

## Lunch Money

Standing in the cafeteria line, Greg opened his red plastic pencil case. He counted once, and then he counted again, just to be sure. Then he grinned. There were thirteen left. Sweet! That means I sold seventeen units. That's what Greg called the comic books he'd been selling—units. And selling seventeen units before lunch was a new sales record. Greg's comic books weren't the kind for sale at stores. Regular comic books were sort of tall. Also a little floppy. Not Greg's. Greg's comic books were about the size of a credit card, and they could stand up on one end all by themselves. They were only sixteen pages long, and he could fit about fifty of them into his pencil case. These comic books were short and sturdy. And that's why they were called Chunky Comics. Greg loved that name. He had chosen it himself. He got to pick the name because he was the author of all the Chunky Comics stories. He had drawn all the pictures too. And he was also the designer, the printer, and the binder. Plus he was the marketing manager, the advertising director, and the entire sales force. Chunky Comics was a one-kid operation, and that one kid was Greg Kenton. Greg snapped the pencil case shut and grabbed a tray. He took a grilled cheese sandwich, a cup of carrot sticks, and then looked over the fruit cocktail bowls until he found one with three chunks of cherry. He got a chocolate milk from the cooler, and as he walked toward his seat, Greg did some mental math.

Monday, the first day Chunky Comics had gone on sale, he had sold twelve units; Tuesday, fifteen units; Wednesday, eighteen units; and today, Thursday, he had already sold seventeen units—before lunch. So that was . . . sixty-two units since Monday morning, and each little book sold for \$.25. So the up-to-the-minute sales total for September 12 was . . . \$15.50.

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Greg knew why sales were increasing: word of mouth. Kids had been telling other kids about his comic book. The cover illustration was powerful, the inside pictures were strong, and the story was loaded with action. The title was Creon: Return of the Hunter, and it was volume 1,

number 1, the very first of the Chunky Comics. So that made it a collector's item. Greg sat down at his regular lunch table, next to Ted Kendall. Ted nodded and said, "Hi," but Greg didn't hear him. Greg picked up his sandwich and took a big bite. He chewed the warm bread and the soft cheese, but he didn't taste a thing. Greg was still thinking about sales. Fifteen fifty in three and a half days—not so hot. Greg had set a sales goal for the first week: twenty-five dollars—which meant that he had to sell one hundred units. It looked like he was going to fall short.

The idea of making and selling comic books had hit Greg like a over the head from Superman himself. It made perfect sense. Candy and gum were against school rules, and tiny toys were boring—and also against the rules. But how could he go wrong selling little books? School was all about books and reading. True, reading a comic book wasn't exactly the same as reading a regular book, but still, there was a rack of comics right in the kids' section at the public library downtown, and some new graphic novels, too. Comic books had been part of Greg's life forever, mostly because of his dad's collection. His dad's collection filled three shelves in the family room—and it was worth over ten thousand dollars. Once Greg had shown he knew how to take care of the comic books, he had been allowed to read and look at them all he wanted. Greg had even bought a few collectible comics of his own, mostly newer ones that weren't very expensive.

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It was his love of comic books that had first gotten Greg interested in drawing. Comics had led Greg to books like *How to Draw Comic Book Villains*, *You Can Draw Superheroes*, *Make Your Own Comic-Book Art*, and *Draw the Monsters We Love to Hate*. Back in third grade Greg had used his own money to buy india ink, dip pens, brushes, and paper at the art supply store. And drawing new comic-book characters was one of his favorite things to do—when he

wasn't earning money.

That whole summer before sixth grade Greg had worked toward the launch of Chunky Comics. From the start he had felt pretty sure he could come up with a story idea, and he knew he would be able to do the drawings.

But first he'd had to deal with a lot of hows: How does a whole comic book get put together? How big should each be? How was he going to print them? How much would it cost him to make each one? And finally, how much money should he charge for his finished comic books—assuming he could actually make some?

But one by one, Greg had found the answers. An encyclopedia article about printing books had helped a lot. It showed how pages of a book start as one large sheet of paper that gets folded in half several times. Each time the sheet is folded, the number of pages is doubled. So Greg took a piece of regular letter-size paper, and folded it in half three times the way it showed in the encyclopedia.

That one piece of paper turned into a chunky little sixteen-page book—Chunky Comics. It was so simple.

But not really. Greg figured out that making

Little comic books were a ten-step process.

5. Using a copier, print the images

from “master copy one” onto one

side of a “press sheet”—a piece of

regular letter-size paper.

6. Print “master copy two” onto

the flip side of the press sheet—

making eight page images on the

front, and eight on the back.

7. Carefully fold the press sheet with

the sixteen copied minipages on it.

8. Put in two staples along the crease

at the very center of the little

book—between pages 8 and 9.

9. Trim the three unstapled edges—

and that makes one finished

mini-comic book.

10. Repeat. And each of the ten steps had

to be done perfectly, or no one would ever want to spend

money on his little comics