

= Famous Fantastic Mysteries =

Famous Fantastic Mysteries was an American science fiction and fantasy pulp magazine published from 1939 to 1953 . The editor was Mary Gnaedinger . It was launched by the Munsey Company as a way to reprint the many science fiction and fantasy stories which had appeared over the preceding decades in the Munsey magazines , such as Argosy . The first issue was dated September / October 1939 ; the magazine was immediately successful , and less than a year later a companion magazine , Fantastic Novels , was launched .

Frequently reprinted authors included George Allan England , A. Merritt , and Austin Hall ; the artwork was also a major reason for the success of the magazine , with artists such as Virgil Finlay and Lawrence Stevens contributing some of their best work . In late 1942 Popular Publications acquired the title from Munsey , and Famous Fantastic Mysteries stopped reprinting short stories from the earlier magazines . It continued to reprint longer works , including titles by G. K. Chesterton , H. G. Wells , and H. Rider Haggard . Original short fiction also began to appear , including Arthur C. Clarke 's " Guardian Angel " , which would later form the first section of his novel Childhood 's End . In 1951 the publishers experimented briefly with a large digest format , but returned quickly to the original pulp layout . The magazine ceased publication in 1953 , almost at the end of the pulp era .

= = Publication history = =

By the early decades of the 20th century , science fiction (sf) stories were frequently seen in popular magazines . The Munsey Company , a major pulp magazine publisher , printed a great deal of science fiction in these years , but it was not until 1926 that Amazing Stories , the first pulp magazine specializing in science fiction appeared . Munsey continued to print sf in Argosy during the 1930s , including stories such as Murray Leinster 's The War of the Purple Gas and Arthur Leo Zagat 's " Tomorrow " , though they owned no magazines that specialized in science fiction . By the end of the 1930s science fiction was a growing market , with several new sf magazines launched in 1939 . That year Munsey took advantage of science fiction 's growing popularity by launching Famous Fantastic Mysteries as a vehicle for reprinting the most popular fantasy and sf stories from the Munsey magazines .

The first issue was dated September / October 1939 , and was edited by Mary Gnaedinger . The magazine immediately became successful and went to a monthly schedule starting in November 1939 . Demand for reprints of old favorites was so strong that Munsey decided to launch an additional magazine , Fantastic Novels , in July 1940 . The two magazines were placed on alternating bimonthly schedules , but when Fantastic Novels ceased publication in early 1941 Famous Fantastic Mysteries remained bimonthly until June 1942 . Munsey sold Famous Fantastic Mysteries to Popular Publications , a major pulp publisher , at the end of 1942 ; it appears to have been a sudden decision , since the editorial in the December 1942 issue discusses a planned February issue that never materialized , and mentions forthcoming reprints that did not appear . The first issue from Popular appeared in March 1943 , and only two more issues appeared that year ; the September 1943 issue marked the beginning of a regular quarterly schedule . It returned to a bimonthly schedule in 1946 which it maintained with only slight deviations until the end of its run .

In 1949 , Street & Smith , one of the longest established and most respected publishers , shut down all of their pulp magazines : the pulp era was drawing to a close . Popular Publications was the biggest pulp publisher , which helped their titles last a little longer , but Famous Fantastic Mysteries finally ceased publication in 1953 , only a couple of years before the last of the pulps ceased publication .

= = Contents and reception = =

Munsey 's plan for the magazines was laid out in a note that appeared in the first four issues : " This magazine is the answer to thousands of requests we have received over a period of years ,

demanding a second look at famous fantasies which , since their original publication , have become accepted classics . Our choice has been dictated by your requests and our firm belief that these are the aces of imaginative fiction . " The first issue included Ray Cummings ' " The Girl in the Golden Atom " and A. Merritt 's " The Moon Pool " , both popular stories by well @-@ known authors . Merritt 's sequel , " The Conquest of the Moon Pool " , began serialization in the next issue , with illustrations by Virgil Finlay . Finlay did many illustrations for Famous Fantastic Mysteries over its lifetime , and became one of its most popular artists . Frank R. Paul began illustrating for the magazine with the third issue ; he was not as capable an artist as Finlay but was very popular with the readers . The first five covers were simply tables of contents , but with the sixth issue , dated March 1940 , pictorial covers began , with Finlay the artist for that first cover . Three early covers in 1940 were painted by Paul , but thereafter almost every cover was painted by either Finlay , Lawrence Stevens , or his son , Peter Stevens , including every single issue from February 1941 through April 1950 . The high quality of the artwork helped make the magazine one of the most popular of its day , and sf historian Thomas Clareson has suggested that it was Finlay 's work in Famous Fantastic Mysteries and Fantastic Novels that made his reputation .

The decision to launch Fantastic Novels was taken partly because there were a great many book @-@ length works that readers wanted to see reprinted . Gnaedinger commented that " Everyone seems to have realized that although [the] set @-@ up of five to seven stories with two serials running , was highly satisfactory , that the long list of novels would have to be speeded up somehow " . When Fantastic Novels was launched , Famous Fantastic Mysteries was partway through serialization of The Blind Spot , by Austin Hall and Homer Eon Flint , with the third episode appearing in the May / June 1940 issue . Rather than complete the serialization , Gnaedinger decided to print the novel in its entirety in the first issue of Fantastic Novels , ensuring that readers of Famous Fantastic Mysteries would also acquire the new magazine . After Fantastic Novels ceased publication in 1941 , Famous Fantastic Mysteries changed its policy , and began publishing a complete novel in every issue , rather than several stories and one or two serials running concurrently . Usually there were also short stories , but occasionally a particularly long novel would appear alone in the issue : this happened , for example , with the February 1942 issue , which contained Francis Stevens ' The Citadel of Fear , and no other fiction .

When Munsey sold Famous Fantastic Mysteries to Popular , the editorial policy changed again , to exclude reprints of short fiction that had previously appeared in magazine form . Book length fiction continued to be reprinted , as did some shorter works that had appeared only in books , such as William Hope Hodgson 's " The Derelict " , and Robert W. Chambers ' " The Mask " , both of which appeared in the December 1943 issue . The reprinted novels included G. K. Chesterton 's The Man Who Was Thursday , H. G. Wells ' The Island of Dr. Moreau , H. Rider Haggard 's The Ancient Allan , and works by Algernon Blackwood , Lord Dunsany , and Arthur Machen . Some of the reprinted material was abridged , but despite this , Famous Fantastic Mysteries did an important service to its readers by making works available that had been long out of print , and which in some cases had only been previously published in the U.K. , making their appearance in the magazine the first chance many subscribers would have had to read them .

Some original material also appeared after Popular acquired the magazine . Contributors who published original stories in Famous Fantastic Mysteries included Henry Kuttner , Ray Bradbury , and C. L. Moore . Arthur C. Clarke 's story " Guardian Angel " appeared in the April 1950 issue ; it was later turned into the first section of his novel Childhood 's End .

= = Bibliographic details = =

Mary Gnaedinger was the editor of Famous Fantastic Mysteries for all 81 issues . The magazine was launched as a bimonthly in September 1939 , and was converted to monthly from the second issue , in November 1939 . The May 1940 issue was followed by August 1940 , which began a bimonthly sequence that lasted until June 1942 , which began another monthly sequence that ran through the end of 1942 . The next issue , March 1943 , was followed by a September issue that inaugurated a quarterly sequence that ran until December 1945 , which began another bimonthly

run . This lasted until the final issue in June 1953 with only two irregularities : October 1950 was followed by January 1951 , and July 1951 was followed by October 1951 . Famous Fantastic Mysteries was published by the Munsey Corporation until the end of 1942 , and by Popular Publications , thereafter . The magazine was initially 128 pages long . This was cut to 112 pages with the October 1940 issue , and then returned to 128 pages for the June 1941 issue . From June 1942 to March 1944 the page count was 144 ; it was cut to 132 in June 1944 and again to 112 in January 1951 , where it remained until the end of the run . The price was 15 cents throughout , except for the period from October 1940 to April 1941 during which it was 10 cents . Famous Fantastic Mysteries began as a pulp , and remained in that format throughout its run except for a brief experiment in 1951 in which it was reduced to large digest size .

A Canadian reprint edition , with identical contents and dates , began in February 1948 , from All Fiction Field , Inc . ; in October 1951 the publisher became Popular Publications , Toronto , but this was just a name change rather than a change of ownership . The final Canadian issue was dated August 1952 ; these issues were half an inch longer than the U.S. versions . In addition , the Canadian edition of Super Science Stories , which had initially reprinted from its U.S. namesake and from the U.S. edition of Astonishing Stories , began to reprint almost entirely from Famous Fantastic Mysteries beginning with the August 1944 Canadian issue . As a nod to the change in source material , the title of the Canadian edition was changed to Super Science and Fantastic Stories starting with the December 1944 issue . A Mexican magazine , Los Cuentos Fantásticos , which published 44 issues between 1948 and 1953 , reprinted stories from both Famous Fantastic Mysteries and Astounding Science Fiction , mostly (though not entirely) without obtaining permission first .

An anthology , Famous Fantastic Mysteries : 30 Great Tales of Fantasy and Horror from the Classic Pulp Magazines Famous Fantastic Mysteries and Fantastic Novels , appeared in 1991 , edited by Stefan R. Dziemianowicz , Robert E. Weinberg and Martin H. Greenberg , and drawing almost all of its contents from Famous Fantastic Mysteries .