

ALEX TOTH'S RULES FOR MAKING COMICS

- Eliminate the superfluous, the unnecessary. Be lazy!
- Edit your art continuously, at every stage. Save work!
- Focus on the remaining (important) picture elements.
- Emphasize what is important in a scene. Save drawing!
- Isolate such key elements (as one does in a view finder).
- Closeups only when needed: face(s)-for mood and expression, and objects-small, difficult to distinguish in other ways.
- To set a scene, a place, to establish a locale, etc., go to a wide shot, angles okay (down/up, etc.)-but again, simply!
- Then, cut to tighter shots-pace them, for interest, etc....(wide/one shot/two shot/group/close-up/tight close-up).
- Establish light source, if need be, for dramatic mood and for blacks, drop shadows, etc., on figures & objects and walks, as correctly placed as you can make 'em!
- Eliminate such light/shadow work in other shots.
- Simplify, simplify, simplify, throughout!
- Remember, some scenes will and must be pedestrian, unimportant, and dull- because they are "bridges" between key storytelling scenes. As in any story telling form, movies, TV, books, plays, music, opera, painting, etc., you *can't* knock 'em dead with *every* shot. Remember, this is what gives pace to a story, visual commas and periods in a pictorial "paragraph" or "sentence"! These are the resting places in an otherwise moving storm! *Use* them! Without fear!
- Some such "rests" or "pauses" can be heightened in pictorial interest by way of a pretty scene of quiet mood-if your locale allows! Don't stretch logic to do it!
- By learning to eliminate unnecessary objects, figures, and background, etc., you can focus on what is left to draw in the shot-and draw it well enough to "carry" the shot!
- In other words: strip it all down to essentials and draw the hell out of what is left!
- All of this advice is based on Roy Crane's critiques of *my* work-and he is absolutely correct, on *all* points!
- In the *Wash Tubbs* and *Captain Easy* strips and in *Buz Sawyer*, with Sundays focused on pal Roscoe Sweeny, his work of fifty-odd years demonstrates its validity! in his work, as in no other of his contemporaries' offerings, you will find an extraordinary sense of balance, in his design of space within a panel frame, a strip, or a page! His simplicity allows us to see the use of shapes within his pictures, how they create tension, action or repose...clearly!
- He avoided confusing details!
- To quote something just read: "To *add* to *truth* only *subtracts* from it!!! (Isn't that beautifully put?)
- Authentic devices, objects, machines, locales, furniture, buildings, etc....to lend credibility!
- As Sickles put it: "Understand how a thing is built and you'll have no trouble drawing it through!"
- Spend more time *thinking*-about what and what *not* to draw, and *how*-and you'll do *less drawing*!
- *Pre-plan, pre-think*...Thus, save work and time!

- But whatever you do, do it well!
- Tell the story as best you can! Bend to that storm!
- Be honest to it. Give it all you've got! Enhance it!
- Study films, photographs, paintings, etc. for composition! For cutting, cropping out of nonessentials, pacing, punch, economy, forceful and direct impact. But also for beauty and subtlety-tension, suspense, action, humor, light and dark, balance, line vs. mass, ad infinitum! *Use it all!*
- Analyze everything you see-be critical! Positively so!
- See - Observe - Remember! Build up your memory file!
- Good luck

Forget technique, tricks, cheating, faking and concentrate on how to tell a story as it should be told! Clarify! Reveal! Don't conceal! Don't confuse! Show! Explain! Simplify! Economize! Open up areas! Don't clutter! And for God's sake, if you don't know about a subject you must draw, then find out! You'll learn! So will your readers! Once drawn, you'll keep memory of it – so years later, you'll recall it, if need be – photos help document/authenticate subjects, people, places, things and we're swarming with sources for such info – there's no excuse for not using it – camels and palm trees and 'copters and deserts and costumes are infinitely varied – their differing types provide you with pictorial fun and interest – ditto your readers! USE it! Learn!

Think! Think! Think!

Before you draw, while you draw – and AFTER – and REDRAW, if it doesn't work – be honest with yourself! And your readers! Stop faking! You don't know enough to do it well, so don't! Learn! See! Observe!

I'm old fashioned, but I don't comprehend your (and too many other young cartoonists') disdain for designing all your captions and dialogue balloons' exact shape/size/positions in every panel and page – and CLEARLY penciling in legible readable copy!?

I always did, and DO – as did most of my generation of crocks! You're missing half the fun (and ALL of the responsibility!) by throwing that part of your job away, too! Copy, in strips, as in all graphic/aural media, is of vital importance, and part of overall design! It CONTROLS your readers' eye flow, through your panels, up, down, around and pages! Why fob it off on a letterer who'll care less, know less, about such vital components and who may just mess it up more? I don't get it!

The logo (title) placement's very important, too, and if you're given a 'Jonny Quest' stat for paste-up, or design your own, plus the story (episode) title, that's YOUR job!

You've played fast and loose with this too! Disappointing! You don't care!
Or do you?

As it is, I don't see our title here 'Jonny Quest' in all of this splash page – just the back view of a kid who might be him, unimportantly sized and positioned and posed – for a first-time reader to see this page, he'd wonder which character was the hero?

You give more importance to an incidental character in Panel 2, than Jonny in the splash? Why? And who's the guy in the background? Study staging, in films/TV and YES, the stage!
And remember!

And Keep Doing This All Your Productive Life!

Always be a STUDENT! A scholar! Admitting to how little you know, how much there's still left to learn, is your KEY to learning! For a lifetime!

Study everything! Be curious/interested/in everything, you may have to draw it someday! You can't draw something credibly until/unless you do/can understand it! And vice versa!

Comic books print the WORST just art! 99% of it is cheap, vulgar, ignorant, ugly, senseless fakery and trickery of characterless hue – if that's ALL you want, just do what you're doing – you'll be a mite better than the REST, but that won't be much!

Your growth is in your hands, not mine!

I hate giving critiques – an emotional drain! They anger me! And those I critique! Like you! If you're angry – don't waste it on me! Be angry with YOU! YOU are in YOUR OWN HANDS, like clay waiting to be formed – you must ALWAYS be your OWN best teacher! Not me! I refuse that – unless I hold classes! No old pro, no teacher, no school, no book, no how-to film/cassette will EVER teach YOU as well as you can and must. But they help you to think!

To DO that, you must be AWARE! Not smug, or complacent, or cocky, or relaxed about how good you are! You've used 10% of your THINKING skills thus far – you've got 90% left! For the rest of your career and life! HOW MUCH of it will you USE?

Forget all the fandom bullshit and kudos and hype and convention groupies' adulation – and be true to yourself and your long road ahead to the top, or to wherever you want to go – and don't let ego stop you from LEARNING to do BETTER, BEST!

That's all, kiddo! Study our old masters of art, sculpture, illustration, strips, film, of the last 100 years and beyond, here and abroad!

– Alex Toth