



Redstone Science Fiction #18 Cover

Layout by Michael Ray

Redstone Science Fiction #18 - November 2011

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Welcome to Redstone Science Fiction #18.

This month we have two excellent new stories for RSF. [Passive Resistance](#) by David Tallerman is a tense adventure SF story that subtly considers the nature of violence. We've worked to have a broad range of stories for RSF and were excited to find such an excellent example of this style in our inbox.

Our second story this month, [On the Sabbath Day Be Ye Cleansed](#) by Amanda C. Davis, as another outstanding piece. It considers religion, colonization, and the impact of technological advance in a tightly written package. We have enjoyed her other work, including a runner-up submission in our summer contest, and are pleased to have the chance to bring you this one. We hope that after reading it that you feel as unclean as we did.

We also have Five Question interviews with both [David](#) and [Amanda](#). They have provided us with some insightful answers that should illuminate them and their work just a little for you.

We're always looking for ways to improve our magazine, so this month, in addition to our new stories and author interviews, we begin podcasting our catalog of Redstone Science stories. Amanda Fitzwater is working with us as a vocal artist. Together we're working together to create audio versions of all of our stories. This month we'll [podcast](#) Freefall by Peter Roberts and Raising Tom Chambers by Daniel Powell.

We are having a great time doing Redstone SF and enjoy all the interactions we have with people in the SF field. We open to submissions again this month and look forward to reading work from another (large) group of SF authors.

Your Friend,
Michael Ray
Editor
Redstone SF

Passive Resistance

by David Tallerman

Alec turned just in time to see Ennis begin to fall, to feel wetness spray across his face. Ennis, his bodyguard, his friend, wavered for an instant – then collapsed backward, emptying a flower of red over the steps behind him.

Alec was already running. There was the whiplash crack of a second shot and a pane in the vast series of glass doors disintegrated. Arms up over his face, Alec threw himself into the opening, felt splinters shivering across his clothes and skin, stumbled and fell.

For an instant he was sure he was going to die. But Ennis's training was coming back, and he used the momentum, rolled, and pushed off in a new direction. A second pane exploded into whirling fragments and then he was past the doors, into a corridor that ran straight ahead as far as he could see, and – crucially – had no windows.

Alec slowed, struggling against the rush of adrenaline. Only then did he realise there was a message waiting in his Networked Neural Portion, the chip nestled against his skull, connected both to his brain and the IO port beneath his right ear. The message was from Ennis, and strung with half a dozen bulky attachments. The time stamp was for a few seconds ago.

Alec opened it, without slowing. As a secondary function, his translator plug-in could interpret audiotext, and it kicked in now. Suddenly Ennis's voice was in his mind, impossibly fast but thanks to the software, understood.

“Alec, I've programmed this message to send on a dead man's switch, so if you're hearing it I guess that means I'm dead and you're not. What can I say? I'm sorry I screwed up, that I'm not there to do my job.

If they got me then the people trying to kill you are professionals, well organised and equipped. There'll likely be more than one, a sniper and three or four on mop-up. They know the police will be on their way, but that still leaves plenty of time. With me out of the way, they think this will be easy.

So here it is. I tried to train you to defend yourself. I told you, it's a noble thing to be a pacifist and a dangerous game when not everyone is playing. Maybe you were right, but I wish you'd listened. There's so damn much you need to know if you have a hope of getting through this.”

All in the blink of an eye. There was something at once comforting and sickening about hearing his friend's voice spiralling through his mind, oblivious of death.

“You'll have noticed the attachments I sent. They'll have automatically installed themselves by now. First, I've updated the firewall on your NNP. They won't be able to hack your brain, and you should be safe from viral infection. That means they'll have to do this the old-fashioned way. Second is a hack plug-in of your own. It's automatic, and will get you into places you're not meant to be. You may have to bend the law a little to get through this.

So first things first Alec, get orientated. Download maps, floor plans, blueprints, whatever there is for wherever you are. They'll have planned this and they'll know every inch of your location. Unless you do too, this will be over before it's started."

The message paused and he was alone again, feet still pounding against the tiled floor, the corridor sliding by to either side. Blueprints, floor plans? Where did he start? Like most of his generation, Alec had never taken to his modifications. He viewed them as an unwanted necessity and favoured passive software like the translator, crucial to an ambassador and hardly noticeable once you got over the shock of hearing in two languages at once. If he needed to do anything more sophisticated he did it sitting down, in a dark room for preference – not while running for his life.

He'd been here once before, three years ago, and been led through a maze of stairs and corridors by a bored young receptionist. Back then, he couldn't find the toilets without a guide. He knew he was lost already and, after Ennis's warning, had an awful sense of unseen assailants closing on him.

He had to try, at least.

That meant slowing down though. Not that he had much choice; his heart was pounding and the muscles in his legs were already raw, because while he was hardly unfit he was, after all, over forty, and more overweight than he'd like to admit. At a fast jog, he began to search with the only parameters he could think of: BERLIN COLLEGE OF PEACE STUDIES; BLUEPRINTS; FLOORPLANS. Instantaneously, reams of results bloomed into view, projected by his optic modification onto the periphery of his sight. Disorientated, he stumbled, glanced hard against the wall.

How could he watch two things at once?

Yet – and he could almost hear Ennis saying it – he had to do both if he was going to survive. He forced himself back to a sprint, aimed for the middle of the passage and tried again.

This time he found that, while he couldn't do either well, he could do both, if only because the NNL compensated for his slow perceptions. He opened a result for the college's archive and found only endless essays, some no doubt his own. He tried again with the council's planning department site, but the amount of information was overwhelming and the miniaturised designs in blue and white incomprehensible. He was about to try a third site when Ennis's recording started again.

"Done that? Good. Now that you know where you are, whatever happens, keep moving. Don't try to hide because they'll likely have thermal imaging. Keep out of corridors, avoid dead ends. Head for open-plan rooms, populated areas, they may hesitate to open fire and you'll have plenty of cover. Buy time until the police arrive."

Alec cursed fiercely. *Damn you, Ennis, you know me better than that. You know I can hardly make sense of this stuff at the best of times. I can't do this!*

“There’s one more thing and you won’t to like it. I’m sorry, truly. But I’m dead, you’re alive, and it’s my job to keep you that way.

Odds are that they’ll find you. Then, pacifist or not, you’re going to have to defend yourself or die. I know you don’t want to, that you don’t know how, and I respect your ideals more than you know. But you’re only human, and when you’re cornered, your instinct will be to fight back. I’m making sure you can.

So the last files are military dirtware: hand-to-hand combat training, firearms, some basic tactics, as much as you can subconsciously take in. When you need it, it’ll be there. It’s the last thing, the only thing I can do for you. Good luck, Alec, goodbye. I hope you make it.”

The message stopped, leaving nothing in his head except his own thoughts – and anger.

You respect my ideals? Ennis, did nothing I said mean anything to you? You think I can lecture about a world without violence when you’ve filled my mind up with this, when suddenly I know a hundred ways to kill someone with my bare hands?

Only, not doing something because you couldn’t, or you’d never had to, that was no choice at all. Ennis had said that once, before asking the question levelled at every pacifist sooner or later: what would Alec do if someone was pointing a gun at him, or at Isabel, or their children? Would he kill to save them if he could? Alec had tried to tell him, no, not even then. Someone had to choose not to, whatever the cost.

Had Ennis always known this day would come?

There was a dull crack from behind, and to his left the plaster exploded, white dust clouding the air. Alec almost fell, flailing at the drifting residue of what instants ago had been a chunk of wall.

A second shot couldn’t possibly miss. He could dodge all he liked, but he was in a corridor, and there was nowhere to go ... nowhere, except...

Alec threw himself towards the door coming up on his left, praying it wasn’t locked, that it wasn’t a broom cupboard. It burst open and he stumbled through, barely hearing the second shot a moment later as the door slammed closed behind him.

He was at the bottom of a stairwell, flight after flight leading to a glass dome a dozen floors above. His whole body was shaking with exertion, but he began to run again anyway, taking the stairs two or three at a time, clutching the lacquered handrail. They knew where he was. Now it was just a matter of time. Behind the next door he opened, they’d be waiting. Even if they weren’t, how long could he keep running for? Where was he going? He was lost, they knew exactly where he was, and...

And that meant there was nothing to lose by trying again. In his peripheral vision, the list of search results still hung superimposed. He tried to focus, using the rail to guide himself.

Somehow, it seemed a little easier this time. Though most of the results were gibberish, one caught his attention:

Paul Gruder – Berlin College of Peace Studies (Visitor’s Guide) – roving NNL link – Floor plans, all floors <RESTRICTED ACCESS LINK>

Alec knew unauthorised remote connects were possible, used in extreme circumstances by the emergency services and armed forces. He knew as well that outside those professions they were highly illegal, and difficult, the reserve of skilled hackers. Would the software Ennis had sent him work? Could he really break into someone’s mind? Did he even have the right?

You need to stop thinking or you’re going to die.

He tried the link. Perhaps it took a fraction of a second longer than usual, or maybe even that was his imagination. A new directory opened. There were maps, dozens of them, detailed diagrams of every inch of the building. Glancing aside, he saw he was coming up on the third floor landing, and cycled through the files for the appropriate plan. He was at the front of the building, in the east wing. No good, the stairs led into corridors, small offices, they’d corner him easily.

The fourth floor? No better. Lecture rooms, staff rooms, no cover.

Fifth? The fifth floor was archives, the library.

Yes.

Alec could hear footsteps from below, a steady tapping on the stone stairs not far behind. He didn’t have any strength left, he was barely jogging and still each step meant struggling to make his legs respond. There was an insistent pain in his chest and each ragged breath was a challenge. The other steps were far more rapid than his own, and growing louder.

He had to concentrate on something other than the pain of moving.

The part of his mind that stubbornly remained a professor, which refused to admit he was running for his life, said, *how strange to be reading information from someone else’s mind.* Even if it wasn’t strictly true, the thought was thrilling.

He stumbled past a sign that read FOURTH FLOOR. The other steps were two floors beneath him, no more.

Somewhere in the building, a tour-guide named Paul Gruder was going about his business, completely unaware that at this instant Alec was looking at information stored millimetres from his brain.

Alec reached the middle landing, swung around the corner, barely kept his footing. He staggered up the last steps and towards the door ahead.

It made him feel less isolated to know that, even if it was only unconsciously, Paul Gruder was assisting his survival. It was a reminder that he wasn't alone – that even today, a Sunday, the college wasn't empty.

Alec slipped through the door as quietly as possible, hoping against hope that the owner of the footsteps might continue upwards. He was beginning to understand the power of the tool Ennis had given him. He was surrounded by information, if only he could think how to use it. He was surrounded by people...

Alec couldn't help but smile. The professor in him wasn't such an idiot after all, even in matters of survival. Turning the corner into the college's central library, a vast space of ceiling-high shelves spaced with rows of kiosks, he began another search. It was easier this time. He knew exactly what he was looking for, and found it almost immediately.

Hans Bruhl – Berlin College of Peace Studies (Head of Building Security) – roving NNL link
<RESTRICTED ACCESS LINK>

He requested a speech link, marking the message 'urgent'.

The name was a misnomer because you didn't have to speak, just think as if you were speaking, and the NNP did the rest. It was another aspect of the astonishing technology in his head that Alec had always avoided, if only because it was alarmingly akin to how he imagined multiple personality disorder. Sure enough, he had to struggle against panic when a mental voice not his own said, "Whoever you are, this is not the time. We are in the middle of a security crisis..."

"I *am* the crisis," Alec interrupted.

There was no response, only silence, the mental equivalent of bated breath.

"I'm a lecturer, that's why I'm here, but I'm also an ambassador for the Peace Council and I'm speaking at the UN summit next week, arguing for unilateral disarmament, and there's a very real chance I'll succeed in that, and as you can imagine there are plenty of people who don't want me giving that talk, who'd rather see me dead, very powerful people who are trying to kill me right here and now, and I need your help."

With no need to breathe, it was all too easy to babble in speech links. "Do you understand?" he added hesitantly.

This time, the reply came straight away. "I understand. Now, listen. Two of my security staff are already dead. I am in contact with the police and they will be here very soon. But perhaps not soon enough to avoid more casualties, including your own, unless you are prepared to do what I tell you."

"Of course." thought Alec.

"Where are you?"

“In the fifth floor library.”

At that precise moment, contrary to Ennis’s advice, he was hiding, crouched behind a bookcase in the shadow of a thousand texts on military history. Having made it to the library, he’d realised he had no idea where to go. The maps in his mind made no difference to that. Nor could he watch where he was going, concentrate on the speech link and follow the optically projected diagrams all at once. He was trying to keep calm because it was crucial to the link, but he had no idea if his assailant from the stairwell had followed him. Panic was welling in his stomach.

“Ah ... military history, seventeenth to nineteenth centuries.”

“Wait. Yes, I have you on the cameras.”

Though he hardly dared entertain the thought, he had to know. “Is anyone else here?”

There was too long a pause, and he was beginning to wonder if the link had been somehow broken when Bruhl replied, “Yes. Move now. Straight ahead. *Run.*”

Alec ran.

He was expecting the sound of a shot, or even the impact of a bullet. Neither came. He sprinted as straight as he could, darting round shelves and tables with no idea where he was going, until Bruhl’s voice began again.

“Stop, *stop.* I don’t know if he’s seen you. Some kind of augmentation but – I can’t tell. Do you remember where you came in, where the door is?”

“No,” thought Alex. He barely knew anything for the fear and adrenalin hammering in his head.

“I think perhaps you could make it. The police are nearly here, if you can get to the ground floor – a moment – *now*, to your right.”

Alex was moving again almost before the sentence finished, his feet pounding against the carpet. All he could think, and he didn’t know anymore which thoughts he was transmitting to Bruhl and which were his own, was, *even if he can’t see me he must be able to hear me, any second I’ll turn a corner and he’ll be there...*

Yet for all that, the gun barrel came as a surprise.

It seemed to fill his entire view, although the man was a good twenty metres away. He was dressed in black from head to toe, and Bruhl was right, he was augmented, so blatantly that even Alec recognised it for illegal technology. Where his right eye should have been was only plastic and glass. That was all Alec could see of his face, his eyes: one real, one artificial, both utterly without expression.

Even then, it was hard to focus on anything but the gun barrel. It was a black hole filling his view, seemingly drawing him in, because he couldn't stop running. His conscious brain wasn't doing much beyond waiting for the oblivion it knew must come at any instant.

He wasn't sure what the unconscious part was doing. On some level he was aware of muscles clenching, hands drawing into fists, his balance subtly shifting. The distance between them was closing. Where was the shot? Was it possible that this man, this killer, was as alarmed as he was?

Closer and closer, and it seemed like an eternity had passed between them, a lifetime of waiting to die. His arm moved forward, up. The impact sent pain tearing through his wrist.

The next Alec knew, his attacker was sprawled on the floor, the hand that had been holding a gun an instant ago now clutching a shoulder visibly out of joint. The man was actually whimpering with pain. Had he done that? The sense of power was astonishing, like nothing he'd ever felt. Had he really done that?

"Damn it, the gun, take the gun!"

It was Bruhl's voice. It didn't register at first. Then he saw it, close to his foot, an innocuous black lump of metal. How had he been so afraid of that? It was nothing. He bent to pick it up.

"Shoot him! Damn it, Alec, he will kill you."

Sure enough, the man was struggling to his feet, a jagged knife in his hand now, its edge glinting beneath the strip lights. Alec pointed. He had no idea how to use a gun, but the programming in his brain evidently did. All he had to do was relax and let things take their course.

Only, the academic in him was fighting for attention again. He could feel his finger contracting, ever so slowly, but something was wrong. He was aware of a thought struggling to surface, like a bubble through water. He could feel his finger tightening.

"Bruhl, I don't remember telling you my name," Alex said aloud. But his voice was muffled even to his own ears by the thunder-peal of the thing in his hands.

His hand unclenched. The gun dropped to the floor. He couldn't hear anything at first except for the ringing in his ears; and then only his own breathing, unnaturally loud. He realised suddenly that his legs wouldn't support him, so he sat down. As the tension began to ease from his muscles and his mind, he realised how much he wanted to cry.

"I never told you my name."

"Didn't you?" The voice was different now. "Damn, I think you're right."

"I saw you die. I still have your blood on my face."

“You saw what you needed to see, I’m afraid.”

“Would it be stupid to ask why you’d do this, Ennis?” Alec tried to keep his mental voice steady. The anger was muddying his thoughts, and he didn’t want to lose the fragment of calm he had left – not before he got some answers.

“Not stupid, but I’d like to think you could work it out. Still, I guess I owe you an explanation.” Ennis’s tone was relaxed, conversational. “You know, they said they wanted you dead. You can imagine the kind of people we’re talking about here, Alec. They tracked me down, and they offered me an astronomical amount to kill you. They told me the only other option was that they’d find somebody else, someone better than me, and he’d kill us both.

Of course, I said I wouldn’t. Hell, we’re friends after all. They weren’t so unreasonable, though. All they really wanted was to make sure you couldn’t speak next week. And I have to admit, that struck a cord. Because, you know, all those theoretical debates we had, did you ever think for a minute that there’s no place for someone like me in your brave new world?

So in the end, I offered a compromise. I don’t think anyone will take you quite so seriously now you’re a killer, do you? Would you even have the balls to get up there and speak after what you’ve just done?”

“What about Bruhl? Does he even exist? And how did you know one of your thugs wouldn’t just kill me?”

“They had orders not to shoot, or if it came to it, just to wound you, Alec. That was the deal. Hospitalising you was an option, but discrediting you, getting you into such a corner that you finally pushed back – well, I convinced them how much more appealing that could be. Worth the loss of a few hired grunts, at any rate. This way they hurt you, your cause, and your opinion means shit from now until the end of time.

As for Bruhl, it was a stroke of luck that you thought of trying a link-up – and impressive, by the way. I’d already hacked the local security, so it wasn’t hard to intercept your link and mask my voice. You could do just as much and more with the software I gave you. You made it easy. In the end, I didn’t have to make you a killer, just stand by and watch you get on with it.”

More than anything, this last line twisted sharp and cold in Alec’s gut. It wasn’t true. He’d been tricked. He couldn’t possibly have known. What control had he even had? “It wasn’t me. It wasn’t, it was the software.”

“The software, Alec?” There was something awful in Ennis’s voice.

“That garbage you dumped into my brain.”

“Ah. You’re talking about the dummy files, aren’t you?”

“What? You’re lying.”

He could hear hurried steps on the stairs. It had to be the police.

That meant it was over. That meant he was safe.

“You have a cheap commercial NNL. Do you really think you have the capacity for military dirtware? No, Alec, I’m afraid the killing was all you.”

“Damn you, you’re lying!”

“I’ve no reason to. So live with it, Alec. If you can.”

Alec turned to the stairwell door, watched as a half-dozen uniformed figures burst through the door. He was safe. It was over. Yet there was something cold in their eyes as they surveyed the scene: The body sprawled broken on the ground, the blank angle of the gun, himself.

“Down on the floor,” one said in clipped English. “On the floor, your hands behind your head.”

He did as he was told. What did it matter? It was over. Lying on his belly, seeing nothing now but carpet and blood, feeling the chill of metal as they cuffed his wrists, Alec closed his eyes and listened to the voice in his mind, a murmur over a serpentine hiss of static:

“It’s like you always told me,” whispered Ennis, “it’s not about the tools. It’s how you choose to use them.”

And the link went dead.

The End

David Tallerman’s science fiction, fantasy and horror short stories have appeared in over thirty markets, including Lightspeed, Bull Spec, Digital Science Fiction and John Joseph Adams’s zombie best-of anthology The Living Dead. Amongst other projects, David has also published poetry (in Chiaroscuro), various film reviews and articles, and comic scripts through the award-winning British Futurequake Press. David’s first novel, comic fantasy adventure Giant Thief, will be published in early 2012 by UK publisher Angry Robot, to be closely followed by two sequels. He can be found online at <http://davidtallerman.net/> and <http://davidtallerman.blogspot.com/>.

On the Sabbath Day Be Ye Cleansed

by Amanda C. Davis

The temple opened for Purge, but Purge did not begin.

We knelt, arching our faces to the temple like flowers strain toward the sun. We remembered the week, the loves gained and friends won. Those lost. Our conflicts. Our sins. We remembered.

We remembered far too long.

“What is going on?” murmured Riia, my weeks-wife, in my ear. How like Riia, to speak in the silence. Her breath made my skin tingle. New love. “Tagon, has this happened before?”

Of course I knew no more than she did.

At last the temple’s bright steel clenched like a grim mouth. From below the priestess emerged. She had grease up the sleeves of her sacred robes, and smears of oil and dust at her knees. The priestess raised her hands. Her palms were chapped and bloody.

“I have spoken to the gods,” she said. Her voice, ever heavy with our cumulative guilt, weighed heavier than ever. “There will be no Purge this week. Go and live as if your sin was taken from you.”

No Purge.

I felt filthy. Some stared at her, but many turned back to the temple, expectant, baby birds gaping at a wormless mother. Others around me began to stand, avoiding the eyes of the ones they had grown close to that week. I stayed on my knees. Perhaps the temple would open. Perhaps the priestess was wrong.

She was not. Even the most pious among us could not wait forever. When Riia stood and tugged me after her, I followed—dutiful as a lamb, and just as lost.

* * *

We had never before left the temple knowing where to go.

Instead of escorting us to new barracks and house-rows, the priests stood with their croziers over their shoulders and shrugged: “Go back where you came from. Wherever you came from.”

Back: to the week before, to the things we had expected to leave behind. It was then we realized that our sins were not undone, and what that meant.

I saw a man turn to his weeks-wife with eyes growing wide, and she—the smaller by far, bruised in the face—raised her eyes to his, so that the week of memories passed invisibly between them. She grabbed a rock from the ground. I flinched when she threw it at her week-husband's head.

“No! No! Not another week with this sinner! Purge me, I must be Purged!”

Two of the priests restrained her and two of them held her husband back: there would have been retaliation, I was sure.

“Another week,” said Riia to me. She had been holding my hand since I left the temple, but I only now realized it. “Another week?”

We had all left our stains on a bed that week, and who would leave their own mess in favor of someone else's? Without the Purge, we had nowhere else to go.

“Another week,” I said.

Riia clutched my hand tighter. It felt strangely, eerily familiar.

* * *

The houses had not been Purged either.

People returned to their doors only to recoil and back away, confronted with the accumulation of sin. Garbage sat where it sat. Our receptacles were still full. Nothing was clean. Our accidents had not been fixed, our errors had not been repaired. A man came out and sat on his litter-strewn porch, weeping openly.

Riia went to the kitchen bin. “We should...put it somewhere.”

“Where?” I said. “There's nowhere to put it.”

“Well, where does it go during the Purge?”

I didn't know. “The same place our sins go,” I said, making a joke that wasn't funny and didn't sound joking. “Maybe we should ask the priests to take it somewhere.”

“Maybe we should,” she said. She took a wrapper from the counter and put it in the bin: the memento of breakfast we hadn't expected to remember. “We could put it outside.”

“It would just stay there.”

“Better than in here.”

Was it? The bin smelled a little. Outside everyone could smell it. Was it better to keep our sins to ourselves and bear the worst of their stench?

“I don’t know,” I said. “What’s everyone else doing?”

We peeked out the window. We weren’t the first on our square to have the idea. Some of our neighbors had eschewed bins altogether. No priests had stopped them. It must be all right. We put all the trash bins outside, open at the tops, in case we needed them again. After that we closed the windows to block the smell, and the curtains to block the sight...but it bothered me to know they were there.

* * *

Riia and I pretended it was Saturday. We talked about how nice it would feel to be clean, gossiped about which neighbors would likely worship far from their weeks-partners so that they could have new ones. We ate from the leftovers in the refrigerator as if we knew it would be restocked tomorrow. They tasted old. We smiled as we ate anyway.

After dinner we went next door to invite the neighbors, who we had met three days ago, to come over and play a board game before bed.

Booan, the younger, met us at the door; his face lit up at our invitation. “It would be wonderful. We had a good time last Thursday.” He called over his shoulder, “Didn’t we, Sam?”

Sam shuffled into sight. He had a haggard look and the skin under his eyes sagged, reminding me how much older he looked than the rest of us. “We did,” he said. “I wish I did not know that.”

Booan’s face fell. “Please,” he said. It sounded like he was asking for more than a game.

“We’re pretending it’s Saturday,” Riia piped up.

Sam raised his tired eyes to meet hers. “Yes,” he said slowly. “Yes. We’ll pretend.”

We weren’t very good at pretending.

We played our game, but no one could keep their minds on the blocks or the pegs.

Sam said, “Do you remember how we got here?”

Our false fun dissipated. “Sam, we’ve always been here.”

“I don’t think so,” said Sam. “I think we were brought. I had dreams....”

“He had terrible dreams last night,” said Booan, apologetically.

“Dreams of...travel. Dreams—I’m afraid—of things that should have been Purged away.”

We didn’t know how to answer that.

Riia said, “What do you suppose we’ll eat when our pantries are empty?”

Another unanswerable question.

The edge of a playing card sliced my finger. A miniscule tear of blood welled up. The prick of pain and dot of red made me aware of my skin, what was happening to me, and I felt this: the foulness of skin-oils. The grease of my hair. The sick cottony sour-coating of my mouth.

I stumbled to my feet. “Be back,” I gasped, and lunged toward the bathroom.

This was wicked, it was intolerable. I tore myself out of my clothes. I wished I could tear away the skin under it. I imagined I saw the grime inches thick. I brushed my teeth, then did it again. A good start. I washed my face. Better. I ran water through my hair. That made it worse. Soon I stood in a puddle before the sink, shaking with the awful truth. This was nothing like the hot, dry, dizzying cleanliness of Purge. I could never simulate it on my own. Not even close.

Sam and Boonan went home not long after. Riia had won the game, but no one cared.

* * *

There was a crowd outside the temple as early as midmorning. Riia and I scrubbed ourselves in the sink as best we could, making ourselves as Purgelessly clean as possible, before we joined them.

We weren’t there long before a pair of priests emerged from the temple. They put themselves between us and the door, waving their crosiers. “Go home!” shouted one. “Go home!”

The crowd drew in tighter.

The priest who had shouted lowered his crosier toward the crowd. The other held him back.

“No, Mike! There are consequences now! You’ll only make it worse!”

“We can still control them!” shouted the priest Mike. (I didn’t know the priests had names as we did.) “We can still salvage the colony!” He knocked the other one aside. Leaving him in the dirt, he strode deep into the group. He thrust his crosier toward us.

“Go home! Go home now!”

The crowd closed in. He was both our obstructor and our salvation. “Purge us! Please, Purge us!”

“Go home!” he screamed.

I saw Sam, the older neighbor, lunge forward with his hands out. I imagined him gripping the priest by the shirt, shaking him, begging him.

He did not make it so far.

A ball of blue light formed at the tip of the crosier. It leapt to Sam's chest and enveloped him in brilliance. Sam burst into flame. He seemed to fly. Then he fell, and didn't rise.

The crowd backed away.

"Get back in your homes," screamed the priest, *"or the wrath of God will strike you too!"*

One moment of bright blue light, and a god we knew only as cleanser became a destroyer. The crowd fled – Riia, myself, even Boan – every one of us a coward before the wrath of God. Soon, the priests left too.

Sam remained.

* * *

Riia woke up screaming.

She grabbed me and I, startled and woozy still, grabbed her back. She put her head on my chest.

"I was cold," she said. "I was small. There were people everywhere. Arms and legs and—I'm not that small, Tagon! How could I be so small?"

"You're not small," I told her.

"It was before now. Weeks and weeks. Sam was right. We came here. Where were we before?"

"Don't think about before," I said.

Through her I felt the chill and the smallness of her dream. We clung to each other. In the dark I forgot how dirty we were, how rumped the sheets, how gritty the floor, how oily our hair. Somehow, just then, we were clean in each other's arms. But I longed to be clean for real.

* * *

The shouting began at dawn.

I watched out the window, because I couldn't bear to go outside and be seen in this state. The crowd had returned to the temple. There were no priests in sight. Many of our neighbors had their faces raised as if shouting at the ceiling of the Purge itself. I could barely believe the dirty robes, the dirty faces. My memory, then, was nine days old: as far as I knew, longer than it had ever been.

Riia squeezed in beside me. I cringed a little as skin met skin.

“Where are the priests?” said Riia. “Why aren’t they stopping them?”

I hadn’t seen a priest all day. Sam still lay where the wrath of God had struck him down. I hadn’t seen Boan all day either.

“We have to find them,” said Riia. “The priests are the only ones who know anything.”

“They won’t tell us,” I said.

“We’ll make them tell! We just have to talk to them.”

“Like Sam did?” I said. “They have the wrath of God.”

“We’ve tried to stay clean!” said Riia. “We would be Purged if we could! I don’t fear the wrath of God.”

“I do,” I said.

But I watched my neighbors clamor at the closed door to the temple and realized I feared something more: to live another unpurged day with no direction, not knowing why we had been abandoned, or where to get food, or what to wear, or where to put the trash we were still generating and leaving in overflowing bins by the door. We couldn’t play games and pretend it was Saturday forever. We had no Purge, but we must still have priests. They could lead us. If they would.

I said, “Is there another door that only the priests use?”

“I don’t know.”

“I’ll go left along the wall,” I said, “and you go right, and we’ll come back here when it’s dark or we’ve found a priest to help us.”

She nodded.

It took us a long time to decide what to take with us. In the end, we didn’t take anything. The priests—if and when we found them—would have everything we needed.

Riia went first. She didn’t look back.

My path took me around the mob at the temple. I circled them warily. No one paid me any attention. I wasn’t a priest; I’d know no more than they did. I wondered, for the first time (so many first times, piled on one another!) who chose them for that caste, how they filled a role so different from ours that they might as well be another creature entirely. Had they gotten too dirty to Purge? Had they seen its true face without forgetting? Was that why they took no weeks-wives?

Not too far down the wall I found a long indent, the hint of a door. I gave it a push. It held firm. Another small indent was beside it, at level to my eye. I pressed that.

“Speak,” said the indent.

I leapt back, looked around. There was no one. I waited, but no other voice came. I pushed it again.

“Speak.”

I licked my lips. “I want to see the priests.”

“Priest,” said the indent.

The door slid open. I went inside. The door slid shut behind me.

The interior of the wall had a dingy look compared to our homes; the lighting was lower, the floors sandier. I touched a wall. It had grime on the long looping chunks of exposed wiring. Dust hung in lacy arcs from the ceiling. So the priests that bore our filth had filth of their own to bear.

I walked until I found a staircase, and climbed. At the top of the stairs was a room with a huge window overlooking the town. I saw the temple and its crowd, the rows of housing, the other wall, and – just beyond that – bare rocky ground, where there were no houses or temples at all. I’d never seen beyond the wall. It turned out there wasn’t much to see.

There was a priestess at the window with her back to me. She was speaking into a box, with a clear and deliberate diction.

“...is a disaster. We expect irreparable colony collapse within three weeks. The maintenance staff has voted unanimously to pull out and reconvene at the nearest Terling Corp. holdings...” She read off a long list of numbers. “We expect to arrive in seven months. We’ll be bringing as many warm bodies as we can fit. If you send another team to reclaim the area, I can’t promise what you’ll find. Even under the provisions for political turmoil it’ll be hard to claim the colony as functional; we’re likely to lose the turf claim in universal court. The staff recommends that we write it off as a swarm, take the loss, and reestablish elsewhere on the planet, preferably more than 300km from the original, to prevent cross-colony tainting. Please advise. Over.”

She settled the box into an indentation that fit it on the table in front of her. Then she sat heavily and put her head in her hands. I imagined she was praying on our behalf.

I said, “Priestess?”

Her head snapped up. She took a crosier from beneath her robes and pointed it at me. I stared back. *The wrath of God*, I thought, heart beating fast. *I wonder how it feels*. Then her shoulders fell and she put it on a table. She sat again.

“God, what’s the point?” she said. “It’ll all get out soon enough. What do you want? Passage? Answers?”

I didn’t understand what she meant by “passage.” I said, “What is happening to us?”

“You tell me.”

“We’re having nightmares,” I said. “We’re disgusting.”

“You’re waking up,” she said. “Without the Purge, you’ll start to think for yourselves. You’ll remember things. You’re already remembering, aren’t you? You wouldn’t have made it up here if you weren’t.”

“I am,” I said. “So is Riia. So are others.”

She was silent for a moment. “I told them three weeks,” she said—not quite to me. “This place won’t last two.”

“I want to be clean,” I said.

The priestess gave me a long, tired look. “You’ll never be clean again,” she said. “I’m sorry. Even if we reinstated Purge it’s already been too long between sessions; it wouldn’t take. What have we done? We made you a god and then let him die.”

“I have to be clean!”

“Tough titty.”

I raised my hands. I could barely stand to feel my own skin. “Then...what now? What do I do now? What do we do next?”

“What do *you* do now?” she said. “What do *we* do now? Do you have any idea how much you stupid Eloi cost us per capita? This compound is outfitted with supplies for the next five years and a state-of-the-art agricultural infrastructure already producing at half-capacity! You’ll just reduce your own population and then someone will get hungry enough to finally pick up a trowel or figure out how to get past the settlement walls. *We* have to take the loss. *You’ll* be fine. Barbarians, but fine. Terling Corp: inventors of the alien caveman!”

I had no idea what she was talking about. I felt nothing but the crawling filth that started on my skin and crept to the stubble on my face, the wax in my ears, the half-formed memories in my brain. Trowels? Terling? I wanted the priestess to guide me. “What do I do?”

She leapt from her chair and stormed toward me. I flinched away. She leaned right into my face and screamed, “*Figure it out for yourself for once.*”

I stood there, half-deafened, thinking about what she had said to me and to the box, what Riia had seen in her memories and what I had heard in mine. I was not used to this, the processing, the deciding. I had impressions of travel. Predictions...we had never needed to predict beyond days. I forced my imagination. I envisioned the decay of the past week and pushed it further, longer, into the second and third week...where would the garbage go? Where would the food come from? Would the priests continue to serve us? I realized, like a slap in the face, that they would not. We would be priestless. Purgeless. Godless.

I knew no other place. But *this* place would be a ruin.

“I...want to...to leave.”

The priestess let out her breath in a huge swoosh. “What do you know. We have a thinker after all.” She rolled over to the screen and made a few passes. “If you want to leave, we can make it happen. What’s your name?”

“Tagon.” My name rolled onto the screen, along with columns of text too small to see.

The priestess tapped the screen in a few places and then leaned in, squinting. “Would you like to bring Riia?”

“Riia?” I had momentarily forgotten that she was still my weeks-wife though the week was long past. “For...forever?”

“Well, you couldn’t purge her away,” said the priestess, “but I guess you could always get divorced. You could call it off,” she said, raising her voice in irritation that I didn’t know what a “divorce” was. “Just leave her. It happens. I only thought I’d offer because you chose each other,” She glanced again at the screen, “Twenty-one times this year. I thought you might want to have her around.”

“Oh,” I said. This wasn’t like choosing a weeks-partner.

“Never mind. Just thought I’d offer.”

“What, what if I don’t? Choose her?”

“She stays here with everyone else,” said the priestess. “God, you’re gonna be a nightmare to train. We’ll have to work through thirty years of stupid to get back to the smart.”

I had only the faintest concept, then, what a “year” was. Another decision to make, based on only the faintest abilities to remember and predict.

“Yes,” I said. “Bring Riia. I’ll get her.”

So I did.

I have seen incredible things since that day. I learned words I never knew. Entropy. Aging. Permanence. Self-reliance. Work. Expectation. Love. When Purge failed the universe opened itself to me. I expanded to fill as much of my little allotment of it as I could.

But I have never since felt clean.

The End

Amanda is a combustion engineer working in Pennsylvania. “On the Sabbath Day Be Ye Cleansed” was inspired entirely by a line in her employer’s standard troubleshooting manual. Her work has appeared in Shock Totem, Daily Science Fiction, and others. She takes bread-baking, aphid-killing, and schlocky horror movies very, very seriously. You can read more of her work at <http://www.amandacdavis.com> or follow her on Twitter at [@davisac1](https://twitter.com/davisac1).

Five Questions with David Tallerman

by Michael Ray

1) When we first discussed taking your story, we learned that you lived near areas where there had been serious rioting. Have things changed substantially in nearby areas, or have they largely returned to normal?

The honest truth is, I have no idea. I was kind of between addresses at the time, living in hotels in out of the way places, and I hardly ever watch television or listen to the radio, so most of what I heard was after the event and from other people. The biggest riots, the rioting in London, passed me by for a ridiculously long time.

Even then, it was a while before the scale of it sunk in. Just as an example, I found out later that my friend was worried his flat was going to be burned down because it was right in the middle of a trouble spot. If the local community hadn't gone out and faced off with the rioters, it actually might have been.

So ... as far as I know, things are getting back to normal. I actually passed through London yesterday, and I don't know the city well, but things seemed normal enough. But really, if it wasn't I'd be the last to hear about it!

2) Many authors seem to focus on one style of fiction, one genre, or even one sub-genre, but your list of publications has an impressive breadth. What has led you to write across a wide variety of genres?

That was definitely a deliberate choice when I was starting out. Because, I know what I'm like, and I'd get bored if I felt I was covering the same ground again and again. If I write a horror story, the last thing I want to do is write another horror story straight afterwards. If I write something slow-paced and thoughtful, I'll get to the end itching to write an action scene. I read and have affection for a lot of different genres, and I'd be gutted if I thought the fact that I'd written a lot of fantasy stories meant I couldn't then write, say, a crime novel.

Again, I try hard to fit the style to the story, rather than the other way round. That way, I'm always learning, which is something else that matters a lot to me. The same is true of switching genres regularly. There's always a new challenge. And more and more, I find myself bringing it all together, writing what I guess you'd call cross-genre fiction.

Of course, looking back it's easy to see that I've made things difficult for myself ... probably more than I realised I would. But in terms of where I am now, the fact that I've had success in different genres, the degree of freedom that's come with that – I feel like it's been worth the extra effort.

3) You have written [a large number of reviews of movies and some book & music reviews](#). What effects do you feel that your close examination of so much media has had on your work?

The reviews themselves, I suspect, not so much – although the long series of film reviews I did for Son and Foe taught me a huge amount about self-editing and the value of brevity. But the fact that I love films, music and comics just as much as I do books is, I think, a massive influence on how and what I write. That’s really been sinking in this year. Along with the new novel, *Crown Thief*, and a few short stories, I’ve written a poem, comic books scripts, film screenplays – actually, a short film I co-wrote just came away with a load of awards in the [Two Days Later competition](#).

It’s been a lot of fun to be able to do things like that, and to collaborate with some terrifically talented people. That’s something you tend to miss out on writing novels and short fiction. And again, it’s teaching me things that hopefully then feed back into the prose writing.

4) On [your blog](#) you’ve written a series of articles about “Things the Small Press Can Do As Well (Or Better) Than the Professional Press”. What do you see as the central advantages of small press publishing?

Actually, this is going to be something I look at in one of the last three articles! Although really, I hope that the undercurrent of the series has been about what the small press has to offer that’s unique. That was definitely what I intended – that it be something positive, a little bit celebratory. As much as I’ve been critical in places, one of the main themes of the whole piece is that the small press has a huge amount to offer, and that a lot of people are out there getting it right.

To answer the question though ... I think the greatest advantage of the small press is that it isn’t completely bound by the rules of commerce. A small press magazine can publish stories, champion authors, mess around with genres, without the deciding factor being whether the result is going to drum up a big enough readership to ensure a profit. Things improve through experimentation, and experiments have to allow for the possibility of failure. For me, that’s where the small press can truly make its mark.

5) Last, but of paramount importance: What should I (and our readers) know about [Giant Thief](#), the novel you have coming out in 2012 with [Angry Robot](#), that will make us want to read it?

Giant Thief is fun! That’s definitely the main thing you need to know.

But ... the slightly longer answer is, *Giant Thief* came out me trying to write the kind of fantasy book I really wanted to read at that time. I wanted to write something entertaining, fast paced and funny, because I don’t know that you see those kinds of books so much these days. I wanted something anyone could enjoy, that didn’t rely on them liking or even being familiar with tropes of the genre – but that at the same time was definitely fantasy, and worked on those terms. I wanted it to stand alone enough that buying it didn’t mean committing yourself to a half dozen

sequels if you wanted to enjoy the story. I wanted characters I could believe in, who didn't necessarily behave like people in a fantasy book.

I can only hope I pulled all that off. Adrian Tchaikovsky recently described *Giant Thief* as “a fast-paced, witty and original fantasy, reminiscent of Scott Lynch and Fritz Leiber,” and I'm happy to take his word for it!

Five Questions with Amanda C. Davis

by Michael Ray

1) Why Penanggalan (listed elsewhere as a favorite monster)?

She's a flying head with guts hanging out! What's not to love? I think she's among my favorites because she's so distinctive, and her lore is appealingly complete. I first heard about her when I was spending a lot of time reading about ways to identify and deal with folkloric creatures. The Penanggalan has distinct identifying characteristics—the smell of vinegar and, I don't know, being a flying head with guts hanging out—and there are specific, concrete ways to defeat her: you catch her in thorns or keep her away from her jar of vinegar. She's G. K. Chesterton's dragon that both exists and can be beaten.

2) Your garden sounds great, and I'm intrigued by the fishing. And jealous. How did that come about?

My parents, on both counts. They're apple growers; we were raised as farm kids, and I must have inherited my father's green thumb because there's nothing I like more than rescuing a dying plant from the grocery store for a dollar, nursing it back to health, and eventually whining about how much space it's taking up. I don't even have any land. I live in an apartment. I've just got several dozen pots crammed with vegetables. And three trees.

For fishing, we vacation on the same island every year. It's like a second home. We all like to keep busy, so why just hang out on a beach when we could hang out on a beach and ALSO catch dinner? We're not the easiest people to vacation with. We treat Disney World like it's a triathlon.

3) You are clearly a horror movie expert. We are fans of Dario Argento & Takashi Miike around RSF. What is it about the horror genre that intrigues you?

I'd say "aficionado", since I still have huge gaps in my knowledge, but that's a question I wonder about myself! I've split it down into serious horror and silly horror, though of course there's overlap. Serious horror can and does deal with incredibly powerful themes; the stakes are naturally high, from death to damnation and worse, and in skilled hands those stakes can be used to push characters to their absolute ends. I love, love a good story about sacrifice. Not the "Satanic panic" kind, but the soldier drawing zombies away from his friends. The captain going down with his ship. The light seems so much lighter when it's coming out of the dark.

Then there's silly horror, in which useless people get slaughtered in interesting ways. Either the characters are terrible people, or the killer/monster/setting is incredibly unconvincing, or I recognize the actors from other (usually terrible) movies, and it's fun to see how they bite it THIS time. In silly horror, the stakes are absolutely null. That character's not really dead, I saw him on Supernatural! And he had it coming anyway! So it's fun. I love playing compare/contrast with horror movies. My lifetime goal is, upon hearing about or watching any horror movie, to be able to name three other movies I've seen that have something in common with it. I want to be a walking decision tree for horror movies.

4) Your story is RSF draws on many ideas about religion, colonization, societal collapse and social responsibility. What led you write such an excellent story?

Wow, I wish I could say I planned it out like a piece of clockwork, but it went like my stories usually do, and all those elements (some of which I'm not even sure I consciously included) grew out of other elements. Like I mentioned in my bio, the first line was based on a line in my company's troubleshooting manual. "Purge" is essentially the process of passing large quantities of air through a boiler to get rid of any residual flue gasses. I just thought that phrase "purge failed" was so evocative: a strong word like "purge", with a reversal built right into the condition. Then I had to decide what my Purge was, who was getting it, and why, and what were they going to do when it didn't work...? It came together in pieces, and apparently many, many things that had been on my mind at the time influenced the end product. I will say the idea of a disposable population seems to me like one of the less speculative parts of the story. I don't think it's uncommon for people in my generation to wonder if they're really just taking up space, or to believe they're being treated like they are.

5) What should we look for from you in the future?

I'll be in a few upcoming anthologies, including *Night Terrors II* from Blood Bound Books, *FISH* from Dagan Books, and *Zombie Kong* from Books of the Dead Press. I'm especially excited about those last two since I'm sharing the table of contents for both with my sister, Meg Engelhardt. Plus I cannot tell you how excited I am to be in an anthology entirely about giant zombie gorillas. Otherwise, it's NaNoWriMo, so my Twitter is bound to overflow with misbegotten lines and bad advice, along with the usual attempts at wit and live-tweeted horror movies. I have no power to resist either one.

Great stuff! Thanks for joining us here at RSF. You can visit Amanda at amandacdavis.com.