

HOOK ME

*High Concept...The Big Idea...*whatever you call it, it's gotta have a HOOK. A twist on a familiar or classic character or scenario.

Here are three relatively recent films that were sold as specs or pitches. Each one sports a very clear and dynamic hook:

Armored – When five armored guards rob their own shipment of \$8 million and an innocent man is killed, the rookie in the bunch locks himself in the armored vehicle...with the money.

The Hangover – A group of guys wake up in Vegas the morning after their bachelor party with no memory of the night before and the groom is missing.

No Strings Attached (Note: the script was originally named *F**kbuddies*, a title that everyone in town knew was not releasable but made sure that everyone in town wanted to read it!) – A guy and a girl make a pact to use each other for meaningless sex...until true feelings arise.

Take a look at John Hughes films for a bunch of fantastic Big Ideas:

- Five teens, all strangers and from different circles, spend a Saturday in detention and bond as they battle their tyrannical school principal.
- A popular teenage kid and his two friends have the ultimate ditch day from school as they are stalked by the principal.
- Two teenage virgins create a sexy woman with their computer.
- A recently laid-off father must become a stay-at-home dad while his wife joins the work force.
- Two strangers get stranded during a blizzard and must travel cross-country together by car to get home for Christmas.
- A young boy gets left behind by his family and must defend his house from two burglars.

Here are some Big Ideas that we all wish we could have invented:

Shakespeare in Love – A comedic “re-writing of history” in which a young William Shakespeare is inspired by his own tortured romance to write “Romeo and Juliet,” the most famous fictional romance in history.

Slumdog Millionaire – A kid who grew up in extreme poverty uses his memories to answer the questions on the quiz show, “Who Wants to Be A Millionaire?”

Minority Report – The police officer who oversees the department that predicts future murders must go on the run when the system predicts he is the next killer.

Ransom – A father decides to offer the \$1 million ransom as a bounty on the head of his son’s kidnappers.

The Others – A family plagued by a haunted house turn out to be the ghosts haunting the real family that lives in the house.

Extract – A guy stuck in a sexless marriage hires a young gigolo to seduce his wife so he can justify his own affair, guilt-free.

Here are four high-concept scripts that sold in recent years...

Swingles – A “wingwoman” helps a guy pick up girls in bars.

Buried – A man is buried in a coffin with only his cell phone.

The Days Before – A man from the future keeps hopping one successive day into the past, desperate to stop a vicious race of time-traveling aliens from wiping out humanity.

Allies With Benefits – The female President of The United States falls for her old college fling, the new Prime Minister of England.

PRE-EXISTING ELEMENTS AND ARCHETYPES

Here are some more, but see if you can spot a pattern this time...

Nottingham – A re-imagining of the Robin Hood story told from the perspective of the Sheriff.

Goliath – A re-imagining of the David and Goliath story as an action movie that creates an expanded origin of the giant Goliath.

The Curse Of Medusa – A re-imagining of the myth that creates an expanded origin story for Medusa the Gorgon.

Snow White And The Huntsman – A re-imagining of the story of Snow White in which the huntsman sent to kill her becomes her mentor.

Hyde – A re-imagining of the classic story in which an allegedly rehabilitated Dr. Jekyll is pulled out of prison to help hunt a new monster who seems to be using an improved version of the Hyde serum.

Hollywood sure loves its re-imaginings, huh? They're always looking for the new take on a classic story, especially when it's in the public domain like myths and fairy tales. That means they don't have to pay for the rights.

The lesson here is that it's wise to build your concept from a universal story – a myth, fairy tale, historical event, public figure or pop culture archetype that is known by millions.

Here are three dynamic big ideas that hinge on very recognizable elements. I'm not saying they're *great* ideas—to each his own—just that the hooks have a very high recognition factor:

Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter – When the mother of future United States President Abraham Lincoln is murdered by a vampire, he begins a lifelong vendetta to rid the world of the heinous creatures.

Roundtable – Four modern-day knights (i.e., celebrities, not warriors) find themselves called upon to save the planet from an ancient evil force.

Comic Con – To save their beloved neighborhood comic shop, a Justice League of geeks must plan and execute a daring heist at Comic-Con.

Execution-Dependent

There are some big ideas that are so quirky and unique, they are said to be “execution-dependent.” In other words, it's a great idea *if* it's a great script, but a horrible idea if it's not. For example: