

Frank

Frank was sat at the airport waiting. He'd not been waiting for a long time, but an eternally long time. So far, he'd been here for nine hours, just sitting in the car park: waiting. His tyres were aching, his engine was cold, and the longer this went on, the worse it would be when the driver started his engine.

For the last five years he'd been passed from one criminal to another or locked up in police compounds and had barely been driven more than a thousand miles in that time.

On this rare trip outside a garage or compound he was being driven by a killer. The intended target wasn't anyone big, just some CIA intern on the run. But that was humans for you.

He cast his mind back to his first owner, a dull looking woman in her thirties. She'd turned up in her shell suit at the garage, said a few words to the salesman and drove him away to her house. The house must have been fairly new as the garage was almost empty.

For a few years she'd driven him between work and home and occasionally took him on holiday with her when she went to Norfolk with her boyfriend.

That all stopped when the two of them married and she'd had that awful child. Frank could never understand why she doted on that two-legged monstrosity. He was either throwing up on his carpet, or emptying a packet of cheese and onion crisps down his back seat.

As that thing got older and bigger he started to test out his father's Swiss army knife on Frank's seat covers. And what did she do? Sold Frank to a garage in part-exchange for a new estate car.

Why couldn't she sell the kid instead? That little tyrant was ruining her life and she couldn't see it.

After that it was a succession young lads fresh from their driving test, each of them crunching their way through his gears as they practised their driving skills. Frank winced at the thought. He still bore the scars in his innards.

If it wasn't the learner drivers it was the wannabe car mechanics attempting to fix Frank themselves whilst playing something resembling music as loudly as possible through a newly, and badly, installed stereo system. Why do young men always jerry-rig an expensive new stereo into the first car they buy?

After six years of this abuse Frank finally gave up and decided to break down in the Hatfield tunnel. He just couldn't stand anymore of their tinkering and messing about with his engine. It wasn't as if they knew what they were doing.

There then followed a selection of dodgy second hand car dealers before he became part of the criminal fraternity.

Frank harrumphed, which caused the killer to stir a little and wonder what had happened before returning to his book.

Frank's only consolation was that criminals knew how to look after him. His outside may be dirty and the rust may keep multiplying like bacteria across his skin, but his chassis was in good order and his engine was in the best condition it had been for years. New oil, spark plugs and air filter: the whole works. He smiled the smile that can only be seen by other cars.

The sleek looking Mazda MX-5 in the bay opposite returned the smile. Frank hadn't liked the car when he first saw it, but they'd both been in the car park a long while and got talking about their owners.

"Nice sleep Maurice?"

"Hmmm. Waking up," Maurice yawned, "is the hardest part when you're not garaged."

The killer stirred again, trying to work out where the noise was coming from. But all he

could hear were the squeaks, cracks, groans and the hissing of tyres that made up the language of motor vehicles. He returned to his book, unaware of the conversation going on outside.

"I know. The cold gets everywhere."

They both sighed. There were some mutterings from the other cars about the two of them not keeping quiet, or not having respect for those who were sleeping, but Maurice and Frank ignored them.

"How often does he leave you here?" Frank said.

"Every other weekend on average. It depends on who he picks up on a Friday night."

Frank and Maurice grinned at each other.

"Does it make you giddy when they have sex inside you?" Frank asked.

"It's more funny than anything. He's over six feet tall and has to cramp himself up to do anything at all. I've got used to my springs going up and down and side to side as they wiggle around on the passenger seat. Although it does hurt when one of their feet hit the dashboard, especially if it's one of the woman's sharp heels."

They heard a snigger from a few bays down. They looked and saw a white van. Its driver was checking the ticket machine at the exit.

Maurice and Frank looked at each other again and rolled their headlamps. All cars agreed on the common nature of vans. Repulsive creatures to a chassis, even those who were supposedly similar to the cars.

The van drove past them soon after. "It's much more fun watching them when you've got a mattress in your back. He he."

"Is it the way they're used that turns them into louts," Maurice asked, "or are they just built that way?"

"Nature or nurture?"

"Mind you, there are cars like that."

"I find that French cars and BMWs are the worst."

"Rolls Royces are good fun though. The stories they tell." Maurice whistled.

"Do you get to meet many? I've only ever seen one and that was from a distance."

"Oh I see plenty of them in here. They're very down to earth, Rolls Royces. Not so much the Bentleys though. I think have an inferiority complex."

The killer's mobile rang and he answered it. "I'm coming in now. I know what you look like."

The killer hung up and put the phone down on the passenger seat. He gently turned the key, much to Franks satisfaction, and drove him out of the car park.

"Goodbye Maurice. Hope you don't have to wait too much longer."

"Oh I'll probably be here for a day or two yet. Still, it was nice to meet you. Bye."

A minute later they pulled up in the taxi rank outside terminal 4. The killer got out and hurried into the terminal building.

Frank compared his position to Maurice's. Whilst Frank was now part of the criminal underworld, he was at least looked after. He got to stay in protected police compounds, had regular services and was well oiled throughout.

He had the normal aches and pains of old age, but nothing life threatening. A few leaks and drips, rust in his metalwork and more soreness than normal when he was left unstated for a long time, but nothing serious.

Maurice had to put up with daily abuse or loneliness on an unbelievable scale. His lifespan was undoubtedly going to be shorter because of it. It would be days between engine starts, followed by high speeds, hard braking and sharp turns. It wasn't as if he was serviced on a regular basis.

Frank had lived for nearly twenty years. Maurice would be doing well to last ten before he

went to the great recycling.

"Ahhh, the great recycling," Frank said absent-mindedly, much to the amusement of the taxicabs around him, some of whom laughed out loud. Frank ignored them.

Most cars and lorries talked about the recycling with reverence. Some cars dreamed of returning as a Ferrari, or a short-life F1 car.

The Lorries were more sceptical. They had seen too much of this world, and carried too much of it, to have a fervent belief in recycling. For them it was more of a great hope and they envied the more simplistic outlook of the cars, but they still hoped to be recycled. For them their lives of service would be a waste if this one existence was all that life offered.

Vans just sneered. All they wanted to do was party and play loud music. Sadly, their belief was taking a greater hold on the auto-world. The van's aesthetic belief had been given a boost when large numbers of sports cars had abandoned their belief in recycling. This was followed by those archetype bandwagon followers, the minicabs.

Frank's musings were interrupted when he felt his passenger door swing violently open, followed quickly by the drivers door. They very nearly came off their ageing hinges and the quick swinging and quicker slamming caused Frank to wince.

The killer thrust the key into the ignition and turned it harshly, causing Frank to yelp with pain. The killer then revved Frank's engine as high as it could go, engaged first gear with a crunch that reverberated through his gearbox and leapt away from the terminal.

"Get Down," the killer yelled.

Frank cried out in pain as a bullet whipped through his front passenger window and lodged itself in the windscreen, leaving glass sprayed on the road, the seat and the girl.

The killer was yelling at the girl explaining what was happening, but all Frank could think about was the bullet in his windscreen. It moved continuously, jarring with each harsh

gear change and each corner turned. There was a ripple of dull pain every time his tyres hit a small hole in the road, or the killer turned a corner.

They accelerated away from Heathrow, pain throbbing through his body, his chassis and his wheels. He'd not been driven like this for years and he didn't like it.

The killer turned another corner and the bullet fell out onto Frank's carpet. The jangling pain stopped, replaced by a dull ache in the place where the bullet used to be. Behind him he could see two police cars giving chase, lights flashing. Frank tried to call for help from the two cars, but they couldn't hear him above the sirens.

The pain was intense and getting stronger as they shot round corners and over humps. Ahead he could see two cars blocking the road. The killer put his foot down on the accelerator hard. Surely he wasn't planning to run into them?

He was.

Frank watched, scared stiff as the killer aimed him between the two cars. The five men standing behind them ran for cover and the killer drove Frank through the two cars.

Frank screamed loudly, as did the other cars.

They entered a trading estate and the killer drove Frank round it at high speed. Frank tried to think what he could do to end his suffering.

He remembered the Hatfield tunnel. He remembered what he'd done to stop himself.

Could he, though much older, do it again?

Frank made a great effort to stop his engine, to stop the thousands of miniature explosions that provided power to his wheels. The car stuttered, one cylinder, two cylinders began to misfire. The petrol clogged up inside them before Frank managed to stop them all. Then he engaged the brakes and he screeched to a halt outside what must have been the oldest, scruffiest warehouse on the estate.

Frank groaned in pain. Every part of his chassis and body ached, his wheels felt as

though they had been burnt in a furnace and his remaining glass was ravaged by pinpoint aches from the bumps and the bullets and his engine felt like it was about to fall from its moorings. Every bolt ached.

He shouldn't be doing this at his age, he moaned to himself.

Frank didn't notice the two chasing police cars slide to a stop behind him, or the humans get out, guns at the ready.

He was stirred from his aches by two bullets that hit him in the rear. One of them burst through the metal and lodged in the rear seat, whilst the other ricocheted off the boot lock, smashing it in the process.

It was yet another painful blow. He cried out for help, but none came.

More bullets crunched into Frank's rear bodywork. One of the humans had run to the side of Frank and taken cover behind some boxes. He was now firing bullets into the drivers side.

Each and every bullet that hit him sent another sharp stab of pain through his body. He thought back to the child that had torn his seats with a knife and back to the kids that had practised driving in him and their pathetic repair efforts. What they had done was nothing in comparison to this. He almost longed for those days and began to regret breaking down in the tunnel.

Another three bullets flew through his glass, shattering all that remained. Then another came through the drivers door and hit the killer in the chest.

More bullets came, but they couldn't make the pain any worse. He had holes in his body, his petrol tank and his radiator were leaking and Frank felt fainter and fainter as his life seemed to be drowning in an oncoming tide of pain.

The sounds of gunfire were replaced by the hysterical screams of the girl and then Frank felt his passenger door being wrenched open. She was dragged out of the car, still

screaming and into the warehouse. Then, nothing.

"Stay awake," called one of the Police cars, "Stay with us."

"What's your name?" asked the other.

"Frank," he answered airily, "Frank." He could feel the liquids seep from his pipes and his sight grew dimmer. "Help me, please help me."

"We'll do what we can, just keep talking."

Frank had spent enough time being repaired in garages to know when his time was up. Although he could be repaired, his oil was still in his system, he knew that at his age it was unlikely to be done. The Mondeos kept talking, trying to elicit a response from Frank, trying to keep him conscious.

The world around him became greyer and greyer, until everything turned black and became only dimly aware of the events around him.

Weakly he answered Peter's questions. "My name is Frank...I'm nineteen years old...Yes it has been a long life."

Frank's mind began to wander over his past. The first time he awoke after being built, then driven off the production line and parked in an open lot with thousands of other newly created cars of all shapes and sizes.

He recalled his owners one by one. Their smiles as they drove him away for the first time and his own satisfaction at the smooth, gentle handling that each new owner always showed.

The two cars kept trying asking Frank questions for several minutes, but eventually Frank couldn't answer anymore: he was too weak.

The sounds around him became softer and softer and blurred into each other, until there was silence and Frank was left alone with his final thoughts. He felt sleepy and wondered if he would awaken as a new car: a Ferrari maybe. Frank smiled.