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EXEGESIS: Give Them What They Want.

THESIS: Corporate Truth.

An exegesis and thesis submitted to Auckland University of Technology in fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of Master of Creative Writing (MCW).

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Abstract

Corporate Truth is a thriller novel, which forms the thesis part of a Master of Creative Writing project. It is accompanied by the exegesis Give Them What They Want, which frames the psychology behind the creative work and delves into readers' expectations within a prose novel.

The novel Corporate Truth is set within the world of multi national corporations. It highlights the psychopathic nature of these companies and the people that excel within them. It is the first novel in a series and has an ending that breaks the normative expectations that a typical prose novel has. This was done to entice people to instantly pick up and read the next book in the series. The first three novels in the series will be launched at the same time to encourage people to binge read and counter the frustrating ending Corporate Truth has.

The exegesis frames Corporate Truth in this decision to break normative expectations in the first book, to deliver them in the last book. Give Them What They Want, explains why structure in a novel is so important to readers and why these expectations must be delivered in the end for a readers satisfaction.

Give Them What They Want

An Exegesis by Karl Fleet

Introduction

Corporate Truth is a full-length creative work set within the thriller genre and it is the first book in the series, *The Truth Files*. It follows Justin Truth's climb up the corporate ladder in a large multinational corporation. Justin is the personification of the corporate psychopath; he will do anything to anyone to further his career. Justin has an even darker side, he is also a serial killer, murdering the innocent and covering his tracks by making the murders look like freak accidents. While Justin goes about his nasty business, four people are out to expose him. Ross Smith, a hardened detective, has linked together the murders that Justin has committed and is hot on his trail, yet no one except Ross believes these freak accidents are actually the work of a serial killer. Two of Justin's co-workers, Montana Cruz and Steve Baker, uncover some damning evidence of Justin's illegal manoeuvring to get his job. They must play within the corporate system to reveal his manipulations and force him out. Justin's own mother, who knows his dark secrets, fights out of a chemically-induced vegetative state that he put her in, to tell the authorities that his first victim was her husband so he could receive a large insurance payout.

The story twists and turns as the walls slowly tighten around Justin, pulling the reader along a roller coaster as it thunders towards who will be the one to expose Justin, halting his murderous ways and squelching his thirst for power.

Corporate Truth explores themes of power, betrayal, family, principles, justice and judgment, and greed.

This exegesis sets out to explain my reasons and methodology for writing *Corporate Truth*. I will focus on three areas: normative expectations, the rise of the negative protagonist, and the relationship between psychopaths and corporations.

Combining these three topics, you will see why I have chosen to end *Corporate Truth* in a way that will antagonise the reader and springboard them into the rest of the series.

PART ONE: Normative Expectations

Story

What makes a good story?

What makes readers want to read more, hear more and share the story with others?

How do readers know how a story should end without reading it before?

When reading a story, why do they expect certain things to happen?

Why can't a story just be about anything?

Why can't a writer say and do what ever they want? It's their story, right?

When I set out to write *Corporate Truth*, I didn't think about the inherent rules of writing a prose novel. I had a story in my head that I wanted to tell; it was part of a larger story that would be told over a series of novels, *The Truth Files*. I knew how the series would begin, the middle and the end, I knew there would be a few heroes and of course a villain. The heroes will have to overcome great conflict and work together to bring, the seemingly unstoppable, villain down. Sounds pretty normal for a series of novels so far.

Where *Corporate Truth* differs from the standard novel is, the main protagonist Justin Truth, is actually the villain, which also makes him the antagonist for the entire series. In the first book, *Corporate Truth*, not only does he get away without consequence for his evil deeds, he is actually rewarded for them. I knew this approach wasn't the norm, but why wasn't it the norm and does it actually matter? I knew people may be upset with the ending of *Corporate Truth*, but I hadn't really thought about why until I started to research the psychology behind what makes a good story and what draws readers in.

In his book *The Storytelling Animal*, Jonathan Gottschall suggested that human beings are natural storytellers and that they even turn things that aren't really stories into stories because they like narratives. (Gottschall, 2012) Humans will take things that happen to us and tweak them into a good story. We all have that friend that can't wait to tell you what happened to them, the truth getting slightly embellished or the story distorted to make it more entertaining.

American mythologist and writer, Joseph Campbell was passionate on why we should read good books.

“Sit in a room and read and read and read. And read the right books by the right people. Your mind is brought onto that level, and you have a nice, mild, slow-burning rapture all the time.” (Campbell, 1989, p. 122)

For over twenty years Christopher Booker researched why humans tell stories and wrote his finding into the book *The Seven Basic Plots*.

“Imagine we are about to be plunged into a story – any story in the world. A curtain rises on a stage. A cinema darkens. We turn to the first paragraph of a novel. On the face of it, so limitless is the human imagination and so boundless the realm of the storytellers command, we might think that literally anything could happen next. But in fact there are certain things we can be pretty sure we know about our story before it even begins.” (Booker, 2004, p. 17)

He made the point that readers have an expectation on how a story will go, that it's bred into us from birth. Stories are passed down from generation to generation, giving readers/listeners the basic skills of judging a good story from a bad one. As a species, stories are as much a part of us as breathing, yet for a limitless number of stories, there is a finite amount of ways a reader will accept a story and enjoy it. Bookstores are full of books, some sell millions of copies, and some only sell a handful. Why is one a better book than the other? The books that aren't published or don't sell, are they bad stories or are they good stories poorly told? (Gopnik, 2012)

Forming Reading Habits

When writing *Corporate Truth*, I knew it would alienate some readers. This isn't because of the atrocities that happen within its pages, the foul language, violence, murder, sex, drugs, and manipulation. It has plenty of this. It is the ending of *Corporate Truth* that will frustrate and alienate readers because it does not have a “happy ending”. I have to make this clear, it's not because *Corporate Truth* does not come to a climax, resolution, or tie up

all the plot points. It does all of this. However, at the end of *Corporate Truth*, Justin Truth comes out on top, the villain of the book overcomes all the obstacles in front of him and gets what he wants. But why would this type of ending alienate readers?

When it comes to stories, it's pretty ingrained in how we expect them to work. Within a genre and sub genre, this expectation becomes more defined and expected. A reader of Mills & Boon's books will have a strong expectation of what they will read in a Mills & Boon's book before they read it (Flood, 2010). The company has been criticized for repeating plots, predictable outlines and their happy endings, whereas fans cite these as a key reason for reading (Segal, 2007).

Penny Jordan, an author writing for Mills & Boon, acknowledged,

“If you diverge from reader expectations, they won't read your second book.”
(Flood, 2010)

Readers of Lee Child's hugely successful Jack Reacher series have an expectation of what to expect when they pick up a Jack Reacher novel.

“Reacher novels—which involve, invariably, Reacher tumbling across some kind of malevolent conspiracy in the American heartland and killing everyone involved.” (Gladwell, 2015)

For Rick Gekoski, writer and occasional broadcaster,

“The major pleasures of a Reacher book are relatively simple. The ex-army major and MP, a peripatetic loner who leaves no traces except in the hearts of those he has touched, is a one-man wrecking crew, hurling bad guys into the darkness with breathtaking efficiency.” (Gekoski, 2013)

If a Jack Reacher novel didn't deliver on these expectations, the Reacher reader wouldn't be happy. Every time a reader picks up a book, no matter what the genre, we have an expectation of what to expect from the plot.

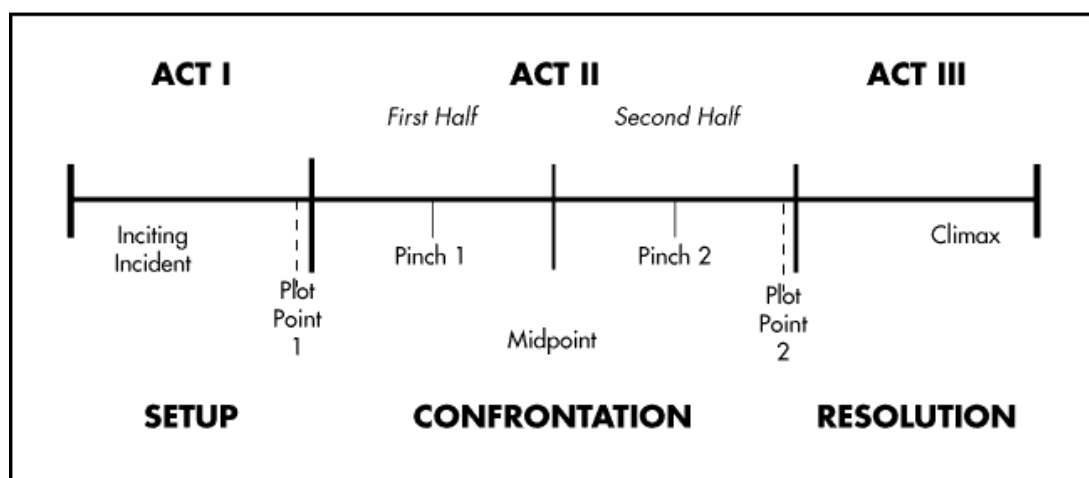
Readers have these normative expectations on how a story should be and if we refer back to Booker's *The Seven Basic Plots*, he believes every story can be grouped in to one of these seven basic plots as noted below:

1. Overcoming the Monster
2. Rags to riches
3. The quest
4. Voyage and return
5. Comedy
6. Tragedy
7. Rebirth

According to Booker, for a reader to engage and enjoy the story, the story needs to follow one of the above basic plots. Each plot is not mutually exclusive and often one story can have a weave of many plots. Yet, if a story fails to follow one of these basic plots, the story is unlikely to be enjoyed (Booker, 2004).

Syd Field, an American screen writing guru, suggested if you don't write a screenplay to a viewer's expectation, the film would flop. He broke down a film into a 3-act structure with 2 plot points. He suggested if screenwriters stick to this structure, film audiences would always be engaged in their film, as it would answer their expectations (Field, 1984).

The Syd Field "Paradigm"



Act 1 – Set Up

Everything in act one relates to the set up, places, and characters the audience should know and care about. This act concludes with plot point 1.

Plot point 1 is, as McKee suggests, an inciting incident that spins the story into another direction for the protagonist (McKee, 2010).

Act 2 – Confrontation

Here the protagonist is confronted with dramatic action, conflict, and obstacles. They have hit rock bottom and leads to plot point 2.

Plot point 2, is the point in your story where everything seems to come together for the protagonist. They discover something about themselves they didn't know or discovers the last titbit of information to tackle the villain in the resolution.

Act 3 – Resolution

The protagonist takes what they have learnt, overcomes the villain, and gets a resolution.

Most films follow this basic plot structure, some down to the very minute and page of the screenplay structure that Field recommends (Field, 1984).

Not everyone believes that stories should be tied so tightly to plot points. In his book *On Writing: A Memoir Of The Craft*, Steven King encourages writers to write stories not plots. It is his belief that a good story will have everything that you need. If writers are just plotting a story, the reader will see through it and the story becomes formulaic or predictable. If writers just write from plot point to plot point, the reader will have no reason to read (King, 2000).

King raises a good point, readers expect certain plots from stories, and without them a reader may not like the story. Yet, if the story follows it too closely the reader can also be put off, as it may become too predictable and boring. A writer needs to deliver and excite at the same time. The reason for this is, human brains love problem solving and when we figure something out, the brain releases an intoxicating rush of neurotransmitters that say

“good job”. The pleasure of reading a story is trying to figure out what’s really going on (Rock & Schwartz, 2006). So when we are solving the problems with the protagonist we feel good.

Normative expectations tell us the protagonist of a book should be a leader/hero who champions a particular cause or idea. Basically, the protagonist should be a good guy who does the right thing when faced with adversity. We want to have empathy for them, we like to see them do well and get what they need in order to succeed (Snyder, 2005). Some would say a good story is when good (the underdog) triumphs over evil (the oppressor). (Cron, 2012) (Pinker, 1997).

Our Brains

In her book, *Wired for Story*, Lisa Cron explains how a human brain process stories. That our brains have evolved to keep us safe and ensure survival by the way it processes the world around us. The human brain processes millions and millions of bits of information everyday, without us even realising it (Cron, 2012). Cron went on to explain that stories are also processed a certain way.

Brian Boyd in his book, *On the Origin of Story*, explains in greater detail how story has played a large part in the evolution of human culture. Humans will tell stories to explain things and we can’t stop telling stories because they fascinate and engage us, even if we know they are untrue (Boyd, 2009). Not only do we crave stories, we also have very specific hard-wired expectations for every story we read (Cron, 2012).

Evolution has trained the human brain to look for patterns in everything we do (Shermer, 2003). Here’s an example: think about the way you make your morning coffee, this would become a routine or a pattern, if you will. What if someone put the coffee back in the wrong place, so when you go to make your coffee before work in the morning, you can’t find it? How would this interruption to your morning routine make you feel? You might become really frustrated or annoyed because you’ve now had to stop and think about where the coffee jar might be and the last thing a human’s brain wants to do is, think when it doesn’t have to. This is the whole reason why brains create patterns. Cron suggests that

it's the same for story, and therefore we can't help but also look for patterns in them (Cron, 2012).

Readers recognise basic patterns in a story: the protagonist's issue, the theme, and the plot. It gives a story focus and allows the reader to interpret the events as they happen and anticipate what will happen next (Cron, 2012) (Boyd, 2009). As with the missing coffee jar breaking a morning routine, the brain does not like it when a basic plot is broken or out of order.

“The brain doesn't like change. Would you, if you had spent millions of years evolving with the sole goal of maintaining a constant stable equilibrium.” (Cron, 2012, p. 125)

When this “change” happens in a story, readers are hit with internal conflict. The story doesn't make sense to them, they become frustrated and in their minds feel the story was bad. People don't like change and they don't like conflict, so most of the time people do their best to avoid both. Yet, that's exactly why readers turn to story – to experience all the conflicts, that in their life they avoid. As a reader they want to know what these conflicts would cost them emotionally without it actually happening to them. Stories are a safe way for us to experience dangerous conflicts, without having conflicts (Cron, 2012).

Our brains use mirror neurons for this purpose. These are neurons that fire both when an animal acts and when an animal observes the same action performed by another animal. The neuron “mirrors” the behaviour of the other animal, as though the observing animal were in itself performing the action (Boyd, 2009). Mirror neurons allow us to feel what others experience almost as if it were happening to us, therefore we feel what they are feeling. A young child, for example, drops his ice cream and this makes him sad. When we observe this situation happening to the child and the child's response to dropping his ice cream, our mirror neurons fire and we empathise with that child causing us, as the observer, to feel sadness for him (Boyd, 2009). Our mirror neurons can't tell the difference between real and fictional characters; therefore we don't just mirror other people, we also mirror fictional characters too. This is why we can identify with characters in a story and relate to them (Cron, 2012).

“Everyone has a goal, big, small. We all have something to do. For our mirror neurons to work in a story the protagonist needs a driving, deep-seated need that he believes his quest will fulfil. If he has no purpose, the things that happen will feel random; they won’t add up to anything. Without knowing what he wants, there’s no yardstick by which to measure your protagonist progress, no context to give it meaning.” (Cron, 2012).

We get into stories about a man, not man, the specifics of people’s lives. If it’s personalised, it has a greater affect than if it’s abstract. So this is why our brains like a story about a protagonist overcoming a problem. We like to solve and overcome problems ourselves.

The Negative Protagonist

As previously mentioned, Booker believes there are seven basic plots and each of these can also be told in the negative. If in a plot the protagonist is really an antagonist, instead of succeeding at the end, the protagonist fails. The story still fulfils the normative expectation (Booker, 2004).

A few examples of this are:

- In *Lolita*, Humbert is arrested at the end and dies in prison. (Nabokov, 2011).
- In *The Cleaner*, Joe Middleton is arrested and sent to jail. (Cleave, 2012).
- In *Perfume*, Jean-Baptiste Grenouille returns to Paris, where a crowd tears him to pieces, and consumes him. (Suskind, 2010).
- In *Filth*, Bruce Robertson is exposed at the end as a sad loser who is cross-dressing as his wife and is exposed for all his incompetence. (Welsh, 2001).

However, there are also books that have broken this normative expectation, such as *American Psycho*. When we get to the end of this book, Patrick Bateman goes about life as if nothing has happened (Ellis, 2006). Kory Grow recently interviewed Bret Easton

Ellis for *Rolling Stone* magazine, 25 years after *American Psycho* first was published. Grow asked about the ending:

Grow: “Since Patrick Bateman is an unreliable narrator, and it is unclear at the end, have you ever decided whether or not he actually is a killer?”

Ellis: “No, I've never made a decision. And when I was writing the book, I couldn't make a decision. That was what was so interesting to me about it. You can read the book either way. He's telling you these things are happening, and yet things are contradicting him throughout the book, so I don't know.” (Grow, 2016).

Which leads me to this question, would the people who read *American Psycho* and hated the ending, buy a second book where Patrick Bateman did get his comeuppance? I think they would.

Point of View

In *Corporate Truth* I have used the third person point of view limited. The view of the story is told by jumping between characters, this way the reader isn't limited to just the view of the negative protagonist, Justin Truth. I've written it this way so the reader can spend time with the positive protagonists, giving them characters they can have empathy with and root for.

George RR Martin used this technique well in *Game of Thrones*. Each chapter was third person limited with a different character, each one pushing the story forward from a different point of view (Martin, 2012). James Patterson in his Alex Cross series, writes from first person for his protagonist, Alex Cross, and in some chapters jumps to what his antagonist is up to in third person; giving the reader a taste of what the antagonist is doing (Patterson, 1995).

By using this technique with the point of view and short chapters, I can weave in other basic plots for the positive protagonists to travel, the basic plots that reader's brains are hardwired to follow (Cron, 2012). Take Detective Ross Smith, he has his own 3-act

structure within the book and the basic plot of overcoming the monster (Booker, 2004). Montana Cruz also has her own 3-act structure and basic plot, rags to riches (Booker, 2004). As previously mentioned, Booker suggests stories can have multiple overlapping plots and are not just limited to one.

PART TWO: Redefining the Bad Guy

Good to be Bad

It has been said that some of the best screen characters are villains. As master horror writer/director Clive Barker said:

“I firmly believe that a story is only as good as the villain.” (Barker, 2016)

Yet, we typically don't spend that much time on how the villain became a villain. They tend to just magically appear when the protagonist needs someone to overcome. Or how Samuel Taylor Coleridge penned “motiveless malignancy” when describing Iago in Shakespeare's *Othello*, meaning Iago has no real motive and does evil only because he is evil (Coleridge, 1987).

I was a massive James Bond fan growing up. I even learnt to raise one eyebrow like Sean Connery. The structure was always beautiful, even though at the time I didn't realise what the story structure was, or did I? Bond would uncover an evil plan, overcome the henchmen, defeat the evil genius, and ride off with the beautiful girl. Often I would think to myself, *how did the bad guy get so much money and power?* He wouldn't have just had it given to him; he probably had to do a lot of evil things to come by it. But what kind of evil things and why did the evil genius choose that path? I wanted to know their back-story and how they came to be, the way they were.

The Horror genre in film, gives their villain more room to play, even crossing them into anti-hero roles. The film *Saw* is a great example of this, at the end the bad guy gets up and just walks away (Wan, 2003). The originality of the story made us forgive the ending and line up the following year to see the sequel, all six of them, and each time the bad guy limps away victoriously. The film series earned over four hundred million in the United States alone (Mojo, 2016).

In the film *Deadpool*, they played with the negative protagonist as the lead, Wade Wilson.

“I'm just a bad guy who gets paid to fuck up worst guys.” (Miller, 2016).

To give the audience a normative ending, they had him overcome another villain. *Deadpool* broke a lot of the normative expectations on its way to breaking box office records and earning \$363 Million USD (Mojo, 2016).

A Growing Trend

There is a new trend with the type of TV shows that my friends are watching and recommending for me to watch. The new shows that they are becoming “addicted to” are shorter in number of episodes, longer in single story lines, and less predictable than traditional TV shows. The popularity of these shows are not limited to just my friends, they are some of the highest rated shows in America right now (Schneider, 2016). The growth of online TV has put the power in the hands of viewers like never before (Walgrove, 2015). Viewers now pick what they want to watch and when they want to watch it, no longer can broadcasters dictate their viewing habits.

Typically the TV shows on major networks in America, run for a season consisting of about 22 episodes. The basic structure of every episode would be the same; a problem confronts the protagonist/group, they work together to solve it and once solved the overarching storyline would progress a fraction. Take *Criminal Minds*, for example. Each episode has one case that gets solved within an episode, while a longer overarching story runs over the 22 episodes. At the end of the season, the overarching storyline would climax and end with a cliff-hanger (Davis, 2005). The viewers know what to expect each and every episode.

To stand out, networks like Netflix, HBO, and ACM pushed their programs in another direction, creating shorter seasons and making them less episodic. Netflix is now launching whole seasons at once. Their second season of *House of Cards* saw viewers sitting in front of the TV for nearly 12 hours straight (Toledo, 2016). With the growing “binge watching” culture, people are watching shows over a couple of days instead of one episode a week over multiple weeks.

A host of these newer TV shows were using darker main leads and dealing with the darker side of lives; *True Detective* (Pizzolatto, 2014), *The Sopranos* (Chase, 1999), *Breaking Bad* (Gilligan, 2013), *Son's of Anarchy* (Sutter, 2008), *Dexter* (Lindsay, 2006), *Mad Men* (Weiner, 2007) and *House of Cards* (Willimon, 2013) to name a few. The typical protagonist is now played by a more antagonist archetype.

The Truth Files has been written to side with the new form of TV shows. If people are tuning into these types of antagonist-led shows in their millions, wouldn't they also like to tune into a book that delivers this in written form?

Wrestling with Story

There is an area of story telling that a lot of people don't know about. In its current incarnation, it has been around for a hundred years. Hard-core wrestling legend, Mick Foley, suggests it can be dated back to the Roman Empire and the gladiators in the coliseum (Foley, 2000). People enjoy this form of entertainment all over the world and it's one of the longest episodic TV shows in the world with 1223 episodes and counting (McMahon & Rhodes, 1993). Every year over 100,000 people from all across the world travel to watch one show live and 1.2 million watch it on TV. The owner of the show is worth \$1.2 billion (Pantaleo, 2016). It's Professional Wrestling.

Professional wrestling is a form of entertainment where two men fight. The outcome of each match is predetermined and the two wrestlers work together to make the match entertaining. The wrestlers are not actually out to hurt each other in real life; however, the hits are real and a wrestler could get seriously injured. There is a fine art to making the match look real to provide maximum entertainment, without seriously injuring the other wrestler. Every match will have a good guy (the Face) and a bad guy (the Heel). (Hart, 2007). Both wrestlers have a role to play in the match to entertain the crowd. Without these defined roles, the match can be rather boring because the crowd won't know which wrestler to cheer and which wrestler to boo. The match is scripted to get a response from the crowd and here is what a lot of people don't know, the match has the structure of a story. Borrowing heavily from Booker's "Overcoming the Monster" plot (Booker, 2004), here is how a basic match goes: Shine – Heat – Comeback.

Shine — The start of the match is fast, furious, and favours the Face. The Face impresses the crowd by being entertaining and out-wrestling the Heel. The crowd wants the Face to win and cheers him on.

Heat — The Heel cheats to take over the match. He isn't as good as the Face and has to do underhanded things behind the referee's back to stay on top. The crowd reacts with boos and jeers. The Heel thrives on the "heat" he receives from the crowd and slows the match down by putting obstacles in the way of the Face. He loves being the "bad guy". He struts around the ring egging the crowd on more, his ego inflating with every boo he hears.

Comeback — The Face fires back up, outthinks the Heel and the pace quickens. He shows the crowd he has learnt from the obstacles that the Heel put in front of him and typically wins the match. The crowd erupts and goes home happy (Jericho, 2008). (Hart, 2007).

Sounds a lot like 3-act structure Field recommends, right?

To make money, promoters need fans to come back every week. Now, if the Face won every time, the crowd would get bored and drift away because the matches become predictable. The promoters noticed that they made more money when a Heel was the champion and a Face chased him. Fans want to get behind a Face to win the championship belt, but they are also more invested in the story than the wrestlers. (Hart, 2007). To deliver on the fan's expectations of story in the match, promoters invented the championship advantage. The championship advantage means an opponent can only defeat a champion if they beat them cleanly following specific rules (Madden, 2015).

These rules are: if the champion was counted out, they stayed the champ, if they were disqualified, they stayed the champ, and if the match went over the time limit, they stayed the champ. On the outside, these rules looked good for a Face to be the champ, it would protect him from being screwed over by the Heel. In fact they were created so the Heel could stay champ for a long time, by bending the rules to hold on to the coveted

championship belt. The Face would get close, even win in the eyes of the fans but the Heel would retain the belt, thus annoying fans and enticing them to come back the next week to hopefully see the Heel finally lose (Madden, 2015).

Eventually the Face will defeat the Heel and obtain the belt just before a new Heel arrives in town. The new Heel of course, wins the belt using dirty tactics and the story starts all over again. So the protagonist will eventually overcome the odds and win, but the wrestling promoters need the antagonist to win for a while to make as much money as they can, and to keep fans coming back in the hope that the protagonist will defeat the antagonist.

In *Corporate Truth*, I'm using wrestling psychology to build Justin Truth as the champion Heel. Montana Cruz, Steve Baker and Ross Smith take on the role of Faces to chase Justin. One of them will beat him and become the champion, just not right away. I want readers to come back again and again to see who will eventually defeat Justin.

PART THREE: Psychopaths and Corporations

The Corporate World

Why set *Corporate Truth* in the corporate world? One, it's a real life monster and two, no one has really claimed it within the fiction shelf in bookstores. Within the thriller genre, the high ground feels like it's already taken; John Grisham with lawyers, James Paterson with detectives, and Lee Child with ex military police. As Jimmy Hendrix's father once told him, "be the first you". (Cross, 2006). Why play in a crowded park, create a new park and be the first. This feels like a new playground that is fresh, also very topical in today's climate.

Over the last twenty years, large corporations have fallen under the microscope of reporters and are getting slammed for putting profits before people (Baken, 2004).

As Bill Hicks eloquently said,

"By the way, if anyone here is in marketing or advertising... kill yourself. Thank you. Just planting seeds, planting seeds is all I'm doing. No joke here, really. Seriously, kill yourself, you have no rationalization for what you do, you are Satan's little helpers. Kill yourself, kill yourself, kill yourself now." (Hicks, 1997).

In Naomi Klein's book *No Logo*, she has documented the resentment large corporations are falling under. People are pushing for corporations to take responsibility for their actions. Many large corporations in America have closed down their local manufacturing plants and pushed production off shore, usually into countries that have a cheaper workforce. This means corporations are taking advantage of less stringent labour laws in other countries to keep their labour costs to a minimum, thus maximising their profits. However, when large corporations take their labour off shore, they are also hurting the economy and community by taking away jobs from local people. Corporations and those that run them are maximising their own bank accounts at the expense of communities in which they operate (Klein, 2010).

Many American corporations are recruiting sweatshops in third world countries to create their products and ship them back to America and the rest of the world. They are using

places like Vietnam, where workers are making as low as \$0.26 USD cents an hour (Powell & Skarbek, 2004).

“IBM claims that its technology spans the globe, and so it does, but often its international presence takes the form of cheap Third World labor producing the computer chips and power sources that drive our machines. On the outskirts of Manila, for instance, I met a seventeen-year-old girl who assembles CD-ROM drives for IBM. I told her I was impressed that someone so young could do such high-tech work. “We make computers”, she told me, “but we don’t know how to operate computers” (Klein, 2010, p. 69).

Even here in New Zealand “Big Corporations” have been seen to be getting away with dodging tax laws. In 2016, the New Zealand Government created a \$450,000 advertising campaign targeting tradesmen. The government claims that tradesmen are breaking the law by doing cash jobs and evading tax (Jones N. , 2016), while at the same time corporations were dodging nearly \$500 million through tax avoidance (Nippert, 2016). Tax avoidance versus tax evasion, what is the difference? If you are doing all you can to lower your tax bill, it’s avoidance and is legal. If you fail to declare income, that’s evasion (Jackson, 2015).

Difficult People We Work With

In the corporate world, there’s a perception that “bad” gets promoted over “good” (Crowley, 2015). Where the phrase, “it’s just business and not personal” means you can be aggressive, manipulative, and underhanded. So, in business does that mean you don’t have to play by the rules of human decency?

There are a few books on helping people deal with “difficult people”, these people whom display psychopathic tendencies in the workplace (Clark, 2002). Not all psychopaths are serial killers and psychopathy is among the most difficult disorders to spot (Boon, 2014). A psychopath can appear normal and is usually very charming. However, underneath the smooth talking, charming exterior, the psychopath lacks a conscience and empathy for

others, making for a conniving, manipulative, volatile and often (but by no mean always) criminal individual (Babiak & Hare, 2006).

Psychopaths tend to do well within large corporations (Babiak & Hare, 2006). The movie *Wall Street* is a great example of how we see psychopathic behaviour within the corporate world and how if you make money with it, it's seen as a good thing. Gordon Gekko was the face of this movement.

“I am not a destroyer of companies. I am a liberator of them! The point is, ladies and gentleman, that greed, for lack of a better word, is good. Greed is right, greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through, and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit. Greed, in all of its forms; greed for life, for money, for love, knowledge has marked the upward surge of mankind.” (Stone, 1987).

It looked like the only way to make it in business was to embrace the “Greed Works” mantra and people were openly rewarded for it.

Naomi Klein went against this belief, in her book *No Logo*; she documented the antics of big business. She travelled the world talking to people affected by this corporate greed, shining a light on their “profit before people” mentality (Klein, 2010).

The Psychopath in the Work Place

In *Corporate Truth*, Justin Truth is a psychopath. Could he really move up so quickly in his career with this type of personality? Robert D. Hare, PhD described a psychopath as:

“... social predators who charm, manipulate, and ruthlessly plow their way through life, leaving a broad trail of broken hearts, shattered expectations, and empty wallets. Completely lacking in feelings for others, they selfishly take what they want and do as they please, violating social norms and expectations without the slightest sense of guilt or regret.” (Hare, 1993, p. XI).

In the book and film of the same name *The Corporation*, they described a corporation as:

“Corporations are required by law to elevate their own interests above those of others, making them prone to prey upon and exploit others without regard for legal rules or moral limits.” (Baken, 2004).

“They are a special kind of person who have no moral conscience designed by law to be concerned only for their share holders.” (Achbar & Abbott, 2004).

The U.S. Supreme Court agrees and says corporations are a person or corporate personhood, at least for some purposes. It has some, but not all, of the legal rights and responsibilities enjoyed by a real person (Totenberg, 2014). So according to U.S law, a corporation is classed as a person. What type of personality would a corporation have if it were to take a personality test?

“In *The Corporation*, they use the personality diagnostic checklist DSM-IV to test corporations for pathological symptoms:

Callous disregard for the feelings of others? ✓

Incapacity to maintain enduring relationships? ✓

Reckless disregard for the safety of others? ✓

Deceitfulness: repeated lying and conniving others for profit? ✓

Incapacity to experience guilt? ✓

Failure to conform to social norms with respect to lawful behaviors? ✓

Result? Corporations are in fact psychopaths.” (Jones S. , 2012)

Sounds pretty close to the type of person Justin Truth is.

There is a common link a lot of business leaders share. Victor Lipman, in his article for *Forbes*, detailed the link between psychopathy and leadership. He pointed out troubling research that indicates the increase of psychopathic behaviour in senior management. (Lipman, 2013). Robert Hare, an expert on psychopathy, and Paul Babiak, an industrial-organizational psychologist, came together to study how psychopaths operate within corporations. They found that the modern, more flexible corporate environment in which taking high risks can equal high rewards, attracts those with psychopathic tendencies

(Babiak & Hare, 2006). So we can see how a corporation and a psychopath would be attracted to each other and how it can be mutually beneficial.

Lipman beautifully sums up why someone like Justin Truth would excel in the corporate world:

“The hallmarks of the psychopathic personality involve egocentric, grandiose behavior, completely lacking empathy and conscience. Additionally, psychopaths may be charismatic, charming, and adept at manipulating one-on-one interactions. In a corporation, one’s ability to advance is determined in large measure by a person’s ability to favorably impress his or her direct manager. Unfortunately, certain of these psychopathic qualities – in particular charm, charisma, grandiosity (which can be mistaken for vision or confidence) and the ability to ‘perform’ convincingly in one-on-one settings – are also qualities that can help one get ahead in the business world.” (Lipman, 2013).

Summary

Corporate Truth breaks a reader's normative expectation on how a novel should end. Readers expect Justin Truth to fail in his quest, as he is a negative protagonist. Yet the series, *The Truth Files*, actually sits within the reader's expectations. In the final book of the series, the reader will be given what they want. At its heart, *The Truth Files* is a blend of three of Booker's seven basic plots. The first is a "rags to riches" plot for the negative protagonist. The other two plots are combinations of "a quest" and "overcoming the monster". With the way the human brain looks for patterns in a story, it will pick up on these plot combinations and help carry the reader from one book to another.

There is already a marketing strategy in place for the release of *The Truth Files*. By launching with three books, this will help the reader get over the shock ending to *Corporate Truth* by knowing the story isn't over. Justin may have won for now, but he is going to get what's coming to him.

Game of Thrones writer George R.R. Martin has done this brilliantly. Think of the famous endings he has penned: The beheading of Ned Stark, the "Red Wedding", and the murder of Jon Snow by his fellow members of the Night's Watch. All of which are breaking the normative expectations, yet they all work as Martin and readers know the final book will see good eventually triumph over evil. All the pain they have gone through will be worth it.

In writing *Corporate Truth*, I wanted to bring a fresh perspective to the classic novel while also bringing in a modern take on protagonists. I wanted to use other forms of story telling, such as those used in professional wrestling, and introduce that psychology into a prose novel.

I set the scene in the corporate world because Justin, being the psychopath that he is, would naturally be attracted to this sort of environment given that corporations by nature are also psychopathic.

I believe *The Truth Files* are on the cutting edge of modern story telling, taking a basic plot and turning it on its head, just long enough before giving people what they want.

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