

= Fantastic Universe =

Fantastic Universe was a U.S. science fiction magazine which began publishing in the 1950s . It ran for 69 issues , from June 1953 to March 1960 , under two different publishers . It was part of the explosion of science fiction magazine publishing in the 1950s in the United States , and was moderately successful , outlasting almost all of its competitors . The main editors were Leo Margulies (1954 ? 1956) and Hans Stefan Santesson (1956 ? 1960) ; under Santesson 's tenure the quality declined somewhat , and the magazine became known for printing much UFO @-@ related material . A collection of stories from the magazine , edited by Santesson , appeared in 1960 from Prentice @-@ Hall , titled The Fantastic Universe Omnibus .

= = Publication history = =

The early 1950s saw dramatic changes in the world of U.S. science fiction publishing . At the start of 1949 , all but one of the major magazines in the field were in pulp format ; by the end of 1955 , all had either ceased publication or switched to digest format . This change was largely the work of the distributors , such as American News Company , who refused to carry the pulp magazines since they were no longer profitable ; the loss of profitability was in turn associated with the rise in mass @-@ market science fiction publishing , with paperback publishers such as Ace Books and Ballantine Books becoming established . Along with the increase in science fiction in book form came a flood of new U.S. magazines : from a low of eight active magazines in 1946 , the field expanded to twenty in 1950 , and a further twenty @-@ two had commenced publication by 1954 .

Fantastic Universe published its first issue in the midst of this publishing boom . The issue , in digest format , was dated June ? July 1953 , and was priced at 50 cents . This was higher than any of its competition , but it also had the highest page count in the field at the time , with 196 pages . The initial editorial team was Leo Margulies as publisher , and Sam Merwin as editor ; this was a combination familiar to science fiction fans from their years together at Thrilling Wonder Stories , which Merwin edited from 1945 to 1951 . The publisher , King @-@ Size Publications , also produced The Saint Detective Magazine , which was popular , so Fantastic Universe enjoyed good distribution from the start ? a key factor in a magazine 's success . The first issue included stories by Arthur C. Clarke , Philip K. Dick , and Ray Bradbury . According to Donald Tuck , the author of an early SF encyclopaedia , the magazine kept a fairly high quality through Merwin 's departure after a year , and through the subsequent brief period of caretaker editorship by Beatrice Jones . Margulies took over the editor 's post with the May 1954 issue .

In October 1955 , Hans Stefan Santesson , an American writer , editor , and reviewer , began contributing " Universe in Books " , the regular book review column . A year later , with the September 1956 issue , Santesson took over from Margulies as editor . One immediate change was an increase in the number of articles about UFOs . Santesson ran several articles by Ivan T. Sanderson , among others , including articles on auras and on the abominable snowman . However , he also ran polemical articles opposed to the UFO mania , including strongly worded pieces by Lester del Rey and C.M. Kornbluth . Del Rey , at least , felt that Santesson was not a believer in UFOs : " So far as I could determine , Santessen [sic] was skeptical about such things , but felt that all sides deserved a hearing and also that the controversies were good for circulation . "

The quality of the fiction is thought by Donald Tuck to have generally fallen during Santesson 's period at the helm , though this was not entirely his fault ? there were a great many other magazines competing for stories by the top writers . Santesson himself , despite a modicum of controversy over his heavy use of UFO and related material , was kind and helpful to writers , and was well liked as a result .

In late 1959 the magazine was sold to Great American Publications , and it was significantly redesigned . The size was increased to that of a glossy magazine , although the magazine was still bound rather than saddle @-@ stapled . Under King @-@ Size Publications , the magazine had had no artwork except small " filler " illustrations ; now interior illustrations complementing the stories were introduced , and photographs and diagrams accompanied some of the articles . A fan column ,

by Belle C. Dietz , began , and Sam Moskowitz wrote two detailed historical articles about proto @-@ sf . However , the March 1960 issue was the last one . Fredric Brown 's " The Mind Thing " had begun serialization in that issue ; it was eventually published in book form later that year .

Circulation figures for Fantastic Universe are unknown , since at that time circulation figures were not required to be published annually , as they were later . After the magazine folded , the publisher entertained plans to publish material bought for the magazine as a one @-@ shot issue to be titled " Summer SF " ; however , the issue never appeared . Santesson did later edit an anthology drawn from the magazine , titled The Fantastic Universe Omnibus .

= = Contents = =

Fantastic Universe published several significant stories during its seven @-@ year history . These included stories from Tales of Conan , a collection of four Robert E. Howard stories rewritten as Conan stories by L. Sprague de Camp . Three of the stories were published in Fantastic Universe , two before the book , and one after :

" Hawks Over Shem " (October 1955)

" The Road of the Eagles " (as " Conan , Man of Destiny " , December 1955)

" The Blood @-@ Stained God " (April 1956)

Other notable and widely reprinted stories included :

" Short in the Chest " , by Margaret St. Clair (writing as Ildris Seabright , July 1954) .

" Who ? " , by Algis Budrys (April 1955) . Formed the basis for Budrys 's novel , Who ?

" The Minority Report " , by Philip K. Dick (January 1956) . The basis for the movie Minority Report

" First Law " , by Isaac Asimov (October 1956) . One of Asimov 's robot stories .

" Curative Telepath " , by John Brunner (December 1959) . Formed the basis of Brunner 's novel The Whole Man .

" The Large Ant " , by Howard Fast (February 1960) .

Other writers who appeared in the magazine included Harlan Ellison , Theodore Sturgeon , Robert Silverberg , Clifford Simak , Robert F. Young , and Robert Bloch .

One offbeat feature of the magazine was the habit of including very short (less than a page) vignettes of fiction , usually but not always relating to the cover , without credit . These were most probably the work of the editor in many cases , though Frank Belknap Long wrote several of these for the inside front cover of the magazine . There was never a letter column , though in the very last issue there was a note that one was planned for future issues . The book review column , always titled " Universe in Books " , appeared fairly regularly but was liable to be dropped if there was no room for it . It was originally signed " The Editor " , and was presumably written by Sam Merwin ; Robert Frazier took the column on when Merwin left at the end of 1953 . Santesson took over in October 1955 and wrote every column that appeared from that point on . After the first few issues , which contained editorial essays from both editor and publisher , the editorials disappeared , though Santesson did sometimes fill a blank space with a few editorial comments .

Two articles by Moskowitz in the last few months of the magazine , " Two Thousand Years of Space Travel " , and " To Mars and Venus in the Gay Nineties " , were unusually early and well @-@ researched articles on proto @-@ science fiction . A couple of other non @-@ fiction articles appeared late on , but with the exception of UFO @-@ related material , and occasional filler paragraphs reporting science news , Fantastic Universe did not generally run science @-@ related articles .

= = Bibliographic details = =

The magazine began as a fat 196 @-@ page digest , priced at 50 cents , but this experiment did not last . The fourth issue , January 1954 , cut the price to 35 cents , and it stayed at that price for the rest of its life . The page count also dropped , to 164 pages with the fourth issue , then to 132 pages with the eighth issue , September 1954 . The page count stayed at 132 through the rest of

the digest period , and for the first five issues of the " glossy " period under the new publisher . The very last issue cut the page count to 100 pages .

The magazine was initially bimonthly . The first three issues were named with two months : " June ? July 1953 " , and so on . At the end of 1953 the naming was changed to the odd numbered months ; and then after January , March , May , and July , the magazine went monthly , starting with the September 1954 issue . This lasted without a break until the November 1958 issue . Another bimonthly schedule , starting with January 1959 , followed ; the last King @-@ Size Publications issue was September 1959 , and it was followed by an October 1959 issue from Great American . The remaining five issues followed a regular monthly schedule ; the last issue was March 1960 . The volume numbering scheme was fairly regular ; the first five volumes had six numbers each . Volume 6 had only five numbers , in order to get the new volume 7 to start with the new year , in 1957 . This lasted until volume 10 was cut short at five numbers when the magazine returned to a bimonthly schedule at the end of 1958 . Volume 11 had six numbers ; volume 12 had five .

The editors were :

June ? July 1953 to October ? November 1953 : Sam Merwin , Jr . (3 issues)

January 1954 to March 1954 : Beatrice Jones (2 issues)

May 1954 to August 1956 : Leo Margulies (26 issues)

September 1956 to March 1960 : Hans Stefan Santesson (38 issues)

Cover art was initially mostly by Alex Schomburg . Other artists , including Ed Emshwiller , Kelly Freas , and Mel Hunter , contributed covers ; and towards the end there was a long sequence of covers by Virgil Finlay . Finlay also contributed much of the interior art in the last six issues ; generally Great American did not credit the artists , but along with Finlay , Emshwiller and John Giunta were featured .