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November, 1947

Vol. XXVII, No. 12

# WRITER'S DIGEST MAGAZINE

RICHARD K. ABBOTT, Editor

IDA MASINI, Editorial Secretary

MINNA BARDON, ESTHER LAMB, LOUISE DREIFUS, Managing Editors

A. M. MATHIEU, Business Manager

## There's Money In Comics!

By STAN LEE

Editor and Art Director, *Timely Comics, Inc.*

WELL, what are you waiting for? They've been publishing comic magazines for more than 10 years. They've been buying scripts for these magazines from free-lance writers for that same length of time and paying good rates for them. There are 92 comic magazines appearing on the stands every single month—and each magazine uses an average of 5 stories. It's a big field, it's a well-paying field, and it's an interesting field. If you haven't tried to crack the comics yet, now's the time to start.

No matter what type of writing you specialize in—adventure, detective style, romantic stories, or humorous material, there is some comic magazine which uses the type of story you'd like to write. And, once you've broken into the field, you'll find that your assignments come to you at a fairly steady pace.

The pay is good. A competent writer can write about 10 pages a day for \$6 to \$9 per page, depending upon the strip he is writ-

ing and the quality of his material. So, this comic field certainly bears a pretty close scrutiny from any writer who's interested in receiving meaty checks, and in receiving them often. (And I've yet to see the writer who *isn't* interested!)

"But I'm not good at drawing! How can I work with an artist on a comic strip?" How often I've heard that said by writers!

Look! You don't have to be able to draw flies! You do need an imagination, and the ability to write snappy dialogue and to describe continuity. And what writer won't lay claim to *those* talents?

Comic strip writing is very comparable to radio writing, or to writing for the stage. The radio writer must describe sound effects in his script, and the playwright must give staging directions in his play. Well, the comic strip writer also gives directions for staging and sound effects in his script, but HIS directions are given in writing to the artist, rather than to a director. He must tell the artist what to draw, and

then must write the dialogue and captions.

A sample page from a script of "The Blonde Phantom" follows. This is an actual page, just as it was typed by Al Sulman, the writer. You will notice that the page is roughly divided into two sections, the left-hand section containing the instructions for the artist, and the right-hand section containing the dialogue. There are no set rules as to margins and borders, the important consideration being to make sure that the script is written clearly and can be easily understood by the editor and the artist.

The panel on facing page was artist Syd Shores' version of the instructions given to him by the author, Alan Sulman, whose play by play description of what to draw and what the characters are talking about, appears below.

Panel 1. Scene in office, as Louise clears up her desk. Mark faces her.

1. Louise: (thought) He never notices me! All he ever thinks of is the *Blonde Phantom*!

Panel 2. Louise, hands outward, looking at the reader, as if her thoughts in the previous panel were just proven true by what Mark has said.

Mark: Gosh, if I could only find where the *Blonde Phantom* lives! We could have a night of it together!

Panel 3. Louise, ready to leave office. Mark sits on desk and smiles at her as if he has just thought of a wonderful idea.

2. Louise: See what I mean?

3. Louise: Well, everything's finished for today, Mark! See you in the morning!

Panel 4. Louise alone, suddenly looking interested and excited, expecting Mark to ask her for a date.

Mark: Say, wait a minute, Louise! How would you like to . . . ?

Panel 5. Mark lights his pipe, expressionless, as if he has changed his mind. Louise seems plenty angry.

4. Louise: Huh? Yes, what is it, Mark?

5. Mark: Well, I . . . er . . . never mind! It wasn't important! Good night, Louise!

Panel 6. Door slams shut as Mark looks at it, slightly surprised and bewildered.

Louise: (thought) That's what I call a quick brushoff, you . . . you . . .

6. Ballon from Louise: *Good night!*

Mark: Huh? Now what's she so mad about?  
Sound effects: SLAM!

One interesting aspect of writing a comic strip is seeing how the artist finally interprets your script. Syd Shores used the above copy to draw one page for "Blonde Phantom Comics," issue #15. As you can see, the artist relied on the instructions that Alan Sulman typed on the left side of the script.

**B**UT there's more to comic strip writing than just knowing on which side of a page to type artist's instructions. Let's try to analyze some of the factors which go into the making of a good script:

1. *Interesting Beginning.* Just as in a story, the comic strip must catch the reader's



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- Mark: Gosh, if I could only find where the *Blonde Phantom* lives! We could have a night of it together!
- 2. Louise: See what I mean?
- 3. Louise: Well, everything's finished for today, Mark! See you in the morning!
- Mark: Say, wait a minute, Louise! How would you like to . . . ?
- 4. Louise: *Huh?* Yes, what is it, Mark?
- 5. Mark: Well, I . . . er . . . never mind! It wasn't important! Good night, Louise!
- Louise: (thought) That's what I call a quick brushoff, you . . . you . . .
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- Sound effects: **SLAM!**

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*Interesting Beginning.* Just as in a story, the comic strip must catch the reader's



interest from the first. The very first few panels should show the reader that something of interest is happening, or is about to happen.

2. *Smooth Continuity.* The action from panel to panel must be natural and unforced. If a character is walking on the street talking to another character in one panel, we wouldn't show him horse-back riding in the next panel with a different character. There ARE times when it is necessary to have a sudden change of scene or time, however, and for such times the writer uses captions. For example, if we have Patsy Walker lying in bed, about to fall asleep, in one panel, and want to show her eating breakfast in the next panel, the second panel would have an accompanying caption reading something like this: "The next morning, after a sound night's sleep, Patsy rushes to the kitchen to do justice to a hearty breakfast." Thus, by the use of captions, we are able to justify time and space lapses in our panels.
3. *Good Dialogue.* This is of prime importance. The era of Captain America hitting the Red Skull and shouting "So you want to play, eh?" is over! Today, with the comic magazine business being one of the most highly competitive fields, each editor tries to get the best and snappiest dialogue possible for his characters. In writing a comic strip, have your characters speak like real people, not like inhabitants of a strange and baffling new world!
4. *Suspense Throughout.* Whether you are writing a mystery script or a humorous script, the same rule applies: Keep it interesting throughout. Any comic strip in which the reader isn't particularly interested in what happens in the panel following the one he's reading, isn't a good comic strip. All of the tricks you have learned and applied in writing other forms of fiction can be used in comic writing insofar as holding the reader's attention is concerned. But remember, giving the reader well-drawn

pictures to look at is not enough; the reader must WANT to look at the pictures because he is interested in following the adventures of the lead character.

5. Finally, a *Satisfactory Ending.* An ending which leaves the reader with a smile on his lips and a pleasant feeling that all the loose strings of the story have been neatly tied together can cover a multitude of sins. It has always been my own conviction that a strip with an interesting beginning, good dialogue, and a satisfactory ending, can't be TOO bad, no matter how many other faults it may have.

One point which I can't stress too strongly is: DON'T WRITE DOWN TO YOUR READERS! It is common knowledge that a large portion of comic magazine readers are adults, and the rest of the readers who may be kids are generally pretty sharp characters. They are used to seeing movies and listening to radio shows and have a pretty good idea of the stories they want to read. If you figure that "anything goes" in a comic magazine, a study of any recent copy of *Daredevil Comics* or *Bat Man* will show you that a great deal of thought goes into every story; and there are plenty of gimmicks, sub-plots, human interest angles, and the other elements that go into the making of any type of good story, whether it be a comic strip or a novel.

Another important point to remember is: The only way you can learn about comics is by reading them. So far as I know, there are no schools which give specialized courses in comic strip writing and no books which can be of too much help to you. Constant reading of the various comic magazines is the only way to develop a "feel" for what constitutes a good comic strip.

Another consideration of prime importance is: Decide which comic magazine you want to write for *before you do any writing.* The various magazines in the field have editorial differences which are almost amazing. A story which Timely Comics would consider exciting might be deemed



"Miss Balting,

too fantastic by True Comics, Inc., Classic Comics, Inc., would have very use for the type of story preferred at F House! Each comic publishing com has its own distinctive formula and the way to really grasp this formula is to the magazines.

**M**OST everybody knows something about the organization and workings of an ordinary fiction publishing company. To most people, writers included, a comic magazine publishing outfit is cloaked in mystery. Let me tell you a little about how a comic house operates so that you'll have a better general knowledge about this but comparatively unknown field.

The guy you're most interested in is the editor of the comic publishing house. "How does he differ from editors of other magazines?" Here's how: The editor of a comic magazine is more of a coordinator. He doesn't only consider the merits of a script, but also who is going to draw it and who



quaint yourself with the style of art work which is used in the script you are interested in writing. And then slant your story in such a way so that particular style of art work will blend in perfectly with your story. The writers who concentrate on such details are the ones who attain top recognition and top rates in the phenomenal comics field.

**N**OW then, here you are, a fairly accomplished writer interested in trying your hand at the comics. What type of writing is your forte? Is it adventure, teen-age humor, fantasy, true crime? At the close of this article you will find a list of comic publishers and the type of material they buy. Just select your favorite from this list. Let's assume you prefer teen-age humor and you have decided to cast your lot with Timely Comics. The next step is to write to the editor and get a list of the teen-age magazines he edits and, if possible, his story needs. After receiving the list of magazines he sends you, head for the nearest newsstand and look them over. Select the one which appeals most to you and for which you think your style is best suited.

But up till this point your preliminary work is just beginning. You've now got to read every copy of this magazine you can lay your hands on. Suppose "Georgie" is the magazine you selected. Get old copies of "Georgie," get current copies of "Georgie" and leave an order for future copies. Read that strip until you can feel you've known Georgie personally for years, and can anticipate what each Georgie story will be about after reading the first page. Live with Georgie for days—get the "Georgie" formula down pat—and then—

Send some synopses of "Georgie" stories to the editor. Make them the same type of stories which had been appearing in all the "Georgies" you read. *Not* the same PLOT, just the same TYPE of story.

Should your synopses click, you'll get an order for a "Georgie" story from the editor. He will tell you how many panels to write per page, how many pages in length to make the story, and any other relevant information.

Now it's up to you. If you write a perfectly satisfactory story (and there's no reason not to, if you're studied the magazines long and carefully enough) there's an excellent chance you'll be asked to do more stories on the same character—and later on, perhaps, additional stories for still other characters. For once you're "in," there are many assignments which can come your way.

So, those of you writers who are itching to crack new markets have a market waiting for you which is just made to order. It may seem a little complicated, but the rewards are well worth any time you may spend learning the comic style. I'm sure you won't regret spending the time—I didn't!

### Comic Magazine Market

**NOTE:** Write to the Editor to get his exact requirements and further details, before working on any scripts!

**ARCHIE COMIC PUBLICATIONS, INC.,** 241 Church Street, New York, N. Y.: Harry Shorten, Ed. Specialize in humor and teen-age. Six to 10 pages per story, some three-page fillers. About six panels per page. Rates vary depending on writer and feature.

**CLASSIC COMICS,** 510 6th Avenue, New York, N. Y.: Harry Adler, Ed. Uses one condensation per month of a classic, such as "David Copperfield," "Moby Dick," "Les Miserables," etc. Back page of the magazine lists all titles previously used. Runs 53 pages to the story. All scripts are free lance. Pays \$125 per story.

**DELL PUBLISHING CO., INC.,** 149 Madison Avenue, New York, N. Y.: Oscar Lebeck, Ed. Work directly with writers and buy nothing on the open market.

**EDUCATIONAL COMICS, INC.,** 225 Lafayette Street, New York, N. Y.: Ivan Clapper, Ed. Four magazines in educational group: American history, science, world history, and the Bible. Regular comics: animation, crime, adventure, family, magic, fantasy, western. Six to



*The contract has not  
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**THE COMIC PUBLICATIONS,**  
241 Church Street, New York, N.  
Harry Shorten, Ed. Specialize in  
or and teen-age. Six to 10 pages per  
some three-page fillers. About six  
s per page. Rates vary depending  
riter and feature.

**DC COMICS,** 510 6th Avenue, New  
N. Y.: Harry Adler, Ed. Uses one  
ensation per month of a classic, such  
David Copperfield," "Moby Dick,"  
Miserables," etc. Back page of the  
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*He considered his situation to run outside  
without the ~~and~~ considered that his duty  
lay in carrying on in another nation*

12 pages per story; approximately seven panels per page. Scripts bring \$5 to \$10; art, \$20 to \$30 per page.

**FAWCETT PUBLICATIONS, INC.**, 67 West 44th Street, New York, N. Y.: Will Lieberman, Ed. Buy practically everything on the open market. Use adventure, humor, western, fantasy, teen-age, and jungle comics. About \$7 per page, about 8 pages per story. Are overstocked now.

**FICTION HOUSE, INC.**, 670 Fifth Ave., New York, N. Y.: Jack Byrne, Ed. All scripts are staff written.

**LEV GLEASON PUBLICATIONS, INC.**, 114 East 32nd Street, New York, N. Y.: Bob Wood, Ed. True crime needed. Stocked on all other material. Five to eight pages per story, about eight panels per page. Average rate of payment \$5 and up.

**HARVEY PUBLICATIONS, INC.**, 1860 Broadway, New York, N. Y.: Leon Harvey, Ed. Teen-age, adventure, animated, detective, western. Number of pages vary. Rates vary with writer.

**HILLMAN PERIODICALS, INC.**, 535 Fifth Avenue, New York, N. Y.: Ed Cronin, Ed. Buying only true crime on the open market. Six and seven pages to the story. Rates vary.

**NATIONAL COMICS PUBLICATIONS, INC.**, 480 Lexington Avenue, New York, N. Y.: Whit Ellsworth, Ed. Very light requirements at present. Only interested in working personally with writers.

**PARENTS' MAGAZINE**, 52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, N. Y.: Eliot Kaplan, Ed. Educational, adventure, true historical, current events, teen-age. All magazines slanted toward specific age groups: four to eight, eight to twelve,

and nine to sixteen. Five or six pages per story. \$6.00 per page, with extra for research.

**STANDARD PUBLICATIONS**, 10 East 40th Street, New York, N. Y.: Joseph Greene, Ed. Humor, animated, fantasy, jungle, detective. Seven to 12 pages, about six panels per page. Pays about \$5 to \$9 per page, depending on writer and feature.

**PREMIUM SERVICE CO., INC.**, 119 West 19th Street, New York, N. Y.: Robert D. Wheeler, Ed. Would like writers experienced in comic book technique to submit samples. Adventure, detective adventure are the best bets. \$5 and up.

**QUALITY COMIC GROUP**, 25 West 45th Street, New York, N. Y.: George Brenner, Ed. Buy very little free-lance work. Prefer to have synopses submitted.

**STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATIONS, INC.**, 153 West 15th Street, New York, N.Y.: William De Grouchy, Ed. Teen-age, fantasy, and detective. Also have an All-Sport Comic which uses true human interest stories of sports figures and how-to-do-it stories. About eight pages per story, 14 pages for the lead story, with four to six panels per page, paying up to \$10.

**TIMELY COMICS, INC.**, 350 Fifth Ave., New York, 1, N. Y.: Stan Lee, Ed. Adventure, teen-humor, and true crime. Quiz Dave Berg, Script Ed., on his exact needs before submitting.

**A. A. WYN**, 23 West 47th Street, New York, N. Y.: Fredrick Gardener, Ed. Teen-age, adventure, fantasy, detective. Seven to 10 pages per story, six to seven panels per page. Rates vary.

## How To Make

By WILL

**I**T ISN'T literature — this business of writing for the movie fan magazine — but it's a living.

Your audience will consist, mainly, of a hair-dryer set and young girls who swoon over Sinatra and gush over Gene Kelly. Those who read *The Atlantic* won't read your by-line and you'll necessarily be reconciled to "I read an article of yours in the beauty parlor." But, it's possible to wangle \$100 a week, every week, via the fan-book route.

Strangely enough, almost all such magazines have their editorial offices in New York City, a mere 3000 miles from Hollywood, film capitol. Probably because New York is a publishing center, because these magazines usually turn out other types of books well, and because everything even remotely connected with the movie game is necessarily a bit daffy.

As to getting hold of the gilded stars, they all land in New York, eventually. Usually on vacation and in a genial mood, ready to be interviewed by all and sundry. This, of course, only holds good if the studio is financing their stay. When the Warner Bros. is paying for Joe McBlow's \$100 a day suite at the Plaza, Joe is interviewed all day long. When Joe sneaks into the city on his own, he even hides from the Brokers of Warner—until it's time to head for the Stork.

If you're an enterprising writer, you can subscribe to the Celebrity Service (don't list it), which says who's in town and who's out. If you're fairly well established, however, you can simply wait for one of the editors to call and order a piece on so-and-so. Usually the studio press agent has already previously sold the editor on the star and made all arrangements for you to see