

SOME OF THE MANTRAS for creating good screenplays are the exact challenges in adapting fiction to the big screen: *show don't tell, get in late, leave early - get to the hook by the twentieth page* and more. Still, the vaults of Hollywood are filled with beloved novels that have been made into movies. It is cliché to say, "The book was better than the movie" as fiction fosters the sort of intimate experience that kindles the imagination in its readers, and taps into a trove of experiences and responses to the material that's highly personal. So rare is the movie that is considered "better" than the book, that top 10 lists have been created to honor these few. Such lists invariably include *The Godfather*, which could smack as an insult to the author. Yet Mario Puzo's book spent 67 weeks on the "New York Times Bestsellers-List" and he was a part of the duo that took the material to the next level using the art of motion pictures. He was already screenwriting the disaster movie *Earthquake* when tapped to write the adaptation with Francis Coppola. For his efforts, Mr. Puzo went home with an Oscar® for Best Adapted Screenplay. Here, the original storyteller was on hand to lure audiences strategically - perhaps poetically - into that nefarious world washed in old-fashioned imagery.

As one moves down the lists of movies that are *better* than the book, each instance can be debated and personally, I disagree with the conclusion that the film *Gone With The Wind* is better than the sweeping epic Margaret Mitchell penned, which at its height was the second best-selling book of all time after the Bible {long before there was a chap named Harry Potter}. Ms. Mitchell provided a depth of insight and facts to that era in a way the images could not fully grasp. You might see *The Bridges of Madison County* on "the list" yet for me, given the fact that this is the only novel I had personally read in a single sitting - I'd disagree with that claim. And much as *The English Patient* dwells in my all-time favorite films list {I even have a signed copy of its screenplay from the late director, Anthony Minghella} again there is so much detail and scope to be gleaned from the novel that inspired this cinematic achievement. Rooting for the adaptations of particular works has been somewhat of a hobby for a better part of my life and I view the movie as a crowning glory to a well told story and refrain from the sport of be-moaning the interpretation as much as possible - after all we always have our own version in memory to reflect upon. Today, it is the inspired works from Isabel Allende that I would most like to see adapted, particularly *The Island Beneath The Sea* and *Daughter of Fortune*.

Authors like John Grisham have a writing style that parlays effortlessly into movies as the stories move along with more action and dialogue than is typical in a novel, yet when time comes to write the script, heavy hitting screenwriters are dispatched to enliven the works with visual punch that made *A Time to Kill*, *The Firm*, *The Pelican Brief*, *The Client* et al truly zing. Same in the case of Ian Fleming, a master of creating such memorable characters as 007, it is still necessary to pull in the screenwriters who are able to make a film from fiction like we create photo albums from our lives.

Late Michael Crichton is a renaissance man and dynamo that agilely crossed professions. Readers return to his books like academics use the library - to gain the raw data and scientific facts from the Harvard-educated MD - who also happens to write. Or is it the other way around? So important is his part in spearheading quality entertainment that he also launched a career as a film & television producer, most notably for ER. His is a unique case as fans of Jurassic Park also found themselves picking up the book to learn more about the maestro's theories on his extinct creatures. At 7, the very first novel I ever read cover to cover after moving past "Dick & Jane" children's books was adapted to film, twice - *Freaky Friday*. I can clearly recall the anticipation of awaiting the release date to see Annelise Andrews come to life on screen, portrayed first by Jodie Foster. Since that time, I've read dozens of books that went on to be films and in a handful of cases has a movie, like *Black Hawk Down* or *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, inspired me to return to the text to learn more. One recent adaptation that I celebrate, yet never read the book, is *For Colored Girls*. Never before have I seen a director weave poetry so seamlessly into a film as in this one - kudos to 34th Street Films.

The act of casting beloved characters from cherished books has created some of the most legendary casting calls, such as for Scarlett O' Hara. And with the most recent literary sensation, "The Millennium Trilogy" there's a new girl in town with a sensation all her own... Lisbeth Salander is a character that was first discovered in *The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* and with all three books simultaneously appearing in the top 5 slots of the "New York Times Bestsellers-List" along with the 3 Swedish-produced films {with English subtitles} a casting search in Hollywood was launched in 2010. With that now decided, we will have the opportunity to view another interpretation of this compelling material by the late Stieg Larsson, who incidentally did not live long enough to see his works published and produced.

The role of author is a vital member of the arts. Catalyzing the film medium from the voices that first creep around the psyche of the scribes, then stir the imaginations of its readers. I marvel at the process and know that cinematic history is deeply indebted to the original storytellers for their courage and persistence to weave absorbing tales.



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