



The Phantom Lady Omnibus [Fantastic Femmes of the Comics]

Jean Marie (ed.) Stine, Will (creator) Eisner

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The Phantom Lady in full color! Created by Will Eisner of The Spirit fame, Phantom Lady was the first and longest-lived costumed heroine to grace the comic books (in a different form she is still around today). Phantom Lady made her entrance in 1941, the brainchild of the the legendary Will Eisner and his then partner Jerry Iger. Although she didn't have super powers, Phantom Lady, like Batman, had honed her physical and mental reactions far beyond those of most mortals, and in battle was more than a match for the average gang of miscreants. Also like Batman, she used science to give her an edge when fighting villains, ordinary or super – a futuristic gun that shot a wide beam of blackness, instead of light, completely blinding her enemies. In real life, Phantom Lady was Sandra Knight, the daughter of a U.S. senator who had grown bored with her privileged life and decided to use information that came to her as a Washington insider to help fight espionage and crime. Phantom Lady reached her height at the hands of illustrator Matt Baker, fabled today as one of the kings of "good girl art" and the comic book industry's first successful African-American artist. Baker changed Phantom Lady's outfit to a revealing, blue and red that packed every frame with sexual dynamite. Alas, Baker's cover for Phantom Lady No. 17, featuring Sandra Knight attempting to free herself from ropes (reproduced on the cover of this omnibus), helped stimulate a congressional hearing on comic books, and was denounced by psychiatrist Frederic Wertham, who claimed Baker's cover aroused unhealthy "sexual stimulation by combining 'headlights' with the sadist's dream of tying up a woman." In his sixties, a wiser Wertham, with a wider view of life, recanted his indictment of comic books and claims they were a harmful influence on the young. (You will find a gallery of Phantom Lady covers at the end of this omnibus and can make up your own mind about Baker's Phantom Lady art.) Like all works of art from earlier eras, these stories from Phantom Lady comic books are redolent of the values, concerns, fantasies, stereotypes, and events of their time and could cause offense to some. But, most of all, we hope you will enjoy Phantom Lady as an early, and still compelling, portrayal of a strong, independent female figure in popular media, and one who in her more recent incarnations, is still inspiring people today.

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