THE FILM YOU’LL be editing is a 12-minute children’s ghost story called Pranks, which was written and directed by Marios Chirtou and produced by Mark Riley. The film’s original rushes—the raw, unedited footage shot during the film’s production—has been made available to you, and by following the exercises in this book, you’ll be taken through the process of editing this short film from start to finish.

The task of an editor is to take the individual shots filmed by the production crew, and assemble them into a complete movie that tells a compelling story and entertains an audience. Editing is not simply a case of piecing together the shots into the correct script order; instead, it’s an art and craft that has a major impact on the final film. How a film is edited dictates the tone, overall pace, and emotional impact that the film delivers and, when done well, the viewer never even notices the editor’s art at work.

This book aims to reproduce many of the common challenges that an editor faces by taking the reader through a typical workflow for editing a film. Each chapter focuses on a different part of the process, everything from organizing the rushes to the final export of the finished film.
The first step in this process is to become familiar with the story that you’re about to tell (the shooting script) and the material that has been captured by the production team to tell that story (the rushes, continuity script, and shot list), which is what this first chapter is all about.

The making of *Pranks*

*Pranks* was shot on location, over a four-day period at a large Victorian house in St. Albans, Hertfordshire, which is 23 miles from London. The cast included the great English actress Jenny Seagrove—whose many successes include the film *Local Hero* (1983), directed by Bill Forsyth, and the long-running BBC drama series *Judge John Deed* (2001–2007), initially directed by Alrick Riley—and 12-year-old Ellie Darcey-Alden, an amazing young actress who took on the lead role of Katie, playing opposite her brother Joseph.

The film was shot on a RED ONE M-X camera by our director of photography, John Ferguson, who gave us the wonderful filmic images that you see in the film’s rushes. The 456 GB of shoot media was transcoded to Apple ProRes 422 (Proxy) suitable for editing on Final Cut Pro X and has been made available for you on the DVD.
Reading the Script

Before embarking on an edit, you need to get familiar with the script. You can find a PDF of the script on the DVD accompanying this book. We recommend that you read through the script a few times before you dive in and start working with the footage. It’s important to have a clear concept of the project right from the start, before you get too deep in the chaos of all the shots and takes that make up a movie. As you read the script, try to get a sense of the tone, genre, structure, and pace of the story, and pick out what you feel are the important plot points and moments that should be emphasized.

In this section, we cover some key points for you to look for when breaking down the structure of the story. We’ve also included some profiles so that you get to know the characters better.

Story and structure

Pranks concerns an orphan child named Katie who arrives at an impressive new care home run by Joyce Anders (Figure 1.1). A reclusive child that prefers to keep to herself, Katie...
moves into her new room unaware that the ghost of a mischievous little boy with a penchant for tricks and games also inhabits her home (Figure 1.2). Katie continuously falls victim to the boy’s childish pranks and is unable to convince Joyce that another presence resides in the house with them. This sets her on a quest to obtain proof of the boy’s existence, and, along the way, she learns how to open up and have some fun. After a nighttime chase around the house, Katie eventually catches up with the boy, only to have him be scared away by Joyce. The story ends with Katie patiently waiting for his return.

Let’s see how the story breaks down in terms of a traditional three-act structure:

- **Act I:** The first act of *Pranks* is made up of Scenes 1 through 6 in the script and establishes the characters (Katie and Joyce) and the dramatic situation of the story (a reclusive child moves into a new foster home), ending on a turning point that presents a problem for the main character to solve (someone is disrupting Katie’s new room).

- **Act II:** The second act consists of Scenes 7 through 16 and is all about the obstacles and conflicts that the main character faces as she tries to solve the problem encountered at the end of the first act. In Act II, Katie first seeks Joyce’s help, only to have her
complaints dismissed out of hand. When the pranks continue, Katie is forced to take matters into her own hands and embarks on a quest to obtain photographic evidence. After a cat-and-mouse chase around the house, the act ends on a second turning point, when Katie begins to come out of her shell and enjoy the games.

**Act III:** The third act is comprised of Scenes 17 and 18 and resolves the story problem. Katie finally comes face to face with the boy and learns the truth about who he is. The ending shows how Katie has been positively impacted by the events of the story and concludes on a bittersweet note as she waits for his return.

We’ll be delving deeper into some of the story points as we work through the edit later in the book, but for now let’s take a closer look at the characters.

**The characters**

Katie is a 12-year-old orphan with a troubled past. For most of her life, she has been hauled from one foster home to another, never staying long enough to form any kind of bond with the caregivers that take her in. Because of this, she has become self-reliant and is reluctant to let anyone get close to her for fear of getting hurt. She especially distances herself from other children, from whom she feels completely alienated. This has caused problems with some of the families she’s stayed with, earning her a reputation for not “playing nice” with the other children of the house. Though she is searching for a place to call home, it has to be on her terms, and it’s this uncompromising attitude that gets her into trouble every time.

Joyce’s life has always been about children. A best-selling author of children’s books, she has been living off the royalties from her books since splitting from her husband only a few short years into their marriage. Her compassionate nature led her to put all her energies into setting up a residence for homeless children, fostering many orphans over the years. This came to a tragic end when her son, Jason, became very ill and died. Heartbroken, she could never bring herself to look after another child, becoming reclusive and leading a solitary existence for years. Burdened by the guilt she carries from losing a child in her care, Joyce is oblivious to the fact that the child’s spirit still resides in the house with her. Joyce sees this new opportunity to foster another child as a way to make amends with the past. However Katie’s tendency to withdraw from everyone makes this difficult for Joyce. Joyce’s main objective is to form a bond with Katie and build a relationship with her. She spends the whole story trying to connect with Katie, a goal she manages to achieve with some indirect help from Jason, the child she lost.
Jason’s spirit is trapped in limbo inside the house he shares with his foster mother (Figure 1.3). He has spent the past few years wandering the house alone, trying to get his foster mother’s attention, but to no avail. With Katie’s arrival, he sees a potential new playmate and is anxious to involve her in his games, despite her reluctance to participate.

**Figure 1.3**
Joseph Darcey-Alden as the ghost in a scene from *Pranks*.

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**Working with Reports and Logs**

Now that you’re familiar with the story and characters, the next step is to review the continuity paperwork. Good continuity notes save an editor time (and, therefore, the production money) and allow the editor to make a number of informed decisions during the edit. These notes are provided by the script supervisor, who is responsible for taking detailed notes of everything that is shot during a film’s production. This includes everything from matching the actors’ eye lines to wardrobe, makeup, and the position of props. It’s done to ensure that the continuity of the film matches from shot to shot. The script supervisor also notes clapper information for each shot, any technical issues that arise, and the director’s preferred takes.
The script supervisor’s work is especially important because movies are usually shot out of sequence and each department looks to them for answers when questions of continuity arise on the set. The script supervisor essentially ensures that the recorded shots match and cut together after they’re assembled, so his work is indispensable to an editor.

In the Documentation folder on the DVD, you’ll find the continuity shot list and continuity script for Pranks. These documents provide useful information about the rushes that you have to work with, which you can refer to as you work on the film. Let’s take a closer look at both documents.

**The continuity shot list**

At first glance, the continuity shot list may look like a jumbled set of words, numbers, and abbreviations, but it’s actually a treasure trove to an editor. The continuity shot list is like a detailed map of the shoot, which tells you the scene order in which the film was shot, the location in which the scene takes place, and what occurred on set during the recording. These details provide an accurate reference of what took place—good or bad—in each scene during the shoot, and help reveal any changes that might have occurred between takes.

The shot list provides an exhaustive list of all the relevant details from each take and helps the production maintain continuity so that the editor is able to cut the final film. Whether it was an unwanted daily visit on set from any one of the numerous cats in our location, a fantastic performance by the cast, or a change in props, clothing, or weather, these useful points are all noted in a well-documented continuity shot list.

Our script supervisor in charge of continuity on set was Yvonne Craven, who did a brilliant job of keeping track of anything that was worth noting during the recording on her page-per-slate notes. She then typed up a continuity shot list from these notes during the course of the shoot. The continuity shot list works hand in hand with the continuity script, which we discuss in the next section.

So, running through the headings in the continuity shot list, you’ll see Mag, Slate, and Take (see Figure 1.4). Historically the Mag number refers to a magazine of film roll, but here, Mag actually refers to the numbered digital flash cards we used during filming. These were downloaded to the hard drives at the DIT workstation before being reused again (Figure 1.5).
During filming, each new shot setup is assigned a new slate number. The amount of times or
takes the director shoots that particular slate also is listed by the assistant camera operator
on a clapperboard. The clapperboard is recorded before each take (or sometimes after); it
helps not only identify the take in question, but also with the synchronization of the picture
and sound later in the edit (see Chapter 8).

Following the slate and take number, the script supervisor notes whether the shot in ques-
tion was recorded without sound. This is indicated with the abbreviation MOS, and heralds
from the early sync sound days when a sound recordist would be requested to run the “motor
only sync” to create mute shots. Finally, the shot’s running time also is listed under the
Duration heading.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mag No.</th>
<th>Slate No.</th>
<th>Take No.</th>
<th>TITLE: PRANKS</th>
<th>DAY 1</th>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Dur</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SCENE 1: A CHILD’S BEDROOM - INT / DAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Toy box – MCU Pan L-R across toys on floor, across toy box past door. Ball bounces into FR L and rolls across floor. Continue pan across bedside table, hold on teddy on bed. OK. Shot upside down for time.</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0.34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SCENE 2: THE ANDERS RESIDENCE - EXT / DAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>POV through bedroom window of car on drive &amp; Joyce &amp; Katie getting out. OK in cloud.</td>
<td>MOS</td>
<td>0.36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>MS Joyce getting out of car and walking round front to open door for Katie. Katie gets out with case. Katie walks ahead of Joyce, pauses, and looks up at window of house. Joyce hurries ahead and opens front door. They go inside. Jenny hesitates before opening door of car. Cloud. OK.</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0.50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>C/A hands &amp; Joyce trying to take case from Katie - handle? OK.</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0.08</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>MS Joyce to car and Katie exiting, approaching house towards cam. (Cam to R of front door) Joyce walks round car, Katie gets out, and they walk to cam MS. Katie stops &amp; looks up at window ROF, exits FR L. OK.</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0.25</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>POV Katie look up at window, curtain twitches. OK.</td>
<td>MOS</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>WS Car pulling up outside house, Car enters ROF and stops. OK.</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SCENE 3: INT HALLWAY / FRONT ENTRANCE - INT / DAY</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Joyce &amp; Katie enter through front door, Joyce puts bag down &amp; takes coat off and turns to Katie. Katie pauses by doorway with case. Joyce walks past her to front door to close it. Katie goes upstairs with case. Joyce stands, looks up at her. OK.</td>
<td>S</td>
<td>0.43</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Usually, an editor would reference the continuity shot list with the clapperboard information at the start of each shot. However, in order to maximize the space on the DVD, and give you more footage to edit with, we’ve excluded the clapperboards from the rushes provided and the corresponding scene, slate, and take numbers are listed on the file name for each clip instead. We’ve also excluded any really bad takes for the same reason.

Let’s look at some examples of the kind of information you can glean from the continuity shot list. Scene 1, Slate 1, Take 5 tells us that it’s an interior (INT) shot (an exterior shot is indicated by EXT), that the shot takes place during the day, and that it is 34 seconds in duration. We can also see that the shot features a toy box, with the camera moving left to right in a medium close up (MCU). The continuity notes also alert you that this shot was recorded upside-down (more on this later in the chapter).

Examining the rest of the shot list reveals other useful information. The jump in the Mag number that occurs on the shot list—going from 1, to 3, then back to 2 again—was due to a reshoot made necessary by a change in the weather. Scene 2 Slate 2, Take 4, the point of view (POV) through the bedroom window, was reshot a second time after the weather turned cloudy, and no longer matched the sunny shot recorded earlier, causing the jump in the Mag
numbers listed on the shot list. The sunny versions of these shots were omitted from the DVD (and the shot list) for space reasons, but we left the Mag numbers listed in their original order.

You may also have noticed that dialogue is listed with letters next to it—for example, Scene 3, Slate 13, Take 2 lists “Dialogue A–E”. This is a simple and effective way for the script supervisor to quickly identify which sections from the dialogue were spoken during a particular slate or take. Letters are used to avoid confusion with slates and take numbers and also are listed on the continuity script.

The last two pages of the continuity shot list ends with a list of ADR recordings (for more on ADR, see Chapter 13) and a continuity key guide that runs through all the abbreviations used. With these facts at hand you can easily start to form a picture of what occurred during each take before you even start to review the rushes.

The continuity script

Let’s now take a look at the continuity script, which is also known as a marked-up script, because the script supervisor marks the continuity on the original shooting script. You’ll notice there are a number of vertical lines drawn on the script, showing you the script coverage for each individual slate. These show how many slates were taken and also the type of shot used.

For instance, referring to the continuity script for Scene 2 (see Figure 1.6), you can see “6/1” listed, which means Slate 6, Take 1. Below this, a red line indicates the approximate script coverage for this slate. There’s also a short reference that this shot depicts Katie’s (K) point-of-view (POV). If you now refer back to the continuity shot list and look up Slate 6, Take 1, you can see these same details cross-referenced there also. The shot list also adds the note “Katie look up at window, curtain twitches. OK” and that the shot is 1 second in duration and recorded without sound.

Because we’ve supplied only the best takes for you to use, the continuity script and shot list show only the actual takes that we’ve supplied. In usual continuity practice, Slate 4/2 would indicate that for Slate 4, two takes were recorded and available for the editor to use. However, for the purposes of this book, Slate 4/2 signifies that only Take 2 is available for Slate 4. When we have provided more takes for a particular slate, this too is indicated on the continuity script. For example, “Scene 5, 80/2 & 3” shows that Takes 2 and 3 have been supplied for you as well.

It’s worth noting that during the shoot, the cast improvised their dialogue in some of the scenes, so both the shooting script and continuity scripts are not verbatim.
Some GIGGLES.

A car door SLAMS in the distance. An INDISTINCT VOICE can be heard outside.

We MOVE to the window, and through the glass we see a Volkswagen Beetle parked in a driveway.

EXT. THE ANDERS RESIDENCE – DAY

JOYCE ANDERS, mid-forties, appears from the Beetle’s driver’s side and rushes to open the passenger door. A YOUNG GIRL sits nonchalantly inside.

This is KATIE KRUEK, 12 years old going on 40. Katie grabs her suitcase and warily exits the car. Joyce offers to help her with it, but she tactfully withdraws.

Katie glances up at the house and catches someone peeking.

A FIGURE tears away from the window.

INT. HALLWAY – FRONT ENTRANCE – DAY

Keys CLATTER and the front door flings open. Joyce bounds into the house, holds the door open. Katie lingers at the doorway.

Your Role as Editor

Editors often are hired before production and can offer a director valuable input and feedback before and during the shoot. This could be advice on how to create a specific effect or style, which is often dependent on how the film is shot, or even suggestions on the appropriate shooting format based on the film’s intended distribution. But primarily, the editor is mainly responsible for crafting the story from the footage he receives and much of his task involves separating the wheat from the chaff. You’ll be surprised by how many shots that may appear unusable on first impression don’t necessarily need to disappear into the trash bin.

Editors continually face scenarios in which they need to cut around problematic footage. This can be caused by technical problems that inevitably crop up to spoil a shot, or vital scenes from the script that have been left un-filmed due to time limitations on the set. Your job is to work with the material at hand—sometimes even piecing together an actor’s performance from different takes—while still continuing to make sense of the narrative.

As you examine the rushes from the DVD, you’ll come across the occasional shot that may contain a problem of some kind. For instance, when Katie kicks the alphabet blocks in Scene 8, Slate 59, Take 1, there is a long pause before we actually see her kick the bricks. You might remedy this by speeding up the footage slightly during the pause (see Chapter 14).
Earlier in the chapter, the continuity shot list alerted us that Scene 1 Slate 1 Take 5—a Steadicam shot recorded by our camera operator, Iain MacKay—was recorded with the camera mounted upside-down. A Steadicam can operate either in normal high mode (where the camera is mounted for shots above waist level) or in low mode (where the camera is mounted for shots below waist level). Changing the rig to low mode, just for this shot, would have been time consuming, so the camera team took the initiative to physically flip the rig upside down to mimic the low mode instead. This meant that the resulting shot would also be recorded upside-down, requiring the editor to flip the shot back around again in the edit. We show you how to do exactly that in Chapter 14.

Of course, every film is unique, and as an editor, you face all manner of challenges to solve in the course of a project. Ultimately, you may need to make a decision on whether to use a shot that has some issues. Minor issues, like fleeting continuity errors, can be forgiven by the viewer during the course of a gripping story, but larger issues, like dialogue that’s inaudible due to unwanted background noise, may require re-recording. As a general rule, if the footage has a technical issue, but an actor produces a fine performance, it’s usually worth going the extra mile to salvage the shot and include it where at all possible.

Creating your cut

After you’ve had the chance to view all the rushes and complete the exercises from the book, you may begin to feel that there is an alternative way to tell this same story. Go ahead and create an alternative cut of the film, using the existing shots, along with some of the unused takes from the rushes. Rewatch the director’s version (Pranks Final Cut) included as a project on the DVD and substitute other shots or play with different shot lengths than those used in the final film. Notice how changing the duration of a clip in the Timeline affects the overall pace of the scene. When we cut to a medium shot, cut to a close-up, just to see what happens. Experimenting like this is a great way to learn.

Above all, have fun!