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The Iceman cometh

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THE man next to me is driving from Colchester to London. He's a taxi driver; it's a professional engagement, not a favour.

I can't drive. The nearest I got was at the age of 21 when my then girlfriend coaxed me into the driving seat of her car and tenderly talked me through starting it up. Unfortunately, the car had been left in gear and so as I turned the key everything jolted forward, I screamed, ran into the house and was later found hiding under a duvet in the spare bedroom.

But the man next to me driving to London has had many lessons. He's told me many things. Chiefly, at this point, that he used to be a racing driver, formula 400. That his licence for racing extended two classes beyond that in which he competed, such was his natural aptitude for the game, and he no longer races, due to "a major accident" he had a few years back and the fact that almost his entire left arm is reconstructed and pinned to his body with metal.

As he drives, he talks, and slowly his life unfurls in a gradual but unrelenting monologue. It transpires he plays computer games. I begin to blather about my Xbox. I sense common ground between us and after 45 minutes of feigned racing enthusiasm and fatuous queries ("So which car goes fastest?", "Are you allowed to bang into each other?") I grab it, eager to talk on something of a level footing for a while, at least.

However, the gaming in which my driving friend participates is hardcore team-based online war gaming. The teams are called clans, the games are called battles. And I, once more am reduced to the role of interloping tourist. He almost visibly sniggers at my Xbox enthusiasm. Xbox is clearly a toy, for children. He is about to get his PC defragged and cleaned from "all the porn" now clogging it up. Which is excellent news because it will give him increased speed. For quicker killing. In the games. The war games.

Over the next 50 minutes he tells me at length about his tactics. About how he's worked out a way of blowing up an opposing player who is, by all accounts, tremendously skilled as a violent helicopter pilot. He talks about capturing flags and spawning points. And then, just as my affection for the man and my interest in his deathmongering has hit an all-time low, he tells me about a ship. A warship. Laden with guns. Air guns, land guns, sea guns. He has long since mentioned that he pairs up with a guy called "Jazz". They operate as a team within a team. Their skill, he tells me, is such and their reputation so huge that if they should commandeer this ship, the game is immediately considered lost by their opponents.

He says: "Everyone says, if Jazz and Iceman get the ship, this game is done."

Everything stops for a moment as realisation washes over me like cool water on a hot day. This is Iceman. I am being driven to London by Iceman, former racing driver and present-day cyber warlord. He shows me his clan tattoo of "Iceman" with "for ever" inked underneath it and talks me through his favourite Subway sandwich, he mentions his former wife and his latest girlfriend and, after I get my bag from the boot, he drives away. Into the night. Back to Colchester. Iceman.

Daniel Kitson is appearing at the Melbourne International Comedy Festival.