SIMON SAYS

GREGKROJAC

This book or any portion thereof may not be reproduced or used in any manner whatsoever without the express permission of the author except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Please note that this book is a work of fiction and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, or places, events or locales is purely coincidental. The characters are productions of the author's imagination and are used fictitiously.

Copyright © 2021 Greg Krojac
All rights reserved
Language: UK English

Hannah eased herself out of the armchair and walked across her modest living room to the freshly polished sideboard, upon which sat a rented 20" black and white TV set. The TV was possibly the most modern thing in the house, having four pushbuttons for channel selection instead of the normal three, essential now that BBC Two had started broadcasting. Up until recently, there had been only two channels – BBC One and the commercial broadcaster, ITV, but the salesman had insisted that one day — maybe in the not too distant future — there would probably be another commercial channel and that by choosing the more modern four-buttoned model she was future-proofing her viewing choices. She wasn't entirely convinced, believing that three channels must surely be enough for anyone, but the salesman was quite good-looking and she had enjoyed the flirtatious nature of his spiel.

She turned the on/off/volume knob to the right, simultaneously pressing and twisting it so that it didn't fall off. She really should contact the TV rental company and ask them to send a repairman out to fix it, or perhaps she might even change the set for another one. It would be a good excuse to see that nice young salesman again.

Once the TV had warmed up, she pushed the button to change the channel to BBC1 and sat down on a chair that she'd brought in from the kitchen. She liked the armchair but sitting in it for too long wasn't good for her back. Her back posture corrected by the hard back of the kitchen chair, she eagerly awaited one of her favourite programmes, Jackanory. A cartoon, 'Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol', was about to finish and then it would be Jackanory with the actress Wendy Hiller reading 'Little Grey Rabbit's Christmas'. Hannah enjoyed Jackanory, even though her childhood was now far behind her. The first episode of Jackanory had been broadcast only eleven days earlier when Lee Montague read the fairy story 'Cap-o'-Rushes' and Hannah had been hooked since that very first episode. She put aside fifteen minutes of each day to watch the programme, whether her ten-year-old son, Simon, watched with her or not.

This would be the third successive Christmas that she'd spent alone with Simon but, with each Christmas that passed, she became more used to it just being the two of them.

Simon's father, Richard, had left three years earlier — not to the day, but almost. Her husband had arrived home from work, placed his briefcase on the kitchen table, and brazenly announced to his wife that he'd met someone else

and was moving to Cardiff. Hannah had always thought the stories of travelling salesmen cheating on their wives were just clichés, but Richard had proved the stereotype to be true in his case. Anyway, she still had Simon and she felt that she could face anything with her boy by her side.

The house the two lived in was a typical two up, two down terraced house with a small back garden. Hannah didn't have much money to spare but she did her best to keep their home clean and tidy and tried not to let her son want for anything. She always looked well-dressed, in no small part thanks to a mail-order company that allowed her to pay for purchases by weekly instalments. The company was also another source of income, as she passed their catalogue around her friends and family making a little money from the commission gained as an agent. Her house was a small but happy home, and she and Simon made a small but happy family.

Upstairs, Simon was in his bedroom playing with his train set. His mother had tried to get him interested in watching Jackanory but he was more interested in playing with his model railway.

The train layout was a real feat of miniature domestic civil engineering. The tracks were set amongst papier-mâché hills, moulded by Simon with the help of his mother. Simon had painted the hills, but anything that required finer detail than broad brush strokes had been lovingly painted by Hannah. The hills were peppered with model shrubs and trees that he bought from the local model shop (with his own pocket money), but the pièce de résistance was the attention paid to the buildings in which Simon's father, in happier times, had installed electric lighting. At night the landscape was a small forest of glistening lights. It was nothing short of amazing what his dad had been able to do with clear Christmas tree light bulbs and a little ingenuity.

Simon still saw quite a lot of his father, but it wasn't the same as having him at home. He had a special relationship with his father, one of love but also one of wonder at the things that Richard could do. He missed his dad.

That particular Christmas Eve was a special night, a night he'd been looking forward to for weeks so he made sure that he was dressed for the occasion, in his favourite green checked shirt and a new pair of jeans that his mother had bought the week before from the local supermarket. He didn't mind wearing the jeans inside the house, where nobody could see the label on the back pocket, but if he

went outside he preferred to wear shorts – even in cold weather – rather than wear the supermarket's own-brand jeans.

Hannah called up the stairs.

"Simon, your programme's about to start. It's nearly five o'clock. Joe Brown's on this week. You like him."

In reality, it was only a quarter to five but Hannah always exaggerated the lateness of the hour. At first, it had been a ruse to make sure that he got out of bed in time to have breakfast before he went to school, but now it had become a habit. For his part, Simon was fully aware of his mother's strategy but he didn't let on.

Simon loved Crackerjack. Five to five on a Friday afternoon was his favourite time. He would sit in front of the TV set waiting impatiently for the cry of '*it's Friday, it's five to five and it's Crackerjack*'. That night the programme was actually due to start five minutes later, at five o'clock – probably due to it being Christmas Eve — but they wouldn't change their catchphrase just because of that. He loved how whenever somebody on the show mentioned the word '*Crackerjack*', the studio audience of children would erupt in unison, shouting out '*Crackerjack*' and children all over the country, watching at home, would do the same. Simon was no exception. He loved shouting '*Crackerjack*' back at the TV, even though he knew that the only person who could hear him was his mother. His favourite part was the little play that the presenters performed at the end of each show, shoehorning the latest pop songs into the rather dubious comedy-drama finale of the programme. He'd have watched Crackerjack every night of the week if it had been on that frequently but one night a week of Simon shouting at the TV was plenty enough for his mother's nerves.

Simon says, turn off the train set and go downstairs.

Simon turned the dial of his train set control to the off position and the OO/HO gauge model of the Princess Victoria steam locomotive halted abruptly.

"On my way down, Mum,"

He hoisted his leg over the varnished bannister and slid down it to the bottom of the stairs. Like all children, this was his favourite way of going downstairs but he was careful to make sure he only did it when his mother couldn't see. He thought she probably knew what he was up to, but he didn't see any point in putting his suspicions to the test.

He trotted into the living room and flopped into the vacant soft velour armchair. He started half-watching Jackanory but didn't pay much attention as he considered the 'Little Grey Rabbit' stories too young for him now. He'd no idea why his mother was watching — she was a grown-up. If the story was too young for him, then it was too young for her. His favourite books were the Jennings books. He couldn't get enough of the schoolboy adventures of Jennings and his best friend Darbishire. If those books were ever featured on Jackanory, he'd definitely watch the programme.

The two-seater sofa was free but he preferred the way that the armchair kind of wrapped itself around him.

Hannah glanced over at her son, wincing as a sudden unexpected shot of pain stabbed her spine.

"There's jelly and ice cream in the fridge."

Crackerjack coupled with jelly and ice cream was a combination that her son could never resist.

"What flavour is it, Mum?"

"Go and fetch it and you'll find out, won't you?"

Simon poured himself out of the armchair and skipped into the kitchen. He was in an exceptionally good mood. He opened the door of the ageing Frigidaire refrigerator and saw two glass dishes on the top shelf, each containing a generous portion of raspberry jelly. Then he opened the freezer compartment and took out a tub of Wall's raspberry ripple ice cream, the best in the world in his opinion, but he did like Lyons Maid ice cream too. In fact, that was just as good, if he were to be honest.

He whistled tunelessly as he strolled across the kitchen to the welsh dresser.

Simon says, open the drawer.

He opened the second drawer down, his hand scrambling around inside it trying to find the ice cream scoop. Scoop found, he stood for a moment looking at the freshly sharpened carving knife sitting in its block on the nearby worktop.

His mother's voice drifted in from the living room.

"What's keeping you, Simon? Crackerjack will be starting soon."

He didn't take his eyes off the carving knife.

"Be there in a minute, Mum."

He crept over to the kitchen doorway and peeked into the living room. His mother was still sitting bolt upright on the dining room chair, trying to ignore her pain, waiting patiently for her dessert.

His gaze returned to the carving knife, This was too good an opportunity to miss.

Simon says, take out the carving knife.

He drew it from the block.

He pulled open another drawer, into which lots of plastic carrier bags had been randomly stuffed, and dug around inside the drawer. The mass of plastic bags inside threatened to swallow his hand, but he found what he was looking for – a particularly large green plastic carrier bag. Simon had hidden it at the bottom of the drawer several weeks earlier as it had the number one quality necessary to help him in his next venture – no air holes. From a third drawer – the knick-knack drawer - he took a length of strong but flexible cable, and two rolls of gaffer tape.

Simon says, suffocate her – but don't kill her.

Simon quietly slipped out of the kitchen, crept up behind his mother and with one swift movement pulled the plastic bag over her head. He pulled it taut, bracing his feet against the chair legs to help him fight against the resistance that his panicking mother was putting up. After a brief struggle, the lack of air caused Hannah to lose consciousness. Satisfied that he hadn't accidentally killed her – that wasn't part of his plan - and that she wasn't going to wake up anytime soon, Simon removed the bag and looked at his mother slumped on the chair

He ripped off another length of gaffer tape and carefully bound her ankles to the chair legs and her wrists behind the upright of the chair-back so that she couldn't escape when she woke up. He had plenty of gaffer tape left and decided that he might as well use it. He continued wrapping the tape around her calves and forearms, pinning her limbs to the chair in a vice-like grip. Then he tore off the last strip of tape and pressed it over her mouth.

Simon stepped back and admired his handiwork, looking very pleased with himself. He'd done a very professional job - Hannah certainly wasn't going anywhere. He went back into the kitchen and returned seconds later, dragging another kitchen chair behind him, pulling it past his unconscious mother and placing it in front of her, at a distance of about three feet. Spinning the chair around to face his mother, he sat down, toying with the carving knife. On TV, Leslie

Crowther was telling a losing contestant that she'd won a Crackerjack pencil. The responding roar of '*Crackerjack*' interrupted Simon's concentration for a couple of seconds as he felt a compulsion to join in.

"*Crackerjack*!"

He couldn't stop himself. Pavlov would have been proud of the programme's production team. Their audience was perfectly brainwashed.

Somehow his shout didn't wake up his mother immediately but a few minutes later she did regain consciousness and blinked in bewilderment at finding herself bound and gagged. Who had done this to her? Her eyes darted around the room looking for signs of an intruder but all she could see was her beloved ten-year-old son sitting opposite her, his intense gaze burrowing into her head. Surely Simon couldn't have done this? But there was nobody else around. She was unsettled by how remarkably composed and unfazed her son seemed to be in these surreal circumstances.

Simon looked Hannah up and down and took a deep breath.

"Hi, Mum."

Hi Mum? She was imprisoned by gaffer tape and that was all he could come up with?

Simon's glasses slipped forward a little so he pushed them back onto the bridge of his nose. It happened so often that it was an instinctive reaction.

"Wondering what's happening to you, Hannah? Well, I'll tell you. This is when you pay for your past sins. You've wronged me, Hannah, you've wronged me very greatly indeed."

Hannah was confused. Simon had never called her by her first name before. Of course, he knew her real name, but she was his mum and he always referred to her as such. And his speech seemed somehow more sophisticated, certainly not that of a ten-year-old.

She'd always done her best for Simon, she'd made sure that he never went without, no matter how tight money became. She knew that he wasn't overjoyed with the jeans that she'd bought him, the label on the back pocket announcing to anybody and everybody that she'd bought them from Tesco's supermarket, but she couldn't afford the fancy brands like Levi or Wrangler. What could anger a ten-year-old boy to make him do something like this? Simon pointed a finger menacingly at his mother.

"I want you to think back to before you were born. In fact, think back to long before you were born - about 150 years ago. Not so easy for you, is it? But I remember it as if it were yesterday. You see, we knew each other in a past life, Hannah. In those days you were Joseph Grimes, an overseer on a cotton plantation in Louisiana. You were a monster, a hard and unfair taskmaster and way too fond of the booze. A violent and drunken bully."

Hannah couldn't believe what she was hearing. What had got into her sweet, loving son? He'd gone crazy. Was he possessed or something? How could he know about her previous lives? What previous lives? He wasn't making any sense. He'd obviously gone insane.

Simon took a deep breath and continued his explanation.

"My name was Ruth and I was a slave on the plantation. I was a good worker. I always brought in my quota of cotton. Hell, I often surpassed my quota. Of course, my conditions weren't that great – I was a slave – but I did have a family. A family that I loved with all my heart. I had a wonderful husband and a beautiful little daughter, Mary. One night, a few months after my husband had fallen ill with a fever and passed away, you came to my hut and battered on the door, demanding to be let in. I was frightened and hid behind my daughter`s bed, huddled together with her, hoping that you`d get bored and go away. But then I heard an almighty crash, a crash loud enough to awaken even my poor deceased husband, and I saw you stumble into the house, saliva dribbling down onto your chin, the door barely hanging on its hinges. You were stinking drunk."

Hannah wanted this nightmare to be over, but she was in no position to do anything about it. She wanted to shout at him, to beg him to let her go, to promise that they'd find someone to help rid him of this dreadful sickness or whatever it was that was afflicting his mind, but the tape over her mouth was stuck fast. She was powerless to do or say anything.

"I stayed as quiet as I could, quiet as a mouse. I pushed Mary behind me to protect her, and we hid behind our old wooden bed. We tried to remain unnoticed but you spotted us and hauled the bed away from us. The door was broken but you weren't afraid of anyone seeing you; after all, you were the overseer and were untouchable. I shouted and pleaded with you to get out, to leave us alone, I begged you to let my daughter leave, whilst you did whatever you wanted to do to me. But you blocked the doorway with the wardrobe.

"You grinned that sickly, disgusting grin of yours, dragged me to my feet, and then punched me full in the face. I crumpled to the floor. You unbuckled your belt, allowing your trousers to drop to the floor and, despite all the whiskey you'd thrown down your throat, you still managed to get a hard-on.

"I called to Mary to hide in another room but you told her that if she did so you would kill us both. I told her to close her eyes and cover her ears but you repeated the same threat. And then, and then you climbed on top of me, clawing at my dress and undergarments with your fat stubby fingers, ripping them off and exposing my womanhood. You raped me, you bastard. You raped me in front of my little girl. And that's why you must die. That's why you must die. But not because you raped me – I could have lived with that - because you raped me in front of my six-year-old daughter, destroying her innocence in one fell swoop."

Simon stopped fidgeting with the knife and grasped its hilt.

Simon says, kill Hannah.

The boy stood up and drove the blade deep into his mother's abdomen. He twisted the knife to the right and then back to the left, drawing it free, blood dripping off its blade. Hannah grimaced with the sudden pain. Again, he drove the knife home, this time just below the ribcage. A third lunge buried the blade in Hannah's abdomen again, and the fourth and final attack was a slicing motion that opened Hannah's throat, leaving a gaping wound, dripping crimson, as if a macabre smile had been painted onto her neck

Simon let the knife fall to the floor and went upstairs to his bedroom, where he opened a drawer and pulled out a fresh pair of Y-fronts. He casually changed into clean underwear. His mother had always said that he should wear clean underwear when going out, in case he had an accident.

He put his used underpants into the laundry basket on the upstairs landing just as he would have done on any other day, even though there was no one to wash them now. He put his jeans back on, tucked his shirt into his jeans, and refastened his blue and red snake belt before walking over to his train set, picking up the Princess Victoria locomotive and putting the model train into his pocket.

He left the bedroom, not bothering to close the door, and stopped at the top of the stairs. He paused for a couple of seconds and then lifted his leg over the bannister and slid down to the bottom of the stairs. Dismounting from the bannister he looked towards the upstairs landing. He smiled and spoke aloud to himself.

"Why not? Who's going to stop me?"

He jogged back upstairs and climbed back onto the bannister, sliding down again, this time letting out a 'whoop' as if he were a cowboy on a bucking bronco. He dismounted the bannister and turned towards the front door.

He pulled the door open and stepped outside. There wasn't much traffic, it being Christmas Eve, but the house was situated on the main road and he knew that there would still be some cars, trucks, and buses passing his house. Not everyone was at home with their families yet. He took a few paces forward and stood by the kerb, looking to his right, watching the oncoming vehicles. A grey Ford Anglia and a black Austin Morris 1100 drove past. Simon was very good at recognizing cars thanks to the Observers book of Automobiles that his father had given him last Christmas. He also had an Observers book of birds, but it was much easier to car-watch than bird-watch. Especially when you lived on the main road. A light-blue Triumph Herald convertible approached with its roof down. The couple inside must have been crazy; Simon could feel the cold evening air trying to cut through him. He tried in vain to blow smoke rings from his breath as it left his mouth, just like his dad had been able to do when smoking a cigarette.

He heard a louder engine. That was more like it. This was almost certainly a lorry. He took a better look and could see that the headlights were set too high and too far apart to be those of a car. As the vehicle got closer he could make out the shape of a dumper truck.

Simon says, step off the kerb.

The impact was inevitable as Simon walked calmly into the path of the diesel-powered monster. His head smashed against the front of the vehicle before being wrenched backwards, snapping his neck. As his body was dragged underneath the truck, the weight of the nearside wheels crushed his torso as they passed over him.

The driver braked hard, pulling back on the steering wheel as if that would somehow help stop the vehicle and avoid what had already happened. After what seemed an eternity the truck slithered to a halt and stood there, motionless, apparently untouched except for some blood that dripped as if from a macabre leaky tap and a small portion of Simon's scalp rippling in the breeze, lodged between the bumper and the vehicle's cab.

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 ten published novels, three novellas, and five short stories.

He currently lives just outside the city of Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, with Eliene, and their two dogs, Sophie and Simba, and 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 cohosts a podcast for short-read readers and short-read writers called Short Is The New Long[1].

You can find out more about Greg and his books at www.gregkrojac.com[2]

1. https://anchor.fm/shortisthenewlong
2. https://www.gregkrojac.com

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 that takes the criminal investigation into the ethical minefield of human cloning.

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

Neither Karen nor Coppélia are prepared for the incredible truth.

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 conversation.

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)

Some things about the world appear to be different, but that's only to be expected when one has been away for a hundred years or so. Coppélia's 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 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 astrophysicists' 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 the 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

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 be released from employment.

A sci-fi parable on the consequences of personal freedom taken to extremes.

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 on 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 the circumstances that he now finds himself in.

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

It's not often that anyone gets the jump on Judd Witherspoon. The man seems to have a sixth sense for trouble. This time is an exception. 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."

Judd offers his terms for the man's life again.

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

The man can tell that Judd's a courier and couriers carry valuable cargo. He cocks the hammer of the vintage weapon. Before the man 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 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 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.

He's at the British Library, researching background information for a new case when the text and images on the page he's reading disappear before his very eyes.

Members of Project Clockwise, the team that discovered time travel is being wiped from existence.

Can Aristotle stop the erasures and save 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.

MISTAKEN

The world as we know it is gone, fallen to a zombie apocalypse. A man is trying to make his way to an abandoned military compound which – if rumours are true – has been turned into a haven by human survivors.