

= The Thrill Book =

The Thrill Book was a U.S. pulp magazine published by Street & Smith in 1919 . It was intended to carry " different " stories : this meant stories that were unusual or unclassifiable , which in practice often meant that the stories were fantasy or science fiction . The first eight issues , edited by Harold Hersey , were a mixture of adventure and weird stories . Contributors included Grege La Spina , Charles Fulton Oursler , J. H. Coryell , and Seabury Quinn . Hersey was replaced by Ronald Oliphant with the July 1 issue , probably because Street & Smith were unhappy with his performance .

Oliphant printed more science fiction and fantasy than Hersey had done , though this included two stories by Murray Leinster which Hersey had purchased before being replaced . The most famous story from The Thrill Book is The Heads of Cerberus , a very early example of a novel about alternate time tracks , by Francis Stevens . Oliphant was given a larger budget than Hersey , and was able to acquire material by popular writers such as H. Bedford Jones , but he was only able to produce eight more issues before the end came . The last issue was dated October 15 , 1919 ; it was probably cancelled because of poor sales , although a printers ' strike at that time may have been a factor .

Although The Thrill Book has been described as the first American pulp to specialize in fantasy and science fiction , this description is not supported by recent historians of the field , who regard it instead as a stepping stone on the path that ultimately led to Weird Tales and Amazing Stories , the first true specialized magazines in the fields of weird fiction and science fiction respectively .

= = Publication history = =

In the late 19th century popular magazines typically did not print fiction to the exclusion of other content ; they would include non fiction articles and poetry as well . In October 1896 , the Frank A. Munsey company 's Argosy magazine was the first to switch to printing only fiction , and in December of that year it switched to using cheap wood pulp paper . This is now regarded by magazine historians as having been the start of the pulp magazine era . For twenty years pulp magazines were successful without restricting their fiction content to any specific genre , but in 1915 the influential magazine publisher Street & Smith began to issue titles that focused on a particular niche , such as Detective Story Magazine and Western Story Magazine , thus pioneering the specialized and single genre pulps . In the midst of these changes , some time in 1918 , Street & Smith 's circulation manager , Henry Ralston , decided to launch a new magazine to publish " different " stories : " different " meant stories that were unusual or unclassifiable in some way , which in most cases meant that they included either fantasy or science fiction elements . In The Fiction Factory , Quentin Reynolds ' history of Street & Smith , Reynolds asserts that the magazine was the brainchild of Ormond G. Smith , one of the publishers , but pulp historian Will Murray regards this as unlikely to be the full story , given that Reynolds ' book was written almost forty years later and was an " approved " history . Murray asserts that Ralston was certainly involved in the creation of The Thrill Book . Walter Adolphe Roberts , the editor of Street & Smith 's Ainslee 's Magazine , told a friend of his , Harold Hersey , that Ralston was looking for an editor for a new magazine . Hersey had sold some writing to the pulps but his editorial experience was limited to no more than a year 's work on several little magazines . He met with Ralston in early 1919 and was immediately hired on the basis of the interview . It is possible that Eugene A. Clancy , the editor of Street & Smith 's The Popular Magazine , was originally intended to be the editor of The Thrill Book , but was unable to take on the additional work , though Clancy did assist Hersey on some issues of The Thrill Book . Bringing Hersey on as editor was unfortunate ; historians of the field describe Hersey as lacking talent both as a writer and an editor .

The first issue of The Thrill Book was dated March 1 , 1915 , and was published in a format similar to that of a dime novel . The choice of format was probably a mistake , as it was associated in the minds of the buying public with low quality fiction aimed at readers with very low standards . The plan to publish twice a month indicated that Street & Smith were confident that the new

magazine would be successful .

With the ninth issue , dated July 1 , 1919 , Hersey was replaced by Ronald Oliphant . The reason he was replaced is not clear , though several explanations have been suggested . Murray Leinster claimed that Hersey was fired for publishing too much of his own fiction and poetry in the magazine ; according to Leinster , some of the poetry may have actually been written by Hersey 's mother rather than by Hersey himself . Pulp historian Richard Bleiler regards this theory as unlikely , since although up to eighteen of the twenty @-@ five short poems in the first eight issues of the magazine may have been by Hersey , only two stories in those issues are definitely by him , and there are only four other stories which may have been Hersey 's work published under a pseudonym . Bleiler suggests that at most Street & Smith would have reprimanded Hersey , and that the real reason for his dismissal is more likely to be that Street & Smith were dissatisfied with The Thrill Book under his editorship . Bleiler also suggests that Hersey may have started the rumor that he was let go for buying too much of his own material , as this would have been less harmful to his reputation than a dismissal for failure . Hersey himself claimed that he was not fired , but quit : " I wasn 't fired , but I should have been ... I saw the ' handwriting on the wall ' ahead of time . I asked to be relieved of my duties ... and my request was promptly accepted ! "

At the same time that Oliphant was appointed editor , the layout of the magazine was changed to that of a standard pulp . At 160 pages , this offered readers much better value for money than the 48 @-@ page dime novel format of the first eight issues , even with a price increase from 10 to 15 cents . A question and answer department , " Cross @-@ Trails " , was begun , in imitation of a similar feature in Adventure , the most successful pulp magazine of the day , and the format change may also have been done to increase the resemblance of the two magazines , along with a change to the appearance of The Thrill Book 's contents page to resemble that of Adventure .

Street & Smith cancelled the magazine after the sixteenth issue , dated October 15 . A printers ' strike has often been suggested as the reason , though Hersey denied it in his reminiscences , and it is clear that poor sales were at least part of the reason for the cancellation . Stories were still being acquired for the magazine by Street & Smith in November , and since the final issue would have appeared on newsstands some time in September , this implies that the magazine went on hiatus ( possibly because of the printers ' strike ) with the expectation of returning , perhaps on a less frequent schedule . A note in Street & Smith 's files records the cancellation date as December 1 , 1919 , which may indicate the point at which the delay caused by the strike convinced Street & Smith to finally kill the magazine .

= = Contents and reception = =

Hersey began by making himself familiar with the work of writers already in the market who were capable of producing the kind of material Ralston wanted . He soon concluded that the new magazine would have to include some reprinted stories alongside the original material . The budget did not permit Hersey to pay rates that would attract top @-@ quality writers , nor even to reprint the best @-@ known stories of the kind he was looking for , and he was forced to use relatively unknown authors such as Perley Poore Sheehan and Robert W. Sneddon . Hersey distributed a " Notice to Writers " that described what he was looking for : " strange , bizarre , occult , mysterious tales ... mystic happenings , weird adventures , feats of leger @-@ de @-@ main , spiritualism , et cetera ... If you have an idea which you have considered too bizarre to write , too weird or strange , let us see it . " This did not restrict the submissions to fantasy or science fiction , and as a result Hersey received ( and printed ) all kinds of fiction , including mysteries , adventures , and love stories , though it may be that he simply did not receive enough good quality science fiction and fantasy to fill the magazine . Hersey later recalled that the notice did not bring in many usable manuscripts : " As a result of the notices in the writers ' magazines , I received a thousand manuscripts but was able to buy only ten ! "

The first issue included " Wolf of the Steppes " , a werewolf story by Grege La Spina . This had been submitted to The Popular Magazine but purchased by Clancy for The Thrill Book in 1918 , when Street & Smith began making plans for the new magazine . The story was the first by La Spina

, whose real name was Fanny Greye Bragg ; she would go on to publish several more stories in The Thrill Book , and later became a regular contributor to Weird Tales . Another first story was " The Thing That Wept " , by Charles Fulton Oursler , who later went on to edit Liberty and to write novels under the name Anthony Abbot . Two serials were begun in the first issue : " The Jeweled Ibis " by J.C. Kofoed , and " In the Shadows of Race " , by J. Hampton Bishop . Both contained enough fantastic or science @-@ fictional elements to fit the original plans for the magazine : " The Jeweled Ibis " was about worshippers of the ancient Egyptian gods , and Bishop 's story was about a lost race in Africa , and included intelligent apes . The cover for the first issue was by Sidney H. Riesenbergy ; Bleiler describes it as " shabby and second @-@ rate " by comparison to cover art in successful magazines of the day such as Adventure and Detective Story Magazine . The May 1 issue included an early short story by Seabury Quinn , " The Stone Image " , which features a character named Dr. Towbridge , who would later appear ( renamed Dr. Trowbridge ) in Quinn 's popular occult detective stories about Jules de Grandin , though Quinn had not yet invented de Grandin . Tod Robbins , a well @-@ regarded writer of fantasy , supplied several short pieces , all " shallow mood sketches " without much substance , in the opinion of science fiction historian Mike Ashley . The contributors included Sophie Louise Wenzel , who later published stories in Weird Tales under the name Sophie Wenzel Ellis , but most of the writers from Hersey 's editorship , such as George C. Jenks and John R. Coryell ? both authors of dime novels ? are no longer well @-@ known names .

When Oliphant took over the editorship , he placed notices in writers ' magazines looking for more submissions . Much of the material published under Oliphant 's editorship would have been bought by Hersey , making it hard to judge Oliphant 's impact . However , it is clear that Oliphant bought more science fiction and fantasy stories than Hersey had done : in particular , Hersey had published almost no stories that were straightforward science fiction , though two he did purchase , Murray Leinster 's " A Thousand Degrees Below Zero " and " The Silver Menace " , appeared in the first few issues of Oliphant 's editorship . Stories such as " The Lost Days " by Trainor Lansing , which dealt with perceptions of time , and " The Ultimate Ingredient " by Greye La Spina , about invisibility , published in August and October respectively , were more evidence of this change in emphasis . The most famous science fiction to appear in The Thrill Book was Francis Stevens ' novel The Heads of Cerberus , which was one of the earliest fictional depictions of alternate timelines . In addition to increasing the science fiction content , Oliphant also brought in authors who were better known than those published under Hersey 's editorship , including H. Bedford @-@ Jones and William Wallace Cook . It seems likely that the fiction budget increased when Oliphant took control , and he used this to pay higher word @-@ rates to the better writers . Hersey had paid about a cent per word for fiction , but Bedford @-@ Jones received \$ 800 for " The Opium Ship " , which was a rate of between 2 @. @ 5 and 3 cents per word . However , Francis Stevens was paid only \$ 400 , or less than a cent per word , for the much longer novel The Heads of Cerberus . Poetry continued to appear , including several more poems by Hersey , and also including " Dissonance " by Clark Ashton Smith , whom Hersey had contacted in March asking for submissions in what Will Murray describes as " a rare instance of Hersey 's editorial foresight " .

When The Thrill Book ceased publication , Street & Smith had numerous manuscripts in inventory that had been purchased for the magazine . These were offered to other Street & Smith magazines such as Sea Stories over the next few years . Greye La Spina bought back her manuscript to " The Dead Wagon " in 1927 and re @-@ sold it to Weird Tales . Francis Stevens had sold three serials and three short stories to The Thrill Book that remained unpublished : one of the serials , Serapion , was published in Argosy in 1920 , but the fate of the other two is not known ? they may have been earlier titles for known works of hers . The three short stories are not known to have been published elsewhere . In 1940 , John L. Nanovic , the editor of Doc Savage and The Shadow , reviewed the remaining Thrill Book manuscripts , and suggested to Ralston that a few stories might be publishable in Love Story Magazine , and also suggested a few stories that John W. Campbell might be interested in for Unknown . The following year Oliphant reviewed ten of the manuscripts and returned them to Nanovic with his recommendations . Campbell reviewed three of them and declined to take any ; he also declined to take Murray Leinster 's " The Great Catastrophe " , which

had been submitted to The Thrill Book and found independently of Nanovic 's review . Other magazines that considered and rejected the stories Oliphant recommended included Clues , Mystery , and Detective Story Magazine . The only story from The Thrill Book 's inventory that was used from this review was Clyde Broadwell 's " The Speed Demon 's Vendetta " , which was rewritten and published in The Avenger in March 1942 under the pseudonym " Denby Brixton " , which Broadwell had used for a story he had sold to The Thrill Book .

In 1976 the manuscripts were reviewed again by Will Murray . By this time they had been donated to Syracuse University by Condé Nast , which had acquired Street & Smith in 1961 . The ten stories reviewed by Oliphant were found and plans were made for Odyssey Publications to publish a paperback edition of Thrill Book material including these stories along with some reprints . The following year another group of Thrill Book manuscripts was found in the Syracuse collection , including Leinster 's " The Great Catastrophe " and La Spina 's " The Bracelet " , and the planned contents of the anthology were revised to include some of this material . None of the Francis Stevens stories were found in either group of manuscripts . One story , " As It Is Written " , by De Lysle Ferree Cass , was misidentified by Murray as the work of Clark Ashton Smith , and this led to delays in publication as Odyssey made separate plans to publish the story under Smith 's name . The misidentification was not discovered until after the story appeared in print in 1982 . Four years later , Odyssey went out of business , and the anthology of Thrill Book material never appeared .

Because The Thrill Book was only sold in selected parts of the US , copies of the magazine are very scarce and are highly prized by pulp magazine collectors . Despite its rarity , or perhaps because of it , it has been often described as the first science fiction and fantasy magazine ever published , though more recent assessments by science fiction and pulp historians agree instead that the magazine was a failed attempt at specialization . In the words of Will Murray , the view that The Thrill Book is the first such magazine is " erroneously held by many " , and he adds that it was " merely a prologue to the Golden Era of periodical weird fiction " . In Murray 's opinion it might well have become a dominant force in the genre had it continued publication . Richard Bleiler comments that " it was a magazine that somehow became a symbol to a generation of pulp readers ... it was the first eidetic flash of a dream that would later come into being with Weird Tales " , and in Mike Ashley 's opinion it was just " a step towards a full @-@ blown fantasy magazine " .

= = Bibliographic details = =

The Thrill Book was published by Street & Smith . Initially the magazine was saddle @-@ stapled , 10 3 ? 4 in by 8 in , 48 pages long , and priced at 10 cents . This changed with the ninth issue , dated July 1 , 1919 , to pulp format , with 160 pages , priced at 15 cents . The editor was Harold Hersey from March 1 , 1919 to June 15 , 1919 , and Ronald Oliphant thereafter . There were eight issues to the first volume , six in the second , and two in the third and final volume . Hersey later recalled that he had heard of a Thrill Book Quarterly being issued , but no evidence of such a magazine has been found .

Two issues of The Thrill Book have been reprinted in facsimile editions , both by Wildside Press : the September 1 , 1919 issue , published in 2005 , and the first issue , March 1 , 1919 , which appeared in 2011 .