

You Get Played, I Get Paid

Michael Botur

I rocked up to Franklin Congregational Church on the Monday wearing thick hi-vis yellow socks and within a minute, honest, this milf come out from the lil office where she was doin the accounting and arksed if I was there to do some

community service, like sent by Department of Corrections and shit. Here's her thinkin I was there to weed the garden and scoop rotten leaves out of the roof gutters and it was like, Bitch, I know you got cash money round here somewhere. Pay the playa.

She got me to wash paint brushes for a hour, still thinking I's some sucker on probation. People always think that, even when I'm not. After I'd had enough of little painty water sploshlets staining my shirt, I went out into the hallway and took a squiz around reception, looking for some decent shit to roll. Bitch wasn't at her computer, bitch was loading the dishwasher, I could tell from the noise comin outta the kitchen. Just me and her with a whole church to ourselves. No kids in the daycare that morning, leaving me pretty much uninterrupted while I searched for the collection plate, or collection box or whatever.

Turned out this place had a ice cream container for its collection dish. Retards hadn't even emptied it. I hefted it, tryna predict how much I would score, just a little game I liked to play. Fools are there to get played, I'm there to get paid. I tipped the notes and gold coins into my gumboots, musta been like \$150 all up, and moonwalked the fuck up outta there, trying not to clink like a motherfuckin piggy bank. I hopped on a bus that said it was goin downtown and the driver was like, You got change? and I just about cracked up. Yeah boi. I had me some change.

The movies was good, and the Burger Fuel deluxe kumara chips with aioli tasted better than Scarlett Johansson's pussy, but when the food and flicks was over, there was me, sitting in a lit-up cinema, drumming my fingers, like Fuck. Less than a hundy left. Back to work already.

I went to Specsavers, bought me nerd glasses that took up like \$50, got a squeaky-nark haircut with a part down the side from this old white fella for \$20, then got one of them golf

shirts with the crocodile on the titty and that was me pretty much tapped out, just a broke-arse undercover gangsta, shirt tucked in, school shoes blacked up. I looked like a honest dude just dressed up nice for a job interview at a real good gas station. The po-poes even cruised past and I fully nodded at them, like Good morning, officer. Lovely day to be a pigshit.

Then I jumped on a bus and went Waiuku ways.

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The West Franklin Baptist Haven was this ginormous octagon-shaped building that musta been three storeys tall, with a epic metal roof, huge panes of glass, and billboards on its lawn – 'cept the billboard was looking kinda rain-soaked, and some of them panes of glass was different colours like they'd been replaced on the cheap. Kind of looked like the pad could use a community service slave to spruce it the fuck up.

There was no point standin out on the street where the 5-0 could pick me up so I headed up the wheelchair ramp, knocked on the door, peered in the dark glass. A man came across the carpet and opened the door, without even hesitating. What a trusting cunt.

'Hello hello hello!' he said, pulling a cordless phone away from his ear and pressing the End button. He looked like kind of a faggot in his black turtleneck skivvy and black pants and soft white sneakers, except a fag who's in the closet. He wasn't skinny though, he had a bit of muscle on his old brown body.

'Just been dealing with insurance,' he went, rolling his eyes. Then his eyebrows asked me a question, like Say what you're here for, son.

I opened my mouth to bullshit like I'd been sent to unclog the roof gutter or some shit, but I kinda stuttered. The

big old pastor lookin all satisfied and confident with his insurance bullshit made me need to shit and piss at the same time. I don't usually deal with anyone but old ladies.

The pastor got the message I was nervous. He held the door open all wide and grampa-ish. Only when he shut the door behind me could I breathe again. I's wrong to call him a fag. I sensed some strength in the dude – yeah, he was built, if you looked at him for a bit, and tall. His head was bald on top with puffy silver curls above his ears, like a old-arse circus clown, but from the jaw down Mr Pastor had a body like a old gangsta.

'You look like you've been walking the streets for far too long,' he said, smiling, putting his hands in his pockets, non-confrontational-styles. 'Bet you could use a roof over your head and a warm cup of Milo.'

I nodded and pouted like a bitchboy.

'I'm stapling some crêpe paper on the walls, but I always have time to welcome visitors. We'll talk when you're ready. Come staple with me.'

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The church was borderline fucked. Pastor didn't say it in them words, but that was the message. The place looked like it was held together with papier mâché. 'We're not insured against wet weather damage, so thank God for this,' he went, flicking his hand up at the skylight over reception. Outside it was sunny but there were a few dirty clouds. I spotted a drip coming down.

'Your roof still looks kinda fucked,' I told him. 'Sall rusty and shit.'

Pastor put a hand on my shoulder and sorta brushed me towards the church hall. It had a peak in the middle with a big octagon-ial skylight and extra lights fixed to these racks and

frames way up on the ceiling. Megachurches is sposda be bright and clean but this one was dirty everywhere except around the central platformy thingy with the microphone—pulpit, I think that’s what you call it. I could see the crêpe paper the pastor had been putting up on the walls but they wouldn’t’ve had much of a party here. Like, there was electric leads everywhere and mosta them had Sellotape holding them in place. They couldn’t even afford duct tape, bro.

Pastor said the first thing I could do was find a way to tie up the electric leads that didn’t cost a gazillion dollars. I followed the leads to where they were plugged in, in this little AV booth that looked like a coat locker. It was a old-as sound system, like on the mixing desk there was knobs missing, plus a big-arse hole in one place they’d just Sellotaped some newspaper over, and there wasn’t even a digital projector – they had a god damn slide projector, G, like from the Stone Age. I was prepared to look around pretty thorough for electronics to boost, but this? I’d be losing money if I transported this outta here. The labels on each of the buttons were written with a label maker, for fuck’s sake.

I started bundling the extension cords and tried to put back all the knobs I knocked off the mixing desk and I done that for about 10 minutes before I yelled out to the pastor, ‘Oi, cuz. I mean, scuse me, sir: you need a new PA system, bad. How old’s this fuckin thing?’

Pastor patted the mixing desk. ‘You mean Momo.’ He pointed to the Momo tag on it. Momo’s this German brand that used to mean something. ‘Momo’s been here as long as I have, son. You wouldn’t believe the insurance premiums on these things!’

Premium sounded good. Everything classy and expensive’s called premium, like the Premium Whopper at BK. ‘Yeah, looks like it could start a fire. Fuses are all fucked.’

'No fire yet, thank God. She's irreplaceable, Momo is, my son.'

Son. *Yeah, old faggot*, I thought. *Get all affection-y on me. Write me into your fuckin will.*

He gave me a staple gun and a stepladder to staple the paper onto the carpeted walls, but when the good staples ran out, Pastor handed me a ordinary stapler. God damn broke-arse church.

While I was on top of the stepladder, I looked out the window and got such a epic fright I had to clutch the windowsill. I could see cops patrolling the lawn like sharks – two of them. I ducked down right away, the ladder shifted, then just as I was about to fall, the Pastor hugged my ladder.

'You saved my arse, sir,' I told him, stepping down. 'I mean pastor. Reverend?'

'Paulo's my name,' he went. His face looked amused, but he didn't actually go through with the laugh. 'So – cords corded, paper paped. Shall we call it a day?'

I didn't know what the fuck that meant. Sounded like some shit a nine-to-fiver would say to ya. 'It's a day, I guess... Oi, any buses come round here soon?'

'I'd expect the next bus at eight.'

'Aiight. Later.'

'Eight tomorrow, son. Morning bus. No worries this end if you'd like to sleep here,' he went, 'We have dormitories.'

I puffed my cheeks and scratched my armpits. 'Whatever.'

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I had some good sleep-ins and some late nights and used tonnes of wifi on my phone and I had the whole dorms to myself. Breakfast was mostly pretty dumb but they had this rule about buying real Just Juice so I lived off OJ, pretty much. The old ladies who emerged from the little back offices

and the play room acted like I was their long-lost grandson and shit. We'd put up the crêpe paper 'cause we were putting on a baptism, and the baptism was fuckin gay. It was a alright-sized gathering of people, with peeps in the kitchen, peeps in a couple of the pews, but I just couldn't get over how budget the place was. I had all the lights on ready to go and I was standing in the AV booth chuckin some beats through the speakers, 'cept out of the eight pairs of speakers fixed at every corner of the massive-arse auditorium, only three of them still worked. People streamed in for 10 minutes, and soon enough 20 peeps were standin round the pulpit, and I was like Sweet as, got a crowd comin in, they'll chuck their handbags into the cloak room for me, except they didn't. They stood there, clutching their purses, with their backs to me. They weren't even all members of the family of the baby that was getting dunked. The baby was like Papua New Guinean or Zimbabwinese or some weird kind of black, so there were these three tropical lookin peeps with cornrows for hair, and then like six Asians, plus Pastor Paulo and his old white bitches.

Don't get me wrong, the peeps all looked happy, dunking their baby and taking turns reading Bible verses through a microphone that crackled and clicked while the big pastor shook endless hands with his big paws and kissed all the women's cheeks, but as I looked round for money, I thought: this church here's on life support. I'll bet that's why the man upstairs sent me here, actually. Someone with balls to empty the till and pull the plug.

God must've told the Pastor I's thinkin that very thought, 'cause the Pastor came over to the sound booth and he patted it and went, 'Momo's on her last legs.' I checked out the tats on his hands. There were some little crosses on his fingers, some letters and some moons and Nazi signs, plus a

spiderweb that the Rolex on his left wrist was covering up. Pastor Paulo had done time, I could tell.

‘Time to buy a new Momo then. My cousin can get you something hot for –’

‘Oh, I’ve had quotes from Blaupunkt to Sony to Bose, don’t get me wrong,’ Pastor Paulo went, drumming his thick tattooed fingers on Momo. ‘If we had the \$100,000 needed... my Lord, the services we could deliver.’ He shook his head, like he’d just seen a real brutal car crash. ‘Ah well. We’re all grateful for Momo. Now, my son: on with the show.’

‘You’re the boss,’ I went, putting the lyrics for *Joy to the World* into the slide projector. ‘On with the show.’

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The old ladies, with their obviously dyed hair and their legs covered in blue veins, were there every day, making tea, polishing tables, photocopying hymns typed out in shitty old fonts. They had breaks for cupsa tea every 90 minutes and they put THEIR OWN fuckin money into a donation box each time they ate a Superwine biscuit – like, basically they paid themselves to eat.

I went out on a mission with six old church ladies to buy ‘supplies’ in the van. Going on a mission was cool; bullshitting me about the amount of supplies we were gonna load up on was NOT cool. They shoulda said they were going to buy ‘supply,’ single, ’cause it turned out we were just going to get tape. I made lame-arse small talk like What’s your name? and Did you grow up here? and shit but they didn’t ask that much about me, they said the Pastor had told ’em everything already. As I grilled them, I wanted to hear the word Treasurer. I wanted to hear Accountant. I wanted one of them to go, ‘Son, my role is to put all the money in the safe at the end of each Sunday sermon, and that safe’s combination is Left-43, Right-21, Left 37.’ Then I’d reach over, grab the

steering wheel and roll the van over, kill everyone, kick the windscreen out, jog back to the church. You get played; I get paid.

Instead, we drove 10 kays below the speed limit, losing speed on every corner, and they told me each of their roles at the church. One old lady ran the second-hand shop, selling stinky old wool jerseys. Another lady's job was bringing in the newspaper. Three ladies said they printed the sermon together and I wanted to ask if it took eight of them to screw in a fuckin lightbulb. We got to Hammer Hardware and I felt that nervous tingle in my pee-hole, y'know, 'cause I'd stolen gazillions of things from Hammer Hardware before. I was about to go undercover as a straighto. The ladies gave me a 20 and arksed me to buy the church a roll of electrical tape. There was a security guard, and I almost ducked and pulled my hood over my head, then I paused and thought, Nah. I look respectable. I'm associated with old ladies in nice dresses. No caps, no track pants, no jandals. Patience, bro.

I got this real premium electrical tape that's good for tying people's hands behind their back if you ever need to do that and I came back to the van with the change making noises in my pocket and handed over the electrical tape and the ladies thanked me about a million times and I pushed the change in fronta the face of Penelope, the woman driving, and she stopped the van – like actually fully took the keys out – and it took her about six minutes for the accountant lady, Sophia, to put the coins back in the red-lidded Tupperware container. I wanted to seriously scream. It would take weeks to make any money off this church. Most places, right, you can score SOMETHING if there's no hard currency. Grocery vouchers if you're helping out the Salvation Army, ketamine if you're volunteering at the dog pound. You can get SIM cards from the lockers of parents of sick kids if you're working at Ronald McDonald House and use the SIMs to get into people's

Amazon accounts and order shit with their credit card usually. Fuck, if there's no vouchers or SIM cards at a place, you go into the toilets, find taps that are made of that orangey metal, brass or copper or bronze or whatever, and boost those. But this fuckin church was a desert island. Even the walls were too rotted to sell for firewood.

There was a service the next Sunday and barely more peeps than the Baptism came along – 40 peeps spread across 200 seats, I think I counted, sitting in my AV booth hating everyone. A wedding happened, and Pastor Paulo read out some real powerful words that'd been handwritten on scrap cardboard to save money 'cause they didn't have printer paper. They held something called a Children's Day and bro, it was closer to one single child than lots of children. I think I counted seven kids running round, chasing the lollies the Pastor threw on the lawn. Not even a square, even, round 10 children – just seven, and some of them had Downs's syndrome, so they didn't even count. Plus, the lollies were breath mints.

I'd never been undercover this long. I was amping for payday. I stared at Pastor Paulo's meaty hands and fantasised about hacking the left one off and boosting his Rolex. I stomped the floorboards all through the church till I heard what had to be a trapdoor leading down to a cellar full of gemstones and suits of silver armour, 'cept all that was down there was heaps of coat hangers and a box of instruction booklets for the Momo. I searched the cleaning cupboard for expensive mops, or some of that Bugbuster concentrated cleaner that retails for \$50 a litre that they let you get a refund on without a receipt. No petrol vouchers in the office, no jewels, no chequebooks, no paint. No donations in the donation box. I took breaks in the kitchen and drank, like, six glasses of Just Juice in a row just to cost them some money. A

big score was definitely comin. I just had to think of what it was.

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The so-called youth group had a disco. Each youngsta brought a friend so they managed to scrape 14 kids together. Only about two and a half girls looked fuckable, and they all had freaky mutations. The half-a-girl was this bitch in a wheelchair with a real nice rack up top and a real innocent face, but obviously only half of her was worth lookin at.

Puttin on the disco almost broke me. I would've robbed the diabetic kids' insulin if I knew anyone that'd buy it. Doing the lighting, I almost got electrocuted from the sparking, unreliable Momo. I hung some little bunting flags, glued lolly wrappers on a globe to make a disco ball, and I got asked to put on a all-Boney M playlist. I stood in the back of the place in the darkness. Even the old ladies came out on the floorboards and boogied. I shot them all down with lasers from my eyes. I could feel ulcers brewing in my mouth.

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On about my tenth day workin there, the po-po knocked on the door. I was like, 'What can I do for you, officer?' as I held open the ranch slider, my voice soundin like a robot. The po-po looked over my head, callin out for Big Paulo. They did this loud, rough handshake like as if they knew each other. I heard them start talking about burglar-proofin the place. I wanted to bust my guts laughin right there. Fuckin dumb cunts didn't even know they had a criminal mastermind in the building! They talked about insurance being part of burglary protection while I loaded the dishwasher, still keepin my sanding mask and goggles on, one ear cocked towards the big men. Paulo was sayin something about just barely keepin up

with the contents insurance and I was thinkin, Bro, honestly: pay for a wrecking ball and start over.

When Porky Po-Po waddled his curly tail back to his pigmobile, Pastor Paulo came over and leaned on the canteen bench. I slid the wooden curtain aside to let the man speak. He sighed and went on this sorta sermon about how all his troubles started with burglaries back in the day and I was like ‘Ehhh?’ Pastor Paulo wasn’t fazed, he seemed to have a bit of a sermon prepared. He started talkin ’bout how he used to be a thug, how he bashed his stepdad, how he rolled with this clique, how he used to graffiti tombstones, how he used to throw bottles at cop cars, and heaps of stealing, he reckoned he used to nick licence plates all day long and fill up 40 cars a day at 40 different gas stations for the presidents of all these gangs with faggy old school names like The Roaring Forties. I wanted to get his stats, like how many people he shanked, how many old-school ho’s he tricked out, but I think his purpose was to warn me against any of my bros getting me into stealing shit, so I adjusted my fake specs and nodded and bowed my head a little bit to make it look like I’s listening real intently and told him I’s lucky he’d rescued me from the route I was heading down.

‘Praise God,’ he went, bending his heavy brow into a smile.

‘Totes,’ I went.

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On day 12, as they had their 9.55am cuppa tea and wine bikkies, they started talkin about what Porky Pig had told Pastor Paulo, about the hunt for someone that’d ripped off Franklin Congregational. They reckoned the ‘thief’ was a dude with ratty sorta moustache, short and skinny, and I wanted to yell out, like Oi – first off, I’m not skinny. Second-off, I’m not

short, I'm actually a centimetre over the national average (if you're in Thailand). They didn't say nothing 'bout the epic Yakuza-style tat I've got on my back that shoulda been the main way peeps described me. I seriously wanted to rip my shirt off and show them the future of organised crime. Yeah my tat was only a goldfish but I'd get it expanded once I got paid.

I was getting rid of all the spam in the church's inbox (and looking for credit card deets) when Pastor Paulo told me he had to go into town to meet with this couple who wanted to hold their wedding here at the church. The church would get, like, a \$500 donation. Paulo reckoned that would cover next month's insurance.

Pastor Paulo went out and stood there waiting for the bus to go and meet with strangers, and all the staff went out to the kerb too. They'd chose the bus over the van 'cause they didn't have enough money to update the van's rego and they didn't wanna get pulled over and cop a big fine. Pussy-arse old idiots. They left me in charge at 11.20am on a Saturday. It felt buzzy. I called out, saw my voice shake the crêpe papered walls. I plugged my phone into the sound system but couldn't get it to recognise my device. Fuck it. On with the plan.

I stood on the pulpit, put my hands together and shook 'em up towards the Big Guy in the Sky.

'Shot, God,' I muttered. It wasn't Saturday after all. It was Pay Day.

The Momo mixing console was not as deep as you'd think. After I got the screws out, all it amounted to was a extra-heavy console and keyboard, maybe 30kgs. Hopefully the old-school components would have some copper and gold in 'em. I lugged it out to the van, found the keys under the front door mat (nice hiding place, faggots), came inside and took one last look around. When I started workin this joint, there'd been three working speakers remaining on the wall.

Since then, two had stopped working. No one would buy one speaker off me, but the mixing console? Four hundred bucks, I reckoned. Maybe five.

I shunted the Momo onto a trolley, loaded the van up, tucked a big-arse bottle of Just Juice down my pants, and drove up to my fave scrapyard in Mangere. It's got no name or nothing, you just recognise it 'cause you can see over the chain-link fence the mountains of scrap with blue tarps draped over them. Monty's dogs chased the van and tried to nip me as I stepped out. The Momo was really too wide and bulky to move around so I begged Mighty Monty to come out to the van, and to lock his dogs up too. Monty chucked his Mob jacket on – he always puts it on when he goes outside, even if it's just to have a smoke – and opened the back doors of the van.

'There she blows,' I went. Fools get played, I get paid.

Monty squinted, shoved me aside, got in the van and crouched over the Momo a like CSI forensics motherfucker. 'She blows, alright,' he went, and spat on the floor. I didn't appreciate him spittin on my van, but I couldn't say nothing. 'Thought you said she had copper.'

'She does. Peep this.' I crawled in, getting Mighty Monty's spit on my knee. I waggled some of the orange wire. 'Shitloads a copper.'

'Don't you know the difference between fuckin copper and fuckin brass, shithead?'

I wanted to say Don't get all accurate on me, but my second phone went off – the gangsta line.

'Hold up, business call,' I told Monty. Hopefully saying 'Business call' would make me seem like some important, exclusive trader dude. He'd fuck me up if I wasted his time.

I pressed the green button on my phone. 'Who's this?' 'Just a quick call to express my thanks,' went the voice. Pastor Paulo. 'This line's not for... you.'

‘I promise I won’t hold you up,’ he went, and I think I could hear his lips bending into a smile. And that big gangsta forehead. ‘Well, it took a little bit of paperwork, but the Lord has provided. Everyone is rapt with the new sound system. I take it you’re getting some value out of dear Momo?’

‘You dirty mother— ’

‘Two hundred thousand dollars, to answer your next question, not including the policy covering the van. If you’d like to see our new equipment, we would love to have you back. We’re expecting quite a few more on Sundays, what with our new A.V. system to bring us a quality of sound which can only be described as heavensent.’

Monty slammed the van doors and said, ‘Get this piece of shit outta here, it’s hot as fuck. Why would ya nick a van that says CHURCH on the fuckin side of it, ya fuckin Mongoloid?’ Monty stuck his fingers in his mouth and whistled. His dogs erupted in a cloud of dust and came straight for me.

‘Thanks again, from the bottom of my heart,’ Pastor Paulo said into my ear. ‘Buh-bye, son.’