

# Fantasy and Science Fiction

MARCH *Including Venture Science Fiction*

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*In the first place, it's pronounced Van Sy-ock-so there. This funny story of a different way in which future American society deals with the problem of Social Adjustment (if that is indeed the mot juste) was written by a new writer who graduated high school and southern Indiana five years ago to become an Air Force wife. Despite several solo cross-country flights, Sydney Van Scyoc says she is not now flying and does not intend to fly again until she overcomes her fear of "forms, clearances and radio procedures—or until these things have been eliminated." We wish her luck; and, in the meanwhile, are pleased to pluck the fruits of her being grounded—as for instance you take this story of the Unnamed Heroine who was frantic, of Birk who was unstable and silly and exitable, of Cordon who was decisive and strong and disciplined, and of Zack who was—yech!*

## **ZACK WITH HIS SCAR**

by Sydney Van Scyoc

WHEN SHE BLAZED FROM THE lifter clearing that morning Zack abandoned his sometimes-bench, which flickered and became a shrub, and slouched after her, scarred and ugly head held low. Her flaming hair snapped and her hips switched. There were some, coming from the offices at greens-edge, who would have spoken to her. But they saw her eyes, they saw Zack, and they stared. Zack began to wish he had not come.

Soon he knew she knew he followed. A tightening of muscles warned him she was about to turn.

She pierced him with bitter eyes.

He gazed at her, stupidly.

She jerked and plunged ahead.

He followed, beginning to be miserable.

She jerked again, glowered. "Well?"

He gazed, stupidly, then low-

ered his eyes and slunk away. He plunged his hands into his pockets, dejected.

He heard his name behind him. He turned and had a glimpse of angered male face before a fist caught his nose and toppled him to the grass.

His face was pain; he wanted to rock it in his hands. But people were watching, straight and handsome people. He stood, straightened his nose roughly, and plodded away. He remembered the months when he had been straight and handsome too, but that didn't help.

When she left her office that afternoon he followed again, setting his feet down as she did, switching his thick hips, carrying his head defiantly.

She whirled, face afire. "Quit this foolishness!"

Deliberately he made an obscene gesture.

Her hand flew to his jaw, reddening his flesh, and she whirled away. He didn't follow until he saw her hair flame above the clearing.

Then, because he had a special lifter pack, he waited at her apartment block door when she came plunging across the green. The door dissolved and he shoved past her.

She tried to push past him. He blocked her, slouched across the lobby thwarting her. Then, seeing the elevator door slowly materialize, he sprinted. He hit the solidi-

fier and the door materialized in her face. She shimmered with fury as the elevator lifted him.

He disembarked at the top floor and took the service conveyor to the clearing. Minutes later he lifted down at Headquarters green and ran for Complaints. Mix stood at the receiver bench, a big, doubtful man who wore no fault.

The flame-haired woman's face appeared on one of the receivers and Mix dialed his sender. "Mix, Complaints."

"A man has been harassing me. I want you to stop it."

Mix motioned to Zack. "Let my assistant take down the facts."

Zack shoved his scarred face too close to the sender. "Yeah?"

She gasped and scrambled her dials, distorting before disappearing.

Zack waited, punching reports. Then her face reappeared. Mix took the call.

"You must listen," she said. "It's foolishness. I don't need him."

"We got a report," Mix said.

She sighed. "If my counselor filed me; he was mistaken. I'm only a twice-monthly—he's hardly in a position to judge."

"Mistaken?" Mix frowned.

She twitched her lips. "I am capable of managing my affairs without interference.

Patiently he said, "When we get a report—"

"I don't need him. I have everything under control."

Mix looked doubtful.

"I'm neither irresponsible nor adolescent. I'm twenty-seven years old and I supervise twenty-two people every day. I demand you let me decide what I need, and whom."

"If you want to insist—"

"I do!"

"—then I've got to take him off."

"Do it then!" She distorted, then disappeared.

Mix scrambled his own dials and nodded to Zack.

Minutes later Zack was in the air. The city glistened beneath him, green meadows bounded by low gleaming structures. Once, tired of being ugly and misshapen, he had turned in his faults, had had his body processed and had taken a regular job. It had been an interesting job of course, carefully adapted to his individual needs. But it had taken only four hours of his day. The other hours he had spent doing the things people did, taking classes, doing volunteer work, good things, interesting things. But soon he was looking at people and seeing only creases, frowns, tightnesses. Finally, stoically, he had resumed his scar, determined to accept stares and ugliness. But still he had doubts. Was he doing the right thing? Or was he meddling?

He set down at her green, slouched into the lobby of her building and entered the public

booth. He dialed her number. When she dialed herself on, he simply shoved his face into the sender and stared, empty-eyed.

She dialed off the visual from her end. "Get off!" she hissed.

"He took you off my case."

He stared into the sender.

"Get off! I don't need you."

He continued to stare.

"I'm going to call your superior."

He stared. He heard her quick breathing.

She dialed her set off, then tried to dial out. She realized when she saw him that she could not break the circuit from her end. She scalded him with words. He had to tighten his jaws not to flinch.

Finally he stood and left the booth, leaving the set on. She could have his call traced when she thought of it, could come down and terminate it herself.

When she left the clearing the next morning she was grim on the arm of a small, precise-featured man whose name, Zack knew, was Cordon Gaines. She pointed when she saw Zack leaning against a tree, hands in pockets. She propelled Gaines toward him. "That's him."

"You," Gaines commanded.

Zack deigned to look at him.

"You've been harassing her?"

Zack flicked his eyes to her.

The man snapped his head impatiently.

"Hell," Zack said disinterestedly.

"You know that if you are annoying her without authority you can be placed under physical restraint."

"Hell."

Gaines turned to her. "He's still under orders," he said scornfully.

"But his superior told me—"

"Don't believe it." He glanced impatiently at his watch. "I have to get to work." He was already easing away from her. "Ignore him. There's nothing else you can do."

"But you were going to help me," she insisted.

"There's nothing I can do," he said. "Don't make me late, dear."

She stepped hesitantly away, imploring with unhappy eyes.

"Dear," he said with clipped patience.

She bobbed her head humbly and started toward greens-edge.

Zack slouched after her.

She turned, saw him, began to walk faster.

Zack walked faster.

She ran.

He ran.

She reached the offices and flung herself against the door, which dissolved slowly. She looked fearfully back. But Zack had stepped behind a tree. She scanned the green. She was frowning when the elevator lifted her.

Zack lifted back to Headquarters green and worked with Mix

until late afternoon. Then he went to his apartment and packed his clothing, toilet articles, spare faults and half a dozen books.

Her door was solid to all but her. But he brandished his nullifier and stepped inside. She had three pale rooms, and he knew her flaming hair would bring them alive. He found and flipped the switch that materialized the furniture.

He swept her clothing from her closets and dumped it on the couch. He dumped shoes and cosmetics atop clothing and emptied the contents of her storage drawers onto the dining counter. Then he arranged his own clothing, shoes, faults in their place.

He ordered food. When it came he took it to the bedroom and lay on the bed with a book. He got up once, and when he lay back dishes overturned, staining the spread with beet juice and coffee. When he had finished eating he stacked the dishes on the floor, turned over and thought about nothing until he was asleep.

He awoke to her shaking his shoulder. Her hair fell in disorderly flames over her eyes. "It isn't fair," she insisted. "Why are you persecuting me?"

He shrugged his shoulder from her grasp. He leaned over the edge of the bed. He put the dishes into her hands. "Wanta put these on the conveyor for me?"

Her hair flew back from her

face. She slammed the dishes to the floor, and they made bouncing chaos. "Put your own dishes on the conveyer."

"Your dishes," he said disinterestedly.

She hurtled from the room. He heard the clicking of dials and went to the doorway.

Mix's doubtful face appeared on her receiver. "You promised to relieve him and he's here in my apartment sleeping in my bed and eating my food." Her words flamed angrily until she sagged against the sender. "Please," she begged.

Mix looked ponderous and concerned. "I relieved him right after you called, lady."

"Then tell him!" She seized Zack's arm, pulling him into range.

"Can you prove he's the man you complained about?"

"I saw him! You said he was your assistant."

Mix shook his ponderous head. "He *looks* like my man."

"Well?" she demanded.

"You've got to see my position. I can't make positive identification over a viewer. You've got to bring him in."

"Bring him in!" She shoved Zack's face into her sender. "Just order him to leave me alone!"

"How can I order him if he isn't my man?"

"He *is* your man. Aren't you?"

"Are you?" Mix said.

"Hell," Zack said.

Mix shook his head. "He's no

man of mine. My men don't swear when addressing a superior officer."

"But he's moved into my apartment!" she cried. "He's sleeping in my bed. He's thrown my things out of my closets and put his in. You've got to do something."

He sighed. "It's not our place to handle private offenders."

She glared and spun the dials. Her flame of hair leapt as she stomped to the door. "I'm going to bring the house manager."

She returned with an oily round little man. "That's him, he's in my bed again," she crowed.

The manager approached Zack apprehensively. "Sir, the young lady . . ." he said delicately.

Zack stretched and yawned. "No sleeping around this place," he growled.

"Sir, if you will . . ."

"Women!" Zack flung himself off the bed. "Invite you in, then won't let you have five minutes peace."

"I didn't!" she cried. "He was here when I came. He broke in."

But on the way down Zack showed the little man his identity card and badge. Then he took the elevator back up.

When he nullified the door she threw her weight against him. He shoved her across the room before himself, and she flopped into a chair and glared.

He searched her cabinets until he found several bottles. He poured

himself a drink. Then he went to the bedroom, wadded the stained spread and threw it against the wall. He pulled the covers to his chest and opened a book.

She had followed. She dropped ungracefully to the foot of the bed. "I know I'm right. No matter what my counselor says. Birk is unstable and silly and excitable. Whereas Cordon is decisive, strong and disciplined. I supervise twenty-two people at work every day, and I will not marry a fool."

Zack thrust his feet deeper into the covers and nudged her from the bed.

She didn't notice she sat on the floor. Her voice rose and fell and finally she crawled to the side of the bed and tried to tell Zack she had everything under control "Can't you see, I would be miserable with Birk because he is excitable and he giggles and I can't stand silly men. I have to have a man who is stable, like me." She was sobbing, and her hair fell over her cheeks, wet. "Can't you see?"

Zack slapped his book shut. "Lady, I can't listen to this crap all night."

She leapt to her feet and the hair leapt from her face. "You!" She seized at the table where his drink stood and hurled drink and glass at him. She spun around the room, seizing, hurling, reviling.

Zack burrowed under the covers and covered his head with his arms. Sometimes he wondered if

people shouldn't be permitted to make their mistakes. But every Trouble Agent committed to memory that part of the manual which read, "Unconsciously the potentially disturbed citizen examines the world about him and finds it orderly and logical. He then turns a critical eye upon himself and finds over-emotionalism, illogic, imperfection of thought process. He therefore turns upon himself with unconscious scorn which manifests itself in foolish and harmful decisions and attitudes. It is the function of the Trouble Agent to draw the pent-up fury of the potentially disturbed citizen upon his own head. Then, freed of his unconscious burden, the citizen is enabled to resume a normal life, subject of course to frequent re-evaluation."

Or, stated less formally: mankind, through the development of science and technology, had perfected the external world beyond the endurance of its weaker members.

So Zack cowered and let her rage. After a while she ceased bombardment. He sat up.

"Awrrr!" she cried, hurtling out of the room.

He leaned against the doorframe as she dialed Mix. Mix was very sorry but he could not help her. Zack sank into a chair as she dialed the house manager. He too was very sorry, and she screamed and called him names.

She stared at the empty screen, then went to the cabinet and opened a bottle and tilted back her head. She drank until she choked, spilling liquor down her dress. She dialed again.

Cordon Gaines' face sprang to her receiver and before he could speak she poured her troubles to him, telling him of Zack's behavior, repeating every imprecation she had hurled at the manager.

Gaines was calm, reasonable, rational. "You must be calm," he said. "This is how they operate. You can do nothing but—"

She gaped and rampaged through a second recital of her complaints and her opinion of everyone involved. Then because he looked pained at her language, she spat at him. He was shocked and intimidated, stiffly, that she was not behaving like a lady.

"A lady!" she screeched. "All this happening and no one will help, and I'm supposed to behave like a lady?"

He twitched his thin lips in disapproval. "A lady, if she is a lady, will remain a lady in all circumstances," he said. He even intimidated, overriding her rising shriek, that Zack knew his job and would not be with her if she did not require his help.

Then her voice rose over his. When it fell and he admonished again that she must conduct herself like a lady, she scrambled her dials and he disappeared.

She sobbed. Then, her hair in tatters, her eyes swollen, she took the bottle and tilted it back and drank again.

Zack swung his legs across the arm of the chair. "How about a crack at the bottle?"

She motioned to throw it at him. Then she said, "Very well, we shall be very civilized." She found two glasses and filled them brimming. "Didn't you ever have troubles?" she asked.

"Sure. I had troubles."

"So tell me. What happened?"

He shrugged. "Nothing," he said. "I took care of them myself."

"But I supervise twenty-two people every day. Why won't you let me take care of my troubles myself?"

He shook his head. He should have taken an anti-intoxication capsule but it was too late now and he was uncomfortably sober anyway. He winced as she stumbled and caught herself. What if she fell on the bottle and cut her throat? How did he know she wouldn't? What right did he have to meddle in her affairs?

"Why're we staying here?" she said querulously. "Let's go out and have a party. I feel like a party."

"I've gotta get to bed soon."

"But where am I going to sleep?"

"On the couch."

"But it's my apartment."

"I'm your guest. Guests sleep in beds."



She frowned. Finally she said, "What would you do if you were me and I was you?"

"I'd call someone and have him get rid of me."

"It didn't work."

"Then I guess I'd get drunk," he said.

She laughed and he laughed too. "You're all right," she said. "I have got to have a party so all my friends can meet you."

"It's late. I gotta get some sleep."

"Aw. You like parties."

He grunted.

She went to the sender and began dialing. She called the house manager but he was tactful, firm and regretful. She called friends and people who worked with her but they too were tactful, firm and regretful, probably because Zack had moved to share the screen with her.

She called Cordon Gaines and he appeared with his face set for apologies. When she said he must come right over, they were having a party, his lips tightened. "Go drink several cups of black coffee and put your head under the shower. Call me back when you're sober."

"I don't want to be sober," she protested. "You're being stuffy."

"If it's stuffy not to want your fiancée calling drunk and disheveled with a strange man peering over her shoulder, then I am stuffy and I intend to remain stuffy."

She glared and began describing his various undesirable characteristics in cutting detail. He became very white and finally scrambled his dials, and she scrambled her own.

She stalked the floor and jabbed the air with her fingernails as she listed for Zack all the reasons she could not tolerate Cordon Gaines. Then finally she said, "We'll call Birk and Birk will come because Birk's a good guy even if I wouldn't consent to marry him."

Zack nodded, taking his chair again.

She dialed Birk's number and wailed his name, giggling.

He appeared on the screen, a bearlike young man with a handsome glib face and black hair. "Hey!" His shoulders heaved. A giggle shook from his hero's face. "Looka you."

"We're having a party and you are late, Birk Van Bibber."

"You're drunk, kid." His shoulders shook.

"How could we have a party if I'm not?"

He giggled. His shoulders trembled and shook. Then he scrambled off.

He was grinning and gleeful when she dissolved the door for him. Then he saw Zack. "Who he?"

She plunked a brimming glass into his hand and he drank, momentarily diverted. He snickered when some of the drink ran down

his chin. "Who dat man?"

She puckered. "He's my guest."

"Didn't know you had a guest."

He beamed over Zack's hand.

"He's been my guest all day. He's been following me and pestering me and I tried to get him to go away but he wouldn't." She pursed her lips and launched into the whole story, working herself into a temper. "It isn't fair. Because I've already decided not to marry Cordon. I decided without him doing anything, and he's slept in my bed and ruined my bedspread and he's drinking too much. How can we have a party if he drinks it all?"

Birk had been tittering and giggling. She turned on him. "What are you giggling about?"

"It's funny."

"It is not funny. It's all his fault. He made me decide to marry Cordon and he caused it all and he's been making me drink too much so now I'm drunk but I'm not going to stand by and let him ruin your life too. Making trouble, getting people mixed up and drunk and making them marry the wrong man." She slammed her drink down, splashing the floor and herself. "Throw him out! I don't want to look at him! I hate him!"

Birk clouded, ferocious and bearlike. "I'll do that." But he couldn't suppress the silent giggling that shook his shoulders. He pulled Zack out of the chair.

She surrounded the bottle with

both arms, glaring. "You're not getting Birk's bottle!" she cried.

Her voice followed them out, mourning the shambles Zack had almost made of Birk's life. Birk giggled happily. When they reached the lobby he escorted Zack to the door and put him out with a playful shove. "That's for trying to ruin my whole life, buddy."

Zack shook his head, straightened his suit and walked unsteadily across the green. Soon the cool air steadied him.

He was approaching the lifter clearing when a strident voice cried, "You!" A brisk little woman slammed her purse across his face and reviled him scorchingly before trotting self-righteously away.

He got up and rubbed his nose back into shape and looked after her, and he felt good. When he had first seen her she had been dying lingeringly and horribly from a disease no doctor could diagnose. Now she was obviously healthy.

He hardly noticed the throbbing of his face as he strapped on his pack and lifted off. It was one of those good nights, when a case had terminated favorably, when a former subject had slugged him and meant it. He hated to go to his apartment and take off his scar.

So he hovered for a while, watching the city glow and shimmer. Then he lifted down at Headquarters green and headed back to Assignments. ◀