

## Film Feature: From Page to Screen, Fall 2011’s Biggest Adaptations

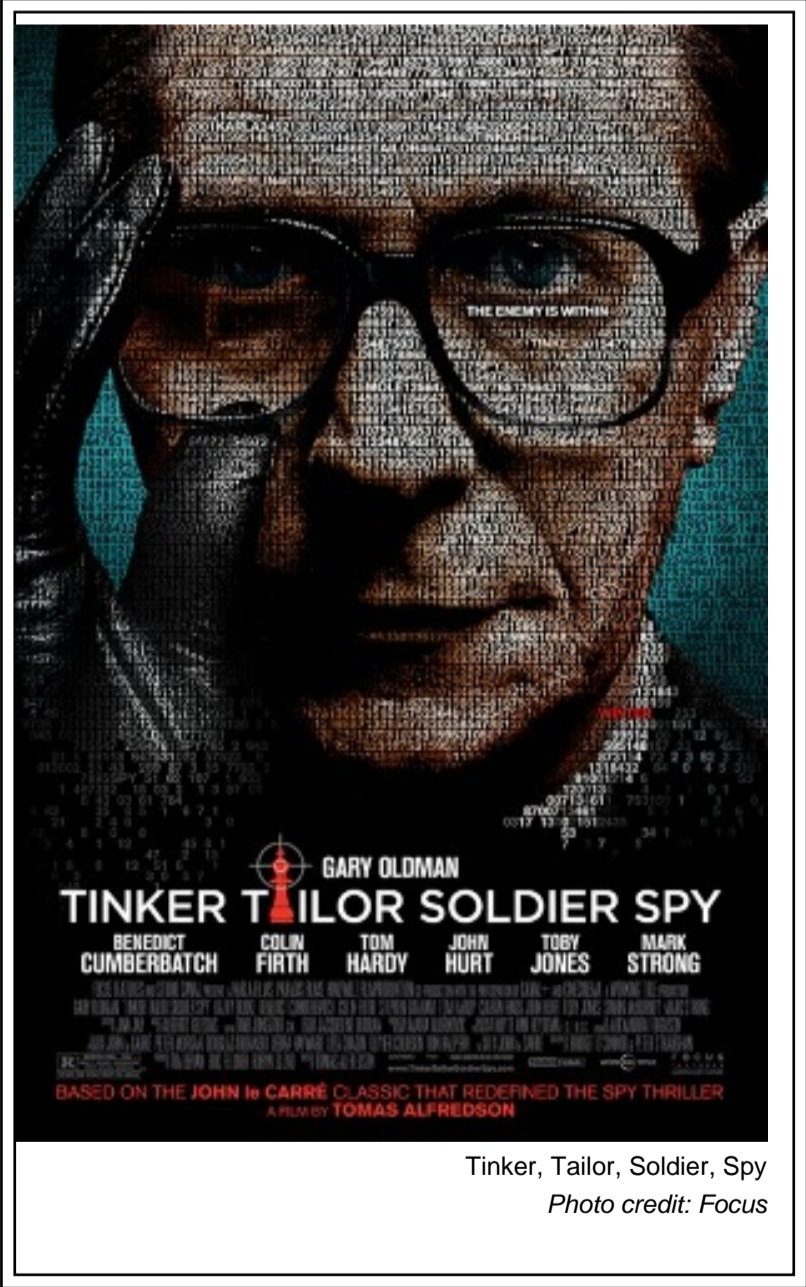
Submitted by [BrianTT](#) [1] on November 28, 2011 - 10:39am

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CHICAGO – Last week saw the release of Martin Scorsese’s “Hugo,” his long-awaited adaptation of Brian Selznick’s award-winning young adult novel, “The Invention of Hugo Cabret”. And the movie has been “long-awaited” for several reasons. One reason is that the idea of Scorsese doing a kid’s movie is a little mind-blowing. Another reason is that the 3D is so good that James Cameron himself is doing ads for the movie. But my favorite reason is the simple fact that “Hugo” is just an epic combination of the right director being picked to adapt the right book. Regardless of the film’s outcome – most critics have gone ga-ga for it and the film did reasonably well in its opening frame against stiff competition – it’s almost impossible to think that Hugo could’ve found a better director than Martin frickin’ Scorsese.

Book-to-film adaptations are big business in Hollywood, and this holiday season is PACKED with big-time directors taking big-time books and trying to turn them into big-time movies. It’s a tried-and-true movie industry formula, but it’s not without risks. Sometimes the pairing of director and book just doesn’t work. Or sometimes the director is the perfect choice, but there are other factors – timing, actors, screenplay, the cosmic forces of the universe – that just ensure that the adaptation doesn’t work in the end. Sometimes you get “The Godfather”, sometimes you get “Bonfire of the Vanities”.

Since this holiday season has so many major book-to-film adaptations hitting the big screen, we thought we’d profile four of the biggest and brightest and rank the factors that are working for and against their box office success.



**Film: “Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy” (December 9)**

**Based On:** One of the most iconic spy novels of all time, published in 1974 by the great John le Carre.

**Director:** Tomas Alfredson, best known for the Swedish vampire flick, “Let the Right One In.”

**Chances For Success:** Strong. “Tinker, Tailor” has already opened at several film festivals and in some international territories and was met with largely positive reviews. (It also has been a big box office hit in the U.K.) Granted, this isn’t a surprise due to the pedigree of the material and the stellar leading cast (Gary Oldman, Colin Firth, Tom Hardy, John Hurt, Toby Jones, Mark Strong, Benedict Cumberbatch, Ciarán Hinds). While “Tinker, Tailor” has been attracting a lot of Oscar buzz, particularly for Oldman, it’s still unclear that, without a major awards nod, if the film will be a box office hit in the U.S. beyond the arthouse circuit. The plot is labyrinthine, the book isn’t nearly as well-known Stateside as Ludlum’s Bourne books, the lead character is a retired pencil-pusher, and can you remember the last movie about the Cold War that really resonated with audiences? Hopefully, “Tinker Tailor” will break that streak (or else we’ll be stuck waiting around for that “Red Dawn” remake that MGM is never going to release).

**Working Against It:** Dry subject material; Alfredson’s possible “sophomore slump”; Bourne burnout leading to unfair expectations for modern spy flicks.



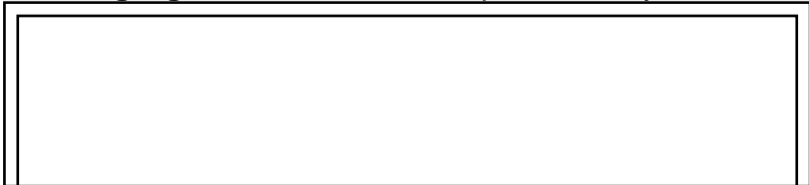
**Film:** “The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo” (December 21)

**Based On:** The most-effed up thriller about international journalism, hacking, and rape that every person you’ve ever met has read recently; originally published in 2005 by the now-deceased Stieg Larsson.

**Director:** David Fincher (“Seven”, “Social Network”, “Zodiac”, “Fight Club”).

**Chances For Success:** Half-and-half – big potential and big risk. “The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo” is the big publishing hit of the moment – you honestly can’t go into an airport without seeing 50 people reading a copy. This Swedish crime thriller has sold over 3 million copies, inspired two sequels, and become a pop culture phenomenon, so it’s no surprise that Hollywood had to make their own version, even though all three books were already turned into extremely popular Swedish films. And having someone like Fincher sign on to the film adaptation is equivalent to when Ron Howard and Tom Hanks signed on to turn Dan Brown’s “Da Vinci Code” into a movie. It’s A-list talent working on A-list material and expecting to make A-list cash in return. This should be a no-brainer, but there are too many risk factors to ignore. First of all, even though “Da Vinci Code” made a lot of money, it was a critical dud and it already feels extremely dated. A-list director and book pairings don’t necessarily always equal “The Godfather”. Second, even though the books are extremely popular, they’re about dark, dark events, which may or may not repel audiences. Are holiday moviegoers really going to want to watch American and British actors pretending they’re Swedish while they rape and murder each other? Is it just too dark for the season? Third, Fincher is a fantastic director, but a populist filmmaker he ain’t. While the man has virtuoso talent, the idea of him adapting such a pop culture popcorn flick still feels a bit off. And, finally, with the books being everywhere and the Swedish “Dragon Tattoo” movies on Netflix streaming, is the world already burned out on Stieg Larsson?

**Working Against It:** Fincher’s unpredictability; difficult subject matter; possible “Dragon Tattoo” burn-out.





The Adventures of Tintin  
Photo credit: Paramount

Film: “The Adventures of Tintin: Secret of the Unicorn” (December 23)

**Based On:** The world’s most popular comic book character that most Americans have never heard of; first published in 1929 by Belgian legend Hergé.

**Director:** Steven Spielberg, up-and-coming director of “1941” and “Indiana Jones and the Kingdom of the Crystal Skull”.

**Chances For Success:** Risky... in America. You see, “Tintin” is like the soccer of comic book properties. It’s fantastically, epically popular all over the world... but just not in America. I mean, c’mon, Americans don’t even call “soccer” by its proper name (“football” makes way more sense). This is the United States’ relationship with “Tintin”. Like the metric system, many of us are aware that “Tintin” exists, but, beyond that, we don’t know much about it and don’t have much desire to learn more. Spielberg’s first foray into animation is making a lot of cash in international territories so far and the reviews have been halfway decent. (“Tintin” is such a beloved property internationally that you had to expect some to be offended by America’s most famous director taking on such a European sacred cow. My favorite, over-the-top pan so far comes from the UK Guardian: “Steven Spielberg’s adaptation is not just a failure; it is an assault on a great body of art so thuggishly moronic as to make one genuinely depressed.”) And it doesn’t help that Spielberg’s take on “Tintin” has been brought to life by performance-capture CGI animation – another art-form that America audiences have failed to embrace. On one hand, we have Steven Spielberg, one of the world’s most famous directors, playing in a film genre that he basically revolutionized with “Raiders of the Lost Ark”. On the other hand, we have an obscure-in-America hero trying to grab our attention across the wide expanse of the uncanny valley. Will it work? I wouldn’t start counting on those “Tintin” sequels quite yet.

**Working Against It:** What’s a “Tintin”?; the marketing to younger audiences has been almost non-existent; No, seriously, what’s a “Tintin”?





We Bought a Zoo  
Photo credit: Paramount

#### Film: “We Bought a Zoo” (December 23)

**Based On:** Benjamin Mee’s stirring 2008 memoir about his family buying a small rural zoo while on the eve of a major personal tragedy.

**Director:** Cameron Crowe, former wunderkind who, admit it, kind of disappeared after “Vanilla Sky” and “Elizabethtown”.

**Chances For Success:** Modest. This is one of the stranger book adaptations of the season. If you only watched the trailer – and had no idea of who made the film or what the book was about – it might look just like a cute Hallmark movie with a surprisingly great cast (Matt Damon, Scarlett Johansson, Thomas Haden Church, Elle Fanning). But, when you start digging into the details, the project gets weirder and weirder. Up front, you’ve got the involvement of Cameron Crowe, who was brought in as a director-for-hire and rewrote a script by Aline Brosh McKenna, which normally wouldn’t be that unusual... except that Crowe is known for his intensely personal films, so having him brought on as a director to adapt a script that adapts a book seems a bit “removed” from Crowe’s normal M.O. Aside from “Vanilla Sky”, Crowe normally works with material that originates with him and, be honest, “Vanilla Sky” wasn’t exactly Crowe’s finest hour. Then you’ve got the fact that “We Bought a Zoo” is a fictionalized adaptation of a real-life memoir, which, again, is a little weird. Why did they need to fictionalize Benjamin Mee’s life story? If it was exciting enough for a book, why didn’t it work for the movie version? The buzz around the movie just sort of smacks of a feel-good, Hollywood-ized story of personal triumph a la “The Blind Side”, but the involvement of Crowe and Matt Damon just don’t seem to fit in that model. If anyone can take that genre and turn it on its ear, it’s Cameron Crowe, but I just haven’t seen anything in the trailers or promotional material yet that make “We Bought a Zoo” seem like anything out of the ordinary.

**Working Against It:** lack of buzz; underwhelming trailers; that whole Ohio rural zoo shooting incident definitely didn’t help.

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