

# So You'd Like to Write for the MOVIES?



While filmland rejects the work of everyone who is not an established author, Frieda Inescort, Warner Brothers featured player, who started as a publicity writer, still hopes to write for the movies.

By Paul Harrison

HOLLYWOOD.

ONE of the maddest things about Hollywood is its paradoxical attitude toward stories.

The movies are rather desperately in need of stories. Every conference table is a wailing-wall for harassed executives who moan about the dearth of fresh material and imaginative talent.

Yet the studios will make no voluntary move toward the discovery of new writers, and every day bales of manuscripts are returned unopened to their disappointed senders. This is done firmly but reluctantly, for everybody knows that among those unseen rejections are stories which the movies would like to have.

Trouble is that the industry has grown skittish about plagiarism suits. To protect itself against a few unscrupulous persons it has adopted the harsh measure of rejecting everything from outsiders.

How, then, ask thousands of amateurs and semi-pros, can a person learn to write scenarios? And having learned, how can he win any consideration?

Well, the first question is tough enough, but it takes on the flavor of duck soup when served with the latter problem. Studio executives themselves say that although you may have an absolutely terrific story worthy of an utterly colossal production with a positively magnificent galaxy of stars, your chances of getting anybody to glance at same are slight if not hopelessly negligible.

However, as in practically everything connected with Hollywood, there are "angles." An angle is an indirect route of approach to an objective. Just as many film players arrived in Hollywood by first going to New York to be discovered, so most of the 700-odd writers in Hollywood got their jobs by round-about means.

CONSIDER Miss Bradley King, from whom later in this article you will hear some counsel about preparation and presentation of stories. She is a good source of information because she has been here 15 years, has worked for all the major studios, has written and adapted scores of screen stories, and has aided many another author. She knows all the angles.

Miss King broke into the movies with less difficulty than most have. She sold four or five short stories to cheap pulp-



The more luxurious studio offices are full of people who once tried to crash Hollywood but were met with chilly indifference. In despair they then went to New York and wrote plays. As soon as the plays were produced they were bought for fantastic sums by movie companies, which also held out fancy contracts to the authors.

Lillian Hellman actually was a reader in a movie studio story department three years ago, at \$40 a week, but they wouldn't let her write. So she quit, penned and sold "The Children's Hour" as a play, and a year ago returned to Hollywood at a salary of \$2000 a week. Norman Krasna was a second string press agent in one of the big studios

is established at Warner Brothers as a featured player. She plans to write for the screen. Helen Valkis, a new leading woman at the same studio, has composed a lot of poetry and had it published. She expects to do scenarios.

Errol Flynn lately has been crashing some of the national magazines, and will star in an original story, "The White Rajah," which he wrote for the movies. Hugh Herbert has made almost as much money from writing as he has from being a comedian. Jeanie MacPherson, under writing contract to Paramount, used to be an actress. And Virginia Van Upp, former child star, now is one of the better-known scenarists, with a score of 18 picture credits. Mae West has furthered her career by revising the scripts of her pictures.

"The easiest and surest way for a writer to bring his stuff to the attention of all the studios is to get it printed," says Bradley King. "Get it printed anywhere. There are hundreds of magazines, and some of 'em will accept almost anything. But the studios read them all."

Miss King might have pointed out the example set by Darryl Zanuck, vice president and dynamo-in-chief of 20th



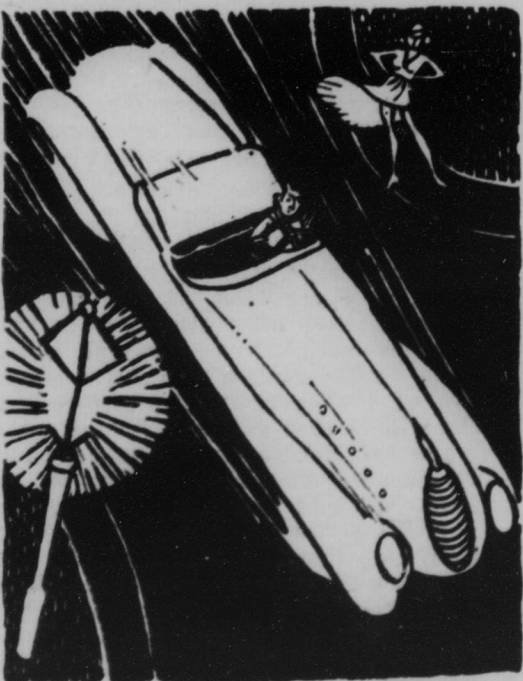
Thomas Ince gave Bradley King, above, a job at \$50 a week. Within five years her pay had risen to \$1500 a week.



Golda Draper became a waitress after having been turned down as a scenario writer. A customer shot her—and while she was in the hospital she wrote a screen story and sold it.

paper magazines. The yarns were bought for films. She went to see Thomas Ince. He said, "I've read some of your stuff and I think your literary style is absolutely lousy. But you've got a good sense of drama, and I'll give you \$50 a week."

That was in the days when screen scribblers were just breaking into the upper income brackets. Five years later Miss King's weekly wage was \$1500, and she hasn't faltered since.



Norman Krasna, studio press agent, had to sell a play in New York before he could interest Hollywood. Now he drives an expensive car and collects \$1700 paychecks.

several years ago, and they wouldn't let him write, either. But he filched a little time here and there, and wrote a comedy called "Louder, Please." Nobody in Hollywood would even read it. Krasna took it to New York, where it was produced and became a hit. The young man—he is only 26 now—is back in Hollywood riding around in a Rolls-Royce and collecting \$1700 pay checks.

Then there was the girl named Golda Draper, who came to Hollywood in search of a scenario job, but who finally took a position as waitress in a cafe. One night a customer shot her. It was a little matter of jealousy or insanity or something—no reflection, at any rate, on her ability as a waitress. But it turned out rather fortunately. While she was in the hospital she wrote a screen yarn, "Night Waitress," and sold it.

WRITING seems to be perfectly compatible with acting, and there are some who have become actors first and writers afterward.

Frieda Inescort tried publicity work, magazine editing, stage acting and now



Virginia Van Upp, former child star, now is one of filmland's most successful scenarists.

Century-Fox. It's a model of ingenuity.

Thirteen years ago, when he was 21, Zanuck was an unsuccessful author. He decided that the studios wouldn't buy his stories because he never had written a book. And so he wrote a book, wrote it in two weeks. Two of the four stories in it were remade from rejected scenarios, and one was a disguised piece of promotion for a hair tonic.

A job printer got out the book and the hair tonic manufacturer paid the bill. Zanuck took a copy, went around to the studios again, and peddled the four stories for a total of \$12,000. He also got a contract with Fox.

"Literary agents have entree to the studios," Miss King resumed. "But not every beginning writer can find an agent who is willing to handle his work. However, there are agents' representatives in all the larger cities, and it's probably easier to interest them than it is to appeal directly to a studio."

One of the colony's chorus girls, Muriel Scheck, is also a writer. For three years, during idle periods, she has been tapping out scenarios. Most of them weren't any good, but finally she hit on a plot that sounded promising. She showed it to all the minor executives who were willing to read it. Some of them put in a favorable word to higher-ups.

Result: RKO bought the yarn. It was "The Smartest Girl in Town," and recently starred Gene Raymond.