

PAY FOR PLAY

Written by

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FADE IN ON:

A black PC screen powers on. Words type across the void:

2027: Due to a trend towards privatization, the Invisible Hand has taken control. The Federal Government's withdrawn from all social services. Military expansion is its only jurisdiction now.

Everything else is Pay for Play: Thanks to the digial revolution, money and credit cards are history. Instead, bank balances are accessed via mandatory implants in each person's wrist. The result: an efficient and fair meritocracy. At least, so we think.

INT. CORPORATE OFFICE - JOSE'S CUBE - EVENING

Fingers fly across a bluetooth keyboard. YELLOW digits pulse beneath the skin of one tan wrist.

The computer's booted and fully loaded now. Soft brown eyes stare at the screen. Which displays:

Enough numbers to make one's head explode. The eyes squint. Premature wrinkles make them look fatigued.

Eyes belonging to JOSE ESQUALES (24). His well pressed suit: corporate but cheap. He's got nothing close to designer wear - these are duds dug from the bottom of some clearance bin.

His office: expensive, but claustrobically small. Just enough room for a desk and a filing cabinet. Not much else at all.

Jose picks up a paper cup. The logo reads: *Hy-Test Espresso* on the side.

As Jose sips, the light on his wrist blinks. A pop-up DIGITAL CLOCK reflects the time.

His other hand intentionally hugs the keyboard, Jose leans over; peeks under his desk.

At an aluminum WATER BOTTLE with an EWM logo. Jose's "coffee hand" drifts towards his fly.

In need of relief, he prepares to unzip. Until:

A gel slicked head pops in his door. Confident and platinum blond KEVIN (25).

KEVIN

Sissy-foos, it's 7PM! Whatcha still doin' here?

Jose jumps. His bladder no longer the focus, he lets go.

JOSE
(jokes back)
The name's Jose, not "Sissy".
Though I know you get confused.

A second head pops in: ROB (23). These corporate clones are fashion plates: they put Jose's bargain-bin style to shame.

Kevin and Rob's wrist display implanted scanners, too. Though theirs glow an emerald green.

ROB
Tiger, here's the 411. Us boys are heading for food and drinks at *The Publick*. You can't focus while you're starving. Why not ease up on the work for once?

Jose glances from numbers on his PC, to the vastly different ones under his skin.

JOSE
My presentation's due tomorrow morning.

ROB
Dinner's more important. Work can wait.

JOSE
That's easy for you to say. I'm hourly. When you're on clock -

KEVIN
Dad's updating the promotion schedule next month. Soon you'll be exempt; like us!

KEVIN
And until that day, either you're a team player or you're not!

JOSE
Enough with the guilt trip. I'll come out; for a while?

Jose grabs a thread-bare jacket off his designer chair. He steps through the doorway. His wrist clock flashes: PAUSED.

The three disappear down the hall.

KEVIN (V.O.)
You won't regret taking a break.
It's Happy Hour at *Publick* now.

ROB (V.O.)
After five cocktails, they give you
one free on the house!

EXT. EWM LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Behind the trio's shoulders, the wealth of a well-heeled corporation looms. An armed GUARD stands behind an ornate desk. His reflection: mirror-perfect against marble floor.

The three slip on AIR FILTER MASKS. Kevin and Rob's look almost stylish. Jose's: not so much.

A few breaths. They push together through the glass door.

INT. URBAN SIDEWALK - CONTINUOUS

A sea of CORPORATE GRUNTS rush by. Each one's in a panicked rush - their faces also protected by pollution MASKS.

Jose wades into the "stream". Kevin and Rob flank each side.

Like everything else, sidewalk use is pay for play. Jose's implant FLASHES. It adds to his charge, each step he takes.

JOSE
(nervous)
When we will be back?

KEVIN
An hour. Maybe two.

JOSE
That long?!?

ROB
What's the rush, workhorse?

JOSE
Rent's due next week. I can't
afford -

KEVIN
Relax. Let fate and funds come to
you. Life is meant to be lived.
Lighten up and have some fun!

They cross the street. On their left, an unexpected blight:

EXT. HOMELESS CAMP - CONTINUOUS

Halfway down the block, a recessed nook. Taped off from the sidewalk, it's in stark contrast to the rest of the street.

Inside: A huddled group of HOMELESS BUMS. Each sports his own wrist implant. Their numbers hover just over zero, glow red.

Fifteen individuals share a SINGLE MASK. They take turns inhaling, pass it on.

The coworkers approach the camp. Kevin shudders in disgust.

KEVIN

Geezus! Those termites bring property values down more each day.

ROB

When are they gonna drive those eyesores out?

JOSE

Where else would they go?

ROB

Anywhere but here, of course!

One of BUMS wanders towards a wall to urinate. Jose side-eyes him as they pass by.

The homeless man hums. As nature "takes its course", his left foot drifts towards the sidewalk. His wrist BUZZES and flashes an extra charge. The bum jumps back, terrified.

Jose winces. The incident brings to mind a thought:

JOSE

Uh, does Publick have bathrooms?

KEVIN

Dude, of course. They're high style!

JOSE

I mean - as part of the door charge?

ROB

What are you, some kinda socialist?

KEVIN

They can't let slackers use the restroom! At *Publick*, the policy's pay-for-pee.

They approach *Publick's* well guarded door. Jose gulps, trails inside.

INT. PUBLICK BAR - MOMENTS LATER

This place is hopping. BEAUTIFUL PEOPLE occupy every inch.

Jose's wrist FLASHES with the entrance charge. He sneaks a peek at Rob and Kevin. Their implants don't even buzz.

JOSE

Wait: I think there's a glitch.

Rob and Kevin stare blankly. Then Rob's face lights up.

ROB

Nah. We're on the company tab. Like that comic book philosopher said: with heavy titles come great perks. Case in point -

Rob leads Kevin and Jose to a private BOOTH. Gold top. Calf-skin chairs.

JOSE

Wow. Fancy!

KEVIN

Of course. Cream rises to the top. Jose, you first. Sit over there.

The three slide in. A cute waitress (BRENDA) arrives, two colorful drinks already in hand.

BRENDA

Your usual, sirs?

ROB

Don't mind if we do.

Brenda turns to Jose with a practiced smile.

BRENDA

Gentleman: what would you like?

KEVIN

Jose told *me* he wants a lap dance.

Jose's jaw drops. Rob snickers, and punches his arm.

ROB

Dude, don't be so serious. We joke with Brenda all the time.

Jose glances at the menu. The prices for drinks look insane!

JOSE
Er, can I get a water?

BRENDA
Would you prefer Cleveland Spring
or Sweden sourced?

JOSE
How much for the cheaper one?

BRENDA
Not much. Fifty dollars a bottle.

JOSE
(gulps)
On second thought, I'll take tap.

That's not a common request. Brenda frowns.

BRENDA
Leaded or unleaded?

JOSE
What exactly's the difference?

ROB
(snickers)
How quick cancer shows up.

JOSE
No. I mean, the cost?

BRENDA
Filtered is thirty dollars. If you
ask me, a man's health is always
worth the price.

JOSE
Fine. I'll take just one.

Brenda nods, skips off. Rob slips in a butt-swatt as she
does.

JOSE
I thought you were joking about the
lap dance stuff.

KEVIN
Brenda knows we give great tips.
And she's assigned to our booth, so
why not?

The three stare across the table. Awkward silence reigns.
Until: Brenda returns.

She drops off Jose's water, whispers in his ear.

BRENDA

A word to the wise: don't eat the
ice cubes. Filters can only remove
so much!

As she leaves, Jose's wrist flashes with a charge. He stares
helplessly at the delivery cost. Rob grins across the table.

ROB

(sing-song)

I think Brenda liliikkkkeees Jose!

Rob and Kevin raise their cocktails for a toast.

KEVIN

Here's to working hard. And
partying harder!

ROB

And to our comrade Jose leaving the
financial trench - and joining us
in upper management next month!

Glasses clink. Beverages flow. Brenda scurries over, and
refills Kevin and Rob's cocktails. She eyes Jose.

BRENDA

Would you like more?

Jose consults his wrist. His bank account's down to \$1.

JOSE

No thanks. I'll pass.

Brenda shrugs, and whisks away his glass.

...causing Jose's balance to go negative. Table cleaning fee:
thirty bucks! Jose jumps to his feet.

JOSE

I gotta go. Guys, it's been fun.

KEVIN

Man, we literally *just* got here.

ROB

By "go", do you mean bathroom?

JOSE
No: back to the office. Now!

ROB
We haven't even ordered food.

Jose scuttles towards the exit, yells over his shoulder:

JOSE
See you in the morning!

WHACK! He bumps into Brenda, causing her to spill a customer's drink. A CHARGE flashes on HER wrist. "Lost of inventory penalty: \$40."

JOSE
Oh my God. I'm so sorry!

BRENDA
(sulks)
Shit happens. Don't mind me.

Jose gulps, darts out the door. Kevin and Rob exchange looks.

KEVIN
Still think Jose's management material?

ROB
It's not his fault. It's a class thing. The boy was just raised wrong.

KEVIN
With no priorities, it seems.

ROB
Good point. I'll let dad know.

INT. URBAN SIDEWALK - MOMENTS LATER

It gets darker by the second. Jose speed walks past the homeless camp.

His stomach GRUMBLES. The bum from before hears, and throws Jose a CRACKER as he darts by. Both their wrists record the transaction, BUZZ.

JOSE
You didn't have to do that!

BUM
You look hangry, man. Take a bite!

Jose nods and stumbles along, crossing his legs.

BUM

No thanks needed. Just be well!

INT. CORPORATE OFFICE - JOSE'S CUBE - NIGHT

The place is *nearly* deserted. All lights extinguished in the hall. A few sounds of bureaucratic activity emanate from Jose and other workers' cubes.

Jose types like a demon on the keyboard. He stares at the screen - determined to make up for lost time.

Each second doesn't count for much, but the bank balance on his wrist replenishes - digital drip by drip.

He hits Enter. The document saves, shuts down.

Joses' wrist flashes - back to \$1. The numbers change back from red to yellow.

JOSE

About time!

Jose relaxes, then recalls the aluminum pee bottle under his desk. Out of view, he unzips. Liquid trickles as he unloads.

Afterwards, Jose glances around his corporate cell.

JOSE

Another successful project. Score!

He fumbles under his desk again. This time, Jose rolls out:

A CAMPING COT. He unfolds and props it against a wall. Substituting his jacket as a makeshift blanket, Jose lies down with a sigh.

JOSE

Promotions are just next month.
Hang in there, Sissy-fuss.
Things'll get better, soon.

He drifts off. Above Jose hangs a POSTER. Your average inspirational fare: "Hard work Is Its Own Reward. There ain't no such thing as a Free Lunch."

Jose snores. As he sleeps, his wrist adds accruing rental costs. 'Cause sleeping on corporate property ain't cheap.

FINAL FADE OUT: