

CAREER JOURNAL

Pay Grade | *At the Drawing Board*

■ **The job:** Comic-book artist.

■ **The pay:** Most comics illustrators are free-lancers who are typically paid \$100 to \$300 a page. Professionals with high stature in the industry may command three times that. Some established artists are employed on a contract basis for long-term projects and earn fees determined on an individual basis.

■ **The hours:** Most free-lance and contract artists set their own schedules. Mike Mignola, creator of "Hellboy," a comic published by Dark Horse Comics Inc., says he works seven days a week from a home studio in southern California. He's usually at the drawing board from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., but he says he takes breaks throughout the day.

■ **Benefits:** Self-employed artists pay their own health-care costs. Contract

professionals commonly get benefit packages.

■ **Other incentives:** Established artists are often expected to sign copies of their books for fans at retail shops and industry conventions, usually traveling on their publishers' tabs. "I've probably flown to do signings within every major city in the U.S.," says Dave Dorman, a freelance artist in Geneva, Ill., whose licensed work includes illustrations for "Star Wars," "Aliens," "Indiana Jones" and "Batman." Some artists have had opportunities to meet the artists they admired as youngsters.

■ **Career path:** Many comic-book artists start out as pencilers, inkers or colorists, while others juggle all three jobs. Some professionals stay in those roles



Denise Dorman/Dark Horse Comics Inc.

Dave Dorman works at his home studio.

throughout their careers. Artists may also work their way into the industry by gaining experience in related fields like advertising and graphic design. A common goal for most professionals is to sell their own line of comics by striking deals with publishers.

■ **Best part of the job:** "You take a blank sheet of paper in the morning, and by the end of the day you've possibly created a whole world," says Lou Manna, a free-lance artist in Staten Island, N.Y., who is illustrating "Soul Arch Saints," a graphic novel to be published this spring by Williams Entertainment Group LLC. Tom Mandrake, an inker and penciler in Randolph, N.J., adds, "You become very famous in a very small market. It's great to go to a convention and hear people say they've been reading your comics their whole life."

■ **Worst part of the job:** "There are those days when the ideas just aren't there," says Jan Duursema, a freelance artist who pencils such comics as "Star Wars Legacy" and is married to Mr. Mandrake. Adds Mr. Dorman: "I'm always working under the

gun to get pieces done to my satisfaction."

■ **Hiring:** Experienced artists say networking is critical. Industry conventions are common targets for building relationships with publishers and scoring impromptu job interviews. Simon Winheld, 24 years old, who graduated from Pratt Institute in December, attended the second annual New York Comic Con last month with his portfolio in tow. "Some people expressed interest in my work," he says. "I have one definite lead and two others that seem promising." Several industry Web sites, including DigitalWebbing.com, list job opportunities for comic-book artists. So do job boards that cater to creative professionals such as Coroflot.com.

—Sarah E. Needleman