

God creates the Office of Just Deserts to save our environment and orders an Archangel-In-Training to take charge and help a young and naive engineer and his worldly girlfriend battle the computer company they work for.

Just Deserts

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# **Just Deserts**

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# **Just Deserts**

**Richard Lemmon**



## CHAPTER 1

"Here are your papers, Mr. Frazer." The young blonde smiled as Charley stepped up to the counter to accept copies of his new hire employment papers. Cute, Andi McKenzie mused, holding on to the papers a little longer than necessary as they touched. Too bad he'd been assigned to Mohammed Washington, the grouch who ran Carrington Computer's Quality Control Department.

"Anybody else assigned to Mr. Washington?" Charley asked. "Or am I the only new guy on the block?"

"You're the only one headed Mohammed's way, but there are a lot of people hired for that new EPA contract. Kind of exciting, all this expansion. Don't forget your badge." She shoved it across the counter.

"Where to from here?" Charley asked from the doorway.

"Room 201 down the hall." He was two years older than her twenty-three...damn she was the older woman. And he was so cute, well maybe a little awkward, especially in those jeans. Jeans, decidedly out of place in the Armani World he was so anxious to join. He'd learn though. They all did. Too bad. "That's the office where they'll take your picture." She eyed the red sport shirt. They'd eat him alive there in engineering.

"Will it take long?"

"Not long. But if I were you, Charley Brown—"

He looked a little chagrined. "It's Frazer, not Brown, Mam."

"I'd get a suit pretty quick...Mister Frazer."

Charley glanced down at his jeans and shrugged. "I don't figure to wear these once I start for good. But a suit?" He shook his head. "I was hoping to get by on slacks and a clean shirt the first week. I mean...you know...that first pay check and all?" His face turned red. "You know what I mean, right?"

Pathetic. In need of a mother to warn him what he was facing out there. "Not mine to say...Mr. Frazer, but you're now in a game where the serious players dress to compete. Suits are what distinguish

the players from the drones.” Stupid to talk like this to a new hire, but damn, he needs someone to set him straight.

“What do girl competitors wear?”

“Suits,” Andi said with a smile. “As close as we can get to a man. For drones like myself—and I admit to being one—skirts and blouses. Rule of thumb, what’s right for a funeral, is right for Carrington Computer.”

“I hate suits.”

“I never would have guessed.”

“Will you help me pick one out when the time comes?”

Coming on? Not all that naive. “Maybe. But before you get involved with the likes of me, I have to warn you that I’m anything but politically correct.”

“I never would have known.” He smiled and slowly backed out into the hallway, pausing when he got there to clear his throat and ask, “If you’re not Miss PC, what is your name?”

“Andi with an ‘I’ and don’t ask if Andi’s a nickname.”

“I’m Charley with an ‘ey’ and don’t ask if it stands for Charles. Can I meet you for lunch later on?”

For the first time in years Andi felt a blush coming on. Like a schoolgirl. “If you’re serious, be back here in two hours, and for God’s sake, don’t look at me like that. “ She beat back a blush and tried to look serious. “I’m...a few years older than you. But don’t forget what I told you about your new manager, Mohammed. Stay on your toes there.”

Charley returned to the counter. “Show where my boss belongs on an organization chart.”

Andi found one and held it out. “Right here near the bottom and way up at the top is Ben Carrington. He owns the company.”

Charley studied the chart and asked, “Mohammed Washington’s an odd name, huh? Is he a Muslim?”

Andi shrugged. “I doubt it but even if he was he married an American. In any respect he was born here. I shouldn’t be telling you all these things but it’s in his record and for that reason public info. But anyway, when he first started with the company ten years ago, his name

was a simple Fred Washington. And then when all this Muslim uproar came about he switched his first name to Mohammed. I don't know if that means he's a practicing Muslim or what."

Charley studied the name and nodded. "Remember the fighter that was the heavyweight champ once upon a time? He became a Muslim. So maybe Mohammed's a fighter." or he liked that guy."

Andi shrugged. "He's listed as a Baptist. Did you ever in your life hear of a Baptist named Mohammed?"

Charley shook his head and returned to studying the chart. "So how come," he pointed to the top of the chart again, "there's two Ben Carringtons?"

"Senior and Junior Carrington. Senior is Chairman of the Board and just about to retire. Junior is President of the company and anxious, according to rumors, for dear Dad to get out of his way. Avoid both of them if you can. One's an old bastard, pardon my English, and the other is an up and coming bastard. As to the rest of the cast," she indicated the names in between Washington and the Carringtons, "all games-men in suits."

"Are you like this with all the new hires?"

Andi put the organization chart back in the drawer. "Not usually, but in some cases my motherly instinct comes out."

"You called Junior Carrington a bastard in training. How would you know that?"

"I know that because I have breast and you don't. Once upon a time I used to be his secretary until he...got a little too friendly, at which point I opted for a transfer. Thus the attitude."

Charley put his employment papers in what looked like a new briefcase and started back to the hallway. "You watch, Andi, before this is all over I'm going to be somebody around here. Eventually. And when I get there, I'll ask for a secretary with an attitude."

"You'll be that up and comer only if you remember what I said about dressing the part. Quick guideline. No short sleeves, no sport coats and always a suit, sincere pinstripe, silk, dark blue with a red tie."

"I'm off to the wars!" And he was gone.



*Richard Lemmon*

Andi had barely turned back to her work when the door opened again and her office mate, Mildred, came in and sat down at her desk. She looked up five minutes later only to find Andi still gazing at the hallway. "Did you see the guy that was just in here when you came in?"

"The kid that blew past me whistling?"

"He just looks like a kid. He's so damn trusting," Andi sighed and returned to her typing and then paused. "And so naive he needs someone...with an attitude to watch over him."

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Two hours later, Charley helped Andi with her lunch tray as they found the last table near a window. Outside, the lawn was being manicured, some would say massacred by a surly group of bearded men with long black mustaches. The truck alongside the curb said Bay Area Trimmers.

"Illegals," Charley ventured.

"Shh.." Andi whispered. "First lesson in elocution, that word may only be whispered among trusted friends. Otherwise the word is undocumented." She stirred the last of her coffee and shrugged. "But you're right. Twice a month I see them out there, never daring to talk to any of us and always looking around in case there's an ICE raid."

"I get it. Same way at college. So back to your advice about a suit, what besides blue since I hate blue."

"There's dark blue and dark brown. Dark colors. More sincere."

"You're pretty much of a skeptic aren't you?"

"I'm an observer, not a skeptic. Change what I observe and then I'll be an optimist. But this is getting too serious. Something lighter, Charley Brown. How do you like Houston?"

Charley returned to checking out the lawn. "Fine if you don't mind green all winter. Up in Maine where I come from, winter is colored white."

"What part of Maine?"

*Just Deserts*

"Born and bred in Rockport," Charley said proudly. "My Mother's still there in fact."

"And your Father?"

He grabbed a saltshaker and began to slide it back and forth between hands. "Dad died from a heart attack when I was knee high to a grasshopper. He was a plumber all of his life."

Andi reached across the table and grabbed the saltshaker out of his hand. "You're driving me nuts." She pointed to his plate. "And you didn't eat your vegetables."

"I hate them too."

"You hate vegetables, I hate small towns," Andi countered. "Nothing to do in them when the sun goes down."

"Where'd you come from?" He started on the peppershaker.

"Boston. Now I'm from here and I live alone. My Mother's a homebody, always was, always will be and my Father's an engineer at NASA. How'd your talk with Mohammed go?"

"Didn't really interview him yet," Charley said. "We kind of just passed in the hall and shot the shit for a minute. He told me I was lucky to get hired, suggesting I wouldn't have been if the company hadn't just won that big deal contract with the Environmental Protection Agency. I asked him what that was all about and he said the company was building an airborne computer designed to check the ocean's supply of phytoplankton, which if you don't know, is the stuff plankton feeds on."

"Did he say anything about our new micro-chip?"

Charley nodded. "Mr. Washington called it the 90421 chip and said that our new computer will be based on it. He also said we had some new software named FADE...which stands for Fast Access Database Entry. He said I'd be working on it almost exclusively. If I do good, and I will, it'll show what I can do."

"Scared you'll fail?"

Charley shrugged. "Lets talk about something besides me falling flat on my face, which I won't. What's Carrington Senior like?"

*Richard Lemmon*

"When he was running things day to day--and quit with the pepper now-- he wasn't a whole lot better than Junior. Both of them like to hit on their secretaries."

"Can't they be fired for harassing?"

Andi pushed her plate away and shook her head. "In theory of course, yes. But only if you have enough money to fight through the courts forever. Never confuse theory from reality."

Charley finished his coffee and shook his head. "You keep hinting I'm naive. Is it naive to expect people to live up to the law?"

"No comment...Charley Brown."

Together, they started back to work.

## CHAPTER 2

The Carrington Computer Building was located on ten plush acres of wooded property just outside Houston and situated directly in the middle of that acreage. The building was six stories high, with pink granite hallways and walls mostly glass. Fronting the building was a pond filled with goldfish, lily pads and grass cuttings. The executive dining room was located on the sixth floor, overlooking that goldfish pond, and while usually full at lunchtime, had almost emptied. There were in fact only two men left, the founder, Carrington Senior and his son Junior.

““Will there be anything else?” the waiter asked as he brushed the crumbs off on the floor.

“Done.” Ben Carrington Senior waved the man away, fighting to keep his right eye from twitching.

“You ought to do something about that,” Junior observed.

“Doctors say the twitch comes from nerves I should have paid attention to forty years ago when we first got rolling. Son-of-a-bitch.” Senior slammed a fist on the table. “Now I have to live with them or cut them out of the side of my face. Ulcers, constipation, you name it, I got it.” Out the window, he watched the blue haze from an oil refinery begin to form and shook his head. “Stinks around here, too.”

Junior shrugged. “I haven’t got time for your list of ills, Dad. I want you to concentrate on this one. Just this one. Do you understand what I’m getting at or not?”

“I’m not deaf and yes, I know what you’re talking about, goddamn it. I am after all still CEO of this outfit.”

“Than you agree we’re in a bind?”

“Only if we do what you want to do!” Senior’s fist hit the table again as he waited for the hatred in his son’s eyes to subside before continuing. “We can’t do what the EPA contracting officer says we ought to do or we close the door on making any money out of that damn contract!”

“We can always buy him off,” Junior offered.

*Richard Lemmon*

“If he’s got a mike on, we’re out of business.”

“Right. We lose only if we get caught.” Junior pushed back from the table. “Otherwise it’s good business. It’s been a way of life with you up to now.”

“Shut-up. Then was then, now is now.”

“You mean now that you got all the money you need.”

“I mean now there’s too much to lose since we have to live on the government, asshole.”

Junior motioned another waiter away as he forced a careful smile. “You have to trust me to handle this, Dad. You’ve lost your nerve, I haven’t. Believe me, it’s only a matter of seeing to it that old Twister—that’s how well I know the EPA contracting officer—is properly rewarded for looking the other way. He’s got the same money worries we have.”

“Is it just money he wants?”

“He also wants to be made a member of our Board when he retires from the government. Which will be when all this is over.”

“We already got a Board full of hungry mouths to feed. One more will be one too many.”

On his way to the door, Junior paused, face flushed. “You think I haven’t handled people like Twister before? Wrong. Remember when the government threatened to sue us for being a monopoly?”

“Vaguely,” Senior conceded.

“Then you also have to remember the lawyer I hired fresh from the Justice Department back then. You complained about me giving him a place on our Board too, but what you didn’t know was that this lawyer shared the government’s case against us with our lawyers. That’s how we won. Did you ever realize that or did you think it was just a good break for us?”

“I knew,” Senior whispered. “I was just afraid to talk about the chance you took.” He shook his head and whispered, “Sometimes I wish you hadn’t been born. I let you get away with too many things that could ruin us.”

“Hang it up,” Junior came back to the table and fished a cigar from his vest. “Quit bucking me.” He snipped off the tip of his cigar

and lit it. "You didn't know about that lawyer, you didn't want to know. Play this the same way, old man. We'd be dead in the water if I hadn't made that offer to Twister. Wasn't for his efforts in our behalf behind the scenes, the EPA would have awarded that contract to Pender Computing."

"Say what you want, do what you want, just don't tell me," Senior finally conceded. On his feet he shook an angry finger under his son's nose. "But fail and you're out on your ass! I'd rather give this company away then go to jail for your stupidity. Understand what I'm telling you?"

"Take it easy, dear old Dad" Junior patted his arm. "I wouldn't want you to have a heart attack until I can be sure that your will is in order. And who besides me would you leave this place to?"

"How in the hell do you intend to handle this damn contract?"

"I'll figure a way."

"Do you realize we're building a computer that has never been built before? That takes engineers and a lot of them."

"I've been busy hiring like crazy," Junior said. "And don't get that look on your face. It's a profit plus expense contract, you know the government. And the computer isn't all that new being it's basically just an upgrade of our Series AB. I'm calling it MOD-C. I could have just as well added that C to AB."

"The Series AB is too underpowered to support a goddamn scanner!"

"That Scanner is our sub-contractor's problem. Contra's problem."

"Dammit, Junior, I've worked too hard to sit idly by and watch you tear down everything I've built. Modifying marginal computers, allying us with shoddy sub-contractors! Given all my mistakes in the past—and there's a lot of them—we've too many enemies waiting to pounce on us."

"Let those enemies know that you've given way to me, they'll back off, guaranteed," Junior snapped. "That's all it takes. Bye-bye Senior, hello Junior."

"Mark my words, you won't even be able to slip this shoddy upgrade past our own Quality Control!"

Junior shook his head. "You're wrong that too. Your old buddy, Mohammed Washington runs Quality Control and he's been around long enough to know where his bread is buttered."

"He's not my old buddy," Senior protested. "I kept him around only because he's the right color and he's crippled. Two points for that. But I always had the feeling he was an angry man biding his time."

"He wants to retire so he's manageable." Junior laughed aloud. "He knows I'll damn well fire his black ass if he gets in my way. You were too soft."

"Over the years," Senior shook his head in disgust, "and there's been more than a few of them, Mohammed has made quite a reputation for himself in the industry. There's a lot of people out there who would like nothing better than to hire him away from us."

"At his age? He's in his sixties," Junior chortled. "But if it will make you feel better, I'll have Mohammed report directly to me. That way he can't get out of line." He patted his Father's head. "How I wish Mother could have been with us long enough to see how harmoniously we work together now."

Senior jerked his head back. "Don't give me a chance to throw you out on your ass too."

"Me give you a chance like that, dear old Dad? And just watch me with old Mohammed. He wants a new ramp built so he doesn't have to go up any stairs, he's got it. A new bathroom to sit on the john, he gets that too. But I'll be pulling his strings whether he likes it or not."

"It'll take more than that," Senior scoffed. "We had to cut profits to the bone to get this contract. No wiggle room anywhere."

"I'm always after a way to get us more money," Junior countered. "Ever hear of Dumont Chemical?"

Senior shook his head. "Don't fool with them. I've crossed swords with their CEO before and Patterson's out of your league."

"Calm down. I'm on it," Junior promised. "And I've got all the aces on this one. To the tune, so far, of a cool million and a half."

“Patterson will simply give you a million and a half dollars? For what?”

“He needs a copy of the EPA programming requirements. I can get that for him.”

“Why does he need that?”

“Because his company makes the fertilizer the ocean plankton feed on. Our computer will be scanning the ocean plankton, in effect assessing the value of his fertilizer. Good fertilizer and his profits continue. Bad fertilizer and he’s in trouble, Thus he want to know how our computer will analyze his fertilizer.”

“You mean to say that if our computer says his stuff is bad, he’s out of business?” Senior asked.

Junior nodded. “Which puts the whip in our hand. The right evaluation from our program and he stays in business. This is a potential windfall.”

The senior Carrington whistled and shook his head. “In the end, mark my words, you’ll get whip-sawed between Dumont and the EPA.”

Junior affected a patient look. “You’ve done worse, but this one ought to go down smooth as silk. Step one; the government launches our MOD-C computer in orbit over the ocean. Step two, the computer measures the plankton that Dumont feeds with a fertilizer they call Chrymazone. If the plankton is doing well, which our program can guarantee, Dumont’s future is secure. Should our program suggest otherwise, Dumont fails.”

“Did it ever occur to you that if there’s not enough sea plankton to scrub the carbon dioxide out of the air we breathe, the earth dies?”

Junior's eyebrows arched. “That’s the Lord’s concern, not mine.”

Senior’s tic went wild and he took a deep breath. “Dammit, Junior, I may be a bad businessman but I’m not a bad human being. Think what you’re about to do.”

Junior's eyes narrowed. “What’s done or not done is up to Dumont, namely Patterson. Let me run the company as I see fit.”



*Richard Lemmon*

Once again Senior wagged a finger under his son's nose. "You son-of-a-bitch, just give me the slightest opportunity to show you up to our Board and you're out."

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Far, far away in the heavens, His voice thundered throughout the universes. "The Carringtons, father and son, are excellent examples of why I must begin My Reward Immediate project, Dominick! Millions of my creations could be adversely affected by Junior Carrington should he succeed in his effort to affect My ocean food chain. Perhaps I should have anticipated such greed and guarded it better."

Dominick could not believe his hearing apparatus. Never before had He even hinted of a prior mistake. Or even hinted that something He had done might be improved upon. But he had to be careful. Very careful of how he approached this possibility. "A mistake, Your Supremeness? Surely not." Dominick did his best to keep his voice down, lest he be overheard.

His face remained impassive. "Perhaps the problem is that no one takes My Book seriously anymore. I ask you why, Dominick, why?"

"Perhaps..." Dominick mused, "if I might be so bold, Your Book could require the tiniest, the very, very tiniest of updates, Your Most Gracious Excellency."

The thunder rose to a crescendo. "A change to My Book? In what way?"

Too far. Dominick began to shudder. Too far. There was no way to recover except to explain his faulty reasoning. "Well, not change, Oh Most High, and I apologize for my impertinence, but perhaps, just perhaps, a minor, very, very minor redoing of Your Book. A minor redo so small as to imperceptible. Non-existent to be exact, Oh Gracious One."

"Proceed!"

*Just Deserts*

"I thought," Dominick cleared what would have been a throat on earth, for instance, a regional redo might be in order." His voice faltered. "Just every so often...don't You know...Your All Powerfulness."

"You were thinking of what!!!"

"A very, very minor redo. So minor as to--"

"Get with it!!!"

"Of course, Greatness. Take the multiplication of fishes as an example, Sire. No one these days eats raw fish... except...in countries that do eat raw fish. But not all do, Oh Most Powerful One. What if You change Your words about passing out free fish and loaves to the multitudes that followed you?"

"Change to what?" The thunder began to grow again.

"Ah well...ah ...perhaps change to ...passing out tuna sandwiches or even egg-rolls? Then--"

"Everyone loves raw fish!"

"Well, of course," Dominick stuttered. "Why didn't I think of that? That's the answer for that, but...a...that brings up another point. Everybody seems to have an edition of Your Book that supports his own view. I thought--"

"Enough! Archangels in Training don't discuss problems, for which I am, of course, not responsible. As new head of the Office of Just Deserts, your only responsibility is to tell Me just how you plan for the Office of Just Deserts to handle the Carrington Affair."

"I thought You...and it would of course be up to You...could advance the date for Ben Carrington Junior's Final Judgment, and--"

"Kill him so I could judge him faster?"

Dominick saw his mistake. "Not really kill, Oh High and Mighty, since You forbade that, but sort of...not kill, but..."

"Kill," He thundered. "Say it. And then tell me from memory what my Book has to say about such things."

"Well luckily, Highness, some translations have used the word murder, and since this isn't exactly--"

*Richard Lemmon*

"I plainly said 'Thou shalt Not Kill!' and I don't expect an AT to mince around the issue by coming up with such translations as My creatures use to support what they want it to support. Next idea!"

"I was thinking I might--"

"Go amongst my creatures and solve the problem, Dominick? Excellent idea."

"I wasn't exactly...that is...thank You, Mighty One! Your wish is of course my command."

"Remember," He advised. "I want this Carrington rebellion nipped in the bud before those men damage any of My creations who will then have to wait for their Just Deserts. Enough waiting in other words, Dominick. Justice sooner rather than later is the true measure of My new Just Deserts Office. Always remember that I now expect the bad guys to get taken to tasks well before they get here. Clear?"

Dominick nodded and the die was now cast.

God creates the Office of Just Deserts to save our environment and orders an Archangel-In-Training to take charge and help a young and naive engineer and his worldly girlfriend battle the computer company they work for.

Just Deserts

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