

RULES OF THE GAME

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SETTING

The background of the stage is divided by a wall to form two "rooms." In one room, there is a table with a black tablecloth, a shot glass and a bottle of wine. The room is well lit and has white wallpaper. In the other room is a wooden table, and on it an old radio and a pile of papers. The wallpaper for this room is a drained blue colour, and the light shining on it is flickering.

CHARACTERS

TINY: A small, scrawny, composed and educated young man who has entered politics in a corrupt country. He is professional and eloquent.

BIGGIE: The older and larger brother of Tiny. He is rugged and comes off as uneducated, inarticulate with his words and unprofessional in his demeanor.

ASSISTANT: Tiny's professional, obedient assistant, who is observant yet quiet about what happens around her.

AT RISE

TINY and his ASSISTANT are standing in the foreground of the stage. TINY is dressed in a white dinner suit with a black bowtie and slim black pants. His hair is excessively stylised, and he carries himself with a sense of pride that comes with believing you are self-made. His ASSISTANT is dressed in a short black skirt and a white dress shirt. The two are inspecting articles of clothing, TINY a comically large, lavish ring and his ASSISTANT a red leather jacket, when the ASSISTANT realises the audience's presence.

ASSISTANT

(turning towards the audience, surprised)

Pardon me! I did not realise we had an audience.

(She steps forward while TINY continues to inspect his ring distractedly)

Hello prospective players, welcome to the 3rd World, the wealthy's most popular piece of entertainment. With an active player base of 16 million, Zimbabwe is one of the most captivating renditions of a third world country at least, that is for the spectators. Developing metagame everything thrilling, and despite its perceived simplicity at first glance, has levels of complexity and depth which can challenge even the most experienced of players. Witness how a simple rule of the game, pay money to get goods, creates challenges and conflict between two players.

(Suddenly, BIGGIE storms onto the stage, screaming, and tackles TINY. They scuffle for a few minutes, pulling at each other's clothes)

Okay that's enough boys!

(ASSISTANT separates the two combatants. Though they stand in the foreground of the stage, the wall in the background seems to separate them. They stare at each other furiously, panged with a sense of regret and guilt only outweighed by their contempt for one another. The audience gets their first still view of BIGGIE - he is dressed in a ripped blue collared shirt, two sizes too big for him, and mud khaki shorts)

BIGGIE

How could you? Honestly, to your own family? You're a monster!

TINY

(With a calm, quiet anger)

You know fully well that I did nothing wrong.

BIGGIE

You're not the same little seven year old who doesn't know right from wrong.
You know what you did!

(Pointing at the ASSISTANT's red jacket)

Buying the clothes off your aunty's back!

(Pointing at TINY's ring, screaming)

Bargaining for her wedding ring, the ring of a widowed single mother! Your own blood no less!

TINY

She needed the money. I gave her the money. Simple.

BIGGIE

Nonsense! All that space in that vacant mansion and you couldn't find the room in your soulless heart to give your family, your own blood, some cash out of good will. The same selfish brat who'd eat all the food in the fridge would grow up to be a shadow of a man who forsakes his own family. I should've seen it coming!

TINY

(Raising his voice)

You really have the audacity to call me selfish? Apologies, I never knew that you chasing a fever dream of becoming a Hollywood actor was an act of selflessness. You were the one who was supposed to get a real job and put food on the table, put money into our mother's hands. How dare you get angry at me? Just because I took the responsibility of the eldest son of the household.

BIGGIE

There's a poetry competition I'm entering. If I win it, I can make connections and-

TINY

Apa hauna cash.

ASSISTANT

(aside)

Rule number two: if you don't have any money, you're not allowed to have an opinion or speak.

BIGGIE

And how about all that cash you have, huh? Is aunty gonna be chased down by some mobsters or drug dealers? How much blood money did you buy that ring for?

TINY

I am still yet to see your sonnets and stanzas put food on the table.

BIGGIE

I'd rather be broke with honest stanzas and sonnets than steal from the poor and give to the rich like a deluded Robin Hood.

TINY

I am a civil servant.

BIGGIE

You're a con artist!

TINY

(Angrily shouting)

No! I am my family's provider. You are a failed caretaker, and certainly no brother to me!

(A red light suddenly shines on the actors as the brothers stare at each other with chests held high. The ASSISTANT moves between them and faces the audience)

ASSISTANT

Rule number three: no teams allowed.

(TINY storms off into the white “room” and BIGGIE runs to the blue room. The red light dims and eventually fades. The two brothers remain in the background of the stage for the rest of the play, while the ASSISTANT moves to the border of each room depending on which character is speaking.)

MUSIC CUE #01: HOW MUCH A DOLLAR COST [TO PIMP A BUTTERFLY - KENDRICK LAMAR]

The music plays in the foreground until the line “How much a dollar really cost”, after which the music fades into the background)

TINY

(Pouring wine into a shot glass and speaking to the audience)

It was not my fault you know. We had the same opportunities, I just made the correct plays. I got the lucky dice rolls, I drew the right cards, concealed my hand, put on a poker face, and now I finally find myself with

(gestures around)

a full house. I won, I beat....

(TINY takes a shot of wine and begins pouring another)

My father always said “Iwe neni, tine basa” - “You and I have work to do.” I thought he and I would work through any challenge together. But then he passed on and- and I realised it was me versus the world. I was, am, and will always be alone: no father, no friends, no aunty, and certainly no day dreaming, poetry writing, ignorant, romanticist Biggie. I played the game all by myself, and I won.

(Downs another shot)

Maybe I should’ve told aunty that all the rare currency I traded for her stuff becomes useless tomorrow morning.

(TINY grabs the bottle of wine and downs the entire thing. As he drinks he begins to sway, and splashes spill onto his dinner suit. TINY starts to hiccup and giggle)

Yeah, this is definitely what winning feels like.

*(TINY claps his hands twice and the light in his room switches off.
A thud followed by the sound of breaking glass is heard. "How Much
a Dollar Cost" is cut off as soon as the crash is heard.*

*MUSIC CUE #02: UNDER PRESSURE (Verse 3) [UNDER
PRESSURE - LOGIC]*

*Song starts from the third verse, and plays in the foreground until
the line "Please leave a message after the tone", after which the music
fades into the background)*

BIGGIE

(Speaking into the phone whilst lying on the floor)

Hey Tiny. I thought I should read you the poem I'm sending in. Remember,
for that poetry competition I mentioned, before we... Y'know, I have a feeling
that this is the one that will go viral, kick off my career, and help me provide
for you guys. You inspired it... Let me stop talking and just let you hear it.

*(He sings in a tone that becomes more sad and defeated as the poem
progresses)*

*I found out a dollar costs character,
Which makes sense given the value of a dollar.
Integrity, character and heart are irreplaceable,
Yet you being so young and smart and ambitious, loving a good challenge
Replaced them.
Deceit, corruption, greed and evil -
In these you seem to be a scholar.
You realised character only costs a dollar
and coming from rags, slums and a house with no money
how could you not be economical with the truth?
The winning path is the one you choose
while I foolishly stick to those irreplaceable things
and lose and lose and lose and lose...*

Did you get any of that? Are you still there? Hello? Stupid phone, let me call
him again.

*(He struggles with his phone as the ASSISTANT moves forward and
faces the audience)*

ASSISTANT

Last rule, like in any game of monopoly or a game where money is involved, where there must be losers: when you go bankrupt, you...

(She shakes her head in despair and faces BIGGIE)

You have insufficient credit to make this call.

BIGGIE

Oh.

*(The light in BIGGIE's room stops flickering and switches off.
BLACKOUT)*