



JACKEE BUDESTA BATANDA

TATA MA CHANCE: The day's carrier waits at the vehicle while the "China Man" counts the money and gives the winning number; a player waits to hear the outcome

Dreaming of a new Jerusalem

FAITH (not her real name) is in her 20s, tall and slender. She wears a red T-shirt. A checked cotton skirt peeps out from under the threadbare maroon towel wrapped around her waist. Her blue-cloth shoes have seen many washing days.

She carries her 21-month-old daughter in one arm and clutches a phone in her free hand. Faith has lived in Jerusalem, an informal settlement between Boksburg and Germiston, since 2006, but only started playing Fafi last year.

She is one of many. Gloria Azwidohi Ramasunzi, 52, one of the first residents and proprietor of the only crèche in the settlement, says Jerusalem was created in 1998 after the Jordan Mining Company closed.

Ramasunzi came to Jerusalem in May 1998 from Goodhope. "People said Jerusalem had space. So we came and started to build shacks."

The shacks are made of old bricks, iron sheets, car tyres, cardboard and whatever materials the residents come up with. There are salons, a metal furniture shop and spaza shops. There is no electricity.

Many of the women who have no jobs make a little money through gambling. Faith speaks softly when she talks about the Fafi numbers game.

"Fafi or the China Game is about a Chinese girl who used to gamble with black people," she says. Players choose which numbers to gamble based on what they dreamt the night before. A group representative takes the bets in one bag to the "China Man", or "Fafi", as they call him.

"He comes at 12.30pm and at 5pm," says Faith. "We bet on numbers ranging from 1 to 36. He gives a number and each person who wrote the winning number wins."

From memory, she recounts the numbers and their meanings, giving insight into the dreams of those who play:

- 1. King. 2. Monkey. 3. Big Water. 4. Dead.
- 5. Tiger. 6. Cow. 7. Knife. 8. Pregnant woman.
- 9. Hat or blood. 10. Eggs. 11. Small car.
- 12. Dead woman. 13. Big fish. 14. Granny.
- 15. Bitch. 16. Cloth. 17. A beautiful woman.
- 18. Silver money or gold. 19. Girls.
- 20. Cat. 21. Elephant. 22. Big car. 23. Horse.

Fafi will not change their lives, but it helps many SA women make ends meet. *By Jackee Budesta Batanda and Alyne Mugisho*

- 24. Mouth. 25. Big house. 26. Soldier.
- 27. Police. 28. Shoes. 29. Small water. 30. Pastor.
- 31. Fire. 32. Money. 33. Boys. 34. Fees. 35. Hole. 36. Gun."

"When I dream about my father," she says, "I know that when Fafi comes, I will write 1 or 4 or 30. I choose the numbers that represent my dad."

Bets and payouts are limited, she says. "If I bet five bob [50 cents] and my number is the one Fafi says, then I win R14. If I bet with R2, Fafi pays me R56 if I win. The maximum bet is R50 and Fafi then pays R1 500."

When we ask whether she believes playing Fafi will change her life, she laughs shyly. "Fafi will not change my life. Now I am not working, that is why I play, but someday I will find work. Fafi will not change my life."

Faith is the third-born in a family of seven children. With her father dead, her mother's salary as an administrator is not enough to support the family.

"I send around R200 twice a week to my family after I have won Fafi," she says.

Faith completed a national diploma in policing at the Tshwane University of Technology in 2009, but her attempts to find a job have been unsuccessful.

I am not working, that is why I play, but someday I will find work

"I have applied to the Metro Police and SAPS," she says. "I heard about the recent recruitment drive. But in South Africa it is hard if you do not have money or know anyone. I was not taken."

She still has hope. "One day I will become a cop. I don't see myself here. There is no future. Life in the squatter camp is hard. Many women do not work and drink a lot of alcohol."

She rubs her daughter's head. "I don't want to see my child grow up like this."

It is nearing half-past noon, time for the China Man to arrive. Groups of women wait under a tree and near a kiosk. Many carry their children on their backs. It looks like an informal social event. Some head single households, others have partners who do not know that they gamble. Fafi gives them a small sense of financial independence.

"Fafi is an opportunity for us to make money instead of staying in the house," says a woman who won't give her name.

"We cannot rely on our men's money." Another adds: "These men get their money and finish it on alcohol. Sometimes you do not get anything from them. As women, we must have a plan, so we play Fafi to cover some of our needs."

The chitchat ends suddenly as a white bakkie parks across the dirt road. The China Man has come.

The group's representative goes to the bakkie with a bag full of the day's bets, the hopes of more than 50 women wishing to have the day's lucky number.

China Man wears spectacles and appears to be in his 50s, with hair greying at the temples. He wears a black jacket, cream trousers and a white shirt. His colleague, also around 50, wears a leather jacket. She checks the numbers while he counts the money. They stay in the car.

He waves us away after we request an interview. "Ask the community members," he says brusquely. "They are the ones to talk to. I do not have time for that."

The women laugh and heckle him. "Hey China Man, today they have found you. You are always cheating us!"

He whispers the number, hands over the money for the winners and drives off, leaving a cloud of red dust.

The bag carrier returns to the waiting group. Faith smiles. "I did not win," she tells us. "The winning number is 27. It stands for police."

She says she will bet during the second session at 5pm when the China Man returns. She will not stop until she makes more money.

Faith leads us back to her shack, where she talks about getting out of Jerusalem. In colour, she dreams of getting a job or enrolling in nursing school, but her black and white reality is playing Fafi to make ends meet.

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BEHIND THE BULLETPROOF GLASS

A former Fafi operator spoke to Lifestyle about the game

Where did Fafi originate?

As far as I know, it was introduced to the Reef by Chinese miners in the early 1900s, and from there it spread to the rest of South Africa. It grew in popularity as an informal lottery, from the mines to the townships and eventually the suburbs.

Did the introduction of the Lotto affect your business?

Not really. It was well established by then. It was commonly known as the "tickey-line", which meant it dealt in small amounts of money and had draws every day as opposed to once a week.

Are there different odds for different numbers?

Yes. We would work out the odds according to the most popular numbers people pick. We used to do this manually, but now it is computerised. The odds are fixed at 28 to 1.

Describe a typical working day

At the height of the business I was responsible for 140 draws a day and had five people working for me. We'd do a day and a night draw at each stop, called a "bank". The "operator" dealt with the "runner", who collected draws from all the betters or punters. It was dangerous work dealing with lots of money. We used to drive ordinary cars, but from 1995 we had to bullet-proof them.

Was your life ever threatened?

On many occasions. I've been held up at gunpoint and chased by panga-wielding men slashing at my tyres.

Any conflict with other operators?

There were always turf wars. Local (Chinese) operators also had to deal with a large foreign Chinese influx. Talk of Uzzi's being brandished, that sort of thing.

How did you deal with the cops?

You get caught so often and your fingerprints taken. We called it "playing piano". You start to develop a relationship with the cops because of being arrested so many times. We usually came to an agreement over "cold-drink money".

