The Secret that Propels So Many Blockbuster Plots by John D. Brown

The wanted object

The antagonist and hero are bent on having it. It's the very thing the villain wants, or it's the critical thing that enables him or her to get what they want, or it's the one thing that can thwart them.

1. Info object

Wanted primarily for information it contains.

- Treasure map.
- War plans.
- Missile designs.
- Documents proving guilt, innocence, ownership.
- Missing part of puzzle.
- Compromising pictures, recording, docs.
- Witness to a crime.
- Etc.

Examples.

- *Star Wars* (R2D2 with schematics of Death Star)
- *The Da Vinci Code* (keystone with location of grail)
- *Skyfall* (list of MI-6 agents).

2. Money object

Wanted primarily for monetary value.

- Cash.
- Diamonds.
- Bearer bonds.
- Kilos of meth.
- Rare art.

Examples.

- *Treasure Island* (the treasure)
- *Romancing the Stone* (the map to the stone).
- *Old Henry* (the satchel of money)

3. Heart object

Wanted primarily for its intrinsic value.

- Person.
- Animal.
- Document.
- Rare artifact or statue.
- Etc.

Examples.

- *Taken* (daughter).
- *Ransom* (son).
- *The Mandalorian* (baby Yoda).
- *Enola Holmes* (Mother).
- *News of the World* (girl).

4. Power object

Wanted primarily for ability it gives possessor.

- Ring.
- Magic herb.
- Amulet.
- Codes.
- Etc.

Examples.

- *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (the stone)
- *Raiders of the Lost Ark* (ark)
- *Herbie the Love Bug* (Herbie)
- *Lord of the Rings* (ring)
- *Sword of Shannara* (sword)
- *Percy Jackson and the Lightening Thief* (lightning bolt)
- *The Terminator* (Sarah Connors)
- *Avengers: End Game* (infinity stones)
- *Mission Impossible: Ghost Protocol* (nuclear codes)
- *Pirates of the Caribbean* (cursed gold)

Other options

- Audience roots for or doesn't (microfilm vs R2D2).
- High concept or low (money vs ark of covenant).
- Human, animal, or inanimate.

Insights

- Stakes can be revealed early or later
- Can do a series of goals
- Can do a series of objects
- Can do a series of questions—what is it, where is it, why does anyone care?
- Can transition away from or into object story

Object ideas

- Apple
- Baker
- Baseball
- Boat
- Book
- Boot
- Boy
- Bullet
- Car
- Cat
- Code
- Computer
- Computer disk

- Costume
- Criminal
- Daughter
- Dog
- Dominoes game
- Dress
- Drugs
- Finger bone
- Game board
- Gun
- Hat
- Hobo
- Jewels
- Man
- Mask
- Money
- Plant
- Poem
- Policeman
- Pumpkin
- Secret documents
- Set of cards
- Slave
- Smart drive
- Song
- Statuette
- Sword
- Truck
- Tune
- Witness
- Woman
- Wrench

Plot verb ideas

- Find it
- Lose it
- Misplace it
- Search for it
- Discover it
- Hunt those who have it
- Evade those who want it
- Steal it
- Have it stolen
- Take it back
- Deliver it to someone
- Hot potato it
- Destroy it

- Protect it
- Hide it
- Attack it
- Transport it
- Uncover it
- Decode it
- Encode it
- Sell it
- Buy it
- Trade it
- Fake it
- Forge or fake it
- Hide it
- Swallow it
- Smuggle it
- Bespell it
- Deport it
- Imprison it
- Ship it
- Break it

Plot questions

- What is it?
- Where is it?
- Who has it?
- Why would anyone kill for this?
- The fate of what is at stake?
- What to do with it?

Plot surprise ideas

- The ally betrays.
- The enemy is the ally.
- The object is a fake.
- The object isn't the final object.
- The villain was two steps ahead and led us into a trap.
- The object isn't what we thought it was.
- The most unlikely person has the answer.
- The person we were supposed to deliver it to is now dead.
- The object is affecting us.

- The person isn't who we thought they were.
- The object does something different than we expected.

Story development

Part 1: The story setup

- Genre
- Compelling character
- Object
- Stakes
- Hero's goal (villain's goal)
- Formidable obstacles

Part 2: The plot

- Pursuit of goal
- Sequence obstacles
- Cool places
- Surprises
- Trapped or tight spots
- Rabbits out of hats
- All is lost

Creative principles

- Monkey see, monkey have fun
- Sketch, then draft

Our monkey have fun

- Generate possible objects (class)
- Genre, soldier, girl
- Generate possible stakes (class)
- Hero's goal (villain's goal)
- Generate possible obstacles (class)
- Generate possible progressions
- Generate exciting locations (class)
- What comes next? What would she naturally do? Her tactics?