

THE GHOST WHO WALKS

80th Anniversary of Phantom

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This year marks the 80th anniversary of "The Phantom", also known as "The Ghost Who Walks". I was introduced to The Phantom via its Indian print of "Aranya Deb", published by Indrajal Comics, and was instantly hooked.

The first daily newspaper strip of The Phantom came out on February 17, 1936. At its peak, in 1966, The Phantom was simultaneously published in 583 daily newspapers worldwide and it was read by more than 100 million people daily. This is one heck of a record that probably will never be broken.

The Phantom was created by Lee Falk (who was also the creator of Mandrake), and he was encouraged by King Features Syndicate. The Phantom was the first comic hero to wear the skintight costume, and also the first to wear a mask with no pupils. In a way, The Phantom set standards for many modern day superheroes. The first story of The Phantom was titled "The Singh Brotherhood".

Lee Falk worked on scripting The Phantom stories until his demise in 1999. Even when he was terminally ill, and in hospital bed, he kept working on The Phantom scripts. He was on oxygen mask but he pulled the mask off to dictate Phantom storylines to his wife (Elizabeth), and she wrote it down. Falk finished two daily strip stories, "Terror at the Opera" and "The Kidnappers", in this way.

After Falk's demise (also during his lifetime as well), various other writers and artists have worked on The Phantom, and came up with original stories. The licensing rights are held by King Feature Syndicate, and till today they are publishing daily newspaper strips; which are written by Tony DePaul, with art by Paul Ryan and Terry Beatty. This is probably the longest running comics book/pulp hero story of all time.

Now let's take a look into the major publications of The Phantom. The first attempt to collect the "daily comic strip stories" was done by Whitman Publishing Company, and stories were collected under the series "Big Little Books". The first Big Little Book with The Phantom was published in 1936, and the last in 1947.

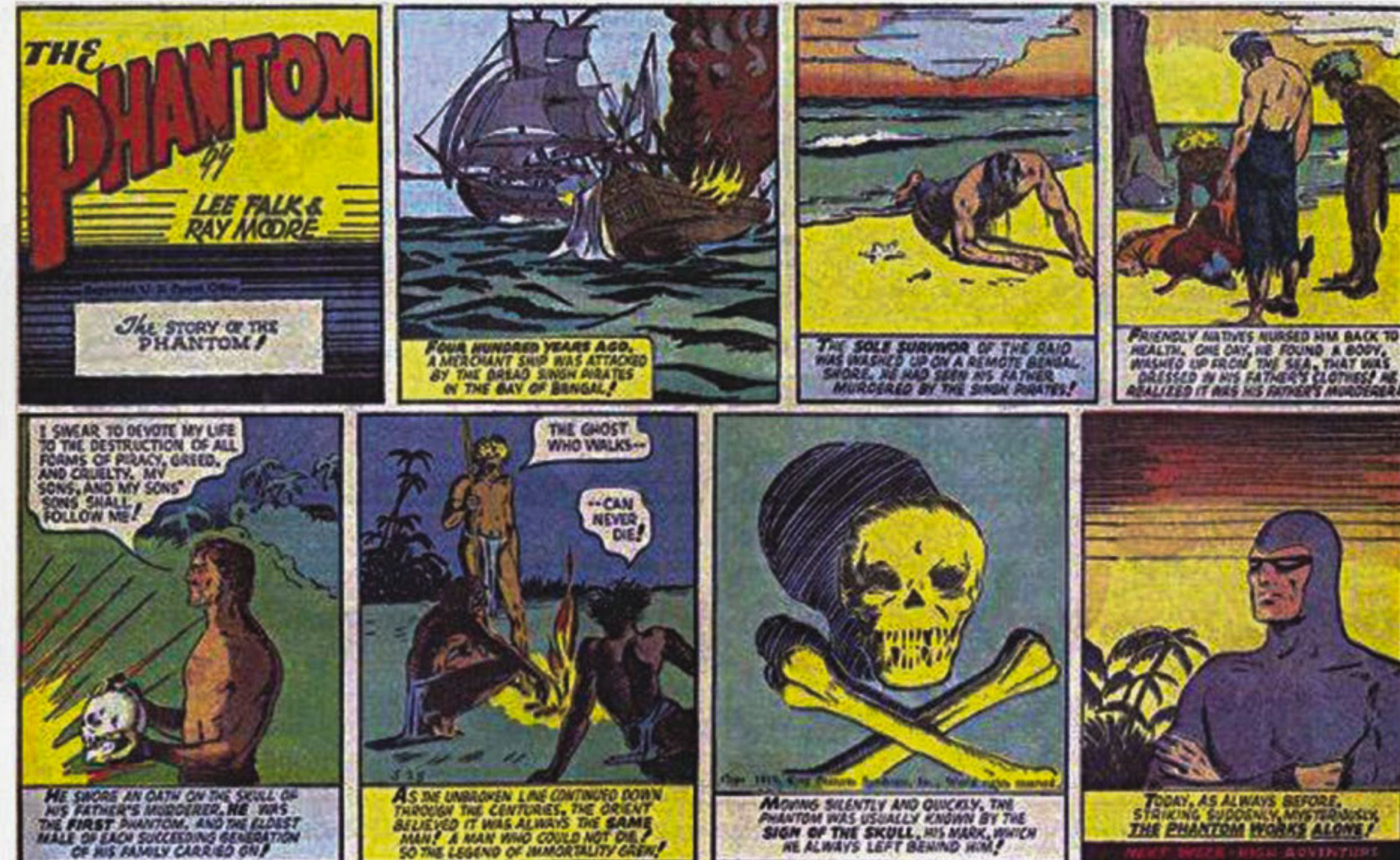
The Phantom got his own comic book series first in 1962. Gold Key Comics launched the title (The Phantom), and it



Lee Falk

ran for 17 issues. Then King Comics took over the license in 1966, continuing the numbering to publish 18 to 28. Then in 1969 came Charlton Comics, and they printed 29 to 74 of this volume. So together, these three publishers brought out the first volume of The Phantom from 1962 to 1977.

In 1987,



Marvel Comics did a Phantom mini-series based on the Defenders of the Earth TV series (written by the legendary Stan Lee). Only four issues were published. Then Marvel discontinued. In 1988, DC Comics published a 4-issues Phantom mini-series; followed by a regular series having 13 issues. This series was cancelled in late 1990, due to declining sales and licensing issues.

Then Marvel came back again with a three issues mini-series in 1994-1995. This series explored a more futuristic, high-tech version of the Phantom (apparently the 22nd Phantom). Also in 1995, Marvel released a 4-part mini-series based on the Phantom 2040 TV series, penciled by the legendary Steve Ditko (co-creator of Spider-Man). This series told the stories of the 24th

Phantom, set in the backdrop of Metropia City, in the year 2040.

In 2002, Moonstone Books (USA) began publishing original graphic novels based on The Phantom. They published 5 graphic novels from 2002 to 2003. In December 2003, they launched a new comic series of 26 issues. It ended in January 2009. After that, Moonstone Books brought out a new series titled "The Phantom: Ghost Who Walks", having 12 issues, and ending in September 2010. Then Dynamite Entertainment took over the license and started publishing a new title: "The Last Phantom". It started in 2010 and ran until 2012.

After 2012, Dynamite Entertainment continued their featuring of Phantom through three short comics series, named: "Kings Watch" (5 issues team-up series), "King-The Phantom" (4 issues), and "Kings Quest" (5 issues team-up series). The team-ups featured The Phantom, Mandrake, Flash Gordon, Prince Valiant, and Jungle Jim. This ends in September 2016.

The entire run of the Phantom newspaper strip, up to and beyond the death of creator Lee Falk, has been reprinted in Australia by Frew Publications (love to Frew Publications for that!). They have started printing from 1948, and they also produce original stories. Today the number of issues published by Frew Publications stands at a whopping 1700+ issues! And they are continuing till date.

The Phantom has a long publishing history in India. The Phantom first appeared in India in the 1940s via a magazine named "The Illustrated Weekly of India". Indrajal Comics took up publication of Phantom comics in English and other Indian languages in 1964. They ceased publication in 1990. The same year Diamond Comics started publishing Phantom comics in digest form, again in many languages including English. This continued until 2000. Then Diamond Comics stopped publishing Phantom comics and Egmont Imagination India took up publication in the same year. They published monthly comics (in English only) until 2002.

So, that is all for now. This is just a small tribute to the "Ghost Who Walks". If it can inspire even one new reader to try out The Phantom, then I would feel my effort contributed something to his lore. So readers, after putting down this article, please do pick up a Phantom comics issue and read it. Happy Reading!

For a more detailed listing of the publications, visit: <http://leo19th.blogspot.com/>

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