

Moviegoers must relate

Continued from 1D

hit the best-seller list" before they start bidding.

Even Oprah Winfrey, whose book club selections become automatic best sellers, can't guarantee box office success for book-to-film adaptations. Moviegoers shunned *Beloved*, the 1998 film adaptation of Toni Morrison's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel that starred Winfrey as a former slave. And the Oprah Book Club picks that have been made into movies—including *The Deep End of the Ocean*, *A Map of the World* and *Where the Heart Is*—have hardly been blockbusters.

Cover story

Oprah-anointed novels and acclaimed non-fiction best sellers such as the Frank McCourt memoir *Angela's Ashes* share traits—they are intricate, dark—that make them good books but questionable commercial film ventures. Many of them have dealt with difficult topics, including child abuse (*A Map of the World*), mental illness (*Girl, Interrupted*) and abject poverty (*Angela's Ashes*), making them hard sells as mass-appeal films.

Explains John Baker, editorial director at *Publishers Weekly*, trade publication of the book industry: "Books with a distinctive literary quality can't be easily translated into a movie. Movies are terribly literal. It is very difficult to achieve poetry in the adaptation of a literary novel. Movies that are really going to have any type of popular audience are going to have a strong narrative line and characters people can relate to."

Many of the box office disappointments "were complex books that became complex movies," says *Perfect Storm* producer Weinstein. "You have to be careful when you have a complex book." And then there is the temptation to Hollywoodize books by making them more upbeat. Although the idea was dismissed, some Warner Bros. executives suggested giving *The Perfect Storm* a happier ending.

That happened with the film adaptation of the best-selling *The Horse Whisperer*. The sage "horse whisperer," played by Robert Redford, dies in the book but lives in the movie.

"If the book is very popular, one of the difficult things is overcoming the panic of disappointing the fans of the book," says screenwriter/director Richard LaGravenese, who adapted *The Horse Whisperer*.

But a book's fan base isn't necessarily vital to its success as a movie. Even books that have sold huge numbers by publishing standards (*The Perfect Storm*, *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil*, *The Deep End of the Ocean*) would wither at the box office if only readers showed up. An Oprah Book Club selection may sell more than 1 million copies, but 1 million moviegoers won't land a film on top of the weekend's box office.

"You have to keep in mind that when you're talking about books, a best seller can sell 100,000 copies," says David Rosenthal, publisher of Simon & Schuster. "For a movie, that is maybe a few hours of business on a single day."

The producers of *The Perfect Storm* learned that lesson when they screened their film for an audience of 500. Although Junger's book has spent three years on various best-seller lists, only a couple of people at the screening said they had read the book, and fewer than

10 had heard of it.

Aside from fickle audiences, Hollywood faces another issue in film books: time. There is an extra step because a screenplay must be adapted from the book. Many best sellers that were sold a few years ago are still waiting for their film close-ups, including Michael Crichton's *Airframe*, Arthur Golden's *Memoirs of a Geisha* and Charles Frazier's *Cold Mountain*.

And because these prestige projects tend to attract big-name directors, scheduling becomes even more of a challenge. Steven Spielberg, for example, plans to direct *Geisha* but has put it on the back burner for now.

Those factors have left frustrated studios wary about spending big bucks on a book. While film rights to *Cold Mountain*, *Message in a Bottle* and *How Stella Got Her Groove Back* all sold for more than \$1 million, executives are more circumspect now. Crichton, for example, didn't receive his normal hefty upfront fee for the rights to his most recent book, *Timeline*. Instead, he'll receive a sizable fee when the book becomes a film.

Still, don't expect Hollywood to give up on books. They have yielded so many all-time movie greats, from *Gone With the Wind* to *The Godfather*. Even in today's marketplace, books make up an estimated 30% of the projects that studios are actively developing, says David Alpert, president of 4filmmakers.com, a site that tracks moviemaking for film professionals.

Historically, novels have been a source for a number of Hollywood's biggest moneymakers, including *Jurassic Park*, *Forrest Gump* and *Jaws*. More serious books also are important to studios because they attract high-profile talent.

"Most of the original screenplays right now are not very good," says *The Perfect Storm* director Petersen. "If somebody writes a great book—novel or non-fiction—very often it has taken years of work from a serious writer. The result, he says, is a story with more layers and depth than the common script."

On a financial level, studios key in on books of high literary quality because they tend to get serious Oscar consideration, which can translate to a box office boom.

At the past 12 Academy Awards, at least one of the best-picture nominees has been based on a

Movie advertising boosts book sales

Even when the film adaptation of a book is a box office flop, the publishing industry can cheer.

That's because publicity for the movie renews interest in the book and boosts book sales dramatically.

"We always hope that one of our books will be adapted as a motion picture because the marketing of the movie will almost always, without fail, give us an opportunity to broaden our potential readership," says Stuart Applebaum, a spokesman for Random House.

A book that might have had a small audience can become a best seller because the jacket of the movie "tie-in" edition sports a photo of a big star.

Patricia Highsmith's *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, for example, sold "hundreds of thousands" of copies once Matt Damon was added to the cover of the novel last year.

By Josh Chetwynd

Not all succeed

With some exceptions, the box office has not been kind to many recent movies adapted from books.

| Estimated budget | Domestic box office gross (in millions) |
|---|---|
| <i>The English Patient</i> (1996) | \$32 |
| <i>A Thousand Acres</i> (1997) | \$78.7 |
| <i>Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil</i> (1997) | \$28 |
| <i>Beloved</i> (1998) | \$7.9 |
| <i>The Deep End of the Ocean</i> (1999) | \$25.1 |
| <i>Girl, Interrupted</i> (1999) | \$55 |
| <i>A Map of the World</i> (1999) | \$22.9 |
| <i>Where the Heart Is</i> (2000) | \$38 |
| | \$13.9 |
| | \$24 |
| | \$28.9 |
| | \$7.5 |
| | \$0.5 |
| | \$15 |
| | \$31.7 |

By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

book. Last year, *The Cider House Rules* gross, which topped out at \$57.5 million, jumped 61% after its nomination, elevating the John Irving adaptation from a mild disappointment to a success. In 1997, *The English Patient*'s take increased 46% after it received 12 Oscar nominations and won best picture.

"Books suggest a certain high-brow quality or an educational imprint on material," says Oscar-winning producer Mark Johnson, who has worked on such adaptations as *A Little Princess* and *The Natural*.

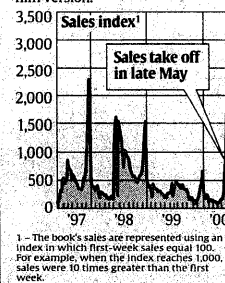
Because books are an essential part of "serious" filmmaking, industry types who champion books are not worried about Hollywood's current cautious approach.

"The (novel) and non-fiction book-to-film business waxes and wanes like all things," says literary agent Ron Bernstein, who has sold the feature rights to numerous books. "What is in vogue at this moment is merchandising—toys, games, rides. It is tough to get all that out of books."

But if upcoming films such as *All the Pretty Horses*, *Bridget Jones's Diary* and *The Perfect Storm* succeed at the box office, good books could easily become central characters in the next chapter in moviemaking.

'Perfect Storm' book sales soar

It's not unusual for a movie to spur sales of the book it's based on. Witness *The Perfect Storm*: It achieved several sales peaks after hitting USA TODAY's Best-Selling Books list in May 1997, but its greatest sales have come in recent weeks as anticipation builds for the film version.



By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

People

Imprisoned Downey feeling less than zero

Robert Downey Jr. is having a grim time in the California Substance Abuse Treatment Facility and State Prison. The actor, 35, shares a cell with four other inmates, washes dishes and cleans up kitchen slop, and faces the continual threat of violence and sexual assault, says the most detailed story yet, in the August *Vanity Fair*.



News & views
By Jeannie Williams

This column appears Tuesday-Thursday

"I'm just sinking deeper into my depression sessions. Sometimes I'm just dead, living in a (bleeping) warehouse. I'm ready to get out," he tells writer Steve Garbarino. But the earliest his three-year term for missing drug tests on probation could end is November.

Meanwhile, his appearance and disposition have changed "radically," writes Garbarino. "The hair at his temples is going gray. His eyes are yellowy." He looks smaller.

"I would never tell you the worst things that have happened to me," Downey says. After some evasions, he denies he has been sexually assaulted in prison.

A psychiatrist who has visited Downey, Manijeh Mikakhtar, says the actor has bipolar disorder, also known as manic depression. She says his drug use has been "self-medicating," and he needs treatment, not punishment. Director Robert Altman goes further: "It's obscene and it's barbaric" that Downey is not in a hospital facility.

Downey says he has been clean of drugs since last June, but wishes the random testing were daily, because "I don't want there to be an open door." He attends treatment sessions four hours a day, five days a week.

He feels "so awful" about the effect of his incarceration on son Indio, 6, and the added responsibility

for estranged wife Deborah Falconer, now living with another man. Indio asked his mother if his daddy was "a bad man." Downey says, "I play myself up as a hero" to the boy. "He likes films with Mel Gibson and Arnold Schwarzenegger. So it was kind of awful to hear that."

The actor first tried to keep to himself, but then made his cellmates laugh with Hollywood horror stories. He has always been an artist; he does portraits of people on paper bags. A friend has sold some to Downey pals. Friends say Downey is nearly broke.

He wants to be moved to a prison where he could have only one cellmate and "pick my own shows on television without it being a group decision." But his publicist said Wednesday he knows of no plans for a move.

Couples: Ellen Barkin arrived for her wedding Wednesday night in Manhattan wearing a cream-colored skirt and jacket with a pink and-green floral pattern and hurried head-down past photographers. She and billionaire Ron Perelman were married in an Upper East Side synagogue. Guests included Penny Marshall, Trudie Styler, Sting's wife and cookbook author, and Gabriel Byrne, Barkin's ex-husband, who was tieless. Leaving the synagogue, Byrne said, "What could I wish them but joy, happiness and health in their life together. It's beautiful."

VIPs: Lisa Kudrow writes a "dream diary" for the August issue of *Marie Claire* magazine, recalling one dream about playing "my own personal Star Wars video game" on what seemed to be a small movie

Art Buchwald suffers stroke, still hospitalized

Syndicated columnist Art Buchwald, 74, is in "serious but stable" condition in a Washington, D.C., hospital after suffering a stroke.

Georgetown University Medical Center spokeswoman Angie Covarrubias said Wednesday that the Pulitzer-winning writer has been in intensive care since the June 16 stroke.

His son, Joel, who has been at the hospital daily with sisters Connie and Jennifer, said Wednesday his father is "coming out of it slowly. He's doing better, but I think it's going to take a while."

Buchwald, who moved to New York a few years ago after decades as a Washington media fixture, was visiting his son in the nation's capital over Father's Day weekend.

He collapsed while talking on the phone at Joel's house.

"I called 911 and got a recording," Joel said. "It was a little frustrating."

But it didn't affect his father's condition, he said, adding, "The D.C. Fire Department was great."

By Ann Oldenburg

NEW POPULAR PSYCHOLOGY BESTSELLER

"...the most amusing, hopeful wonderful book on psychology in the last decade deserves five gold stars and free drink"

Robert Anton Wilson, award-winning author of *Quantum*

BATTLING INNER DUM

The Craziest of Apparently Normal People
by David L. Weiner with Gilbert M. Heffer, MD

"Weiner is a Will Rogers of psychology who, in this delightful book, compassionately skewers pretentious theoretical and clinical ideas and demystifies psychological realities that affect us all"

Michael A. Naglerbach, Ph.D.,
Psychologist, Chicago School of Professional Psychology

"Highly Recommended Library Journal"

"...if you want to understand yourself better, you've got to get in touch with your inner dummy."

Psychology Today

David L. Weiner
Professor of Psychology, Chicago School of Professional Psychology

*Top 100 psychology books of all time on Amazon.com (May 22, 2000)

At bo
Pro
www.p
www

All booked up for Hollywood

While studios executive are more cautious today about having

The New York Times bestseller—now in paperback

THE PERFECT STORM

what's in y
packet?

g nuts for coconuts

Survivor castaways use the majestic palm as coconuts as a source of food and shelter. Communications hardware, when Greg and touches no one with his coconut. Coconut facts and figures:

- Scientific name is *Cocos nucifera*.
- Coconuts are the world's largest seed.
- The word coconut is derived from the Portuguese word for "specter, goblin" or "grinning face."
- Coconut meat is called "copra."
- Marco Polo introduced it to Europe.
- Main exporters are Philippines, Papua New Guinea, Vanuatu, Malaysia and various Pacific islands.
- Coconut palm tree bears fruit from age 5 to 80 years.

Coconut palms grow up to 80 feet. A tree bears 50 coconuts per year. Products from the plant include coconut oil, coconut milk, soap, detergents, shampoos, sym- per and toddy (an alcoholic beverage).

Media Britannica

her Dirk expelled from 'Survivor'

Dirk failed tapioca hunter Dirk Been, 24, left the Survivor island Wednesday night. He was a farmer and teacher back in the world, criticized for laziness and ineptitude, al- is river guide Kelly "I'm a water all-star" who single-handedly forced the Tagi elimination situation by losing a rowing competition to YMCA coach and perpetual competi- tervise Peterson. Peterson was the USA poll's pick for elimination by a 4-1 margin.

lim Shady, still standing up

Unbeatable *The Marshall Mathers LP* tops album chart for the fifth week after selling 100,000 copies, bringing its total to 4.08 million; ac- cording to SoundScan, Britney Spears remains in sec- ond place with her album *Britney* at 3.0 million, easily dominating the week's two other top albums: The Deftones' *White Pony* at No. 3 and Busta Rhymes' *Anarchy* at No. 4. Rounding out the top 10 are 'N Sync, Kid Rock's *Devil*, B.B. King/Eric Clapton, Matchbox Twenty's *Real Time*, and Next's *Welcome II Nextcity* enters the No. 12 with 88,000 copies.

men in 'People' batch of bachelors

Men in *The Perfect Storm* star George Clooney tops the first list of 100 Most Eligible Bachelors in the issue of People's magazine. Friday's list includes many dating singles: Julio D. Law & Order co- star, most are reg- ular Florida postal workers, and Califor- nia Davidson.

gets the blues

Teen star LeAnn Rimes canceled her 30-date concert tour Wednesday after she was diagnosed with a strained vocal- cords. She recovers, her parents continue squab- ble over their daughter's millions. On Mon- day, Rimes filed a petition denying ex-wife Belin- at he squandered their daughter's money.

Princess Diana garden

Memorial Garden, honoring the late Prin- cess, is opening Friday in London's Kensin- gton. The \$2 million, Peter Pan-themed play- grounds a 35-foot-tall pirate ship, a water play- ground, a fountain and a musical garden. Di- ana's garden will be open 365 days a year.

Dennis Quaid split

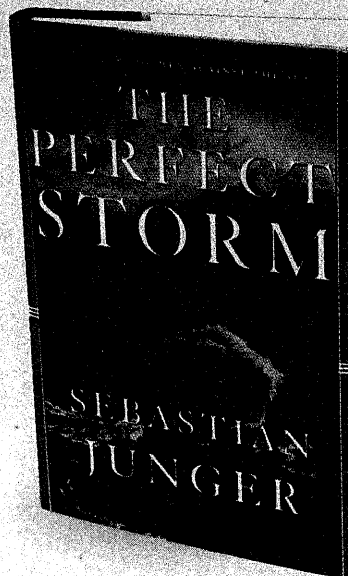
More than nine years as one of Hollywood's most successful married couples, Meg Ryan and Dennis Quaid split up. E! Online reported Wednes- day, which happened about six weeks ago, and amicable, their publicist says.

ugh with Rick Rockwell

It might be the first Playboy where men actually "chase" women. — *Who Wants to Marry a Multi- millionaire?* Rick Rockwell on Fox News Chan- nel about ex Darva Conger's Playboy pictorial.

Sortiano from staff and wire reports
 ne@usatoday.com

Cover story



Estimated film budget:
\$125 million



Box office gross:
?

Hollywood re-scripts book deals

What looks good on paper doesn't always sell at box office

By Josh Chetwynd
 USA TODAY

At first, *The Perfect Storm* didn't seem so perfect to Hollywood. The book's journey from page to big screen wasn't as tempestuous as the violent sea storm depicted in Sebastian Junger's best seller, but it wasn't smooth sailing, either.

In early 1996, the true story of a group of New England fishermen caught in a "perfect" storm was shipped to studios before the book was finished. No takers. Then agents started circulating the manuscript of the gripping tale. But again, they couldn't find a buyer.

It wasn't until Junger took the unusual step of traveling to Hollywood from New York nearly a year later to pitch the book that Warner Bros. and producer Paula Weinstein secured film rights in a six-figure deal. The studio then approached Wolfgang Petersen to direct the movie — but only after *The Perfect Storm* became a best seller.

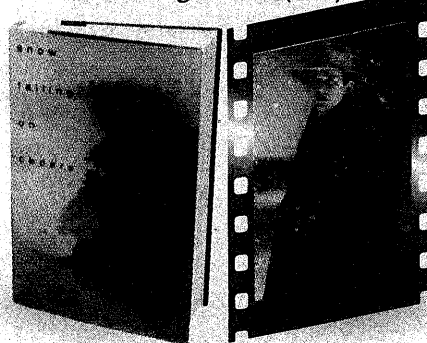
Despite its cloudy beginnings, *The Perfect Storm* hits theaters Friday. And with stunning special effects and a dramatic story line, it would seem to have the ingredients to be a hit. But if the filmmakers are feeling a little queasy about how their \$125 million movie will do, there's a good reason: A number of recent movies made from books — particularly literary fiction titles and quality non-fiction works — have been battered at the box office.

With the exception of a few films, including *The Talented Mr. Ripley* and *The Green Mile*, many of last year's book adaptations were, at best, modest performers. Combined, *Snow Falling on Cedars*, *Angela's Ashes* and *Girl, Interrupted* grossed less than \$60 million. Recent films based on more obscure novels, such as *The Beach* and *Fight Club*, fared no better.

Hollywood will always turn to books for ideas, but with the recent poor box office results and with Hollywood slashing development budgets, their role is being scrutinized.

"Studios are giving a tougher read to books than they would a few years ago," says literary agent Richard Green, who sold *The Perfect Storm* with his partner, Howard Sanders. "In the past, we used to sell from galleys (early print copies). Then we started selling from manuscripts. Nowadays, the trend has reversed itself, and many executives wait to see whether books

Snow Falling on Cedars (1999)



Estimated film budget: **\$36 million**

Box office gross: **\$14.4 million**

Angela's Ashes (1999)



Estimated film budget: **\$25 million**

Box office gross: **\$13 million**

By Julie Snider, USA TODAY

Top, Warner Bros.; center, Universal Studios; bottom, Paramount Pictures

Picture frames: George Clooney, top, in *The Perfect Storm*; Ethan Hawke in *Snow Falling on Cedars*; and Emily Watson and Robert Carlyle with children in *Angela's Ashes*.

Please see COVER STORY next page ►

For seniors, prayer good for body as well as soul

By Kathleen Fackelmann
 USA TODAY

Relatively healthy seniors who pray or meditate may add years to their lives, says a study out today.

The devout have long believed that prayer helps gain admission to the hereafter. But the study suggests that regular prayer, Bible study or meditation may have important benefits in the here and now.

"This is one of the first studies showing that people who pray live longer," says Harold Koenig, one of the researchers at Duke University Medical Center in Durham, N.C. Koenig and colleagues describe the study in the *Journal of Gerontology*.

Koenig and his colleagues studied nearly 4,000 mostly Christian men and women 65 and older from 1986 to 1992. The team asked the seniors about health problems and whether the seniors prayed, meditated or read the Bible.

Researchers discovered that relatively healthy seniors who said they rarely or never prayed ran about a 50% greater risk of dying during the six-year study compared with seniors who prayed at least once a month. People who prayed once a month got the same protection as those who prayed more often, the researchers say.

That's the risk of death after the study controlled for factors known to put people at a greater risk of dying, such as smoking, drinking and social isolation.

The findings could bolster a belief in a divine being. Koenig sticks to the scientific explanation.

Prayer and meditation are known to reduce stress and thus can dampen the body's production of damaging stress hormones such as adrenaline. A drop in stress hormones has been linked to a number of health benefits, including a stronger immune response, which can help fight off disease, he says.

"This is a well-designed study," says David Larson of the National Institute for Healthcare Research, a Rockville, Md., group studying spirituality and health. Other studies have suggested that attendance at a place of worship also can give people a survival edge, he says.

Critics, including Richard Sloan, a psychologist at Columbia University in New York, say the study, and others like it, promote the harmful notion that prayer can protect against illness and death.

Yet people who get sick despite prayer may blame themselves for not praying hard enough, Sloan says. "That's not good medicine or good science."

Surveys show that Americans do turn to religion in times of illness. A 1998 CBS News poll of 825 people found that 80% believed that prayer or other spiritual practices could help speed healing. And the same survey found that 64% said they prayed for their own health.

Talk live with Harold Koenig today at 3 p.m. ET/noon PT at talk.usatoday.com.

Word-of-beak pulls them in to see 'Chicken'

By Andy Seiler
 USA TODAY



grossed \$101.3 million and \$90.6 million, respectively.

Carry On Cabby, etc.) and the Ealing Studios comedies of the 1940s and '50s

references, too.)

► *Braveheart* (1995): Mel Gibson's cli-