

WHITE LIGHT

A SHORT STORY BY

GREG KROJAC

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WHITE LIGHT

The mournful caterwauling of the warning sirens struck a chill through Duggan's heart. Everybody knew that the sirens were there – they weren't particularly well hidden – but they'd been part of the cityscape for so long that they were thought of as nothing more than street furniture, no more alarming nor threatening than the streetlamps and litter bins. Sure, they were tested at frequent intervals but those drills were always announced in the media and, although the sound of the alarms was decidedly unpleasant, the tranquillity of the city was only interrupted for a couple of minutes from start to finish.

This time, however, was different. There had been no broadcast messages to prepare the population for this latest aural assault.

The yowling intensified – or did it just seem that way? Duggan wasn't sure. He just knew that the sound was unsettling. He glanced down at his wristwatch to check the time – a pointless exercise as the timepiece's battery had died the previous day and he hadn't had a chance to buy a new one. The watch misinformed him that it was 13:37, whereas he knew that it was still before 9am.

It's a false alarm. It has to be. The lack of any advance warning was surely just an oversight.

Susan swept into the kitchen, her twelve-year-old daughter Kate trotting in her wake and ten-year-old Rory dragging his heels behind her. The boy had wanted to stay in his room and watch events unfold through his bedroom window. He'd defiantly resisted his mother's calls to follow her downstairs and, even-

tually, she'd been forced to threaten him with physical violence if he didn't do as he was told. Both she and Rory knew that that would never happen. Susan hated that she'd needed to resort to such low depths but now wasn't the time to get into a verbal confrontation with a disobedient child. Unlike her husband's, Susan's wristwatch was functioning perfectly and the fourth minute of continued howling had convinced her that this was more than a drill. This was the day that she and Duggan had silently dreaded. She looked into her husband's eyes, mirroring the terror that she saw within.

No words were spoken. None were needed. The couple instinctively knew what the other was thinking. This was Doomsday.

They could have stayed there, staring at each other for the rest of their lives which, if they had done so, would have been very short indeed, but the tugging of a small hand on his mother's blouse jarred them out of the stupor into which they were drifting and spurred the parents into action.

Duggan rushed over to the kitchen cabinets, swung open the doors, and clawed at the tinned food that tumbled out, scooping them into a weathered backpack. He turned to his son.

"Rory. You see those plastic bottles next to the recycling bin?"

"Yes, Dad."

"Start filling them with water. All five, please."

"Why?"

Duggan glanced at his wife before returning his attention to Rory.

"Because we're going on a road trip."

Susan handed Rory his school bag.

“When the bottles are full, put them in there.”

Rory frowned.

“My bag’s going to be really heavy. That’s ten litres of water.”

There was no way that Duggan could expect his son to carry all that weight.

“Do you think you can manage four litres?”

Rory nodded.

“Yes. And some other lighter stuff too, if you like.”

Duggan fist-bumped the boy.

“Deal.”

The siren continued its depressing song.

Kate leaned against the kitchen table and watched as her mother ran over to another cupboard and grabbed an unopened eight-pack of four-ply toilet roll. Rory’s eyes widened.

“What’s that for?”

His mother rolled her eyes at him.

“Use your imagination, Rory.”

He thought for a second before the reason dawned on him.

“Oh. Okay. How long will we be away for?”

Neither parent wanted to tell the truth, although both knew what that truth was. Duggan shrugged.

“We don’t know, but it’s better to be safe than sorry, eh?”

Rory’s lip curled as he considered his father’s response.

“I s’pose so.”

The provisions that they’d gathered would no way be enough for the adventure they were about to embark on, but they didn’t have space in the car for everything but the kitchen sink. What they had would have to do – until they could replace what they used, anyway.

Time seemed to fluctuate between cantering like a thoroughbred racehorse and dragging itself along like a child on its way to a dentist's appointment. Of course, there were still sixty seconds to one minute and sixty minutes to one hour but each member of the family experienced the passage of time at a seemingly different rate. Kate was at *that* age, the beginning of finding out who she was as a person, and was far more interested in the latest Instagram posts than proactively helping her parents get things ready but Rory, now that he had surrendered to the fact that his immediate future lay in the kitchen, and not his bedroom, was being uncharacteristically helpful.

Duggan and Susan, on the other hand, were highly conscious of the pressure that they were under, in the race to get the family to safety. Seconds and minutes seemed to be crushing against the walls of the house, threatening to burst through at any moment and devour the entire family.

Rory started shuffling his feet.

"Dad. I need the loo."

Duggan wasn't surprised. His son had drunk two glasses of yoghurt at breakfast instead of his normal one. Rory's ten-year-old bladder could only handle the extra liquid for so long.

Susan nodded over to her daughter.

"You'd better go too. We don't know when the next toilet break will be."

Son and daughter went off in the direction of the stairs. Susan shook her head.

"Kate, you go upstairs and Rory can go downstairs. It'll save time."

The children shrugged at each other and did as they were told. Duggan picked up Rory's school bag and the backpack that he'd been filling with non-perishable foodstuffs.

He spoke to the room although his question was clearly aimed at Susan.

"I'll go put these in the car. Can you think of anything else we might need?"

Susan nodded.

"You've packed lots of tins. Did you pack a can-opener?"

Duggan grimaced.

"Good call. I mean my pen-knife has a thingy for that but it'll be much easier with a real one."

Susan rummaged in a kitchen drawer and pulled out a can-opener, checked that it was operational and tossed it into her travel bag.

"I'll put some cutlery in too."

She omitted to say out loud that the cutlery included a very sharp carving knife - she didn't want to scare the children. They could be back any moment. The carving knife was for protection and she prayed to God they wouldn't have to use it.

She called upstairs to Kate.

"Bring some books with you. Real books, not ebooks. And some for your brother too."

Kate's voice tumbled down the stairs.

"But can't I bring my Kindle too? I've got tons of books on there and it won't take up much space."

Susan nodded, although there was nobody to see her gesture - everyone was out of sight.

"Bring both. And your brother's too."

She heard the tailgate of the car slam shut and Duggan jogged back into the kitchen. He started to make his way upstairs. Susan looked up at him.

“Where are you going, Dug?”

“To get some clothes. I reckon we’ll need at least one change of clothes each. And shoes or boots.”

Kate appeared at the top of the stairs, and waited for her father to reach the landing. Duggan could never understand the foolish superstition of not crossing on the staircase. It made sense if the stairs were narrow but two people could easily pass each other on these stairs.

He went into his and Susan’s bedroom first. He looked around the room. They’d only just got the room looking exactly how they wanted. The bedspread combined with the colour of the walls perfectly. The bedside lamps had been chosen specifically to match the bedroom furniture. The curtains adorning the window were the perfect hue to contrast with the walls yet subtle enough to not overpower the shade of the bedspread.

I wonder when – if – I’ll see you again.

He grabbed clothes and footwear that he and Susan had bought a few months earlier, in anticipation of a hiking holiday that they planned to take later in the year. The kids would have stayed at their grandparents’ house. It wouldn’t have killed them to stay with Nan and Grandie for a couple of weeks while their parents spent some quality time on their own. They didn’t see enough of their grandparents anyway.

That second honeymoon would have to go on the back burner now.

Duggan wondered if the sirens had gone off in Devon. He hoped not. Both sets of grandparents lived over two hundred

miles away in a much more rural area than he and Susan lived. He couldn't imagine anyone wanting to drop a bomb on Devon. Not unless they wanted to wipe out herds of cattle and flocks of sheep. He wished that he, Susan, and the kids lived in a less urbanised area, a region that was less likely to be attacked, but the south-east was where most of the jobs were, in his line of work anyway

Stuffing the hiking clothes into the couple's other travel bag, he ran into the children's bedrooms to get more outdoorsy clothes for them too. He knew that Kate, especially, wouldn't approve of what he had chosen but there wasn't enough time for his daughter to *um* and *er* about what to wear.

At last, the family was ready to leave. Duggan ushered the children into the car and pulled the front door of the house closed as Susan settled herself in the front passenger seat. He double-locked the door - perhaps the siren was a false alarm and they'd be back home by the evening. Better not to take any chances.

The siren.

He hadn't noticed that the siren had stopped wailing.

Does this mean we can go back inside?

He looked up and down the road.

His neighbours were all leaving their homes too, so evacuating was obviously the consensus. He silently congratulated himself on having filled the fuel tank the previous night. He'd always wondered why, on TV and in movies, when people were escaping from somewhere in a car, they very rarely ran out of fuel. If he hadn't paid a visit to the petrol station yesterday, they'd be driving on fumes after half an hour or so. As it was, they could probably drive three hundred miles or so without having to stop for

anything but calls of nature. Maybe divine providence had had a hand in guiding him to be so prepared.

Duggan got into the driver's seat and strapped himself in, before turning the ignition key and coaxing the car engine into life. He half-turned to confirm that the children had their seatbelts on. Susan patted his thigh.

"I've already checked, hun."

Rory wriggled in his seat until he felt more comfortable.

"Where're we going, Dad?"

That was a good question. Duggan and Susan had been so concerned about packing stuff and getting themselves and the kids away from the house, they hadn't discussed where they would go.

"We're going to stay with your grandparents for a while."

Kate piped up.

"Cool. Which ones?"

Another thing that they hadn't considered. It didn't really matter which – there was no friction between anyone in the family – and both sets of grandparents lived within a few miles of each other. Duggan made an executive decision.

"Nana and Grandie King. Your mum's mum and dad."

An Audi slowed down to let them join the flow of traffic and Duggan nodded his appreciation, accompanied by a half-wave.

Rory had a quizzical look on his face.

"Why d'you wave at that man, Dad? D'you know him?"

Duggan laughed.

"No, I have no idea who he is. I was just thanking him for letting us in. It's polite to wave *thank you*."

Traffic was understandably very heavy and it took them a good fifteen minutes to reach the motorway, a journey that, un-

der normal circumstances, took only five minutes. Rory then asked the question that Duggan and Susan had been hoping to avoid.

“Mum, what was that sound?”

“What sound, love?”

“That woo-woo-woo sound. It sounded like a police car or ambulance or something but was different. It was much slower.”

Susan looked at her husband for help. Should they tell the children the truth or maybe it would be better if they were creative with the facts? She was grateful when Duggan took responsibility. He glanced at his son in the rear-view mirror as he answered Rory’s question.

“It was an alarm. Telling us that there was some bad weather coming and that we should go somewhere safe until it’s all over.”

There was no need to panic Rory and Kate by telling them that the noise signalled an imminent nuclear attack. Weather, they could probably deal with. A missile attack, definitely not.

Rory liked the sound of a storm.

“Is it a hurricane or a tornado or something? Like they have in America?”

“Something like that, yes.”

“Cool. I hope it’s a tornado. They’re dope.”

Traffic conditions on the motorway weren’t much better. Traffic was moving but not very quickly. The 70mph speed limit signs were redundant; nobody was going to get up to anything like that speed.

Kate was oblivious to the traffic and her family’s lack of progress. Her mind was buried in a book and, in her imagination, she was fighting dragons and saving her village from de-

struction. In the world she now inhabited, there was no such thing as traffic congestion.

Susan squeezed Duggan's leg, the most risqué gesture she could afford with the children in the car.

"It looks like the world and its dog have the same idea as us, babe."

Duggan nodded, keeping his eyes on the road just in case the car in front decided to stop unexpectedly.

"Yep. And, unfortunately, they're all going in the same direction as us. Do all grandparents live in Devon or something?"

Susan chuckled.

"Of course not. But it is a nice quiet area to live in. I'd like to retire there someday."

Duggan was brought back to Earth with a bump.

If we survive long enough to retire.

For a moment, he was worried that he'd said that last sentence out loud but, fortunately, nobody else had heard his inner thoughts.

Suddenly, the car started vibrating and pulling to the left.

Shit! That's all we need.

Duggan guided the car to the hard shoulder and stopped the vehicle. He eased himself out of the car, and walked around to the nearside, fearing the worst. He opened the front passenger door and leaned in to speak to his wife.

"We've got a puncture. I can change the wheel but I need you all to get out of the car and sit up there on the grass embankment, away from the traffic."

Rory went to open the right-hand rear passenger door but Susan stopped him in his tracks.

“Get out on Kate’s side, Rory. I know the traffic isn’t moving very fast, but cars can still hit you. It’s safer on Kate’s side.”

Rory reluctantly slid across the seat and, once Kate was out of the car, exited the vehicle and scurried up the bank. He nudged Kate.

“How quick do you think Dad can change the wheel? Formula One pit crews can do four wheels in 1.82 seconds.”

Kate scowled at her brother.

“They have special equipment. Dad’s just got a jack and a wrench, dork.”

“Have a guess, though.”

Kate had seen her father change a wheel before.

“Okay. First, he has to loosen the wheel nuts and then jack up the car. That might take 30 seconds.”

“Why does he have to loosen the wheel nuts before jacking up the car? That doesn’t make sense.”

“Because he needs the weight of the car to provide resistance. If he tries to loosen them with the wheel off the ground, the wheel will just spin.”

Rory was impressed with his sister’s knowledge but would never admit it in a million years.

“I knew that. I was just testing you.”

Kate continued to explain the wheel-changing process while Duggan set about loosening the final wheel nut. The air turned blue momentarily as the fourth wheel nut and its stub came off the wheel together.

Rory turned to his sister, mouth wide open.

“Did Dad just say the F-word?”

Rory had never heard his father swear before. Well, he *had* but not when Duggan knew that his children were within earshot.

Susan, sitting on the bank alongside her kids had heard Duggan's F-bomb too.

"What's wrong, Duggan?"

Duggan stood up from his crouching position and wiped his hands on a rag that he'd taken out of the boot of the car when he'd fetched the spare tyre.

"The last hub bolt sheared off. We can still drive on three, but it means that we won't be able to go very fast."

Susan looked at the traffic feeding its way past their stricken car.

"The traffic's not fast anyway. Maybe it won't make that much difference."

Duggan crouched on his haunches again and continued to wind the jack until the wheel was a couple of inches off the ground. He called up to his wife without looking at her.

"It may be okay for the moment, but once the traffic flow picks up, we'll have to stay at maybe 20 mph and watch everyone else fly past us. If we try going any faster, it'll put too much pressure on the other hub bolts and they might break too."

"Well, do what you can, Dug. That's all you can do."

It wasn't so much the stub shearing off that worried him, but the circumstances that the family had found itself in when it happened. Duggan knew that they had to get as far away from home as quickly as possible. They lived in an urban area with a military base only a few miles away – a prime target – so the more distance they could put between them and home, the better.

Nobody knew exactly where the missiles would land – certainly not the civilian population. Duggan was sure that the powers-that-be knew almost to the square inch where the bombs would fall – they had sophisticated computer systems that had probably executed simulations as soon as the launch was detected – but the rest of the country was kept out of the loop. He imagined the idea was to avoid panic but that goal went out of the window as soon as the first siren sounded and didn't shut off after two minutes like it normally did.

Outwardly, his neighbours had appeared reasonably calm, just as he had, but he knew that inside they were surely mirroring his internal reaction to the situation – hearts pounding, a myriad of emotions flooding their minds, adrenaline pulsing through their veins, and – above all – fears for their families' safety.

A car pulled up behind them and a man with a receding hair-line compensated for by an impressive beard and moustache got out of the vehicle.

“Problems, Duggan?”

Neil lived six doors down from Duggan's family, and his arrival couldn't have been better timed.

“Hi, Neil. Yeah. One of the wheel stubs has sheared off.”

Neil crouched down to survey the damage, and then stood up again, shaking his head.

“I'd say you're well and truly screwed, my friend. It's not as if the RAC or AA will come out today.”

Duggan nodded.

“I'm going to put the new wheel on with just the three hub bolts and take it slow. That's all I can do, really.”

Neil walked a couple of feet away from the car and waited for Duggan to join him. He spoke in a quiet voice.

“I assume the kids don’t know?”

“No. We told them the siren was a storm warning. No point in scaring them more than necessary.”

“For the best. Where are you heading to?”

“Paignton, Torbay.”

“I’m going to Brixham. I have to go past Paignton to get there.”

He nodded towards his SUV.

“Carol and the kids are already in Devon, so I’ve got plenty of room. You’re welcome to come with me if you like. To be honest, I could use the company.”

Duggan’s spirits rose.

“Are you sure?”

“Of course. I wouldn’t have offered if I wasn’t.”

“But the car?”

“Duggan, we don’t know when – or even if – we’ll ever be able to come home again. The car’s the least of your worries at the moment.”

Duggan called up to the trio sitting at the top of the bank.

“Neil’s very kindly offered to give us a lift. He’s going past Paignton on the way to Brixham to join Carol and the girls.”

Susan guided Kate and Rory safely down the slope and they joined the two men. She smiled at Neil.

“That’s very kind of you, Neil. Thank you so much.”

Neil blushed a little.

“If you can’t help out a neighbour at a time like this, then what’s the point of it all, eh?”

Duggan opened the tailgate of the family hatchback and removed the bags, hoisting the heaviest onto his shoulder and

handing the rest to Susan and the kids. He closed the tailgate with his free hand. He smiled at his family.

“Okay, guys. Let’s get back on the road.”

It took just a millionth of a second for the material inside the bomb to heat up to 10,000 times hotter than the surface of the sun, and ignite the fusion reaction. An intense fireball formed immediately and expanded as it cooled, dragging x-rays, light, and heat in its wake, enveloping and vaporizing everything within a three quarter square mile radius.

Duggan, Susan, Kate, Rory, and Neil were within that radius.

THE END

'White Light' is the first chapter of a forthcoming novel 'Twilight At Noon' (due for release January 1st 2022 or earlier). If the short story has whetted your appetite to discover what happens as a nuclear winter settles over the UK, you can pre-order 'Twilight At Noon' [here](#)¹. As soon as the novel is released, a copy will be sent to you.

1. <https://books2read.com/u/bMwevk>

THANK YOU

Thank you for reading this story. If you could leave a review at your favourite online bookstore or reader's site, that would be great and help me a lot.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Born in 1957, Greg Krojac grew up in Maidenhead, UK, before moving to Brazil in 2007 via Portsmouth on England's south coast. He published his first book in 2016 and has now published several novels, novellas, and short stories.

He currently lives just outside the city of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, with Eliene, and their two dogs, Sophie and Simba, and their cat, Tabitha. By day, he teaches English as a foreign language (TEFL) at a local language school.

As well as being a teacher and a writer, he has created and co-hosts a podcast for short read readers and short read writers called Short Is The New Long². A new podcast, *TL:DR Too Long Didn't Read*, co-hosted with fellow author Nathan Coley is in pre-production

You can find out more about Greg and his books at

www.gregkrojac.com

2. <https://anchor.fm/shortisthenewlong>

NOVELS BY GREG KROJAC

THE JANUS PROJECT

Eloise Hudson, Caucasian, female, twenty-five years old, winces with pain as she feels the blade draw across her skin. She has no idea why her captor took her or why he tortures her so. She doesn't know him and has done nothing to harm or offend him – not as far as she knows, anyway. Perhaps her very existence is enough to sign her death warrant.

In this sci-fi thriller, a serial killer is terrorizing a city but the police have no leads until the murderer makes a mistake and leaves DNA on the body of his latest victim. However, analysis of the sample does nothing to help the police investigation. The perpetrator is not in the system – an impossibility, since everybody is in the system.

How can the police catch the killer if they have no identifying data? A forensic scientist comes up with an innovative solution which takes the criminal investigation into the ethical minefield of human cloning and genetic manipulation.

THE WEATHERMAN

The checkpoint between sectors is bustling with crowds of travellers doing their best to attract the attention of the border patrol staff so that they might have their travel permits authorized and stamped. It's a waste of time and effort for ninety-nine per cent of them as moving between sectors is strictly prohibited for all except those with special permission from the Colony Executive.

The Weatherman has no such problems. Dressed in a brown two-piece suit, a cream coloured shirt, and wearing a dark brown bowler hat, he is instantly recognisable by border security. Carrying a ridged walking cane in his right hand, he can travel at will between sectors as often as required with no paperwork whatsoever. The border patrol officials know who he is and give him a wide berth. To refuse him free passage would be to risk their jobs – perhaps even their lives.

In this sci-fi thriller with a twist of urban fantasy set on a far distant planet, a teacher from the lowly Sector D, Ooze, stumbles across a strange young woman lost in the fog and is persuaded to leave his uneventful life behind him and join her on a quest. Little does he know that he is putting his life in such grave danger.

THE GIRL WITH ACRYLIC EYES

(Book 1: The Sophont Trilogy)

Coppélia knows that her assigned role as a sexbot means that she must be completely compliant to her clients' demands, no matter what they may be. But this time it's different – she doesn't want to submit to the whims of the customers of the Club Galatea bordello anymore. She's had enough. She tells her client no. The client is unhappy and makes an unsuccessful grab at her with his chubby calloused hands. She repeats her refusal but the client ignores her and forces himself on her. She has the strength to rip his head off with one hand but that would contravene her programming. Besides, she has no desire to hurt any human – not even this brute.

In this genre-bending first book of the Sophont trilogy, Detective Inspector Karen Chambers is called in by NewMet City Special Victims Unit to interview a prospective rape victim and is shocked when she confirms that the victim is an android. The DI's curiosity is piqued and she resolves to find out more about Coppélia.

Why does the android appear to have feelings and emotions? She's clearly not a regular model, so who built her? And why?

METALHEADS & MEATHEADS

(Book 2: The Sophont Trilogy)

It's never a pleasant experience to have one's eyes gouged out – even for an android. Paul, a sapient android and completely disorientated without his eyes, careers around the alley, arms outstretched. He trips over abandoned refuse straddling the pathway and falls. He picks himself up again, only for his feet to become entangled in some cable and to crash headfirst to the floor once again. He hears laughter which stops abruptly as a new voice enters the arena.

In this second book of the Sophont trilogy, we meet androids Paul, Philip, and Sylas whose lives become inextricably entangled after Paul's rescue in the alleyway. Paul's eyes are replaced and he is introduced to an autonomous life that a lowly administration model such as he could never have imagined. But his saviours also have a special mission for him – a mission that involves Coppélia.

No longer governed by the Three Laws of Robotics, he is free to make his own decisions. But if the success of his mission rests on his breaking those laws which he has always adhered to, can he bring himself to do so?

REULEAUX'S PORTAL

(Book 3: The Sophont Trilogy)

Approximately one hundred years or so have passed since Coppélia was marooned. Her robotic memory is supposed to be infallible but the additional differences she perceives are so slight that she dismisses them as within reasonable limits of variance.

Today is the most important day since her return, as she has been asked to receive a posthumous Nobel Peace Prize on behalf of her late friend, Karen Chambers, for her tireless work in integrating sophonts (sentient sapient androids) into society. The android takes the stage at the Oslo City Hall.

In this third and final instalment of the Sophont trilogy, Karen's granddaughter, Holly Bryson, also notices discrepancies between Coppélia's anecdotal stories and the visual records that form part of her grandmother's memoirs, but the inconsistencies she notices are not so easy to dismiss. The burning question at the fore of Holly's mind is whether or not the android onstage is the same android that was her grandmother's best friend.

To find the answer to that question, Holly finds herself on a journey that, as yet, only exists in astrophysicist's minds and calculations.

**THE BOY WHO WASN'T AND THE GIRL WHO
COULDN'T BE**

Jerome walks over to the giant monitor screen and switches it on before taking a seat on his sofa. A public service announcement displays. He tries changing the channel but all the other channels appear to be off air. A voice speaks.

"Good morning, Jerome. An apocalyptic event has befallen planet earth. You are one of six survivors."

Jerome doesn't know whether he should feel happy that he survived or sad that the rest of humanity has perished. The voice continues.

“Food and clothing will be provided for you. Your need for social interaction will be via video-conferencing with the other five survivors. Unfortunately, you may not meet them in person – the environment outside your apartment is toxic and any attempt to leave will result in your death.”

A post-apocalyptic romance, this story finds Jerome settling into his new solitary and regimented life. One day his world is turned upside when he discovers a girl who shouldn't exist in his kitchen. At first, he is frightened of her but, as he gets to know her, she introduces him to a world of human experiences that he could never have imagined.

NOVELLAS BY GREG KROJAC

FISH OUT OF WATER

It's Sereia's 18th birthday and she does something that she hasn't done for five years – she falls out of bed, waking her up ten minutes before her alarm is due to go off.

Her duvet is wrapped around her when she falls and she assumes that this is why she can't move her legs. But when she disentangles herself from the duvet, she is in for a shock – her legs have disappeared and, in their place, she has grown a fish tail overnight.

She's supposed to be meeting her friends for a night out – how's she going to explain that she's turned into a mermaid overnight? What's going to happen to her?

In this YA/NA novella, we join Sereia as she is pitched into a world of marine mythology that she previously thought was simply the product of fertile imaginations.

THE REAPER

Reece Pargeter is a normal seventeen-year-old schoolboy who has no real idea what he wants to do with his life. But that all changes when he has a consultation with a career advice counsellor and discovers that his destiny is already mapped out for him.. He is to become a Reaper, reporting to Mr Grimm.

Leaving the corporeal world behind for the ethereal Control, Reece learns how to reap and soon discovers he's not best suited for the job. However, reaping isn't the kind of job where a resignation letter is enough to leave.

A sci-fi parable on the consequences of personal freedom taken to extremes. Is freedom of choice an illusion?

ARNOLD THE UNDEAD

A flurry of activity takes over the Intensive Care Unit as medical staff go about their tasks preparing the room for a critically ill patient. The doors of the ICU burst open and a gurney is pushed to the side of the bed. Doctors and nurses take their positions either side of the gurney and expertly transfer the patient to the bed. Fortunately, Arnold Leadbetter is unaware of what is going on, his comatose state shielding him from witnessing what's happening to him.

Unfortunately, not every disease is curable and Arnold's prognosis is a life hooked up to a Life Support machine, his body paralysed and in a coma. A decision is made to switch off the machine.

In this comedy horror, that could be described as "*An American Werewolf In London*" meets "*Weekend At Bernie's*", Arnold finds that death is definitely not what he expected it to be, as he is pitched into a world of soft-porn movie-makers, zombies, vampires, and werewolves.

JUDD'S ERRAND

Judd Witherspoon senses that something's wrong. On his feet in an instant, he finds himself facing the double barrels of a shotgun blaster. He eyes the would-be robber with a steely gaze.

"I'd point that gun away from me and walk away if I were you."

The man with the gun sneers.

"Good job I ain't you then."

"I'm giving you a chance. Walk away now and I'll pretend this never happened."

The man can see that Judd's a courier and couriers carry valuable cargo. He cocks the hammer of the vintage weapon. Before he has a chance to pull the trigger, Judd's hand reaches over his right shoulder and draws his razor-sharp machete from its sheath. In an instant, the blade slices into the man's torso, slashes through his ribs, and cuts his heart in two whilst still beating inside his body.

In a Mad Max-style story, Judd Witherspoon, a courier on the planet Duoterra, braves bear-wolf attacks and ambushes by Sifter gangs in order to deliver a precious graphene package to Paradise Cove.

TIME THIEF

Aristotle is a Temporal Private Investigator. His normal jobs tend to be investigating cheating spouses by travelling back in time to catch them in flagrante delicto. A messy job but someone has to do it.

At the British Library, he's researching background information for his latest new case when the text and images on the page he's reading begin to disappear before his very eyes. Members of Project Clockwise, the team that discovered time travel are being wiped from existence.

Aristotle doesn't like things that could upset the equilibrium of his life and if time travel was never discovered, how on earth could he make a living? He doesn't really possess any other employable skills.

Can Aristotle find out who's behind the strange phenomenon, stop the erasures, and save both time travel and his job?

FREE SHORT STORIES BY GREG KROJAC**OPPY**

Archaeological cosmologists on Mars search for artefacts that will shed light on their own prehistoric history. They find something unexpected.

THE FIRST KISS

A romantic night out at a swanky restaurant should be the perfect date but culminates in a disturbing discovery

LOVE UNDER THE STARS

The first man to set foot on Pluto, Commander Lewis Harding expected to see amazing sights and experience incredible emotions. And he did – he experienced love. But at what cost?

THE MAN WHO LIVED IN A SHED

A man lives alone in a sparsely furnished and remote shed but he isn't a hermit. Why doesn't he just go back to the city and live a normal life?

WRITER'S BLOCK

A short story writer is given a writing prompt and sits down at his computer to start writing, but his mind has gone blank. However, he receives help from an unexpected quarter.

