

KENNETH BULMER: Advertise Your Cyanide

One of the mainstays of the British magazines throughout the 1950s was Kenneth Bulmer. As a rule Bulmer concentrated on the longer stories, in fact he does not consider himself a short story writer. He prefers the length of a novel which allows him space to develop his characters and his often bizarre themes.

Henry Kenneth Bulmer was born in London on January 14th, 1921, and was an avid sf fan from his early days producing seven issues of his own fanzine *Star Parade* during 1941. Then Bulmer became entangled in the war, in the Royal Corps of Signals, but afterwards returned to the sf fold. After an apprenticeship on the Panther series of sf novels for Hamilton's, Bulmer sold a short story, *First Down*, to *Authentic* and it appeared in the April 1954 issue. Thereafter he appeared regularly in the magazines, under his own name and a few aliases like Nelson Sherwood and H Philip Stratford. Also he collaborated on scientific articles with research chemist John Newman under the name Kenneth Johns.

In 1970 Bulmer edited a fantasy companion magazine to *Vision of Tomorrow*, called *Sword and Sorcery*, but after two issues were set in type the magazine was aborted because of the crippling distribution problems which also killed *Vision*. Most of the unused material was snapped up by other magazines and the experience stood Bulmer in good stead. Today he successfully edits the original anthology series *New Writings in SF*, which he took over after John Carnell's death in 1972.

Readers of *New Writings 24* will have noticed Ken Bulmer drew attention to a story *Advertise Your Cyanide* in his introduction. That story first appeared in the April 1958 *Nebula*, a magazine edited and published single-handedly by Glasgow fan Peter Hamilton. The drive and tenacity of Hamilton produced a highly memorable and exciting (if amateurish looking) magazine that often contained superior fiction to *New Worlds* and the other publications. Hamilton produced the magazine frequently if sometimes erratically, from 1952 to 1959 when, after 41 issues, everything finally became too much. Thereupon Hamilton disappeared from the scene, and I sincerely hope that if he is reading this he will contact me. *Nebula* is a suitable monument to the memory of what one man can do for science fiction and it is fitting that its shade should be invoked by *Advertise Your Cyanide*, undoubtedly one of the finest stories it ever published.

Ken Bulmer had the following to relate about the tale:

‘The origins of this story may be traced back to Manhattan and a New York newspaper. It is one of the results of the USA’s sledgehammer effect on my sensibilities. In addition the disquieting facts being turned up during the course of my work as ‘Kenneth Johns’ gave the background story to the foreground action racketing away. The newspaper claimed that as so many million more mouths would have to be fed, and bodies clothed and housed and provided with wheels, in the near future, mammoth building programmes were under way for the wholesale production of every conceivable product. The disquieting facts were showing that there was a limit to certain commodities.

‘All this now screeches at us from every form of media, and in fact has almost been oversold. Back twenty years it was not fashionable.

‘The form of the story is presented in a way that is now remarkably familiar to the many New Wave stories of a few years ago. This presentation was a conscious attempt, given that form and content are indivisible, to make the form work hard and punch home the content. The story was written in 1955 and took some time to sell. I concur with the preceding remarks about *Nebula*. One reader wrote to Peter Hamilton saying I was either a madman or a genius. Peter was considerate in his reply. Now, in these latter days, the form as well as the content has perhaps been oversold.

‘One final thing: *Advertise Your Cyanide* - there may be a sequel one day called *Hoard Your Psionide* -remains firmly in the sf canon. It deals with specific problems that are within the province of sf. I also write funny stories, too. You may find many rewarding stories covering the whole gamut of sf within the pages of *New Writings in SF*. I like to think, had I been editing *NWinSF* then, I’d have had Peter Hamilton’s courage and accepted *Advertise Your Cyanide*.

* * * *

ADVERTISE YOUR CYANIDE

Kenneth Bulmer

Time: 2100.

The porage flooded into his forearm vein with its usual high-kick bloating impact. That was better! Now he could hit the sky! The needle dangled from his fingers.

Consider this man.

Index: T/A/77894S.

Name: Spencer Lord.

Age: 32. Height: 179 cms. Hair: Black. Eyes: Brown. Ex-Captain Terran Space Force. Athletic. First class shot. Twice wounded. Decorations: Gold Star, Space Cross. Security Risk Rating AAA. Terran Secret Service Operative.

The paper was yellow, thin, official. You ate it when you'd read it.

From: *Security Bureau.*

To: *Op.K.2.*

Subject: *Sahndran Ambassador. Coverage and Protection Advert. Convention.*

You will protect the life of His Excellency Josiah Gosheron at all times during the convention. His Excellency must not rpt not be aware of this protection. You will rpt will consider yourself expendable.

Bolz.

Lord put the needle back into its nest and thrust the plastic case on to the dressing table. The lightning pulsing through his body ironed out the shivers. He ate the yellow message form.

STAB WITH ME,
JAB WITH ME,
COME ON, BABY, GRAB WITH ME!

Lord blinked, pulled on his weapons belt, adjusted his anti-grav and flung his huge synthiermine cape over one arm. His stiff, jewelled gauntlets snapped magnetically to the over-cape's garish hem, ready for use. Expendable, huh? So he was supposed to worry?

He opened the window.

Predatory jungle of light and noise and smell. Neons and lumivapour writhing intestinal convulsions across a slate dinosaur-back horizon. Inside out. Screeching beast-hum of the city; pulsing colour and movement; insistent scraping at nerves deadened and excruciatingly excited by drugs in pain-pleasure cycles.

The world of logical licence. Culture-arid. Scrabbling up a side-avenue of time, self-consciously aware of know-how, worshipping it, refusing to face life and hurrying helter-skelter into experience

SCOOT WITH ME ON MY ATOMIC-SLED,
ROOT AND TOOT AND SLIDE TO BED!

Consider the past years.

The middle period of the twentieth century put the waste of the planet's resources on an organised footing. By that time America had used up in the preceding half-century more raw materials than had all of recorded history. One family - two cars. A spoonful of coffee - use a tree trunk to wrap it. A pack of cigarettes - use two tree trunks. Smooch in the Drive-In - burn a few gallons of gas, they're cheap. Mine the iron, mine the rare metals, process them, turn them into guns and planes and tanks. Let them rust into red wasteful ruin. Cut those trees, men; dig that ore. We won't freeze, men; there's plenty more.

Only there wasn't.

Lord stepped smartly off the windowsill, dropped a sheer hundred stories, then activated his anti-grav belt and swept up and away, relishing that first delirious plunge. He headed over the scarlet-lipped neon of a nude a block wide. She puffed smoke in sulphurous clouds, perfect ring after perfect ring. Her wooden framework was half charred away.

CLEAR THAT BLOCK AND BE A CLEAR,
BLOCK THAT CLEAR AND BE A DEAR.

Cut through the ring of smoke like a shot from a gun in Security HQ target range, spurn that dust, hit the clouds. His Excellency Josiah Gosheron. He savoured the name sourly. The damned old Terran hater. Another all night assignment and Katy on the loose. This convention promised to be dull, too - until you thought about it.

He was speeding above the city now, the wind slapping at his stator field and rushing past his ears. Other citizens sliced across on the downtown levels. Their lights were like frenetic dances of doom, writhing before some obscene idol in a torch-lit temple. Which reminded him of Katy.

She might make it to the convention, she'd said. She might be tipling with some half-crazy spacemen. She might be parading that body of hers on tridi. She might be doing anything. Lord bet a million credits she wasn't thinking of him. The knowledge was an ice-barb in his guts.

Time: 2114.

He slanted in towards the hotel rooftop, where uniformed lackeys stood with magnetoclamps, waiting for outer clothing and hand luggage from guests.

All across the horizon in an unvarying arc marched the squat gloomy bulks of the accumulator stations, waiting insatiably for the energy to quench their bottomless thirst. Now they were giving of their stored wealth, providing the sustenance for a night's squandering. Lord angled his downward plunge to miss the stacked solar mirrors on the hotel's roof and hoped that tomorrow would be fine: the city's power supply was down to danger level and if storm clouds banked heavily tomorrow it might cost more in weather control than would be got out of the sun when it reluctantly appeared.

His feet hit the wooden roof with a jolt. Damn porage wasn't spreading evenly yet: his reflexes were still slightly out of skew. If Katy was here he'd find her. Gosheron permitting. Lord began to walk across the roof towards the attendants.

Get the old Terran hater drunk; that was the idea. Souse him, douse him, light and louse him. Lord smiled and flung his cape at the attendants. His fingers twitched. He needed a drink.

HIT THAT SYNAPSE WITH A WHIZ,
DRAG THAT JAG WITH A NUCLEAR FIZZ!

'Your invitation card, sir?'

The attendant had a flame-rifle steadied across his forearm, aimed uncompromisingly at Lord's navel. The man's trigger finger was white around the knuckle, scar tissue gleamed in reflected light.

'Here, uncle.' Lord tossed a plastic card at the man, twitched his fingers and walked away towards the throng. Free-loading was becoming a tough proposition. But for all that the free-loaders would be here, eating and drinking and doping and experiencing. They were the people he'd have to watch. The regular police could handle most; but the odd man out, the hopped up fanatic, the one with the flash-grenade in his mouth talking quietly to the ambassador....

Whoosh! Bang! Back to the stars, alien.

Back to the stars, where Q's were unimportant. Q's? A trifling item. Merely the amount of energy needed to raise one pound of water one degree fahrenheit - multiplied by one million million million. And how we'd used up our Q's! Two cars a family - but one simply must, my dear. Square-miles of incinerating dumps outside every city. A million years of carboniferous growth consumed in a minute - and no-one to feel the warmth in the room at the time. Empty cans tossed aside to rot.

Spencer Lord stopped at the tall plasti-glass doors to arrange his jacket more comfortably over his weapons belt. Two brightly painted women, chattering like parakeets, passed him. He caught the magnificent glitter of the elder's ring, set with a solid piece of genuine coal, surrounded by diamonds. If he worked all his life, his soured mind nagged him, he still couldn't have bought a ring like that with his amassed salary. Katy'd just have to make goo-goo eyes and do without. Or seduce some fat old algae-mogul, more likely.

Dig deep for that coal. Rake down for that ore. A mile down. Two. Send robots. Honeycomb the Earth. Let the steel rust, plenty more. *Consumption is the god. Advertising is his prophet.*

And productivity is the money.

Only the prophet oversold his god and went bankrupt.

Smoke, smoke, smoke that cigarette. Burn, burn, burn up that old earth. Consume, friends, consume. Sit in your neat little, tight little, snug little house and waste a thousand man-hours every time you open a door. Transmute those elements. Two atoms for one. Big, buster, big! Something for nothing - only the something turned out to be hollow, and to have compound retroactive interest like tiger's claws, or the wind round the poles.

And the world woke up one morning and found itself poor.

Lord stood just inside the door to the crystal walled ballroom. He kept his inner tenseness bubbling inside and an idle, indifferent outward composure. He speared a drink from a passing robot. His mouth might have drooped cynically and he might have felt very tired if the porage wasn't coursing like a breeder reaction through his body. He stood in shadows and watched.

Costumes were everywhere. Almost as much as the absence of costume. Feathers waved above chalky faces, scented masks framed bold eyes. Lights glittered from jewellery and precious metals. Naked flesh, powdered and creamed and electro-treated, gleamed sybaritically against lush fabrics and alien furs. Gas-filled balloons drifted and, bursting, sent everyone around giggling hysterically, Lord caught a whiff of one that split near him and fought down treacherous headiness. He inserted his nasal plugs with a grimace.

Liquor spilt and stank and ran across the floor, soaking into priceless rugs. Streamers fluttered in artificial breezes. Flash bulbs plopped everywhere. People strutted and shouted, carmine lips opening and closing, unheard a pace away. Rockets soared to burst in shimmering stars against the roof. Somewhere massed bands were thumping and groaning and syncopating away almost lost in the gargantuan human uproar.

Everybody was having themselves a whale of a time.

Time: 2123.

Lord found Josiah Gosheron in the arms of a semi-clothed girl struggling in an alcove. The Sahndran Ambassador's two aides were standing by, grinning, unwilling to help the old guy. The girl was persistent. He was having fun, too; but his wind wasn't what it used to be.

Consider this alien.

Index: S/A/64389D.

Name: Josiah V.X. Gosheron.

Age: 83. Height: 151 cms. Hair: Red. Eyes: Brown.

Accredited Sahndran Diplomatic Corps. Responsible for treaty between Eridani and Sirius freezing Earth out. Elusive. Strong racial prejudices. Maintenance of his goodwill to Earth essential. A dangerous man (alien Int.).

SPEND THAT MONEY - BREAK THE GRAVE,
ONLY *SUCKERS* EVER SAVE!

Glib profiteering words, spilling from fat, rat-trap mouths: 'We believe in the future of this great country. There are more than twenty-five million people swelling the world population each year - a potential market of seventy thousand fresh individuals per day. We must feed and clothe and house and amuse and provide transportation for them all. This company's opening two new plants this year and three next ... blah ... production... blah... consumption...'

That's a perfectly good idea! It's a good thing to have children and provide for them and see they have all the things you didn't.

Dig that Earth, provide For all; There's no dearth, come one, come all!

A girl ran past, screaming, her hair trailing silver dust. Parts of her costume fell off as she ran. A youth pursued her, flushed, laughing. He held outstretched a hypodermic filled, ready to provide unworried dream horizons. She'd let him catch her when they were alone - or more or less alone.

Gosheron's two aides finally pulled the squawking girl off their boss. She pouted at them, her face a solid gold-dusted mask, unrecognisable. Her hair was bleached white, coiffed and curled into a spaceship with flaring Venturis down ears, nose and nape. Every time she laughed a beacon lit up on the spaceship's prow. She was lit up, too. Her naked arms and legs showed dozens of pin-pricks through the clogging powder, like a miniaturised moonscape.

Gosheron guffawed, belly shaking. He flung the girl a credit note. He was dressed like an ancient Indian Rajah, spattered with jewels, turban cunningly wound round a stator field generator. His sword looked like it had been built round a flame-rifle. An alien. A Terran hater. A dangerous man.

Lord's life meant nothing measured against the need to keep this alien alive and happy.

This alien Ambassador represented solar systems where Q's were still unused. We'd had ours. We'd been using about .004 Q's a year up till 1850, taking it from the muscles of animals and men. The next hundred years we used four Q's. Then we had twenty-seven Q's of coal and oil left - but why worry? Atomic power, buster, use your noggin!

'Waste not, want not.' That was a laugh. Consume friends, consume. Oh, sure, salvage where you can. A little later: 'Salvage is a national effort.' Then, reluctantly: 'The scrap-iron industry is the largest in the world.' Panicking: 'Salvage is a major aim of all citizens.' Finally, terror-stricken: 'Salvage is the new god!' But - consume, friends, consume!

A robot waiter trundled by and Lord hefted another Nuclear Fizz. This was an Advertising Convention, advertising the world to the aliens - and Katy was off somewhere with a goon from beyond the stars. Lord gulped the drink.

DRINK! DRINK! WOOD AL-CO-HOL!

The Advertising Industry have their eye teeth invested. You can't suddenly cut off an entire industry, with ramifications extending into every part of the economic set-up, with a casual: 'Sorry, Mac' Not a multi-billion credit organisation. Not with that power. Power to keep things running. Power to ensure that the advertising business stayed in power even when there was a worldwide shortage of nearly everything.

Gotta live, you know. Play you eighteen holes, George, then we can talk things over at the nineteenth. Sure you know how it is, old man, times are tough; but there's still the good old atomic power.

Yeah, there's still the good old atom.

All five hundred seventy-five Q's of it.

That didn't last long.

Someone had smuggled in an erotibomb. Lord heard it go off over by the conservatory. He turned to watch, fingering the filters in his nose, and from his position in the alcove was able to see over the milling heads below. Ushers rushed from all directions wearing gasmasks. They shepherded the crowds, surrounded the area. A number of entwined couples were carried out. Lord didn't smile.

He was searching the throng, looking for signs he knew he couldn't possibly see. You couldn't tell an assassin by his expression, not with all those plastic facials about. And, too, he was looking for Katy.

What colour hair would she have tonight? What face would she wear?
What brand of porage had she hit?

SHOOT THAT PORAGE, SMOKE THAT TEA,
VROOM AND ZOOM ON A BLIND D.T.!

The Synthetics Industry had climbed to power. Inevitably, they'd taken over when resources ran thin. Them - and the solar-erg boys. But there was one ever-replenishing resource that had to be handled with kid gloves.

Trees.

Re-afforestation, afforestation, priority. Terran global super-priority. Grow those trees, uncle, else you'll shiver. Bubble that algae, buster, else you'll starve. Split those atoms, fella, else you'll freeze. Synthesize.

SYNTHI, SYNTHI,
I'M A LITTLE SYNTHI,
AREN'T WE ALL ?

Over in a corner, drawn apart from the coruscating bedlam, a group of men talked with the cigar-spurts of conscious authority. Moguls of the Trees. Forest Lords. Big browed, spectacled atom-jugglers. Chlorella Kings.

'... forest fire in Asia that...'

'Don't be obscene!'

'Fires exist, they snatch profits. Grow up, pal!'

'... new hexo-laminated ply peeled off. The ship disintegrated. Need a new bonding resin ...'

'... Wembley's plastic weld ...'

'... finished 'er, George! Two hundred stories. Less than a hundred tons of metal. Should last fifty-seventy years before the weather breaks through ...'

'I need a drink.'

DRINK, DRINK, WOOD AL-CO-HOL!

Down beyond the main ballroom the crystal walls seemed to bulge with the crowd, shimmering and reflecting colours and landscapes, moonscapes, alien scapes as a shadow mime in mood and feeling complementary with the music's

thrum.

Lord felt confused looking in that direction. Someone shot an immense chandelier loose. It crashed down, scattering people like sparks. A girl's clothes caught fire. Extinguishers foamed automatically from the floor. She ran, naked, laughing, foam flecked, plucked three feathers from a fan, used them, rejoined the fray.

They'd formed a snake-hipped line, were singing and stomping, collecting more people, winding round the ice-columns soaring to the roof.

'We're doomed, doomed, pigging in the tomb.'

Time: 2136.

Noise and colour and heat made an almost solid cloud in the wide room. Make-up was running down painted faces. Can't afford a custom re-facial. But, darling, new plastic faces at giveaway prices! Last you twenty years. After that ... You're a big girl, now. You're on your own, sister.

From the shouting crazy line a man reeled like a yo-yo spun off its thread. He stumbled towards the alcove. Lord drew back, tensing. The drunk's wide Chinaman's sleeves flapped and his imitation pigtail bobbed. Lord didn't know the guy.

Index: T/Y/876398/R.

Name: Grunewald Abduol Sloane.

Age: 29. Height: 168 cms. Hair: Brown. Eyes: Brown.

Known revolutionary. Prison record. Member of Earth for Terrans party. Cardio-dope addict. Security Rating XX. A dangerous man.

Beyond the alcove and Lord and the Chinaman the noise drained away in his senses, as though this razor-sharp scene were contained in a balloon, as though everything fined down. Rockets burst silently, hooters whistled and shrilled soundlessly and vacuous mouths opened and shut like fish trapped in four glass walls.

YOU'LL NEVER NEED A PADRE
WHEN YOU HIT THAT TICKER WITH THE ADRE

Lord could see the man was a cardio-dope all right. The blue cheeks, the rapid, shallow breathing, were a trademark. The wide, meaning, knowing smile, as though all the world were an oyster for this guy's own guzzlement. *Get your own ticker-sticker, uncle.*

Gosheron looked up, smiling vacantly, his be-ringed fingers, wet with wine, clutching a liquor dispenser. His aides seemed to tense up, like ropes dipped in water, their faces going stiff and hard and ugly. The man in Chinese costume staggered a few further unsteady, paces, stopped and drew himself up in drunken solemnity. His face twitched. His feet were planted wide apart on the synthi-glass floor, heels off. His knees were slightly bent and Lord could see the quiver running along the muscles of those legs.

The man wasn't drunk.

Noise and confusion came back into Lord's world. The groaning bedlam of the convention beat at him with frenzied hands.

Lord moved a fraction of a second before Gosheron's aides. He drew his needle-beam, holding it carefully under a lapel flap, sighted on the pseudo-drunk and shot his stomach out through his backbone. Then, sheathing the weapon, Lord moved swiftly down the steps on to the floor, his coat flaring, took the dead man companionably by the arm and murmured a polite phrase of greeting.

The man's eyes were still open. Mirrored there was no expression at all. Death had struck too fast for any purely physical reaction. Lord had used a needle beam fined down so the wound was small; there was a little blood and intestine on the back of the man's Chinese coat but the hole in his stomach was invisible. Lord flicked the coat across to make sure.

The cardio-dope was still standing balanced on those wide-apart betraying legs. As he began to fall, his legs buckling, Lord took the weight on his arm, held the corpse upright and started to manoeuvre towards the nearest exit to one side of the alcove. Half-dragging half-carrying the body he got outside attracting as much attention as a hypo-needle at a party. Dopes, drunks, mixers, they all came alike to the bouncers.

'Stab with me, Jab with me, Come on, baby, GRAB with -'

The man suddenly welled a spurt of blood down his trousers and Lord hastily thumbed a window slide and tipped the body over. It's a long way down,

buster. Goodbye, uncle. He went back into the big room, changing faces as he went.

Gosheron would never know he had just had his life saved by a Terran. He musn't know, of course: all that he'd make out of it would be the attempted attack itself. A fine life. Terran Security Agent, a fine jim-dandy life.

Time: 2140.

A group was singing, loudly, discordantly, but in an iron mesh of rhythm.

*I wanna GLOW
With a baby who's not SLOW
I wanna SHOT
Of porage that is hot, HOT, HOT!*

He'd been out of sight of Gosheron for perhaps forty-five seconds. His sigh of relief was not pleasant. Everything looked the same. If Gosheron copped his blood-bucket tonight - exit Lord also, ungracefully.

Impossibly the noise and confusion grew. Sounds and colours rose and burst around him like fire-streaked porpoises breaking the surface of a turgid, boiling, lava-engorged sea.

That was one attempt that had failed. There'd be others - probably fanatics from the Earth for Terrans party. Just so long as the Sahndran Ambassador had a fine old time and was suitably impressed by Terran independence and wealth - wealth! that was as false a front as an anaemic fifteen year old hat-check girl's - then the big wheels of Earth might chisel a few contracts for materials.

He. snatched a glass from a passing robot. *Wood al-co-hol!* Down the hatch, derriere's up - whatever a derriere was. His mind fretted again over Katy. Where in hell was the girl? She'd forgotten him, obviously, taking some boob of a spaceman and sucking him dry. To hell with all women.

I wanna GLOW...

Lord grimaced disgustedly and threw the empty glass at a dispenser. He missed and the crystal shattered into fragments. A girl's high-pitched laugh jeered at his nerves.

Gosheron was talking now with the arbiters of trade and industry and

money. This was the crux of the whole jamboree. This little quiet casual conference was the reason this lavish display of worldly wealth and squandering extravagance had been staged. Gosheron represented Sahndran on Earth, and Sahndran had systems choc-full of raw materials, resources, metals, Q's, everything that Earth lacked. Be nice to him, Terran hater though he might be, pal, he holds the whip hand. Only - don't let him know. Put on a show, throw an Advert. Con. and let him see how we can whoop it up! Dazzle the old boy. Geriatrics kept him chipper at eighty-three. Fling in a woman or two. Talk nice.

And get those raw materials for Earth!

Drink, Your Excellency? Which porage would you prefer? Yes, Your Excellency. This is the latest -

*I wanna WHIZ
Wanna ZIZ,
Drink my NU-CLE-O-NIC FIZZ!*

There had been more than a hint of desperation in the way Earth had flung itself into the algae business. If algae and bacteria could not provide the protein and carbohydrates and fats needed and if the forests could not supply the raw materials for commerce and synthesis, then mankind was sliding to hell in a bucket. The enormous demand for energy had stripped the land of renewable Q's - the sun and wind and tides were left. And still the consumption racket went on, still the stentorian calls for more production and consumption boomed out. It was hysterico-religious mania by then, of course. Geriatrics added to the inferno. Improved methods of equipping the unfit for life sprang up, adding still more burdens. Birth control? Just try, uncle, just try. The whole crazy mess rolled on inevitably, with warfare an outmoded - and unmentionable - method of control.

The basics were perfectly correct. Just that something went wrong along the line, somewhere. Even space travel didn't turn out to be the panacea everyone had confidently expected.

We just weren't the only people in the Galaxy.

A tall, glistening, floodlit flagpole with the United Nations flag bravely fluttered, towering over a garbage can with a gaping ever hungry mouth. That was the symbol.

**WE'LL DRINK AT BARS
SPREAD FROM HERE OUT TO THE STARS**

A world bedlam of frenzied, sensation-seeking, hungry, frightened people.

Drink, drink, wood al-co-hol!

You couldn't really blame them.

Lord felt the shivers and pulled his nasal plugs out, took a rapid sniff of snow, and replaced the filters. He needed it, anyway, after that hop-headed Chinaman. He finished another Nuclear Fizz - this time his cast was accurate and the glass splintered down the dispenser to be carried into the city's complex reclamation system - and wandered into the shadows to the rear of the animated group around Gosheron.

They were busily building empires and tearing others out from under the clammy feet of friends. Lord felt a faint disgust.

The woman with the golden face mask and bleached rocket hair glided swiftly from some purple-lit alcove, seized his arm. Her eyes were yellow pits of fire.

'Spencer! Darling Spencer! Fancy seeing you!'

Index: T/F/354920/E.

Name: Katherine Coburn.

Age: Alleged 26. Chronologic: 40. Height: 160 cms. Hair: Mousy. Eyes: Blue (partial to yellow stain).

Professional tridi entertainer. Four hospitalisations on unspecified data. Possible connections with Earth for Terrans party. Security Risk Rating: BX - problematical. Appears on restricted 'arrest during emergency' list.

There burst a suffocating wash of sound and light from the ballroom carrying her throaty greeting on it like a surfboard, tearing into his guts and making him ache to crush her into his arms then and there.

'Katy - I'd not recognised you - Katy - why in hell didn't you visor me?'

'I recognised you easily, uncle. But, Spencer, darling - I've been so busy -'

'Yeah! I saw! With that fat slug Gosheron.'

'But he's important, darling. And he's got lots of you know what.'

'I can keep you in reasonable comfort, Katy, you know that -'

'Oh, don't propose again, there's a dear boy! I believe passionately in Trial Marriage, and it's so much less fuss. We've been happy for a couple of years, uncle, why not let it go on that way?'

'We've been happy! I've been in hell!'

She shrugged, her naked shoulders a gleam in the lights where finger marks had smeared away powder. Lord's tongue was a cinder in the dryness of his mouth. She smiled at him, the golden sheath around her mouth dimpling and folding over the flesh.

'I need a fix,' he said hoarsely.

'Atta boy, Spencer - I'll join you.' Her yellow eyes smouldered. She lifted her scrap of skirt, drew out a jewelled plastic box. 'What are you hitting these days?'

'Usual.' Lord's own box, his portable carry-case, opened clumsily under his trembling fingers, a hinge snapped with a sharp *ping!* and the lid hung askew.

'Hey, take it easy, uncle!' she laughed.

The needle filled smoothly. Lord bared his forearm, pinched up the flesh and slid the porage home where it was needed. Uncle! Hit that sky!

Katy's eyelids half closed, her body undulated and she rippled her hands in an abandoned temple dance, tiny bells tinkling on her ankles. She crooned softly.

*I need a tonic - Uncle;
I'm super-sonic - Uncle.
Don't get platonic,
You hep carbuncle.'*

'You're mixing!' he accused her.

'Sure, uncle. Sure. I'm hot! I've been mixing coupla weeks now. Get wise, Spencer darling. Grab a jab and stab! The old mainline porage is strictly for the

crumbs.'

The golden sheath around her mouth crimped in and her smile would have drowned the sunrise. Her teeth were very white.

'Do get me a drink, dear boy -'

He brought two Nuclear Fizzes and didn't realise he had finished his own in one gulp. Somewhere off to one side Gosheron was surrounded by the moguls of finance, safe for the moment, giving time to talk to Katy without nagging worry.

'I'll see you after this -' he began eagerly.

She cut him off, gaily, like a sunbeam falling unexpectedly across a candle flame.

'Spencer, darling - have you seen Gruney around?'

'Gruney?' he said vaguely.

'Yes, Gruney,' she laughed impatiently. 'Grunewald Sloane. Such a dear boy. He promised to let me grab a stick from his ticker-sticker. Do you think I should?' She finished archly.

'Stay away from cardio-dopes,' Lord said automatically, not really hearing what she was saying, seeing only the outline of her in the sheathing golden film. He had just realised that the film was all she was wearing, it had looked like a dress with the scrap of pocket-skirt. She looked like the torrid flame from some pagan temple torch.

'That's your trouble, Spencer,' she pouted, flinging her empty glass somewhere in the direction of a disposer. 'You never want any fun! Cardio-dopes are hepped whizzes. Especially Gruney. If you see him tell him I'm aching to have a word with him.' She laughed kittenishly. 'He's dressed like a Chinaman, really utter. Bye, bye, Spencer, darling.'

And she was gone, like a flame twisting round a wind tossed torch. Spencer's mind groped among blackening embers. He puzzled over familiar things with foul sooty fingerprints across them.

Chinaman's clothes? Cardio-dope?

What was Katy doing running with that bunch?

JIB JOB JAB - AGAIN,
HIT THAT VEIN - BRAIN!

Time: 2148

Katy knew a man who had tried to kill Gosheron. Katy didn't know Lord was Terran Security. Katy had been trying to make Gosheron. Spencer Lord's mind twisted like a burned out hyper-drive. His face went sickly grey under the false features and he laid an unsteady hand against the wall to support himself.

Training took over. He didn't feel or hear the relays clicking in his brain; but the icy, wall compounded of complete calm, utter confidence and dedicated obedience clamped shut like the closing valves of an airlock.

Almost.

Jamming the smooth functioning of his Bureau indoctrinated reactions, a sibilant golden flame mocked the closing of that wall. The vivid image of Katy danced maddeningly before his eyes, filtering the coldly calculated trained sequence of actions he must now go through. He shut his eyes in agony for a space, then opened them by an effort of will and put one hand to his weapons belt.

Security Rating Risk: AAA. Terran Security Operative. *Left, right, left, right, left.* BIM! BAM! BOOM! There wasn't much inside him now except a vastly dark hole which sucked his guts through claws of white hot steel.

The song from the chanting line in the ballroom beat up in metronomic waves of hypnotic sound. The wooden floor glistened with spilt liquor. An abandoned needle splintered under his foot. He disregarded all that, walked steadily over to the group around Gosheron. He couldn't see Katy.

If she tried to kill Gosheron he must kill her. It was black and white. There'd be no time for a fast deal, a hand across her mouth dragging her away where he could talk, unfix the crazy notions and fanatic schemes she must have had drilled into her poor befuddled brain. Gosheron must not know, ever, that his life had been endangered. These fanatics would try a shot even if they were dying in pieces - and Katy was one of them!

It was a situation fully covered by various aspects of the training he had

gone through - except that the assassin wasn't the girl he - Lord was too far gone even to curse. The Earth's continued sustenance depended on the deals that would be made tonight, and once Gosheron, the old Terran hater, got a whiff of any murder-plot against him he'd be off - whoosh - to the stars.

Lord was sweating now, the sleazy feel of it slick between plastic face mask and flesh. He felt sick, too.

Giggle-gas balloons were popping everywhere now and Lord forced himself to smile foolishly, mouth drooling as the stuff billowed around him. He had half a mind to take out one filter - it was a hell of a job trying to giggle the way he felt. And, suddenly, it was too dangerously easy.

He checked himself savagely. Gosheron was laughing and chuckling, greasy fat tears rolling down his slobby cheeks. The group around the alien were back-slapping, chortling, having a whale of a time; Lord knew their keen brains were bent on one objective, talking Gosheron into ripe contracts for Earth.

Sharks and shysters they might be: but Earth's future depended on them - good luck to them. Katy - Katy was a moth, a gaudy, brilliantly empty flutterer, giving nothing to the world, only taking. Yet - she was Katy ... Katy ...

Time: 2151.

When Lord saw her flashing eyes and laughing mouth in the crowd around Gosheron, her leg rubbing familiarly against a flushed young roisterer, he knew it was too late. She had wormed her way through the crush towards the alien. Lord pushed through after, laughing, shouting, a drink seized from a lax hand held high. His other hand stayed on his weapons belt under the flaring coat. The girl was a sliver of quicksilver, gliding in among the guests, slipping closer and closer to Gosheron.

I'M RIZ
I'M HIZ
ON MY NU-CLEO-NIC FIZZ!

Lord pushed faster, hating himself, hating the world, wondering just what he dared to do. There was an icy band around his forehead that constricted and drew fire-hot sparks of pain from his temples. Glass smashed in a roar of laughter. Heat beat up in baking waves. People rolled drunkenly away from a couple locked in a torrid embrace. Balloons and rockets crashed and plopped. Gosheron was clumsily tilting a glass, an aide steadied it, moving between Lord and Katy.

He stepped casually fast to one side, reached out a rock steady hand for Katy. She eluded his grasp without appearing to see him. Then he saw the needle between her fingers.

That wouldn't be porage. That would be a killer.

YOU NEED A TONIC - UNCLE
YOU'RE SUPER-SONIC - UNCLE ...

She had one impudent arm around the fat alien now, her ripe lips reaching for his flabby mouth. She was laughing screechingly, piercingly, and flakes of gold began to peel from her body. An aide glanced at her, chuckled, and reached out.

Lord was held suspended in a timeless vacuum. He thought he had stopped breathing and his heart-beats came in sluggish reverberations of sound that hurt his chest.

The aide saw the needle. His laughing face went grim. Katy, all her vibrant body a golden bow, moved the hand with the needle. The drop of liquid at the tip caught the lights and shone fragmentarily blinding like a nova.

'Porage, porage, have a shot of porage,' she chanted.

Gosheron wheezed and shook, his fat face creased in smiles, his eyes avid on the girl's slim body. The aide's hand raked down towards Katy. She thrust and in that instant the other aide, unseen by Lord, fired. His wide beam tore Katy's hand and wrist off. The needle vapourised. She stood looking dazedly at the stump, cauterised already and with no blood oozing.

Miraculously a clearing appeared around the drama. Women screamed. Men swore. There was a sudden, awful, engulfing silence.

Lord's face felt as though a granite crusher had used it for a dummy run. His brain told him that he mustn't allow the Sahndrans to think this an organised attempt on the life of their Ambassador. He had to cover up - fast.

He could not trust himself to speak yet. He shoved roughly into the cleared area, trampling splintered glasses, and took the girl's body on his arm as she collapsed in a dead faint. He faced Gosheron, forced his rigid lips to open.

'She meant no harm!' He whined the words as though fear and horror

stricken. 'She wanted to give you a shot of porage - give you a kick. And you blasted her arm off.'

Gosheron's smile was now all diplomacy.

'I am sorry for the impetuosity of my guards, but -' He shrugged and ripples of fat ran disgustingly along his shoulders. 'We cannot take chances. She should have known better.'

'I'll look after her,' Lord got out. 'My name's Kinroy Tracey, in case you want to pay any compensation.'

Then he was pulling away, carrying Katy, her nude gold filmed body cold against his arm. Cold?

He glanced down in panic. Her closed eyelids showed blue where the gold had worn away. She was barely breathing. He scraped a nail across her gold filmed flesh, saw the betraying blue tinge beneath.

The little idiot! She'd been cardio-doping, all right! The shock, with her in that condition ...

Before he had left the great ballroom she was dead.

'The filthy aliens!' Lord mumbled blindly to himself, over and over. They used a molecular on her. The poor kid. Dead. They only needed to knock her hand away. Dead. A molecular. The dirty rotten twisted ...'

He sat with her in his arms for a long while, whilst around him beat the insistent roar of the world, going to hell in a bucket and enjoying itself every inch of the way.

Time: 2200.

Spencer Lord laid Katy down gently and walked back into the ballroom to continue protecting the alien Ambassador.

Get a Jab - Get a *Grab*.
On a nu-cle-o-nic Fizz!
Drink, drink, wood al-co-hol!
Going to hell in a bucket.

