
CONVERSATION WITH LEE FALK

While still an undergraduate in the Midwest, Lee Falk invented Mandrake the Magician, the first black and white crime-fighting team. He created The Phantom, the first superhero in tights, within two years of graduation. Falk's other consuming passion was theater, which he indulged by owning and operating several playhouses, where he often filled the roles of producer and/or director.

Raymond Elman: You've written several plays, owned a number of theaters, and produced many significant theater pieces. Was your theater life a whole separate existence from your comic strip world?

Lee Falk: My ambition when I was a young man was to be a playwright. I wrote plays and acted while I was in college, though I was never comfortable on the stage. When I went to New York to try and sell *Mandrake*, I also brought a satire about capital and labor, called the *Catatonics*, and some short stories I'd written. I thought whatever sells, that's what I'll do. Clifford Odets, who was about 30 at the time, had a hit play on Broadway, and I secretly said to myself that I would have a hit play on Broadway by the time I was 30—it almost came true.

I submitted my short stories to an agent,

a rather ungracious young man, who talked like he had mashed potatoes in his mouth—very Eastern Establishment. He said, "These little midwest kind of stories are very boring. I don't think you should try to write." About five years later I was sailing back from Europe on the *Isle de France*. By that time I had two strips going, I had started a theater, I had a beautiful young wife, and for a young man I was very successful. The jerk who had turned down my "little midwest stories" was on the boat. He said, "I'm writing some stories, I wish you'd tell me what you think about them." I read them. They were terrible—I mean awful.

RE: Just a few years after coming to New York, you started a summer theater in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Why Cambridge?

LF: John Huntington, who eventually

became my partner, was a Harvard graduate, and he knew about a theater in Cambridge—the Brattle Theater. A little group called The Straw Hat Theater played there, run by Catherine Huntington, who dropped the Straw Hat group to run the Provincetown Theater Company. Oddly enough, these two Huntingtons weren't related. His real name was Duryea Huntington Jones. He changed his name because the boys at Harvard used to call him "Diarrhea." My first wife, Louise, also started acting in Cambridge, and that's how I got involved in the whole Boston area.

Another theater partner was a fellow named Russell Mahoney. He was one of the young editors of *The New Yorker*, and a wonderful short story writer. He died very young, but his stories still appear in anthologies.

We started out as professional theater,



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Lee Falk with Barbara Britton, 1954

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and in two weeks we were flat broke. So I said, "Let's close this silly play, I'd like to do *The Front Page*." This was in 1940. We had an actor named James Rennee, who was a well-known Broadway star. He said, "You know, I've always wanted to play Walter Burns." So we very quickly set up and did it, and it turned out to be a sensation. By pure chance *The Front Page* had never played Boston because the closing line is: "The son-of-a-bitch stole my watch." The Boston censors had said, "You can't say 'son-of-a-bitch.'" And Ben Hecht said, "Well, then we won't play Boston." Another stroke of good fortune was that the model for Walter Burns had become the publisher of the *Boston American*. So we got so much publicity that we became a big hit. That launched us.

RE: You owned other theaters as well?

LF: Yes. During the war years I was in Washington, and Johnny ran the Brattle Theater. When I returned after the war, we continued running in Cambridge, and started doing productions in the New England Mutual Hall in Boston as well. Then we gave up Cambridge because it only had 400 seats, while Mutual Hall had 1200 seats. I was directing most of the shows, running back and forth between Cambridge and Boston. But then Cambridge couldn't carry its weight because the productions became too expensive. So we acquired another theater in Framingham—a 2500 seat theater at Shoppers' World—which was the biggest summer theater in America. Marlon Brando, Billy Burke, Ezio Pinza, the biggest stars played there.

RE: Since you were so active in Boston, why did you continue to live in New York?

LF: I really didn't like New England in the winter. I used to go to the islands in the winter—we opened a winter theater in Nassau. But I liked Boston in the summer—New York certainly wasn't attractive in the summer.

RE: Did you also have your house in Truro then?

LF: No, I didn't buy the Truro house until 1960. So for years I lived in Boston hotels—just like *Mandrake*.

RE: So far you've mentioned theaters in

Cambridge, Boston, Framingham and Nassau.

LF: I had one in Marblehead too.

RE: Was there ever a time when all of the theaters were running simultaneously?

LF: No. There were always two going in the summer. Boston is the one that always ran—that was very successful. In fact, at times, it was the only professional theater in Boston in the summer.

We had to have big theaters because we were using big name stars who demanded big salaries. After a while I became bored with this type of theater. During those years I produced around 300 plays, and directed about 100 of them. My first season in Boston I directed 18 plays in a row, and did the comic strips at the same time. I also wrote plays—I can't imagine how I did all of that.

RE: It's my understanding that you produced the first *Othello* with a black man in the title role—in this case, Paul Robeson.

LF: As far as I know it was the first, certainly in modern times. That production was done in Cambridge—it was fantastic.

We had Margaret Webster as the director, who was the first important female director and one of the top Shakespeare directors in the United States—she was the daughter of Dame May Whitty. The Theater Guild was a little afraid of the idea of a black man in the title role. But we had Uta Hagan as Desdemona, and Jose Ferrar as Iago, everybody was very young, and we decided to try it out anyway in Cambridge and Princeton.

Life magazine sent out a photographer to document our production. We got four double-page-spreads in *Life* of scenes from the play. Robeson was not really a political figure then; he was the top black personality in America as a concert artist.

Peggy Webster had recently done *Othello* in New York with Walter Huston, and she was able to get all of the beautiful costumes from the New York production—all those deep reds. It was a stunning production. The critics in Boston talked about our production for years after.

RE: It's interesting to me that you deny that any of your work is politically moti-

vated, yet many of your most noteworthy endeavors involve blacks in significant roles—Lothar in *Mandrake*, the Phantom's most trustworthy allies are a band of Pygmies, and the first *Othello* with a black in the title role. What kind of mail did the *Othello* production generate?

LF: There was more than mail. The *Life* magazine spread included a picture of Robeson and Uta Hagan kissing. And the story about a little theater in Cambridge gave the impression that the production was somehow connected to Harvard. We were furious because we didn't want Harvard getting credit for our production, and Johnny wanted to sue Henry Luce. I said, "Johnny, you can't sue Henry Luce, I'll write a note to *Life's* editor." So I wrote a letter saying that Harvard had done many wonderful things during its 300 year history, but one of things it didn't do was the Margaret Webster production of *Othello*—"we dood it"—which was an expression at the time. *Life* ran my letter, but they also ran other letters saying, "What's America coming to when *Life* runs a picture of a black man kissing a white woman!" Some people were furious.

RE: In 1950s America, that doesn't surprise me at all.

LF: At the bottom of this column, after all of the hostile letters, was my letter saying, "We dood it."

Although I grew up in St. Louis in a segregated world, I was still surprised by all of the hostility. I had been around the theater and jazz musicians for so long that I had lost my sensitivity to racial differences.

RE: Another controversial figure you worked with was Marlon Brando—what was your experience with "The Wild One."

LF: He played in our production of Shaw's *The Arms of a Man*. It was after *A Streetcar Named Desire*. He was a big star. Which turned out to be a big problem in our production. Brando was playing his part in a highly stylized manner, while his fellow actors were being very low key. They hated him for the contrast. I thought he was a great actor, while the others were not so good.

RE: Brando has a reputation of being

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difficult and not always nice—did you have any problems?

LF: I found him hard to know—we didn't become close. We would all go out to eat afterwards, and he would sit at the table reading a book. He wanted to look like a muscleman, so he was always dieting. He would never order anything at the restaurant. Instead he would pick up a spoon and eat from everyone else's plate. But I didn't have any bad experiences. I just thought of him as a great actor.

RE: Who were some of the other memorable actors that you worked with?

LF: I liked James Mason very much. Charlton Heston, who had just made *The Ten Commandments*, came down to Nassau with me, and I found him to be a likable bright guy. I didn't know what his politics were then. I remember Heston telling a classic actor career story. He was ready to quit the New York theater, and had taken a job at a little radio station in North Carolina, thinking that he would do something like that for the rest of his life. He returned to New York to close his apartment and pick up his belongings. A friend told him that someone was looking for him to play a role in one of television's early dramatic productions. He took the television part, and it changed his career. He was the first major actor to go from television to the movies.

I found him brilliant. We did a nice little comedy, *Bell, Book and Candle*. I had a little tiny stage in Nassau, a two-sided arena theater with about 40 seats. We always had to pay a lot of attention to blocking out a play for this theater. In stock theater you move very fast. We only had nine run-throughs from the time the actors first looked at the script to the time they acted before an audience. So the first couple of days we would always spend a lot of time blocking out the stage movements and writing them on the script. I noticed that Heston wasn't writing anything down, though he must have had hundreds of

moves. Of course, everything must be choreographed on a stage, otherwise it will be complete chaos. So I said, "Chuck, you've got to write down your movements." He said, "No, it's all right." I couldn't argue with him. He was a big guy, not to mention my star. We went through two days of blocking and he didn't write down a thing. We took the next day off, and when we started the following day I was thinking that we were going to have to re-block the whole damn thing, which is very tedious. Well, he got up on the stage and did everything perfect. I couldn't believe it. I worked with hundreds of actors and I never saw anything like that.

*"I was in
the room at
the time that
Mandrake the
Magician was
created. There
was a mirror and
there was me. I
was nineteen with
a mustache."*

RE: What other adventure strips appeared in the papers at the time you created *Mandrake the Magician*?

LF: Not too many. *Mandrake* appeared at the beginning of a new cycle in comics, which they now refer to as a golden age. I think that the only adventure strip that preceded *Mandrake* was *Tarzan*, which of course was adapted from the novels of Edgar Rice Burroughs. Maybe *Buck Rogers* started a year or two before me. But the year I started, *Flash Gordon* started,

Milt Canniff started *Terry & the Pirates*, and the Hearst papers came out with a Saturday tabloid section of comics.

RE: You think of yourself as a writer, not a visual artist, yet you chose a visual medium for a profession.

LF: I did study some art. I drew the original versions of *Mandrake*. I drew a two week's sample, I have enlargements of the originals in my Truro house. I wasn't too interested in drawing, but I didn't draw badly. Frankly, Ray, I just started this as a kick. I had no idea they'd buy it. I was completely out of this field. I was living in Missouri and had no idea who even did this kind of thing. There were very few strips in the '30s. I did meet a man named Tuthill, who had a very successful strip called the *Bungle Family*. A friend of mine worked on the strip as an assistant, and I went to him to find out where I might be able to sell my idea for *Mandrake*. I knew that Tuthill had made quite a bit of money out of his strip. When my friend introduced me to Tuthill, who was an eccentric fellow, the cartoonist said, "Well you go to the syndicate and they'll give you 50 cents, and once you get 50 cents"—he talked like that. I think he was trying to discourage me. But sitting out in front of his big home were a lot of expensive big cars, and I figured you get more than 50 cents out of it.

He finally told me to look up the syndicate addresses in the "red book," which I did, and I sent about 10 letters to New York saying that I had a comic strip idea. Only one syndicate responded, King Features Syndicate, the biggest. They sent back a form letter signed by J.B. Connolly, who was the president, saying either send us your idea or come and see us when you are in New York. It turned out Connolly was the right hand man of William Randolph Hearst. He was head of the whole Hearst communications empire.

So I drove out East with my father during my spring vacation. He was on a

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buying trip. I brought my strip and called up Mr. Connolly, but was told that he was very busy. I said, "I came all the way from St. Louis, and Mr. Connolly said that I should come see him when I was in New York." There was quiet on the other end of the phone, then she said, "You better come right over, because Mr. Connolly is leaving in a couple of hours." It turned out that he was going to San Simeon to see Hearst. I rushed over there. I didn't stop to shave. I was ushered into his office, and I remember that he had the aura of a great man. He was a tall handsome Irishman, with prematurely white hair, walking up and down swinging a gold-handled cane and dictating to two or three secretaries in his huge office.

There was no art on the walls, except for one enormous drawing of Krazy Kat. I must say I was very impressed by this.

He said, "What have you got there?" I showed it to him. I was not a very good artist, but my idea was original. That's what happens sometimes when someone from outside of a field comes into the field. He said, "I'll show this to the Chief and let you know." I didn't know who the Chief was. It turns out that in those days William Randolph Hearst

picked all of the comic strips himself. Comic strips were his special baby. He really created the field of comic strip in this country back at the turn-of-the-century. In the first years that I was with King Features, I would get little notes from Hearst in San Simeon, telling me what he

liked and didn't like. Here he had this huge empire, but he was sending me notes about comic strips.

King Features also asked me to develop a Sunday page, which I wasn't prepared to do. So I went to Phil Davis, an acquaintance about 15 years older than I was, and a commercial artist who did covers for magazines like *Colliers*. I asked him if he would help me on *Mandrake* while I was still in school. So we worked together. Although he was a much better artist than I was, he wasn't so good at comic art—the dry brush technique. It took him a while to get the hang of it, but he finally became one of the best at using pen and dry brush.

LF: Yes. Lothar, Mandrake's side-kick, was the first black in comic strips taken seriously. At first he was an African prince who spoke in "pigeon" English. In a way he was Mandrake's body guard. What I had in mind was that Mandrake the mental giant and Lothar the physical giant would make a great team. As the years progressed Lothar began to speak proper English, and he moved from the body guard's room to the guest room. This was the first black and white crime-fighting team in any media. Of course, today it's commonplace.

RE: Maybe it's become commonplace in the past twenty years, but Lothar was introduced decades before the Civil Rights



Lee and Elizabeth Falk with a replica of the first *Mandrake* panel

Two years after I started *Mandrake*, the same thing happened with *The Phantom*. I drew the original ideas, and Ray Moore, who worked for Phil Davis, eventually took over the art work.

RE: Did Mandrake start out with a black side-kick?

Movement gained national prominence. Did King Features receive a lot of hate mail because of Lothar?

LF: Not really, because Lothar was not an American, he was an African prince.

RE: Did you think about Lothar from a political perspective?

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LF: No, I really didn't see it in political terms. I just liked the idea of a black giant for a body guard and friend to Mandrake.

RE: Mandrake always looked like a rakish, debonair, young Lee Falk. I assume that was intentional.

LF: I was in the room at the time that Mandrake was created, I was the only model available. There was a mirror and there was me. I was nineteen with a mustache.

RE: Do you consider *Mandrake* to be autobiographical?

LF: Not really.

RE: My understanding is that when you become interested in a particular subject, the subject ultimately works its way into the strip.

LF: That's true about both strips. During the war years, for example, they were both involved in what was known as the war effort. The Phantom was in the jungle fighting Japanese invaders and Mandrake went on missions against the Nazis. In general though, I never bring politics into the strips. I always felt that politics belong on the editorial page or the front page. Only a few people like Al Capp and Gary Trudeau have ever successfully married comics and politics.

RE: I was referring to non-political subjects. For example, I remember some outer-space adventures that appeared in your strips shortly after you installed a telescope on the roof-deck of your Truro house.

LF: Again, not really. I've always been interested in science fiction. At that time science fiction appeared in a magazine called *Amazing Stories*, and science fiction was a small cult. I put science fiction into *Mandrake* almost from the start. Science fiction wasn't very popular then, but *Mandrake* took off anyway. Within a few years *Mandrake* was all over the world. It was the number one adventure strip. Then *The Phantom* came along and knocked *Mandrake* out of the top spot.

RE: Was the Phantom the first costumed super hero?

LF: Yes, he was the very first. There was nothing like him. I've often been asked where I got the idea for a masked man

wearing tights running through the jungle. It doesn't seem very appropriate, does it? Tarzan is better dressed for a hot jungle.

A very prominent critic in Paris, who teaches comics at the Sorbonne, wrote that the Phantom wore the costume of a medieval executioner. Which it was. However, I never thought of the Phantom as a medieval executioner. I thought of him as a good guy.

RE: How do you feel about people seeing things in your characters that are so different from your intentions?

LF: I find it very interesting. I've often been asked where the idea for the Phantom

came from, because the Phantom spawned a whole world of super heroes, some of them quite ridiculous. However, Superman, who came after the Phantom, was wonderful. I wish I had thought of him.

RE: Batman looks a lot like the Phantom.

LF: Batman is almost a copy. The Phantom had his Skull cave, Batman has a Batcave, and so forth. It was an imitation that was very successful.

There are only two comic creations that I really admire in terms of originality. One is *Superman*. The other is *The Hulk*, which I think is a great idea—*Jekyll and* (continued on page 171)

The Phantom held hostage in Philadelphia, 1987



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(continued from page 117)

Hyde. Why didn't I think of that?

In answer to what was the inspiration for the Phantom's costume, I would have to say that Robin Hood was one of my boyhood heroes. Originally I envisioned the Phantom's costume as green, but I didn't specify that for the color Sunday pages. The color artists made it purple, which is kind of silly for running around in the jungle. In Europe they made him red. When I met the man responsible, I asked him why red. He said that the mechanicals came over in black and white. They didn't know what color to make him, and they had a lot of red ink.

RE: I remember two stories you told me that are indicative of the impact a strip can have. One was about a cruise ship high-jacking, and the other concerned the use of the Phantom as a secret code during the Nazis occupation of Norway. Could you elaborate?

LF: I once wrote a story about a cruise ship that was plying the waters down in the Caribbean. A gang had come aboard as passengers, and disguised themselves with goggles to highjack the ship. I called them the "Goggle-eyed Pirates." First they took over the radio room, then the engine room to stop the ship. They broke open the captain's safe, then they went from room to room collecting money and jewels. They put everything into sacks. A helicopter came down on deck to collect the sacks. The pirates threw their guns and disguises overboard and disappeared back into their cabins to blend in with the other passengers. That's the story that appeared in the strip. About two or three months later, a Portuguese cruise ship near Brazil, was taken over by some men—actually it was a political act against Salazaar, the Portuguese dictator. But the script they followed was almost identical to my story. Midnight: they take over the radio room. 1:00 AM: they take over the wheel. 2:00 AM: they take over the engine room. My original story was reprinted in the papers. They showed a picture of the Portuguese ship and our drawing of a cruise ship—identical. The highjackers ultimately escaped to a rather obscure African port

called Bengala, which is similar to the fictitious country where the Phantom lives, Bengal. So people wondered if the high-jackers were inspired by my strip. That was fifteen years ago.

The other story happened in Norway during the Nazis occupation. The Germans maintained strict censorship. In the Norwegian papers they were printing that New York was being bombed, Washington was bombed, and so forth. Meanwhile, Sweden, which was neutral, was printing *The Phantom*. They were smuggling the mats for *The Phantom* across the border into Norway, and *The Phantom* was appearing in the Norwegian papers every day. Now my comic strips had never appeared in Germany, so the Germans were not familiar with them. But the Norwegians all knew that *The Phantom* came from America, and they assumed that if *The Phantom* was appearing in their papers every day, then things couldn't be too bad in America. They all thought this was a great joke on the Germans—that an American strip would appear in their heavily censored newspapers. So the Norwegian underground adopted *The Phantom* as one of their passwords.

Ironically, while this was happening, I was at the Office of War Information in Washington, not the cloak and dagger part, but war propaganda. We were in constant communication with the OSS, helping them prepare and send messages into Europe. We were flying messages into Norway, parachuting them in, risking people's lives, none of us knowing that *The Phantom* was going in every day. I didn't find out about *The Phantom* appearing in Norway until after the war. So *The Phantom* has an enduring fan club in Norway.

I should also add that they have a Phantom Fan Club in Scandinavia, which I am told is the biggest youth movement in Scandinavia—bigger than the Boy Scouts. Isn't that amazing. 140,000 members. The King of Sweden was a member of the Phantom Fan Club as a boy. In fact, just outside of Stockholm, they have a Phantom theme park, sort of like Disneyland, but much more modest. They gave me a tour of the park, which included a replica

of the Skull cave. The entrance to the cave is behind a waterfall, just like in the strip. Inside they have the various chambers: the radio room, the treasure room, and so forth. And in the radio room they had a panel set in the wall with various buttons. One said Peking, another London, and there was one blank button. So I said, "Here let's make this one Truro." I wrote Truro under the button. My guide said, "What's there?" I said, "The Phantom's tennis court."

RE: *The Phantom* has been in existence for over 50 years. It must feel strange to see your fantasies take on a kind of tangible reality. The Phantom's world must feel like a real place to you.

LF: That's true. I built a world for the Phantom and characters. The Phantom has a place in this jungle and he has several houses in America, Europe, one at Golden Beach, and so forth. Mandrake is quite different. He has always lived out of hotel rooms. No special background.

The Phantom comes out of the world of classical heroes, which was my world as a boy. All the great heroes of the Greek and Roman myths. And my answer to *The Phantom's* world-wide popularity is that *The Phantom* touches on the mythology of all cultures. This was not accidental, I tried to make him that way.

In fact, I didn't give him eyes. That is, you can't see his eyes. When I first created him I was thinking of the Roman and Greek busts of heroes, whose eyes were blank. If you put eyes in the Phantom it changes the whole appearance. The lack of eyes gives him a god-like image.

RE: Your characters are so strongly developed at this point that they must tell you how they would react to any given situation.

LF: That's quite true. I can't have the Phantom do what Mandrake does, and vice versa. They speak quite differently. Mandrake's much stiffer, he's more austere and sophisticated. The Phantom is not. The Phantom is a down-to-earth fellow with a nice sense of humor. In all these years, despite the violence that exists in today's comic books, I've never had the Phantom shoot or kill anybody. He carries

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two guns which he uses quite a bit, but he never hits anybody, despite the fact that he's a dead-eye shot. He always hits his opponents guns, or knives, or rifles. Shoots them right out of their hands. He has never shot an animal, except to save his own life.

Mandrake, of course, never had this problem, as his weapon is hypnosis. He could turn a gun into a banana, or even the gunman into a banana. So he also avoids violence.

In the beginning Mandrake's magic was real. If he gestured at the ceiling, it really fell in; if he turned someone into a rat, they really were a rat. After six months I realized that this could become very difficult. If Mandrake is so great, how could anybody oppose him. So I changed him gradually, without saying anything, from a magician to a hypnotist.

RE: So you were also the first one to realize that super heroes had to have their weaknesses, their Achilles heel.

LF: Superman had to conquer this problem.

RE: Did you know the creators of *Superman*.

LF: Sure.

RE: My understanding is that they had sold all *Superman* rights to their publisher, and were destitute when the first *Superman* movies appeared.

LF: One of them was blind, and the other had continued working, but neither of them was well-off. When the film rights were purchased by Warner Brothers, a group of cartoonists, including Jerry Robinson, raised a big fuss, and the creators of *Superman* were put on a pension for life.

RE: Did Mandrake and the Phantom ever meet?

LF: Just once, at the Phantom's wedding.

RE: As I recall you and the Phantom got married at the same time. Sort of a double wedding. I remember the *People* magazine photo of you in a Phantom costume and Elizabeth in her wedding dress.

LF: Well, there have been 21 generations of the Phantom, and consequently, many marriages, but none received as much attention as the last one. Joe Connolly used to say to me, "If you have a successful formula, stick with it. If you drift away from

it, you drift out of the newspapers." I had played with the idea of the current Phantom getting married for a long time. It was implicit in the story since he had to have heirs to carry on the tradition. After all he had been engaged to Diana for over 40 years. So finally I did it. It turned out to be a very glamorous affair. The press all over the world picked up the story. I didn't realize they'd do that. In Stockholm, for instance, they had a huge stag party the night before the wedding. It was also picked up as a feminist story, because Diana refused to give up her job at the United Nations and move into the Skull Cave. In New Zealand they debated this issue in the House of Parliament. I have a transcript of the debate.

I guess that pretty much covers the strips. They're still doing well, they pay the rent and the oil bills. □□

OBITUARIES

Lee Falk, comics auteur, dies at 87*Truro summer resident was prominent patron of the arts*

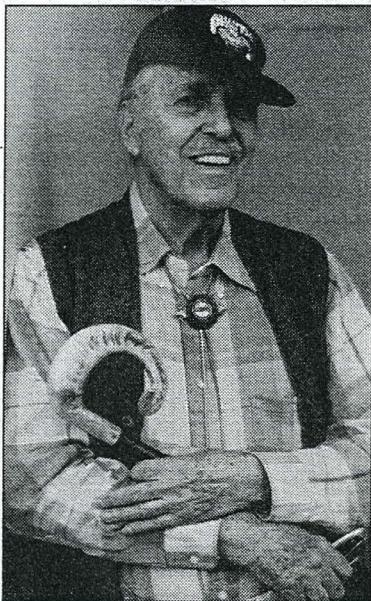
Lee Falk, 87, a long-time summer resident of Truro who was internationally renowned as creator of the comic strips Mandrake the Magician and The Phantom, died Saturday in New York City after a long illness.

He was the husband of Elizabeth Moxley Falk.

Mr. Falk was born in St. Louis. While enrolled at the University of Illinois, he created the character of Mandrake the Magician, whose mustachioed appearance he modeled after himself. Two years later, he created The Phantom, who predated Superman and Batman as the world's first costumed superhero.

In an interview in the mid-'80s, Mr. Falk said The Phantom was inspired by Greek and Nordic mythology, fairy tales and the legend of Robin Hood. "I think when he first came out, people couldn't figure out if he was a good guy or not," he said. "It took a while." He served as an adviser for a movie, "The Phantom," starring Billy Zane, that was released in 1996.

Although he started off drawing Mandrake, Mr. Falk soon recruited artist Phil Davis to render his character, and in 1934 he traveled to New York and sold the strip to King Features Syndicate. (Eastham resident Fred Fredericks has drawn that strip since Davis's death in 1964.)



Lee Falk

After graduating from college, Mr. Falk moved to New York City. He worked in intelligence with the Office of War Information during WW II and later enlisted in the Army.

After the war, Mr. Falk embarked on a new career as a prolific theatrical producer, director and playwright. He ran many professional summer theaters in New England and elsewhere, but eventually decided to concentrate his creative efforts on his comic strips, which he continued to write throughout his life.

Mr. Falk became a summer

resident of Truro in the late '50s, buying a home perched atop a hill off South Pamet Road which he dubbed "Xanadu," and over the years was an integral part of the social and artistic fabric of that community. He founded a performing arts organization entitled PALA (Provincetown Academy of the Living Arts) during the 1960s, and served as president of the board of Truro Center for the Arts at Castle Hill in the early 1990s. As owner of one of just a few private tennis courts in Truro, he presided over many a well-attended Sunday tennis brunch at his home, although he had not played himself over the past two decades.

Mr. Falk was also active in Democratic politics and held fund-raisers at his Truro home for presidential candidate Alan Cranston in 1984 and for the Clinton-Gore ticket in 1992, an event that featured former Sen. Paul Tsongas, who died the following year.

Surviving besides his wife are two daughters, Valerie Falk of Northampton, Mass. and Diane Falk of Washington; a son, Conley Falk of Los Angeles; and a brother.

A private memorial service was scheduled to be held in New York City today.