

# Tarzan vs. The Phantom

Thomas Haroldson

1970

The Phantom of comic strip fame is more symbolic of America than Uncle Sam. In fact, the Purple Pig, as he's known in some circles, should be depicted on the Great Seal of the United States. No one has served the honko cause better.

As a youth, he gave up the comforts of the Skull Cave in order to be educated in an American university. He was, of course, brilliant in every subject, but athletics were his forte. It didn't take long for word to spread. People came from all over to watch the super jock work out.

He could run faster, jump higher and box better than any man alive. Coaches shook their stop watches in disbelief, football and baseball managers begged him to sign up, promoters tried to bribe him, coeds tried to seduce him. But the kid couldn't be swayed. Destiny had decreed that he must follow in his father's footsteps and become the chief law-and-order man of the jungle.

With his school days behind him, the young Phantom returned home just in time to replace the old Phantom. It was important that the jock be on hand when his father died in order to perpetuate the legend of the Ghost Who Walks. The simple ruse of passing the purple long johns on from one generation to the next fooled the ignorant natives into believing the Phantom was indestructible.

Being the top cop of a foreign land was pretty good duty. In addition to having free run of the Skull Cave (the original Death City), the Phantom also had the honor of sitting on the skull throne while dozens of devoted pigmies groveled at his feet. When the miniature house Negroes weren't flat on their bellies, they were busy protecting the Ghost Who Walks, and making certain no one looted his fabulous treasure room.

But the greatest pleasure came from simply wearing the Phantom uniform. The little dudes wearing nothing but loin cloths and funny straw hats had to admire a man who wore black boots, leotards, cowl, mask and two U.S. Army 45s strapped to his hip. Although part of their adulation came from the fact that no one could figure out why he didn't die from a terminal case of prickly heat.

The routine law-and-order chores were left to the Jungle Patrol, a native police force commanded by white colonial advisors. "The Commander" (as in Commander in Chief) was none other than our old friend back in the Skull Cave. In order to give the Jungle Patrol some semblance of autonomy, he kept his role a secret. When he wanted to contact his organization, he went down an abandoned well, through a secret passage way and deposited the orders in a headquarters safe (the Phantom was the original Commander In Absentia, later shortened to CIA).

Since throne sitting, crime fighting and skulking around in old wells took up most of his time, he didn't have much fun. But it wasn't all work and no play. During rare moments of relaxation, he could enjoy his three most precious possessions, which, in order of preference were: his wolf (Devil), his white stallion (Hero) and his white female (Diane Palmer).

The Ghost Who Walks had pretty much made up his mind to give Miss Palmer the honor of bringing the next Phantom into the world. Diane, however, preferred living in the U.S., which made courting a bit difficult. When the Phantom wanted to see her, he had to put on civvies, don dark glasses and catch a commercial flight to the States.

But, even out of uniform, no one messed with the Phantom. The very sound of his voice stopped bad guys dead in their tracks (“When the Phantom speaks, the world drops its load”—Old Jungle LEGEND).

Of course, all this was before the recent ‘unpleasantness in Vietnam. The Phantom hasn’t been doing so well there, and he’s beginning to think maybe he’s losing his touch. Even his little friends, the Poison People, are starting to act strange, and there’s a rumor going around he may not be invulnerable after all.

If the Phantom had walked down the jungle path once in awhile and visited his neighbor, Tarzan, he might have realized there was more to life than skull rings, treasure rooms and power. The King of the Apes, as portrayed in the Johnny Weissmuller series, could have offered him an infinitely superior life style.

But Tarzan was so far ahead of his time that few people realized what the cat was into. While the Phantom was digging World War II, Tarzan was wiling away the hours in an idyllic jungle pool. After a bit of watery love play, he and Jane would draw their wet, nearly naked bodies up on the shore and fall into a tender embrace. Cheetah would cover his eyes; the kids at the Saturday matinee would open theirs.

No matter how you look at it, Tarzan had the right idea: Instead of a uniform, he wore a sensible loin cloth; instead of a cave, he lived in an airy tree house; instead of wasting his time on a frigid virgin, he was happily married to good ol’ groovy Jane.

Tarzan was also a vegetarian and a conditional pacifist (acting only in self-defense). All he asked of the world was to be left alone. But invariably the devils of civilization would appear on the scene. Crash victims, explorers, hunters, soldiers, escaped convicts and jewel thieves kept dropping in uninvited.

His first thought was to get them out of the jungle as quickly as possible. To make certain they got the message, he often started out by wrapping a visitor’s rifle around a tree. But, of course, he could never persuade them to leave peacefully. Usually the intruders, by holding Jane or Boy hostage, would force Tarzan to help them. Sometimes, Jane and an English doctor or explorer would gang up and convince him, against his better judgment, that he could somehow serve mankind by cooperating.

Tarzan, with great wisdom and patience, would explain that it was pretty stupid to safari into a dangerous and remote part of the jungle. But the intruders would insist. However, it usually didn’t take long for Tarzan’s doubts to be confirmed.

As soon as the safari got into Mofo country, the natives started getting restless. Tarzan’s warning that it was less than cool to trespass on black militant land was ignored. At this point the bearers usually split or were split by a shower of Mofo spears. It was clear that the attacking warriors had little in common with the Toms who worked for the Phantom.

In addition to being fierce mothers, they had their own distinctive culture, which often as not included a large village or a mountain top city. The bad guys, who seemed determined to commit suicide, kept trying to dig rubies out of their sacred temple idols. Needless to say, Tarzan took a rather dim view of such activity. In one movie, after chasing a couple of jewel thieves into a quicksand pit, he calmly stood by and watched them gurgle out of sight.

Final proof that Tarzan was not the jungle honko he’s often made out to be can be seen in the picture in which he visited New York. Unlike the Phantom, who got along well with cops, Tarzan soon had the entire police force after him. Even in the Forties, cops knew they couldn’t permit a long haired freak to run loose in their city.

When Tarzan was finally trapped on the Brooklyn Bridge, he stripped down to his loin cloth and made a perfect dive into the East River. At this point, the cops stopped shooting and just shook their heads. “He’s done for,” they said. The man who had directed the operation, a big fellow in a trench coat and shades wearing a strange skull ring, said, “I certainly hope so.”

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