

SOUVESTRE, Pierre (1874-1914); ALLAIN, Marcel (1885-1969)

Fantômas

Paris; Arthème Fayard for Livre Populaire; 1911-1912

22 consecutive volumes, 1-22. 12mo (190 x 125 mm). Original wrappers and colour cover designs, with an advertisement for the subsequent installment before each titlepage. Housed in five boxes.

Consecutive run of twenty-two of the classic anti-hero adventure serial, first editions in original wrappers with the iconic cover designs by Gino Starace.



The arch-criminal master of disguise first hit the streets of Paris in February 1911; the opening lines set out his role: ‘Fantômas / ... what does that mean? / Nothing ... Everything! / But what is it? / No one ... And yet, yes, it is someone! / And what does this someone do? / Spreads terror!’ Leaving a trail of horrific and spectacular crimes which grip the imagination and fill the mind with indelible, fascinating, lurid images, he escapes every time; victims die poisoned with deadly bouquets, or strung up as the clapper in a huge bell; corpses ride the night streets in horse-drawn cabs sent unguided through the capital; the dome of Les Invalides is stripped of its gold and banks disemboweled by high-jacked city buses. Fantômas is hunted through the novels by his arch-nemesis Inspector Juve who must contend not only with the criminal’s elusiveness, but with the naivety and cynicism of his less obsessive superiors – indeed in the fifth novel, Juve is arrested on suspicion of being Fantômas himself. His young collaborator, the journalist Jérôme Fandor (aka Charles Rambert) tortured by love for Hélène, as bad as he is good and unwavering in her loyalty for her notorious father; their impossible love is doubly damned, since Fandor is probably the criminal’s son. Lady Beltham, meanwhile, is equally trapped by the irresistible sway Fantômas holds over her, despite the fact that he was responsible for making a widow of her.

A new novel appeared each month, the first offered at an introductory price of 35 centimes and subsequent volumes were sold for 65 centimes. After a gap of several years and following Souvestre’s death, Allain began a new series which were published by the Société Parisienne d’Edition between April and September 1926, in

thirty-four weekly parts of sixteen pages each. These were then published in book form by Fayard, in five volumes, each containing seven of the thirty-four parts, with a small addition to the last part, supplied by Allain for the purpose. Numerous reprints followed, as well as a new edition serialized issued with Allain's cooperation between April 1932 and November 1934, and in which titles not containing the name Fantômas, were altered to do so. At the same time, Allain wrote new adventures which appeared in various newspapers between 1933 and 1938, and was published subsequently in book form by Fayard.

The series spawned a host of other works, from the silent films by Louis Feuillade (1913-1914), revivalist feature films in the 1960s by Jean Marais, and a TV series in 1979 co-produced by Antenne 2 in France and Hamster Films in Germany, to theatre, poetry and surrealist art, notably by Magritte, who incorporated elements from the Feuillade films into his pictures, such as *L'Assassin Menacé*.

Titles

Fantômas
Juve contre Fantômas
Le Mort qui tue
L'Agent Secret
Un Roi Prisonnier de Fantômas
Le Policier apache
La Fille de Fantômas
Le Fiacre de Nuit
La Main coupée
La Mort de Juve
La Livrée du Crime
Le Magistrat Cambrioleur
L'Arrestation de Fantômas
L'Évadée de Saint-Lazare
La Disparition de Fandor
Le mariage de Fantômas
L'Assassin de Lady Beltham
La Guêpe rouge
Les Souliers du Mort
Le Train perdu
Les Amours d'un Prince

Others in the series, 1912-13: *Le bouquet tragique; Le jockey masqué; Le cercueil vide; Le faiseur des reines; Le cadaver géant; Le voleur d'or; La série rouge; L'hôtel du crime; La cravat de chanvre; Le fin de Fantômas*

By Allain alone (1925-6): *Fantômas est-il ressuscité; Fantômas, roi des recéleurs; Fantômas en danger; Fantômas prend sa revanche; Fantômas attaque Fandor; Si c'était Fantômas? (1933); Oui, c'est Fantômas! (1934); Fantômas joue et gagne (1935); Fantômas rencontre l'amour (1946); Fantômas vole des blondes (1948); Fantômas mène le bal (1963)*