact brings a specialized skill set to bear in the film. He is savantlike in his knowledge of all things towing, salvage, and auto repair. Mater is mistaken for an American secret agent and finds himself thrust into a world of high-octane spies. Yet it's his understanding of obscure British engines and car parts that ends up saving the day. Put simply, without Mater, the bad guys would have gotten away with it. He's not an everyman, an idiot, or even a wise, Feste-like Shakespearean fool. He's a simple country tow truck, nothing more, and this makes him twice the hero all the other cars with high-tech gadgets and hyperanalytic minds will ever be.

"I think Mater resonates with people because he just is who he is; there's no pretense to him. He wears his rust with pride."

— **JAY WARD,** Cars *franchise guardian*

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