

Are you a voting member of the Hugo Awards? Are you mulling over your short story pick? Superversive Press is pleased to offer the critically praised "Zero Tolerance" from [*28 Minutes into the Future*](#) by Chrome Oxide. If you are tired of the sameness on the Hugo Award ballot, then this short might have the freshness you've been looking for but didn't know existed. It made Tangent Online's recommended reading list for 2018. Tangent is the premier short story review site for SFF since 1993. Please consider *Zero Tolerance* for your Hugo nomination choice in the short story category.

Zero Tolerance (Word Count 3,500)

By Chrome Oxide

"Did you forget something when you robbed me last week?" Gary Stoppen pushed the silent alarm when the thug walked through the front door of his convenience store. Gary wasn't sure if he should be more afraid of the thug's gun or the rancid smell of homelessness.

"Why are you bustin' my chops? I'm only doin' my patriotic duty by sharin' the wealth of the one percent." Shagrat, a dark skin, shaved head, heavily tattooed man wearing clothes that hadn't been washed in months pulled a shiny revolver from the shoulder holster hidden under his denim vest. "You know what to do."

Gary shook his head. "At the rate you're robbing me it won't be long before I'm one of the ninety-nine percent. Can't you give me a break? Let me save up a few bucks so I can restock the shelves. If I close my store you won't be able to rob me any more."

"You lie." Shagrat spun the cylinder of his revolver and grinned. "That's not possible. The one percent are always the one percent. I can't go easy 'cause you have centuries of oppression to pay for."

Gary sighed. "I didn't realize I was that old."

“Don’t fuck with me. Don’t trigger me when I’m carryin’ gun.”

Gary chuckled. “I didn’t know you had a sense of humor.”

“Do you see me laughin’?” Shagrat cocked the hammer on his revolver. “All the problems on the planet are caused by the white race.”

“The only race I ran was the 800-yard dash at school and I always lost.”

“Gimme my money and shut your fuckin’ mouth or I’ll do it for you. I’ve got other stops and you holdin’ me up.”

Gary couldn’t resist smiling. “Here’s your money.”

“Are you mocking me?”

“You’re killing me. You should’ve been a comedian.”

“What the fuck are you talkin’ ‘bout?” Shagrat frowned as he counted the money.

“This ain’t much. How am I gonna meet my quota with you supplyin’ so little?”

“Could you rob me less frequently?”

“That ain’t gonna happen.”

“How about you force Entitlees to come here and buy?”

“Now you’re bein’ funny. It ain’t right interferin’ with Entitlee’s freedom of choice and right to buy.”

“What about my right to sell and not be robbed?”

“It ain’t in the constitution so it ain’t a right. Besides this is payback for your white privilege.”

Gary shook his head. “It’s bad enough I have to be robbed, but it’s worse listening to your pretend concern for Entitlees and your politically correct hatred.” He sighed.

“Where are the well-educated loveable rogues the entertainment media is so fond of

portraying?”

“If you believe that shit you’re dumber than you look.” Shagrat paused, uncocked and holstered his revolver. “This week’s collection is pitiful. You need to do better next time or you’ll be sorry.”

“I’m already sorry.”

The thug gave Gary the middle finger salute and walked to the front door of the Stoppenrob convenience store. He paused to wave and smile at the officers in the Amalgamated Security Services patrol car that drove by.

Even from behind the counter Gary recognized Officer Clancy Roscoe in the passenger seat. The officer was smiling and waving at Shagrat. That reminded Gary of something his former dead business partner used to say, “Cops need criminals, because without criminals no one needs cops.”

Gary stared at the back of Shagrat’s denim vest. The words “Sauron’s Slaves” surrounded the image of an Orc. Gary wondered if that was proof that Entitlees could read or watch movies.

Shagrat climbed onto his internal combustion engine motorcycle and rode down the street with the four Slaves who had been waiting outside for him. Gary shook his head. The smoke, noise and smell should have brought the pollution and noise abatement officers, but never did.

Gary’s wife Sally came out of the back room. “He was ready to kill you. Why did you keep talking back to him?”

Gary looked at the empty register. “I can’t take any more of this. How am I supposed to make a living if I keep getting robbed? I refuse to give up and live as an

Entitled. I will not grovel to collect from any of the government welfare programs.”

“How many more times do I have to tell you we need to leave the California Republic of Autonomous People? It’s not safe here. There are other states where citizens have rights and law enforcement doesn’t stand down for criminals.”

“I started the Stoppenrob convenience store twenty years ago. We made a pact when we opened. We would not be chased away by criminals. Civilization dies a little every time the thugs win. This was our stand. I refuse to give it up.”

Sally shook her head and frowned.

Gary smiled. “Besides, I’m still waiting for our house to become beach front property. For more than fifty years the government scientists have been predicting that any minute now the sea level will rise.”

“Why do I put up with you?”

“For my full wit and charm.”

“You are half of what you imagine you are.” She looked over her shoulder, shook her hips and walked into the back room to continue working on the mountain of forms required of anyone who owned or operated a business.

Half an hour later the patrol car that had driven by during the robbery stopped in front of the store and both the uniformed officers entered the store. One officer stood by the door and rested his hand on his ecologically friendly squirt gun that fired ice bullets when the freezer unit worked. The other, Officer Roscoe, pulled out a pen and pad of paper. “Your silent alarm went off again.” He held up his hand when Gary opened his mouth. “Don’t say anything, let me guess. You were robbed by the Sauron’s Slaves and they took all your money and a six pack of beer. Am I right?”

“They didn’t take anything other than money this time.”

Officer Roscoe sighed. “There’s nothing I can do until you or someone else reports a white male suspect. We must ensure the percent of minority criminals arrested doesn’t exceed their percent of the population. That would be racist.” The officers turned to leave.

“Wait. Why didn’t you stop the robbery? You were outside the store when I was being robbed and hit the alarm.”

Officer Roscoe shook his head. “Our records show that you are behind in your monthly crime reduction fees. We work for the taxpayers, not for the wealthy one percent who don’t pay their fair share.”

“I pay electronically at the first of every month. How can my payment not be credited to my account?”

“Do we look like accountants?”

The other officer snickered.

Officer Roscoe continued. “That is not our department.”

“I’m never paying again. You’ve never arrested anyone who has robbed me and never returned any of the stolen merchandise or money. What good are you?”

“I don’t like your attitude. We’re doing our job. If you don’t like it, then leave. We don’t need your kind around here.”

Gary shook his head as he watched the officers walk out.

Sally came from the back of the store. “They could have killed you. Why can’t you be more respectful?”

“When they pay for respect, I’ll show some. They certainly haven’t earned any.”

Gary took a couple of deep breaths.

Sally frowned. "I don't like that look in your eye. What are you about to do that I'm not going to like?"

"If the officers won't protect us, then I will. I'm going to get a gun."

"Using a gun to stop a robbery is what got your business partner killed."

"At least he killed the thug who robbed us. That thug never committed another crime after that, other than polluting the environment with greenhouse gases as his body decomposed. Nobody else robbed us for months afterwards." Gary looked at the empty register. "Mind the store. I'll be back soon. I've got a couple of stops to make."

Sally locked the security gate and hid in the back room after Gary left.

An hour later Gary unlocked the door and walked in. Sally ran to him. "What took you so long? I was worried. Did you change your mind?"

"No. Here it is. The next time someone tries to rob us, I'm going to do kill the bastard."

As Gary was showing Sally his pistol, Officer Roscoe, wearing civilian clothes, walked in with his squirt gun drawn. "Drop the gun and lie down on the floor."

"Are you robbing me? Don't they pay you enough to ignore crime?"

The officer's face turned red. "This is NOT a robbery. You've committed a serious crime, private ownership of a gun."

"Why are you stopping this crime? You told me earlier that I hadn't paid my fee."

"Drop it or I shoot."

Gary dropped his gun and raised his hands.

Roscoe holstered his squirt gun, frisked Gary and handcuffed him. "We're going

to the station.”

Sally ran forward. “Can’t you let him off with a warning? No one was hurt.”

“Gun possession by civilians is a zero tolerance crime. Guns kill.”

Gary frowned. “Then why are you carrying a gun?”

“Guns are dangerous when in the hands of civilians. You should call the Amalgamated Security Services when you need protection.”

Gary frowned. “Like I did earlier?”

“I don’t like your attitude,” Roscoe scowled. “You’ve been robbed frequently enough to know that guns are dangerous. You should be thanking me for protecting you.”

“I don’t feel protected. In fact, every time I have to deal with you I feel scared.”

“I’m not responsible for your feelings. I’m only following orders and obeying the law.”

“There was a time when government workers were punished for following orders and endangering citizens’ lives.”

“There are no statues, memorials or mentions in the history books, so that never happened. No government could ever be so bad that law enforcers need to refuse an order from a superior. Disobeying orders leads to chaos and anarchy.”

Gary thought about the Nuremberg trials but figured that was another part of history that had been revised out of existence. He glanced at Sally and tried to think of any argument that might keep him out of jail. He remembered a prior conversation he’d had with Shagrat. “The thug who robbed me was only obeying the orders from his superiors.”

“That’s different. I don’t recognize his gang as a legitimate government.”

Gary snickered. “How interesting. He said the same thing about you. His gang doesn’t recognize your government as legitimate because it doesn’t protect its citizens or its borders. He says that as part of the Mordor government-in-exile, they protect their borders and their subjects. I see them more frequently than you.”

“Word games.”

Gary tried one last time. “Officer Roscoe, Superman is faster than a speeding bullet. I’m not. What am I supposed to do the next time I’m attacked? Can’t you make an exception?”

“No. Confiscating guns makes the world safer, even if some individuals are not. My job is enforcing all the laws, not deciding which ones to enforce.”

Gary glared at him. “You’re right. Nothing is worse than living in a country where any official can decide when the stand down order should be given.”

“You’re making no sense. In our country all the laws apply to all the Entitleds all the time without any exceptions.”

“You break the law all the time. You carry a gun.”

“That’s not the same. Officers need to carry guns to enforce the no gun laws”

“Yup. And you need to speed to enforce the no speeding laws and to steal to enforce the no stealing laws. I understand.”

Roscoe’s face turned red and he rested his hands on his gun. “Move. I’m taking you for a ride to the station.”

As they walked out of the store, Gary’s face turned white when he spotted one of Sauron’s Slaves ducking behind a crowd of unhappy people.

Roscoe turned around but didn’t seem to see anything out of the ordinary.

Gary wasn't surprised that the officer had ignored the crowd. Most Entitlees wore scared looks on their faces when confronted with law enforcers. It wasn't possible to exist without breaking numerous laws.

Roscoe placed Gary in the back seat of his eGo, his personal environmentally friendly electric car.

"Don't I get a ride in an official vehicle?"

"No. I was coming off shift when a public-spirited Entitlee flagged me down and reported seeing an illegal gun. He didn't even fill out the form to collect his Crime Stopper reward. I didn't have time to return to the station to change into my uniform or pick up an official vehicle. Private gun ownership is such a serious crime that we must react quickly."

"Really? The last I heard, reckless civilian gun owners had killed thousands of people and reckless politicians and government employees had killed hundreds of millions of people. Yet you have zero tolerance for civilian gun owners and infinite tolerance for politicians and government officials."

Roscoe pushed the go pedal. "Those aren't facts, they are opinions. Everyone knows that governments provide peace and safety to all Entitlees."

Gary doubted if Officer Roscoe had heard of Hitler, Stalin, Mao or any of the other leaders of every communist government that ever existed and slaughtered its own people. After all, the offensive history had been rewritten to protect the narrative. "Aren't you going to read me my Miranda Rights?"

"No. My captain recently decided that allowing citizens any rights at all adversely impacts criminal investigations, and the court upheld his special order to deny all rights."

At the next stop light, Roscoe turned and looked at Gary. “Tell me again why I should let you go after committing a serious felony.”

“I have a right to protect myself.”

“Just as long as you don’t use a gun.”

“Without a gun, I may have the right but I don’t have the ability to protect myself.”

“You don’t need a gun for protection. That is my job. The law is for protection of the people.”

Roscoe glanced in the rearview mirror.

Gary frowned. “When seconds count, the police are minutes away.”

“We do the best we can, but we can’t be everywhere. If we were, then we’d be living in a police state and nobody wants that.”

“We must have different definitions of police state.” Gary knew it was hopeless, but he had to try. “The second amendment guarantees me the right to carry a gun.”

“You must be one of the crazy Second Righters. The Supreme Court ruled long ago that the second amendment only authorized the military to carry guns during combat.” Roscoe huffed. “The science is settled. The public is safer when fewer guns are in the hands of the public.”

“You’re right. I feel so much safer now that I’m defenseless again.”

“You’re not defenseless. We’re here to protect and serve.”

“To me it feels more like you are here to collect and observe.”

Roscoe shook his head and looked at his watch. “You really screwed up my day. My shift ended an hour ago and all I wanted to do was cash my paycheck, pick up a six-

pack and watch the game with some of the guys from the precinct. Now I'll be stuck for half the day filling out forms."

"What kind of crimes do you stop when you're busy not stopping robberies?"

"Yesterday I arrested a male Free Speecher for using hurtful words. I also cited a female for *Public Performance of Copyright Material Without A License* for humming a song while walking down the street."

Gary shook his head. He couldn't believe Roscoe took pride in that kind of work.

When they pulled to a stop outside the station, neither Roscoe nor Gary noticed the Slaves performing covert surveillance.

The men proceeded to the main desk. "Book'em Danno. Illegal possession of a firearm and intent to cause bodily harm."

Roscoe went to his desk to fill out the reports. Before he'd even finished filling out the first form, *The Display Of Proper Sensitivity To Sexual Preferences, Racial And Gender Identity, And Immigration Status When Interacting With The Public*, the desk sergeant called out, "Did your perp have gang ties?"

"Not that I know of."

"One of Sauron's Slaves just bailed him out."

"That is strange. All his recent crime reports have been about Sauron's Slaves robbing him. I wonder if he's in the middle of a turf war."

Looking back at the stack of forms in front of him and groaned. He started on the next form in the stack, *Reasonable Suspicion For Probable Cause To Stop And Question An Individual When The Informant Is Unavailable To Testify*.

Four hours later the paperwork was finished. Roscoe drove to the Federal

Regulated Americans United Depository to cash his paycheck. There was no line outside, but their parking lot was full of electric cars and non-electric motorcycles. He grumbled. “Now I’m going to waste the rest of my day trying to cash my paycheck.”

He walked in the front door and looked up. “Oh shit.” A gang of tattooed skinheads pointed pistols and rifles at the customers who were all laying on the ground. The tellers all stood with their hands in the air. The bank robbers were using ecologically unfriendly guns that used gunpowder and lead bullets.

A shot rang out and a bullet grazed Roscoe’s head. He dropped, pulled his squirt gun and rolled behind a desk. He squinted and fired at one of the robbers. “Damn,” he muttered to himself. “That is the Entitlee who reported the gun crime and didn’t wait to collect his Crime Stopper reward. He’s not as rehabilitated as I thought.” He rolled to safety behind a desk just as bullets thudded safely into the thick wood. He touched his head and his hand came away bloody.

Gary lay hiding behind the same desk. He wiped tears from his red eyes with his left hand. There were bruises on his face and left arm.

Roscoe leaned over and fired at one of the robbers. “I left my comm in my car so I need you to call this in.” The ping of his squirt gun was inaudible over the bangs of the robbers’ guns. The criminals had dropped to the ground and were using customers as shields.

Gary stared. “Call what in? My white privilege prevents me from recognizing suspicious activity. This looks like minority youthful hijinks.”

Roscoe fired again at the robbers, accidentally hitting one of the bank customers. He turned and glared at Gary. “Trust me. This is a crime. Call it in.”

An odd expression grew on Gary's face. "I can't. Thugs stole my cell phone." He bit the inside of his cheek.

Roscoe glanced over the desk and shot at one of the robbers crawling closer. They were hiding behind customers and using them as shields. Roscoe pointed at a phone on a nearby desk. "I'll provide cover fire for you."

Gary shook his head no.

Roscoe fired and rolled back behind the desk. "What the fuck is wrong with you? Aren't you scared they'll kill you?"

"I wasn't until you showed up. They promised no shooting. They've never lied before."

"You are required to help me."

Gary shouted, "This is a gun free zone. Drop your guns and leave."

Some of Sauron's Slaves laughed. Shagrat called out. "I'm sorry. I didn't know. I'll never do this again." More of them laughed.

Roscoe shook his head. "What's wrong with you? Use this." He pulled his backup gun from his ankle holster and tossed it over. It hit Gary in the chest and clunked as it hit the floor.

"That's entrapment. I won't touch it."

"I won't file a report this time."

Gary smiled. "I won't cause you to ruin your perfect record of NEVER arbitrarily breaking the law."

Roscoe fired again. "I'm outnumbered. You had a gun earlier. You need to use one now."

Gary raised his right hand, encased in a cast and pointed to it with his left hand. “The gang that turned me in, bailed me out. They broke all my fingers to make me into a law-abiding citizen. That gang also took me back to my store where they raped and murdered my wife of twenty-two years.”

Roscoe leaned out and desperately fired another shot. The gang was even closer. He was running out of time. “I’m sorry that happened. But what difference, at this point, what difference does it make?”

Gary shook his head. “Five or ten minutes after you’re dead, this won’t make any difference either.”

Roscoe pointed his gun at Gary, paused but didn’t pull the trigger. “Government employee lives matter. Why won’t you help? What’s wrong with you?”

The End