



July, 1979

About the Cover

We hope our cover reached up with outstretched arms, entreating you to pick us up and find out what is going on inside! The illustration, by Elinor Mavor, interprets "The Big Blow-Up" by picturing one of its aliens inside a "bubble" symbolizing his protective powers. See Page 108.

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FEATURES

38

A "FABIAN" FEATURE

A six-page Sword & Sorcery creation, written and illustrated by Steve Fabian especially for FANTASTIC.

80

SEX QUEENS FROM OUTER SPACE

Artist Jon Gerung's concept of how women fare at the hands of their creators in the worlds of SF and Fantasy.

FICTION

8

HESSIE AND THE SPACED-OUT DEMON

by William E. Fark

An upbeat alien encounter happily folding in a dash of SF and then a pinch of Fantasy for just the right taste!

fantastic

SCIENCE FICTION

Science Fiction • Fantasy • Sword & Sorcery



25
THE WORM

by David H. Keller

One of the very best tales of suspense you'll ever read.

44
THE SUCCESS MACHINE

by Henry Slesar

If men bend the truth here and there, a machine simply cannot tell a lie.

54
THE BALD-HEADED MIRAGE

by Robert Bloch

Great stone sculptures on earth cause men to wonder; here are some, perhaps even more strange, on another planet.

68
A MUSEUM PIECE

by Roger Zelazny

A lighthearted look at some unique drop-outs. (Another look is given this "piece" by Robert Wilcox immediately following the story.)

84
THE NON-EXISTENT MAN

by Wynn Whiteford

About a time-tripper who took one too many!

94
NOW IS FOREVER

by Dobbin Thorpe

The ultimate recycle job!

108
THE BIG BLOW-UP

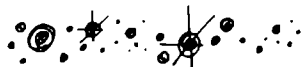
by Daniel F. Galouye

Time is running out for this star, its planet and everyone on it!

Back Cover
EARLY WINTER

by John E. Stith

The end of the world comes with a kicker



DEPARTMENTS

4
OFF THE CLIPBOARD

Editorial notes and news

7
INTERCOM

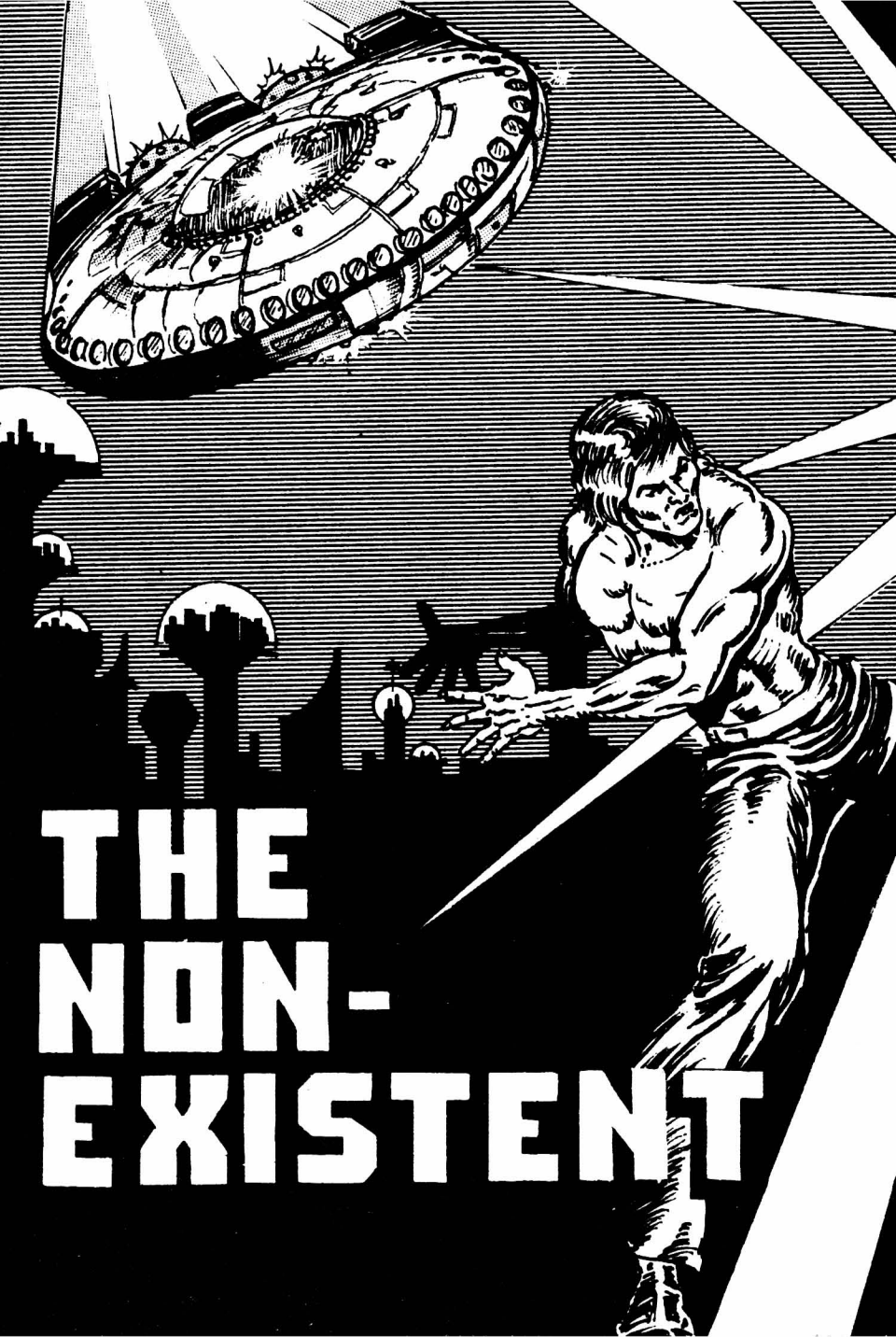
What our readers have to say.

77
BETWEEN THE LINES

Robert Wilcox with some literary "vision."

67
FANTASTIC FACTS

How a scientist sees our place in the universe.



THE NON- EXISTENT



by Wynne Whiteford

Tampering with the past carries inherent dangers that may not be avoidable. If man ever does achieve the capability of tripping in time, what motives might justify the risk of altering events in some catastrophic way? Certainly it should be something far more important than personal gain! But . . . even then . . .

IMMORTAL

MARK! I don't want you to go through with it!"

"What?" By the door, Mark Fallon turned. With two long strides he crossed to the table, putting his brief case on it. As he looked down at his wife, his black brows met in a single heavy bar across his pale face.

He put his hands on her shoulders. "Ria, we've been through this a hundred times. Tonight will be the last time I have free access to the laboratory."

"I don't want you to do it. I'm frightened!"

He shook her slightly, smiling with his mouth but not with his eyes. "I'm running no risk. We know the time-disk works. We've had it back much further into the past than the time I'm aiming for. Neither Jennison nor I have ever got out of it — that's all. But there was nothing to stop us stepping out into the world of any past time — nothing, that is, but Jennison's superstitious fear of changing the course of events." His lips twisted. "As if they couldn't be better."

"But it's such a terrible period you're going back to. Those newspapers in the library — murder and shooting on nearly every page."

Mark gave a confident laugh. He took the revolver out of his pocket and weighed it in his hand, sighting at a point on the wall.

"Put that away!" Her voice was high and shaky. "It's barbaric."

"Probably not one chance in a thousand I'll have to use it. But I feel safer with it. Listen! I'll be in that period only one-hundred

minutes. Just long enough to find John, deliver the photographs, and come away."

"What if he thinks they're faked?"

"He won't. Why d'you think I picked him, out of all my ancestors?"

"Because you've got his diary. He's the only one you know where to find."

"Well — partly that, yes. But more than that, because he had brains. He was an inventor. Not a great inventor, perhaps, but there are still a couple of electronic gadgets named after him."

Ria was silent, troubled. "But — you don't know what effect you'll have on today, giving him the plans of inventions before their time."

Mark flung his arms wide. "It's not long before their time. Damn it, it doesn't matter whether the antigravity field is invented by Cranston in 1996 or by my great-great-grandfather in about 1959 or '60. The same with all the other things." He laughed. "He'll know how to use the stuff. He was bright. Remember, he left quite a fortune — not that any of it came down to me. But this should give him the greatest fortune any man ever had — and there should be plenty left over for me, and for you. If there isn't, I suppose I'll just have to go back again, but we'll worry about that when we come to it."

He picked up the brief case again. "There's no reason why it shouldn't work. It's got to work. With enough money, I could be running the whole project, not

Jennison." Suddenly he grinned. "See you later. I've got a long way to go. A hundred and thirty-seven years each way."

"For heaven's sake be careful," she called after him as he strode out.

HE LANDED his air-car close to the laboratory, walked along in the dark, and let himself in with his key. He didn't turn any lights on until he was in the windowless inner room with the time-disk.

It was partly an aircraft, because it would be necessary at times to maneuver in space to some extent before making a landing in a past period of time. It had a circular cabin with round port-holes, surrounded by a broad circular flange which contained the time-distortion coils. Beneath were three rounded projections of the antigravity thrust-units which lifted it, similar to those used on an air-car. He pressed the button which slid back the laboratory roof, exposing the dark, star-flecked sky.

He entered the cabin of the disk, and carefully set the dials to the date on which his great-great-grandfather's diary had recorded a quiet, uninterrupted evening at his apartment — March 13, 1958. One hundred and thirty-seven years ago. He started the generators. On the antigrav drive, he lifted a thousand, three-thousand, ten-thousand feet into the night air, and then he hovered. He set the emergence-point at 2120 hours, and sent the current flowing through the coils. He threw in the activating switch, and

the tremendous force of the temporal-distortion field flowed through him

A different landscape was suddenly below him. Still a city, but with dim spots of light along narrow streets. He compared it with the photograph of the old map he had copied in the library, and sent the disk skimming horizontally across the river. He wondered if anyone below had noticed it. It didn't matter — in those days, the newspapers often carried reports of strange things seen in the sky.

He picked up his co-ordinates, and lowered the disk on its anti-gravs into a vacant lot near a gaunt iron structure that appeared to be some form of elevated railroad. He took his brief case, set the disk's controls to return on automatic to the laboratory at Time Zero plus ten seconds, then to return exactly to this point at 2300 hours — one hundred minutes from *now*. He got out quickly, dropping to the bare ground and moving away as the disk flicked out of sight.

He looked about him. A train thundered along the elevated railroad, its long line of yellow-lit windows showing strangely attired people within. He watched it out of sight, then walked rapidly towards the street, passing through a gap in a line of straggling bushes.

He looked tensely in each direction, his mind filled with mental pictures of newspaper headlines in the ancient papers of the period — a man shot in the street, another held up and robbed

somewhere else. As Ria had said, it was a barbaric time.

He began to run along the asphalt sidewalk.

"Hey!" called a voice nearby. From the corner of his eye, he saw a figure emerge from the shadows where the bushes grew thickly.

He whirled. The other man was about his own build, similarly dressed, and in his hand was a revolver! Mark's own gun seemed to leap into his hand. He hadn't time to feel fear. The other man moved forward, his face shadowed, menacing.

Mark's gun spat orange flame into the gloom, once, twice. The other man spun with the impact of the bullets against chest and shoulder, sprawling to the ground. His hands clawed forward to the edge of the asphalt.

MARK RAN, flashing beneath a street-lamp and pounding on into the dark. There was the taste of metal in his mouth. He wished the incident hadn't happened, but he couldn't afford complications. If he were held, questioned, he could miss the return of the time-disk. He would be trapped in this hideous, violent world of the past for the rest of his life.

He was still running when he reached the street where his great-great-grandfather, John Fallon, had his apartment. Not ten minutes after leaving the disk, he found the right building.

He was glad of the chance to regain some of his breath as he scanned the names on the mail-boxes. There it was — J.A.

Fallon, Apartment 3B. He pressed the button beneath it, and a moment later a buzzer shrilled. He opened the inner door, and walked up to the third floor, the muscles at the backs of his legs trembling slightly from the unaccustomed effort of climbing stairs.

THE DOOR of apartment 3B was open, with yellowish light flooding out into the passage, and a dark, slim man of medium height stood looking at him. He was quite young. It gave Mark a feeling of incongruity, somehow, to find his great-great-grandfather a young man — but of course, in this year he would be only twenty-two.

"John Fallon?" he asked.

"That's right."

"I'm a relation of yours — Mark. We haven't met before."

The young man gripped his hand, looking at him searchingly. "Are you sure? Didn't know I had a relation called Mark. Come in, anyhow."

The room had queer, old-fashioned wooden furniture. A shaded standard-lamp threw soft yellow light near the single table. Mark sat down, and the younger man moved across to a chest-of-drawers with bottles and glasses on top of it.

"Care for a drink?"

"No, thanks. I haven't much time." Mark was aware of the fact that John was looking at his clothes, particularly at his shoes.

"Just how are we related?"

Mark hesitated, looking at his watch. 2140 hours — twenty of his

hundred minutes gone already. "You might find this hard to take, at first. I'm your great-great-grandson — actually, I think it may be great-great-great-grandson. The point is, I've come back in time from the year Twenty-ninety-five. That is, from a hundred and thirty-seven years in your future."

John stared at him without speaking. Suddenly he laughed. "Okay. But I think I asked a reasonable question. Just how are we related?"

Mark frowned. "I'm serious. Look here, you keep a diary, don't you?"

"What if I do?"

Mark took the photographs from his brief case, and selected one, looking at it. "Yesterday, you wrote in that diary 'Received check from P. Stoddard, \$52.00.' Today, you wrote, or will write, 'Had lunch with Mae. Phone Andrews 2:30.' Right?"

John's face was white. "Say — what the hell is this?"

Mark held up his hand. "Tomorrow, you're going to write 'Called on Andrews 11 a.m.'"

"Tomorrow? What d'you mean, *tomorrow*?"

MARK HANDED him the photograph of the two open pages of the diary. John took it. His eyes went wide. He walked across to a writing desk, and took out the very diary Mark had so often held in his hands — only now it was crisp and almost new, not faded, battered, patched with tape as Mark knew it. John Fallon spread it out on the table beneath the

light, holding the photograph beside it, his eyes travelling from one to the other.

He looked at them for a long time, leaning shakily on the table with both hands. "But how — " He lifted his eyes to Mark's. "Look! Am I going mad?"

Mark shook his head. "Just a demonstration. I've come to help you."

John walked staggeringly across to the chest-of-drawers and poured himself a drink, the neck of the bottle rattling against the glass. He drank quickly, his dilated eyes on Mark.

"You see," said Mark, "I'm speaking the truth. I've come back a hundred and thirty-seven years to help you." He spread some of the other photographs across the table. "Since you were the most promising of my ancestors — you have quite a career ahead of you as an inventor, you know — I decided to give you some help. Not from pure altruism, I admit. You made a moderate fortune, but not enough for it to survive to my generation. If you were to make a really gigantic fortune — are you listening?"

"Go ahead."

"Here are several ways you can do it. First, these copies of articles in technical journals published in 1997, 2014, 2029 — all detailed stuff on ion-drive for space-flight, antigravity fields, electron-shields — but I'll leave it to you to work out the details. There are some simpler devices here that can be real money-spinners — and to get you started, some papers from

nearer your own day. These stockmarket reports — one for next week, and others scattered over weeks, months, years. And a map of a uranium mine that wouldn't otherwise be discovered until 1988 — there's nothing to prevent you — ”

“Stop it! Stop it!” John strode to the door and threw it open. “It's impossible! It's madness! What are you? Some kind of demon? *Get out!*”

Mark lifted his hand. “Wait a minute — ”

“It isn't true!” John's face was ashen. “None of this is true. I don't know what your game is, but I've a damned good mind to lock you in here and — ”

Mark didn't hear the rest. Lock him in? With the disk returning at 2300 hours? He sprang to his feet.

“Come away from that door.” He drew the gun. John froze. “Close the door. Right. Now, over there.”

John moved warily round the room. As he passed the chest-of-drawers he exploded into lightning movement. Mark saw a bottle flying through the air, ducked, heard its splintering crash against the wall behind his head. Then John Fallon was on him. He got his hand on the gun, and they grappled.

THE LAMP smashed to the floor, and the darkness closed in on them like a sack. Mark was bigger, but the younger man's frenzy multiplied his strength. As they struggled in the darkness a shot crashed with an instant of

flame like a photo-flash. John's grip relaxed, and he sprawled against Mark's legs.

Mark put the gun in his pocket. He staggered against the table, the sweat stinging his eyes. He found his little pocketlamp and switched it on.

“Lord!” He turned the sprawling figure over. The eyes stared up at him, their pupils differently dilated. John Fallon, his ancestor, was dead.

Dead. Mark stood upright. According to the diary, he had married at 35, and his first son had been born when he was 37. Yet he was dead, now, at the age of 22.

He heard voices somewhere in the building, and his immediate preservation claimed his attention. He locked the door, opened the window. An iron fire-escape zig-zagged down the back of the place. Within minutes, he was back at the vacant lot.

The man he had shot was still lying there, half-hidden by the bushes and the shadows. Two men he had killed, within less than an hour. Worst of all, he had killed his own ancestor — killed him before he had fathered any children. Theoretically, that meant — What did it mean? Did it mean he should never have been born? . . . He shivered.

He thought the disk would never arrive. He waited, waited, waited, with a chill, void horror within him.

At last, the disk was there. He sprang into it and immediately climbed on the antigravs for a

thousand feet. He hovered, then threw in the switch that cut the time-distortion field. As the vast force was withdrawn, the disk snapped back into its own time.

WITHIN MINUTES, the bright lights of the laboratory were blazing coldly about him again. He climbed out, his knees almost buckling beneath him. He looked around at the familiar benches. Had someone been in here? Things looked just slightly different, although he couldn't at first put his finger on the difference. But he could when he turned around to look at the new rack of shelves he had installed last week.

It wasn't there. In its place was a pile of packing-cases, and a strange drilling machine. The familiar drilling machine he had installed a month ago was gone from its place across the room.

What had happened? An icy, gnawing fear began within him.

He switched off the lights and the power, and let himself out, walking to where he had left his car. It was not there. He found the exact spot where he had left it, but couldn't even see the impressions it must have left in the ground.

His heart thudded heavily. He began walking. It was only a mile to his home, but it seemed to take him a long time to get there. When he reached his house, the thudding of his heart was pounding in his eardrums.

It was the same house he had left two hours ago — yet it had been painted a different color. And a complex metal trelliswork

had been built at the side — trellis-work overgrown with ivy that must have been there for years. Reeling a little, he walked up the drive.

Would there be any change in Ria? He tried to open the door, but his key didn't seem to fit. As he was struggling with it, a light flashed on above him and the door opened. A blonde, Teutonic-looking woman he had never seen before peered out at him.

"What is it?" she demanded.

"Er — is Mrs. Fallon in?"

"No one of that name about here."

"Sorry. I — ah — just moved into the neighborhood. Must have the wrong house."

He could almost feel the woman's eyes on him as he went away. She didn't shut the door until he had turned the corner of the street.

He walked along two blocks to the air-car park. At least, this looked familiar. There seemed to be no change in anything, although when he looked where he usually kept his car he saw another one in its place. Tom Bryan sat in his little office, the light pouring down on his half-bald scalp. Mark walked up and pushed in through the door.

"Hi, Tom."

A blank, questioning gaze met him — hesitant, explorative. "Hi. Have we met?"

"You remember me, Tom. Mark — Mark Fallon."

Tom's forehead corrugated. "Can't recall. But I see a lot of people. What can I do for you, Mr.

Farron?"

"Is my bus here? A blue and white '93 Kesarc." He hesitated as the other man's frown deepened. "I — er — thought my wife might have left it here."

"Sorry, Mr. Farron. Try Giannetti's three blocks down."

MARK WAS glad to get away. The blood thundered in his temples. God, this was his world, his town — the place where he had lived for years. Yet it was as if he'd never been here.

He found a public visiphone booth, and flicked through the directory. His name wasn't in it. Neither was his brother's. He turned to another directory covering the area across the river, where his parents lived. The print blurred and danced on the pages, and he lit a cigarette with shaking hands before he tried to look for his father's name. When he didn't find it, he stared stupidly up and down the columns of names that seemed to pulse in and out of focus with the thud, thud, thud, thud of the blood in his skull.

Then in this world which he, himself, had changed, he had never lived . . . He looked across the street, at the street-lamp shining on the green foliage of a tree. It was solid enough, solid and real, the street, the houses, the parked air-cars, all of it. The people he had known, his neighbors, his school-friends, even Ria — wherever she was — they were all living in it, yet to them he was a stranger, a phantom from nowhere . . .

His school-friends! Peter Bar-

kly — he was the fellow he knew better than any, from school-days up through the University to adult life. He turned again to the directory.

Barkly, Peter E. He dialed the number, pushing the door of the booth open with his foot so that the cool air reached his face. The sweat was like ice on his forehead.

Barkly's face appeared on the screen, expectant, unrecognizing.

"Peter, I'm Mark Fallon. Remember me at school?"

"Can't say I place you. You must have changed a lot."

"Remember, I used to go around with a girl called Ria Walton."

"Ria Walton? Oh, sure. I remember her well. She's married now, you know. Married a guy called Wilson, or Williams, or something like that. . . ."

Mark walked out of the booth and strode aimlessly down the street. He kept on walking like a machine. Occasionally people passed him, one of them a neighbor, but the man glanced at him without a spark of recognition. It would be the same wherever he went — no one would ever know him. They couldn't know him. He had never lived in their world.

Suddenly he stopped in mid-stride. There was a way out!

Fool, that he hadn't thought of it at once. He had gone back 137 years, landing the time-disk at his chosen co-ordinates at 2120 hours, March 13, 1958. Within an hour of that point in time, he had killed his ancestor, changing the

following 137 years in such a way that neither he nor his direct ancestors had been born. But why not go back in the disk again, and stop the change from happening?

HE WAS running towards the laboratory before the thought was fully formed. It was ridiculously simple. All he had to do was go back to that same evening in 1958, just before his first moment of arrival, and stop himself from seeing his great-great-grandfather.

He was breathing heavily as he re-entered the time-disk, but there was intense, profound hope within him.

To hell with the fortune! Once you started to change things in the past, you had no idea where the different chains of cause and effect would lead. He'd stop himself, explain things to himself, then return. The world would remain as he had known it.

He set the co-ordinates for the same point in space, and the time of emergence at 2100 hours. He checked everything meticulously, double-checked it, triple-checked it. He sent the power humming through the coils. Aloft, he threw the switch and felt again the vast surge of power of the time-distortion field . . .

He maneuvered the disk over the same dark, vacant lot where he had landed before — or, rather, where he was to make his first landing in twenty minutes' time. 2100 hours. He set the return emergence for 2150 hours, then sprang out, running across towards the dark tangle of bushes

as the disk flicked out of sight.

He kept looking at his watch. The night seemed the same as when he had been here before. He looked about, feeling the gun in his pocket. He must keep a lookout for the man who had sprung at him from the bushes the first time. He could see no one about.

A TRAIN thundered along the elevated railroad behind the lot. He watched its yellow-lit windows racing past, and then, from the corner of his eye, he saw something else.

The disk — just flicking out of sight as he looked at it. It had come and gone while he had been intent on his search of the bushes. At that rate —

He heard running footsteps. A man raced past him through the gloom, head down. It looked like — *It was!*

"Hey!" he shouted. Involuntarily, he jumped forward.

The figure whirled, and as the light fell on it Mark found himself looking into his own face. He hardly recognized the fear, the tense determination in it. The gun spat orange flame into the gloom, once, twice.

He tried to scream as the bullets smashed like hammer-blows into his chest and shoulder, spinning him to the ground. His hands clawed to the edge of the asphalt.

With blurring, fading vision he saw the running figure flash beneath the street-lamp and pound on into the dark.

Then he could see nothing . . . The blood was hot and salty in his mouth . . . 