

= Planet Stories =

Planet Stories was an American pulp science fiction magazine , published by Fiction House between 1939 and 1955 . It featured interplanetary adventures , both in space and on other planets , and was initially focused on a young readership . Malcolm Reiss was editor or editor @-@ in @-@ chief for all of its 71 issues . Planet Stories was launched at the same time as Planet Comics , the success of which probably helped to fund the early issues of Planet Stories . Planet did not pay well enough to regularly attract the leading science fiction writers of the day , but did manage to obtain work from well @-@ known names on occasion , including Isaac Asimov and Clifford Simak . In 1952 Planet published Philip K. Dick 's first sale , and went on to print four more of his stories over the next three years .

The two writers most identified with Planet Stories are Leigh Brackett and Ray Bradbury , both of whom set many of their stories on a romanticized version of Mars that owed much to the depiction of Barsoom in the works of Edgar Rice Burroughs . Bradbury 's work for Planet included an early story in his Martian Chronicles sequence . Brackett 's best @-@ known work for the magazine was a series of adventures featuring Eric John Stark , which began in the summer of 1949 . Brackett and Bradbury collaborated on one story , " Lorelei of the Red Mist " , which appeared in 1946 ; it was generally well @-@ received , although one letter to the magazine complained that the story 's treatment of sex , though mild by modern standards , was too explicit . The artwork also emphasized attractive women , with scantily clad damsels in distress or alien princesses on almost every cover .

= = Publication history = =

Although science fiction (sf) had been published before the 1920s , it did not begin to coalesce into a separately marketed genre until the appearance in 1926 of Amazing Stories , a pulp magazine published by Hugo Gernsback . By the end of the 1930s the field was undergoing its first boom . Fiction House , a major pulp publisher , had run into difficulties during the Depression , but after a relaunch in 1934 found success with detective and romance pulp titles . Fiction House 's first title with sf interest was Jungle Stories , which was launched in early 1939 ; it was not primarily a science fiction magazine , but often featured storylines with marginally science fictional themes , such as survivors from Atlantis . At the end of 1939 Fiction House decided to add an sf magazine to its line up ; it was titled Planet Stories , and was published by Love Romances , a subsidiary company that had been created to publish Fiction House 's romance titles . The first issue was dated Winter 1939 . Two comics were launched at the same time : Jungle Comics and Planet Comics ; both were published monthly , whereas Planet Stories was quarterly , and it is quite likely that the success of the comics funded the early issues of the pulps .

Malcolm Reiss edited Planet Stories from the beginning , and retained editorial oversight and control throughout its run , though he was not always the named editor on the masthead ; when other editors were involved , his title was " managing editor " . The first of these sub @-@ editors was Wilbur S. Peacock , who took over with the Fall 1942 issue and remained until Fall 1945 , after which he was replaced by Chester Whitehorn for three issues , and then by Paul L. Payne , from Fall 1946 to Spring 1950 .

With the Summer 1950 issue the editorship passed to Jerome Bixby , who was already editing Jungle Stories . Soon thereafter Planet Stories switched from a quarterly to bimonthly schedule . Bixby lasted a little over a year ; Malcolm Reiss took over again in September 1951 , and three issues later , in March 1952 , Jack O 'Sullivan became editor . A contemporary market survey records that in 1953 , payment rates were only one to two cents per word ; this was substantially behind the leading magazines of the day . Planet returned to a quarterly schedule beginning with the Summer 1954 issue , but the pulp market was collapsing , and the Summer 1955 issue was the final one .

= = Contents and reception = =

Fiction House apparently made the decision to launch Planet Stories so quickly that there was little time for Reiss to obtain new stories , so he worked with Julius Schwartz and other authors ' agents to fill the first issue . The results were unremarkable , but Reiss was energetic , and was able to improve the quality of fiction in succeeding issues , though he occasionally apologized to the readers for printing weak material . The magazine was exclusively focused on interplanetary adventures , often taking place in primitive societies that would now be regarded as " sword and sorcery " settings , and was aimed at a young readership ; the result was a mixture of what became known as space opera and planetary romances ? melodramatic tales of action and adventure on alien planets and in interplanetary space . Planet relied on a few authors to provide the bulk of its fiction in the early years , with Nelson Bond providing eight lead stories , some of them novels . Fourteen more were written by Ray Cummings and Ross Rocklynne ; and Leigh Brackett was also a regular contributor , with seventeen stories in total published over the lifetime of the magazine .

The letter column in Planet was titled " The Vizigraph " ; it was very active , with long letters from an engaged readership . It often printed letters from established writers , and from fans who would go on to become well known professionally : Damon Knight 's letters are described by sf historian Mike Ashley as " legendary " ; and Robert Silverberg commented in a letter in the Summer 1950 issue that Ray Bradbury " certainly gets some original ideas , if not good ones " . The editors put a good deal of effort into keeping the letter column friendly and lively ; contemporary writer and editor Robert Lowndes recalls that " Reiss was sincere and urbane ; Wilbur [Peacock] enjoyed taking his coat off and being one of the crowd " .

Despite the focus on melodramatic space adventure , the fiction in Planet Stories improved over the next few years , largely due to the work of Brackett and Bradbury . Both writers set many of their stories on a romanticized version of Mars that owed much to the Barsoom of Edgar Rice Burroughs . Brackett 's writing improved during the 1940s from formulaic pulp adventure to a more mature style , and she became the most accomplished writer of planetary romances of her day . She wrote a well @-@ received series of stories featuring adventurer Eric John Stark , which began in the Summer 1949 Planet with " Queen of the Martian Catacombs " . Her work had a strong influence on other writers , in particular Gardner F. Fox , Lin Carter and Marion Zimmer Bradley , Brackett later argued that " the so @-@ called space opera is the folk @-@ tale , the hero @-@ tale of our particular niche in history " . Also arguing in support of Planet Stories , science fiction critic John Clute has commented that " the content was far more sophisticated than the covers " .

Bradbury 's work for Planet included two of the stories that he later incorporated into The Martian Chronicles , including " The Million Year Picnic " ; only one other story in the series had appeared before this . He also collaborated on a story with Leigh Brackett , " Lorelei of the Red Mist " , based on an idea of hers , which appeared in the Summer of 1946 . His stories for Planet demonstrate his reservations about the advance of technology , in particular " The Golden Apples of the Sun " (November 1953) , and " A Sound of Thunder " (January 1954 , reprinted from the June 28 , 1952 issue of Collier 's Weekly) . Bradbury 's work in Planet Stories is regarded by one pulp historian , Tim de Forest , as " the magazine 's most important contribution to the genre " .

Several other well @-@ known writers appeared in Planet Stories , including Isaac Asimov , Clifford Simak , James Blish , Fredric Brown and Damon Knight . Asimov 's story , originally titled " Pilgrimage " , appeared in 1942 ; Asimov had been unable to sell the piece elsewhere , and rewrote it numerous times for different editors , adding a religious element at John Campbell 's request , and removing it again when Malcolm Reiss asked for further changes . Reiss bought it but changed the name to " Black Friar of the Flame " .

Jerome Bixby , who took over as editor in 1950 , was a published writer and was knowledgeable about sf , though he had primarily written western fiction . In his short tenure he did much to improve the magazine , persuading the established writers to produce better material and finding unusual variations on the interplanetary adventure theme such as Poul Anderson 's " Duel on Syrtis " in March 1951 , about an Earthman tracking an alien on Mars , and Theodore Sturgeon 's " The Incubi on Planet X " , about aliens who kidnap Earth women . After Bixby 's departure in 1952 , Planet 's major contribution to the genre was the discovery of Philip K. Dick , whose first sale , " Beyond Lies the Wub " , appeared in the July 1952 issue . Dick went on to sell another four stories to Planet over

the next two years , including " James P. Crow " , in which a human suffers discrimination in a world of robots .

Planet Stories clearly targeted a young readership , and the simultaneous launch in 1939 of Planet Comics may have been instrumental in attracting young readers to science fiction , but Ashley suggests that it is more likely that Planet Stories attracted experienced readers of the genre who " still yearned for the early days of sf " . Critic and sf historian Thomas Clareson has commented that " Planet seemed to look backward towards the 1930s and earlier " , an impression that was strengthened by the extensive use of interior artwork by Frank Paul , who had been the cover artist for the early Gernsback magazines in the 1920s . Paul 's distinctive style was strongly associated with the early years of the field . The cover art was also melodramatic , with beautiful women ? sometimes human , sometimes princesses from other planets ? and threatening aliens . The subheading on the cover read " Strange Adventures on Other Worlds ? The Universe of Future Centuries " until the end of 1946 .

Although almost every story that appeared in Planet could be described as space opera , there was some variety of approach to the basic themes . Earth was sometimes threatened , but more often the action took place on other worlds , bringing Earthmen into local conflicts . This often involved beautiful native princesses , though the romantic storylines were stereotyped : in one story , Carl Selwyn 's " Venus Has Green Eyes " , which appeared in Fall 1940 , the Venusian princess is dissuaded from her hatred of humans when the hero seizes her and kisses her ; she slaps him , but succumbs to his charm . Some respite from these depictions of women was provided by Leigh Brackett , who described her own heroines as " usually on the bitchy side ? warm @-@ blooded , hot @-@ tempered , but gutty and intelligent " (with " bitchy " intended as a compliment) . During World War II , it was in Planet Stories that a reader was most likely to come across a female character who could fight , instead of merely being fought over . Sex itself had long been taboo in the pulp magazines , but some stories in Planet depicted sexuality more directly than the competing magazines would . The readers were not always accepting ; one reader in a letter in 1949 supported " jettisoning the taboos " , but a letter writer in 1946 objected to " Lorelei of the Red Mist " , saying that he needed " a pint of Listerine to wash the dirty taste out of my mouth " . The cover artwork generally emphasized sex as well , with what sf author and critic Harry Harrison sardonically referred to as " sexual dimorphism in space " : heavy , functional spacesuits for the men , and transparent suits through which bikinis or swimsuits could be seen for the women .

Hannes Bok contributed much of the interior artwork , and the covers were often by Allen Anderson during the early years . Later , Kelly Freas became a frequent cover artist . One of the best artists to work on Planet was Alexander Leydenfrost , whose work , according to Clareson , " epitomized much of what Planet Stories represented in the 1940s " , though his cover artwork was less impressive than his black @-@ and @-@ white interior illustrations . Artist and sf historian David Hardy has described Leydenfrost 's black and white illustrations as " almost Rembrandtian in his use of light and shade " .

= = Bibliographic details = =

The editorial succession at Planet was :

Malcolm Reiss : Winter 1939 ? Summer 1942 .

Wilbur S. Peacock : Fall 1942 ? Fall 1945 .

Chester Whitehorn : Winter 1945 ? Summer 1946 .

Paul L. Payne : Fall 1946 ? Spring 1950 .

Jerome Bixby : Summer 1950 ? July 1951 .

Malcolm Reiss : September 1951 ? January 1952 .

Jack O 'Sullivan : March 1952 ? Summer 1955 .

Planet Stories was a pulp @-@ sized magazine for all of its 71 issues . It was 128 pages for most of its existence , and was priced at 20 cents . With the November 1950 issue the page count was cut to 112 , and the price went up to 25 cents . The page count was reduced to 96 for one issue in March 1952 , but then returned to 112 until Summer 1954 , when it was again reduced to 96 pages

for the last five issues .

Planet began as a quarterly . A brief attempt was made to switch to a bimonthly schedule in 1943 ; a March and May issue appeared , but the next issue was titled Fall 1943 , inaugurating another quarterly period . The Fall 1950 issue was followed by November 1950 , and this began a bimonthly period that lasted until May 1954 , which was followed by a Summer 1954 issue . A quarterly schedule resumed until the end ; unusually , the winter issue that year was dated Winter 1954 / 55 , rather than with a single year . The volume numbering was consistent throughout the magazine 's publication , with five volumes of 12 issues and a final volume of 11 , but there were three errors in the volume numbering printed on the spine (though not on the masthead) : issue 5 / 10 was given as 5 / 8 on the spine ; issue 5 / 11 was given as 6 / 3 on the spine ; and issue 6 / 11 was given as 6 / 12 on the spine .

A British reprint edition appeared between March 1950 and September 1954 ; the issues were numbered but not dated , and were heavily cut , with only 64 to 68 pages . There are twelve issues known ; a thirteenth has been rumored but not seen by any sf bibliographers . The publisher was Pembertons , though some sources indicate that Streamline Publications was the publisher of the first issue . Issues 7 and 8 of the British edition also contained nonfiction material reprinted from Startling Stories and Thrilling Wonder . A Canadian edition was published by American News Co . , from Fall 1948 to March 1951 (a total of twelve issues) ; these were identical to the corresponding U.S. editions .

= = = Related publications = = =

In the summer of 1950 Fiction House launched a companion magazine to Planet . It was titled Two Complete Science @-@ Adventure Books ; the policy was to print two novels in a single magazine . It appeared three times a year and lasted until the spring of 1954 . In 1953 Fiction House launched a reprint magazine , Tops in Science Fiction , selecting the contents from the backfile of stories that had appeared in Planet . It only lasted for two issues , the second of which received almost no distribution .

A derivative anthology , The Best of Planet Stories # 1 , appeared in 1975 from Ballantine Books , edited by Leigh Brackett , containing seven stories reprinted from between 1942 and 1952 . It was intended to be the first of a series , but no further volumes appeared .