The Chase Of A MacGuffin Is An Obsession With No Guarantee Of A Good Outcome

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Abstract

In movies, there is always a central point that makes the story go forward. When a center is an object of high value, it is named MacGuffin. MacGuffin is often very attractive and has a high value. And the characters try to get their hands on it. The title used here, “The Maltese Falcon,” is a good example of it, as we shall see in the text.

Introduction

My thesis statement is, “The chase of a MacGuffin is an obsession with no guarantee of a good outcome.”

A MacGuffin is a plot device. That is shown in a film or novel to be the center of attention of all the main characters involved. The story tends to revolve around this object and is moved forward by it. The characters try to get their hands on this object of some high value to get themselves the benefits. Benefits may include power and, highly naturally, wealth. Designing a MacGuffin is a task requiring skill, as it is not only its physical design that matters. The writer and director have to make the plot device appealing to the viewers. It comes down to the cinematography, the music involved and a lot of good acting when it comes to making a good film.

A MacGuffin is something that creates greed. A lot of it, which makes people chase it and be so reluctant to leave it behind. And leave nothing undone if it helps to get the piece of this worth. However, in the storylines, not much attention is paid to the MacGuffin itself, as much of it is paid to the process of getting it. Certainly, though, its value is seemingly higher than the life of other human beings that come in the pursuer’s path, and the pursuer is willing to destroy it if necessary.

Our MacGuffin

The Maltese Falcon is a falcon statue made of gold and encrusted with jewels from beak to claw, was a tribute to Charles V of Spain from the Knights of Malta (a MacGuffin). It never reached Spain, as the ship was attacked by pirates, and the artifact was stolen. That was in 1539. Throughout the history,

the falcon has moved from hand to hand. Once it was covered with black enamel to hide its story from those who didn't know of it, leaving behind only a chunk of people aware of its worth and what's inside of it. So the MacGuffin somehow finds its way to a Russian General Kemidov, who was residing in Istanbul. And a "fat man" named Gutman gets to know about this, in 1941. This is where our plot of concern is.

Analysis

'Destruction' is what marks the very beginning of the story in many cases. In our case, it ultimately relates to the beginning of "The Maltese Falcon." So the story begins with a "Miss Wonderly" coming to some private detectives in San Francisco and asking them to follow Thursby. That night, the murder of this detective, Mr. Archer, who was a partner of Spade. Later, the same day, Thursby gets killed, and Spade becomes a suspect because they assumed Thursby was a killer of Archer and that Spade was driven by revenge, so he killed Thursby. The next day, a man named Cairo comes to Spade and tells him that he wants a piece of an artifact recovered and will pay a huge price for its retrieval. This is where the director uncovers the MacGuffin of this story. The MacGuffin value in the eyes of viewers depends on how the director, editor, and cameraman reveal its value. This is the point where I will praise the director, John Huston, and editor, Thomas Richards. And the writer, of course. The way on the screen, at the very moment of MacGuffin's introduction, a gun is drawn directly implies how important the artifact is.

So, Mr. Spade goes and meets Miss Wonderly and gets to know that she has given a false story, which leads to the chase of Thursby. He finds out that her real name is Brigid O'Shaughnessy. She said she wanted Thursby pursued because she was expecting him to cheat her. He somewhat thinks of this being related to Cairo, so he makes them meet. The moment they meet, they start talking, showing the fact that they know each other already, which shows Spade that Brigid is also linked to the chase of this "bird figure." This is the point where the story writer adds one more character to the chase of his MacGuffin. The more, the merrier. More suspicion is the answer. This is where the case of Thursby gets clear; it is again about the MacGuffin. Seemingly, Thursby wanted the artifact all for himself without splitting.

As Spade finds out a chaser named Wilmer, he tells the chaser to send a message to his boss. When acknowledged, he receives a call from his boss, Mr. Gutman. Spade and Gutman meet, and the first question Spade asks is, "Let's talk about the blackbird," revealing the fact that the MacGuffin still has one more pursuer. Spade, driven by the knowledge of a good artifact, also gets caught in somewhat greed. "We realize that the blackbird is an example of Hitchcock's 'MacGuffin'–it doesn't matter what it is, so long as everyone in the story wants or fears it." (Ebert, 1941). In an attempt to make a deal with Gutman, he storms out. Tells him a deadline to decide whether he wants Spade's help or not. "Throws his cigar into the fire, smashes his glass, barks out a threat, slams the door and then grins to himself in the hallway, amused by his act." (Ebert, 1941)..

He does later receive a call again, and so he goes to meet Gutman. This is where the true value of the blackbird is given. Gutman, obsessed with this chase, had known almost all the history of this artifact, A Maltese Falcon, back in 1539. He offers Spadea 25,000 $ for the retrieval of it and 1/4th of the money he makes after receiving the falcon, which he thinks would be over a million the least. The offer was impressive, and Spade started to like it. But as that happened, so happened the poisoning that was mixed in the drink of Spade. Spade starts to have blurred vision and fades out.

The Turn-Around

It is shown that when Spade is out, he comes out of a side room, Mr. Cairo. Showing how he was related to Gutman. This scene shows the greed that was sown into all these men by this very MacGuffin. See how greed causes all the conspiracies, hatred and cunning. Gutman had been chasing this falcon for 17 years, so driven by this obsession. We see that the term MacGuffin might seem quite new, yet the concept is quite realistic and known to the people all around us. It's in the form of wealth chase, or maybe sometimes women, or other desires that are not beneficial in reality but seem to be quite a goal to the person pursuing them. And makes them do bad, evil and wild things when it turns into an uncontrollable obsession. One should always know that "Obsession is a young man's game" (Nolan, 2006). So Spade wakes up and searches the apartment. Finds a newspaper with a ship timing circled. Goes to the bay and finds the ship burnt by accident.

He is told that everyone got out safely. When Spade returns to his office, a man named Captain Jacobi stumbles into the office, shot several times in the chest. He carried a package with him. He dies in this office. When Spade checks the package, it is the falcon. At the same time, he receives a call from Brigid. She tells her to arrive at some place as she needs help. He goes and stashes the package in a hidden place. Then goes to the address given by Brigid. It turns out the place was an empty plot. He heads back to his house and finds Brigid at the doorstep. When he enters the house with her, he finds Gutman, Wilmer, and Cairo sitting inside his house. Here, Gutman gives Spade 10,000 $ and demands the falcon be delivered. Spade declines to say that he had offered 25,000 earlier. Gutman says he will be giving more in the future once the falcon is delivered. Spade says that he needs a suspect for the police to hand out the murderer of Archer, Thursby and Captain Jacobi.

Here we see again, that a fine man like Spade, who has an imposing reputation and hadn't done any evil in the past, is now willing to give away a false person so that he gets a big share of the falcon. Spade suggests giving off Wilmer, who then tries to protest and ends up beaten down. He did murder Thursby and Jacobi, but the Archer murder would be put down on him, closing the story in front of the police. Spade asks for the complete story. Gutman tells him that he tried to make a deal with General Kemidov. When he refused, he hired Brigid to get the falcon. Brigid's partner was Thursby, and later, she brought in Cairo. When she stole it, she and Thursby left for Hong Kong, hoping to get the gems of Falcon all to themselves. When they later came to San Francisco, Gutman followed them here, and he got Thursby killed, to send Brigid a message. After knowing this story, Spade tells the secretary to bring the package from the old location. The package is brought and opened and then scratched with

a knife to reveal the gold beneath the enamel. It turns out it is a fake. Gutman loses himself for a moment, then holds back. And expresses the wish to return to Istanbul with Cairo and confront Kemidov again. Wilmer had escaped in the meantime. He asks Spade to return the 10,000. Spade keeps 1000 for “the effort” he put into all this. They leave. Then Spade calls the police and tells them that Wilmer is the one who murdered Thursby and Jacobi. And that Gutman and Cairo are involved with him, and they are moving to the airport.

Then he confronts Brigid, tells that Archer is a wise man, he would never walk behind Thursby into the dark. He would walk if there were a girl that wanted to be in the dark with him. Then, he suggests that Brigid is the one who killed Archer. The police arrive, and he gives them 1000 he had kept, dubbing it the “bribe” he was offered. He then hands Brigid over to the police, saying that he does love her, but he will not go against the law to keep her.

Conclusion

So as we all see, chasing a MacGuffin is not necessarily a profitable thing to do. One might not get a good outcome. We see three different outcomes here: one for Gutman and Cairo, one for Brigid, and one for Spade. And none of them is plausible. This satisfies my statement.

MacGuffin is the driving force in most of our real-life cases. In literature, though, the MacGuffin is a term of interest for all the characters. It drives them mad, turns them into dangerous people and makes them do terrible things. The Maltese Falcon is one perfect example of it (Scott, 2001). Greed is a destructive human nature that should be reckoned with in time. Look at the MacGuffin in our lives and see if it is worth the lives of others.

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