

The Reckoning

A six part serial thriller by Chris Lang

We are in the offices of ‘Martinez, Boyer, Laurent’, a wonky walled wood panelled 18th century time capsule, in the back streets of central Paris. And walking up an impossibly crooked stairway is a middle aged, slightly harassed looking woman by the name of Isabelle Dupres.

She tells the temp she is here to see Monsieur Boyer and after a few minutes wait is shown in to a pokey little room lined with legal books. Stacks of ribboned briefs cover most of the floor space and *all* of the desk behind which sits Charles Boyer – sixty two and just returned from a rather ‘relaxing’ lunch.

Boyer thanks her for responding to his letter and confirms, as detailed in ‘the aforementioned’, that she is indeed the beneficiary of a legacy. What he did not disclose in the letter was the amount she has been left. And so now he forces a smile on to his otherwise slightly irritable face and tells Isabelle Dupres, shelf stacker and divorcee, that she has been left a sum of no less than five million Euros. When Isabelle has finally recovered from her shock (and this takes quite a while) she finally manages to ask a few sensible questions. Who is her benefactor? Why her? When does she get the money?

So the benefactor’s name (Jean LeBlanc) turns out to mean nothing to her, there is no indication in the will as to why she has been chosen to receive the money and as to when she gets it, this will occur as soon as she has met two conditions. The first is a simple non disclosure clause – a promise not to discuss with anyone the contents of a sealed envelope - which contains the second condition. She will obviously only be asked to sign the first when she has read the second. Boyer now hands her a wax sealed envelope and leaves the room to allow her to read it in private. She opens it and reads the following.

Dear Isabelle,

By now you will be aware of what lies within your grasp - a chance to change your life forever. You need never work for minimum wage again, you could unshackle yourself from your ex husband’s alimony games, but most importantly of course, you would finally be able to go to America to pay for the treatment we all pray will offer your daughter the chance of a long and happy life. This legacy offers you all of this and more. On only one condition.

That you kill a man who deserves to die.

Easy enough for me to write, difficult for you to read and (I would imagine) completely impossible for you to ever contemplate doing. You are a law abiding citizen who has a strong moral compass and who will be understandably outraged and disgusted by such a proposal. That I say this person ‘deserves to die’ means nothing, I have absolutely no right to make that judgement.

And yet you read on. And I suspect you read on because you instinctively understand that we live in a more morally complex world that we would perhaps always care to admit – and to dismiss my proposal without at least pause for some thought, would be unintelligent.

So you now have two choices. You can tear this letter up, leave this office and return to your old life. Or, after a period of reflection, you can return here no more than seven days from today, and Boyer will offer you another letter, with a name and address inside. You will have 28 days to consider further and then act. Again, if you choose not to proceed further, you will return to your old life and any agreement between us will be terminated.

A bank account has already been set up in your name, the money is held in that account now and the password to that account will be released to you upon confirmation of the subjects death. This trigger is legally irreversible although you may wish an independent lawyer to verify it.

You may also wish to go to the police now, again that is your prerogative, I should inform you Boyer has no idea of the contents of the letter, he never met me before I died and I have no surviving relatives who are connected with this act in any way.

I wish you luck in making the right choice.

Your benefactor.

The Reckoning is a ‘serial thriller’ that weaves a dark, complex and exciting web of intrigue around a tale of money, morality and murder.

Fairly early on we will realise that our first protagonist was by no means the only person that walked up those stairs that week. Five others sat in front of Boyer, five others heard his disclosure with varying degrees of astonishment, and five others read letters that differed from Isabelle’s only in the personal stories detailed within them. But all were asked to kill someone.

Each will return to their homes that day and debate what to do with the information they hold. That none *do* go to the police is perhaps surprising, but then as the story progresses, we begin to suspect the ‘benefactor’ chose these people for very specific reasons, we begin to suspect he knew them perhaps better than they know themselves - this was the *most* calculated of risks.

So the first part of this morality tale is about the decision our six protagonists make. Not just *what* decision they come to (they will in fact *all* move on to the next stage) but *how* they get to that point. Who, if any, of those closest to them they involve in that process. How long (or not) it takes them to come to that point. How hard (or easy) it is for them. And how sure (or not) they are when they return to the offices of ‘Martinez, Boyer, Laurent’ that they will take this any further, that finding out the name is nothing more than an act of morbid curiosity.

Some will twist themselves in knots as they attempt to find some sort of moral legitimacy for what they have been asked to do – if their target were a child killer or a multiple rapist or an un-caught serial killer – would it be more morally bankrupt to allow him to keep living than to kill him and thus stop him taking other innocent lives. Would ten thousand African lives, saved with the proceeds of this crime, not make the crime worth it. Indeed do we not already

make a choice every day, by our greed and our apathy, to consign the world's undeserving poor to death by starvation – how is this any less morally questionable?

During this period, we will also witness the impact of their extraordinary situation not only on them, but also on those around them – at home, at work, at play. And of course we will begin to learn more about all those personal tragedies detailed in the benefactor's letter – all those well crafted 'justifications' will be made real.

The second part of the story is about what they do when they have opened the second envelope and discovered the name. How much or how little they try to find out about their target, how important they feel it is to find some justification for their heinous crime. It will be at this point that our growing suspicion there was a stronger connection between the six than just their presence in that room is answered. For the six have been tasked with killing each other. Like some diabolical game of tag, Isabelle is to kill the person who entered Boyer's office the day after her, and the man who climbed those stairs six days later, is tasked with killing Isabelle.

For our protagonists this is not so easy to discern but some will, even as they discover that their targets have *all*, as the benefactor said, done some appalling wrong in the past. Will those in the know be able to discover the identity of all of the others in the circle? Will this knowledge affect the ultimate decisions they make? What will the knowledge that their own dark secrets are even now being unearthed and that they are a target themselves, do to them? Will they ally themselves to any of the others or will they go it alone?

The final act is resolution. In which we learn that the benefactor is not in fact dead, but that the legacy is his revenge upon six people whose past sins devastated his life and culminated in the death of his most loved daughter. The repeat offender drink driver who killed his wife in a car crash, the social worker who raped his damaged daughter, the drug dealer who sold her drugs, the banker who used her as a prostitute - just some of the dark secrets that lie behind the faces of the people we will meet.

How many will die as Boyer (for it is he) seeks to exact his diabolical revenge is uncertain, but all will be changed for ever, as they are forced to hold a mirror up to their own sins.

The stage is set for a twisted tale of greed and dark deeds.