

# **Playing To Win**

**A thriller in two acts  
by Dave Buchanan**

**Spotlight Publications**

# Playing To Win

CAST (in order of appearance)

**Michael Dunbar**, 23, a student activist

**Patrick Dunbar**, 56, a politician, Michael's father

**Caroline**, 21, Michael's girl-friend

**McTurk**, 40, police sergeant (plainclothes)

**Connelly**, 20s, police constable

**McNair**, 30s, a criminal

ACT 1

*Setting - Michael's tenement flat in Glasgow*

*Time - the near future, mid-summer, 12.30 p.m.*

ACT 2

*The same, two days later, mid-morning*

## Plot Summary

This is a political thriller about an estranged father and son, Patrick and Michael Dunbar, one a successful politician and the other a student activist. After an apparently chance meeting Patrick attempts a reconciliation with Michael, but there is a hidden agenda - for both of them. Patrick has Michael arrested, but when Michael reveals that he (Michael) has incriminating evidence against his father, Patrick releases him.

In the second act Patrick attempts to remove the evidence from Michael's flat, but is discovered by Michael. A sinister character, McNair, appears and attempts to blackmail Patrick. Things go horribly wrong when McNair is shot and worse is to follow as the play comes to a gripping and suspenseful end.

Duration: approx. 90 minutes

## Act 1

*The scene is a cheap flat with a door R leading to the outside. There is a TV and hi-fi R with an armchair in front of it. UC is a table with a PC and a couple of chairs. The table is strewn with computer paraphernalia, leaflets and other stationery. On the back wall are two large posters of Che Guevara and Marilyn Monroe, and other smaller posters of various protest movements, such as CND etc. L is a door or exit leading to a kitchen and bedroom. DC is a large settee, and L is another armchair. In front of the settee is a small coffee table, and to R and L of it two small beanbags. On the table is a chess board with the chess pieces set for a game*

*The lights are full on throughout*

*There is a knock on the door, then another, then another*

*Eventually Michael Dunbar emerges from the exit L. He is wearing a sloppy T-shirt, trainers and jeans. His head is shaven and he has two earrings*

**Michael** Okay okay, I'm coming.

*He opens the door to reveal Patrick Dunbar, his father, dressed in well-cut trousers and a black leather jacket*

*For a moment they stare at each other*

**Michael** Hi Dad.

**Patrick** Hello Mike.

**Michael** You found me then.

**Patrick** Yes. Took a long time. You covered your tracks pretty well.

**Michael** It's not hard to do. If you really want anonymity. And I wanted it pretty badly.

*There is another pause*

**Patrick** Can I come in?

**Michael** Sure. Why not? Now that you're here. Come in and sit down. Can I get you a coffee?

**Patrick** Sure. Why not?

*Michael exits L while Patrick strolls around the flat*

*(Off)* Milk and two sugars?

**Patrick** Aye. You remembered.

**Michael** *(off)* Coming right up.

*Patrick continues to stroll as Michael returns presently*

The kettle's on.

**Patrick** Just admiring your artwork. I see you still play chess.

**Michael** Occasionally.

*They both sit on the settee*

So how did you find me?

**Patrick** Hired a private eye.

**Michael** Good God! They don't come cheap.

**Patrick** Five K. Took them a month. Their task wasn't made easier by the fact that you've changed your name. More than once, according to the report.

**Michael** Well it's your democratic right, isn't it?

**Patrick** It's got nothing to do with democracy. You can change your name whether you're an Afghan or

an Abo. Or a citizen of the People's Republic. Criminals do it all the time.  
**Michael** I'll just get the coffee. *(He exits)*

*Patrick strolls around looking at the posters*

*Eventually Michael reappears with two mugs of coffee*

**Patrick** Interesting combination.

**Michael** *(handing him the mug and sitting)* What?

**Patrick** Marilyn and Che Guevara.

**Michael** Che?

**Patrick** *(smiling)* Fawlty Towers?

**Michael** Not my era. I'm an eighties child, remember?

**Patrick** More *The Two Ronnies* than *Morecambe and Wise*?

**Michael** No. Ben Elton was more my scene.

**Patrick** Aha. The arch basher of the establishment. You realise of course that he's become part of the establishment now.

**Michael** Meaning?

**Patrick** That we all go through this phase. Call it reaction. Kicking against the traces. You're going through it. You'll come out of it. Once you get the taste of filthy lucre. The attractions of a regular job and an agreeable lifestyle will far outweigh this ... squalor. I mean look at it. Look at you. How do you live? Pay your bills? Let me guess. You work the system. The welfare system. You've got it all worked out. Make the state pay for your lifestyle and all your activities. Because they owe you. So you've got it made. You destroy the fabric of the state and its institutions for six days of the week, and collect your welfare cheque on Thursday. It's beautiful in its sheer simplicity. A perfect way of screwing the state.

*Michael rises and walks downstage*

**Michael** That was quite a speech. But you're wrong. I'm a paid secretary of a large organisation.

**Patrick** Eco Warriors Inc.? How much do they pay you?

**Michael** Enough. Probably a tenth of what you earn. But it's honestly earned.

**Patrick** Meaning?

**Michael** Nothing. So. You reckon you've got me sussed out then? From your detective's report. You must even know my new identity.

**Patrick** You call yourself Michael X. What was wrong with Michael Dunbar?

**Michael** Michael DeVere Dunbar. What do you need a middle name for? Especially a pretentious one like DeVere?

**Patrick** It was one of our family names. It was no big deal.

**Michael** Precisely. The same goes for the surname. What's the point?

**Patrick** It's an indication of your roots. Something to be proud of. Most people are.

**Michael** You may be, Dad. - why am I calling you Dad? I think I'll maybe start calling you Patrick. Or maybe just Dunbar.

**Patrick** *(irritated)* Call me what you damn well please! In most families "Dad" is a term of affection and respect.

**Michael** Clear grounds for not using it then, eh Patrick?

**Patrick** *(rising)* Look what is it with you, Mike? If you want to deny your family, your education, your whole cultural background - go right ahead!

**Michael** You got it on one, Patrick. I prefer the word "abjure".

**Patrick** Abjure?

**Michael** "To renounce on oath or solemnly, to recant, to repudiate." I looked it up.

**Patrick** You sad little bastard!

**Michael** Aha, the truth emerges! So you never did marry my mother after all.

*They are interrupted by the musical tones of a mobile phone*

Excuse me.

*He goes to the table and picks up the phone while Patrick slumps in the armchair DL*

Hi honey ... yes, fine, how are you ... I've got a visitor. My father ... Yeh, he finally caught up with us ... Oh we're just swapping pleasantries ... Well you can meet him if you want to ... I've no idea ... Okay, you decide ... when, about half an hour? Okay, see you then ... Love you. Bye.

*He switches off and sits on the settee. There is a pause*

That was Caroline.

**Patrick** Your partner?

**Michael** She's my wife. She's bringing back a curry. There'll be enough for three. If you wish to partake.

**Patrick** That's an invitation I can't refuse. How long have you -

**Michael** Been living with her? Over a year now. Met her at a Monopoly demo.

**Patrick** Monopoly? Oh of course. City locations renamed according to the board. Princes Street's Piccadilly and Waverley's Euston Station.

**Michael** Well anyway it was in Glasgow and we were demoing outside a conglomerate.

**Patrick** Conglomerate, eh? The convenient name for your perceived enemies. Which one was it? McDonald's? Burger King? Toys R Us? No, it would be McDonald's, wouldn't it? The biggest and handiest target.

**Michael** If you say so. We all sat down together and handcuffed each other.

**Patrick** And you were handcuffed to Caroline?

**Michael** Exactly. We were handcuffed, arrested and put in the same cell overnight.

**Patrick** Very romantic.

**Michael** It was rather. We were released next day, we had a coffee and before you could say Jack Robinson, Bob's your uncle!

**Patrick** You've been an item ever since. Is she your chess partner?

**Michael** Yes. She's picking it up quick. Do you still play?

**Patrick** Not really. (*Gesturing to the chess board*) Fancy a game?

**Michael** Why not?

*They both get up*

If you can lower yourself to beanbags.

**Patrick** No problem.

*They sit on the beanbags*

**Michael** You look pretty fit. Do you still work out?

**Patrick** Of course.

**Michael** (*producing a coin*) Call.

**Patrick** Heads.

**Michael** It is heads.

*He turns the board round*

*They make their opening moves during the next few speeches*

**Patrick** Why Marilyn?

**Michael** What?

**Patrick** I can understand Che Guevara, but Marilyn? A Hollywood sex-goddess?

**Michael** (*shrugging his shoulders*) Universal icon of beauty and free spirit.

**Patrick** Free spirit? She was a junkie and Presidential slag who died of an overdose when Kennedy dumped her.

**Michael** Or an innocent, victimised by the system? Your move.

*They play a few rapid moves*

*Then Patrick sits back, reflecting*

**Patrick** Fischer against Spassky?

**Michael** What?

**Patrick** That move of yours. Reminiscent of Game 4 in Reykjavik.

**Michael** I thought it was my own.

**Patrick** It ends in a draw.

**Michael** (*after a pause*) I remember the first time I beat you. August 25th 1995. I marked it in my diary. "Beat the old man today. Beat him, beat him, beat him!" I was thirteen years old.

**Patrick** I don't remember that you celebrated very much.

**Michael** Not in your presence. I was cool. But later I went round to Kenny's house and we celebrated with some cans. I was elated! And I was pissed, and I was sick, and I had the daddy of all hangovers the next day. But it was worth it.

*A pause, as they stare at the board*

You're right. It's a draw. (*He gets up*) Do you mind if I check my email?

**Patrick** Go ahead.

*Michael goes over to the table and sits down at the PC*

*He makes a few clicks with the mouse*

**Michael** By the way, Caroline's expecting our first child in September.

**Patrick** (*rising*) Congratulations. That'll be my first grandchild.

**Michael** I suppose so.

**Patrick** But I won't be invited to the christening.

**Michael** Well there won't be a christening, but whatever celebration there is, you won't be invited.

**Patrick** Thanks. (*Sitting down at the armchair R*)

Your mother will be devastated.

**Michael** How is she?

**Patrick** Missing you.

**Michael** Come on, Patrick, not the tug-the-heartstrings bit! It won't work. You see, me and well, I should be consistent and call her Helen now, were never very close.

**Patrick** She's not a well person.

**Michael** What do you mean?

**Patrick** When you opted out and disappeared, Helen took an overdose. And then when Erica left, she took another.

**Michael** How is she now?

**Patrick** She suffers from severe depression. But with medication she is - passable.

**Michael** (*coldly*) What Helen really needs, of course, is to be away from you.

**Patrick** What the devil do you mean?

*Michael switches off the PC and comes down C*

**Michael** I mean, Patrick, that her spirit was broken years before I left. And it all stemmed from living with you. I was lucky. I was able to escape. She was caught, like a trapped animal. The collapse was inevitable. I saw it coming.

**Patrick** So you are unmoved by your mother's plight?

**Michael** Of course I'm moved. I just don't think it would serve any purpose me going to see her.

*There is a pause*

*(Sitting on the settee)* Then there's my sister Erica. She got out in time. First offer she got and she was off to the Antipodes. And not just Australia. That's becoming too accessible. New Zealand for God's sake! As far away from you as she could get. Believe me she does not want a visit from you.

*Patrick looks down at his mug and takes out a packet of cigarettes*

**Patrick** Do you mind if I -

**Michael** Yes I do mind. Especially with Caroline pregnant.

**Patrick** God, you're too good to be bloody true! Don't you have any faults?

**Michael** Go outside if you need the weed.

**Patrick** God bloody almighty.

**Michael** Taking the name of the Lord in vain? And a Kirk elder too, Patrick. That's a laugh.

**Patrick** All right I'm a hypocrite. So what? I'm not the first and I won't be the last. *(Looking at his mug)* Don't you have anything stronger than this?

**Michael** Finding it hard going are you, Patrick? I might just have some *usquebaugh*. Be back.

*He exits into the kitchen*

*Patrick quickly takes out a mobile phone and dials a number*

**Patrick** McTurk? Where are you? ... Good. Right, I want you to be ready for the snatch anytime now ... About fifteen, twenty minutes .. Let's synchronise. I've got 12.40 precisely now. Make your move at 1 o'clock. Okay, Roger and out.

*He switches off just as Michael comes in with two glasses of whisky and a bottle. He puts the bottle on the table, hands one of the glasses to Patrick and they sit down on the settee*

**Michael** *Slainte.*

**Patrick** Here's to the next generation.

**Michael** I'll drink to that.

**Patrick** *(taking a large swig)* I was needing that. Now, what shall we talk about?

**Michael** How about your purpose in coming here?

**Patrick** I suppose the idea was to achieve some kind of reconciliation.

**Michael** You really think there's a chance of that? After what's been said?

**Patrick** I'm a born optimist. Plus, I think that blood ties are very strong and I still think despite what you said that you'll want to see Helen. She's your mother, dammit!

**Michael** And you're my father, dammit!

*Pause*

You see, Patrick, you're the problem, not Helen. You're the reason I opted out. The sole reason.

**Patrick** Is this the big moment then?

**Michael** What?

**Patrick** The moment when you tell me why you walked out of my life. And your mother's. The big justification.

**Michael** Well I suppose I owe you some kind of explanation. To begin with -

**Patrick** Is this going to take some time?

**Michael** And if it does?

**Patrick** I could do with another drink. Can I -

**Michael** Help yourself.

*Patrick goes over to the table for the bottle and brings it over to the settee*

**Patrick** Fire away.