

Government Conspiracies and Corporate Greed: Corrupt Systems in

Jack Carr's *The Terminal List*

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ABSTRACT

This academic paper explores political corruption through an unfamiliar storyline. It dives deep into the process involved within the hemisphere of Government conspiracy exposing the military-industrial complexities and abuse of power. This leads to the realization of hideous political and corporate involvements in the armed forces sector, with beneficial interests. This contribution using the work of former Navy SEAL and writer Jack Carr fits seamlessly under the title of 'Unsung Literature' as most people are not aware of the obligations of the people within the SEAL community. This research paper points out how many government officials and corporates take advantage of political agendas exploitatively to cover-up their activities and abuse of power. This directs readers to the lives of the people among the elites, who live through vicious activities stemming from Capitalism. The author deliberately uses his characters to portray the kind of unspoken risks the veteran soldiers undergo without their own knowledge; the mind-set of the capitalist people within the government and industrial sectors thriving to amass wealth by even feeding or sacrificing other lives due to moral decay. And he uses Reece, the protagonist of the novel, to highlight the side-effects of corruption which compels him to commit acts of vigilante justice. Thus, the novel creates moral dilemmas within the interpreter as the law fails to act.

Keywords: Jack Carr, Government conspiracy, Corruption, Vigilante justice, Capitalism, Moral decay.

The article exposes corruption within the military-industrial complex, where the government and the corporate's greed exploit soldiers' lives for profit. Jack Carr, a veteran turned writer, in his work *The Terminal List* reveals how bureaucrats and corporate leaders conspire to test an experimental PTSD drug on soldiers unwillingly. The drug program initially begins aimed at aiding soldiers' trauma but ends in failure and is bought and utilized by Horn, the head of Capstone Corporates, who sees it as a business opportunity. Lorraine, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, secretly diverts military and charity funds to Horn's company, supporting the unethical drug trials. The key conspirators include Lorraine, Horn J.D. Hartley, a congressman, Ben, a CIA, Saul, chief financial officer under Horn, Boykin, lawyer and political fixer, Holder, chief of Naval Special Warfare Intelligence, Pilsner and Howard, high officials within the Navy. They use their power and contacts to push the drug's development, disregarding the harm it might inflict on soldiers.

The conspirator's greed does not stop when an entire SEAL platoon, tested by the drug fails and creates tumours within their skulls. The conspiracy deepens as the drug is secretly tested on a new group of soldiers. This can be clearly understood by the interrogation done by Reece with Saul. He spills all the vital details that reveal the total plan and motive behind the conspiracy. Reece, the story's protagonist, survives the ambush and suffers from the side effects of the drug and the trauma of losing his comrades and family. The schemers plot to silence the survivors, kill his team-mate and stage it as suicide. The accomplices are steadfast to kill Reece. It is evident from the conversation between Horn and Holder, characters from Jack Carr's book.

"Can't you just 'suicide' him like you did his little buddy? No one would question that. How many veterans kill themselves anyway?"

"That's easier said than done, Horn." "Not impossible, just tougher."

“Can you get it done or not?”

“I said I’d get it done, Horn.”

“Good. Let me know when you finish it” (97).

Reece’s journey transforms into a quest for justice, evolving from survival to revenge. This showcases the effect corruption has on the affected individuals. Recce uncovers the full extent of the conspiracy and realizes that the conspirators will stop at nothing to protect their interests. With the conspirators planning to kill him, he makes a choice to eliminate his threat by taking the law in own hands. It is to be noted that Reece’s decision and actions are affected by outward force stemming from corruptive evilness. Carr explores themes of moral decay, betrayal, and the corrupting influence of capitalism. The conspirators inside the novel prioritize wealth and power over human life, exploiting the ethical shield of government and corporate authority. They do not care about the matter as long it profits them without getting their own hands dirty. Lorraine and J. D. Hartley’s dialogue-exchange stands testimony to this:

“We need to close the loop on this drug thing. I need this Reece guy dead and I need it to happen now.” “I’ve given them access to all kinds of classified assets. They better not fuck this up.”

“I know. Another attempt on him in his house would definitely raise some eyebrows.”

“I want you to get on a plane and make those clowns understand that this needs to end now and we’re out and the deal is off. I don’t care how much money is on the table or what disease this thing is going to cure.”

“I agree. I’ll handle it” (141).

Further, Reece’s actions raise moral questions about justice and revenge. While killing is a crime, Reece’s action could stem from ethical dilemma, utilitarian-perspective, or deontological ethics and duty is a response to the greater evil of systemic corruption. The story highlights the harsh realities of military life and the toll it takes on soldiers, questioning whether exposing corruption can truly lead to a change.

As Carr's storyline involves many politics, application of relevant theories makes it more understandable and justifiable, building the argument as more agreeable. First, the Political Economy Theory examines the economic interests and the power of politics to shape policy and outcomes. Vladimir Lenin in his *State and Revolution* states as, "The state is nothing but an instrument of oppression of one class by another." This shows that the ruling party and corporate elites shape and use the policy on drug tests, prioritizing profit over human life. Furthermore, are Karl Marx's words, "The ideas of the ruling class are in every epoch the ruling ideas" (64). This underscores the collusion of government and industry serving capitalist interest over public welfare. Capitalistic and Neoliberal approaches play a vital role as Marx says, "Capitalism has torn away from the family its sentimental veil and has reduced the family relation to a mere money relation" (16). His observation on capitalistic and individualistic view relates to the conspirators and officials, prioritizing personal gain over collective responsibilities. This showcases the officials, viewing soldiers as test subjects, and not as human beings.

A more arguable commentary is possible, using Critical Theory, which brings out the manipulation of societal structures to maintain power hierarchies. The testing of drugs on soldiers under the guise of military progress reflects the usage of ideologies to legitimize exploitation. The government betraying their own soldiers with ease emphasizes the institutional corruption protecting elite interests. A quote from *Dialectic of Enlightenment* adds to the cause, "The culture industry perpetually cheats its consumers of what it perpetually promises" (139). And Theodor Adorno's words "Freedom would be not to choose between black and white but to abjure such prescribed choices" (132). This exposes the concealing of harm done to soldiers in the name of advancement and the inauspicious actions of government and corporate towards their own servicemen.

It is known that the governments are entrusted with power to protect citizen's rights. When governments violate this trust, citizens have the right to resist or overthrow them. The application of Social

Contract Theory from *The Social Contract* goes thus: “Man is born free, and everywhere he is in chains” (1). This theory’s perspective here insinuates the agreement between the elected officials of government and the people to perform their respective obligations. The soldiers trust their government to protect them, but their government exploits them. This leads to Reece’s retaliation that citizens have the right to resist and demand or seek justice when the government fails them. Reece’s vigilante actions mirror John Locke’s idea on liberalism and democracy, stating that citizens have the right to overthrow corrupt governments.

And finally, the application of Postmodernism to the novel brings out the challenges of absolute truths and moral binaries, pinpointing the ambiguity and complexity of modern power structures. This brings out the major arguments presented from within the novel. First, the connection between political, military and corporate interest creates a morally ambiguous reality, wherein right and wrong is blurred. Second, Reece’s role as both victim and avenger points to the breakdown of clear moral bound borderlines as he takes out lives on redeeming himself and bringing social justice and normal functioning by an immoral act. Third, and finally, the conspirators justifying their actions relates to postmodern relativism, which is based on outcomes rather than universal moral principles. This can be argued by bringing in Michel Foucault’s words, “Truth is not discovered; it is created” (93). And “Power is not an institution, nor a structure, it is the name we give to a complex strategic situation in a particular society” (93). This can relate to the false narrative constructed by the conspirators to justify their actions, reflecting Foucault’s idea that truth is shaped by power. The cover-up of the failed drug trials also shows how the information is controlled and maintained by authorities. This clearly blurs the moral boundaries, emphasizing postmodern skepticism regarding universal truths.

Jack Carr’s novel offers a deeper view into the atrocities made by the government officials, teaming up with the industrial corporates. This analysis further exposes the contents within the novel in a detailed manner with the aid of theories to justify the claims made above. This gives exposure to the duties

undertaken by people possessing power in the shadows with personal gain and not for the sake of human wellbeing. This research brings out the effects of the deadly combination of greed and capitalism, shaping human minds to be completely self-centered with empathy and concern towards none but themselves. The details presented through Carr's novel reveal that the actions done and still undertaken by people at power disregard their fealty to their people and nation. It also creates a sense of doubt and question, relating to universal morals and ethics behind every action. Carr brings out the avarice and hypocrisy that overcomes the people after attaining a powerful position. Carr creates ambiguity within the novel by blurring the line between good and evil actions.

The pressing factor that leaves Reece with no options is due to the threats that not only tries to kill him but also pursues on the path of wrongdoings as it holds the controlling power. The actions of the conspirators stand testimony to the limit they will reach to control and silence if necessary for their own ideals and well-being. This is further extended by their actions of digging holes for their counterparts as well. Carr uses the doings of the conspirators to show the real-life condition of a human, overcome by desire and self-ego, emitting moral decay over personal gains. The government fails in fulfilling its purpose and is committing harm, using the privilege to an advantage.

The situations of Carr's novel forces Reece to a corner to do unethical work in terms of public view, even so the turmoil and circumstances make him do so. The actions of both the conspirators on committing covert testing and Reece performing vigilante justice are unethical and harmful actions. But the former's actions disrupt the normal cycle of ethics whereas the latter is forced to correct the unchecked error and to prevent it from proceeding unnoticed, affecting the cycle of ethics more if left to be. Thus, this article through Jack Carr's *The Terminal List* further exposes the reality of prevailing conspiracies within government. And the ever-present greediness of the corporates leads a corrupt system, making the lives of people under the power more difficult.

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