

How to Get Your Book Adapted into a Screenplay



By Scott Lorenz

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Most authors hope that one day their book will be adapted into a movie or a series on Netflix or HBO. I've never met an author who could not envision their book on the big screen. As a [book publicist](#), I've worked with authors whose book was optioned by Hollywood after we obtained a higher profile with publicity or when they won an award. The question is how does an author go about intentionally getting that movie deal?

There are numerous paths authors can take to get their book adapted into a movie. I recently spoke with two screenplay writers, Oliver Tuthill and Tara Walker, and they offered terrific advice for authors interested in pursuing this path.

Scott Lorenz: Can you give me examples of books that were adapted into screenplays and made it onto the movie screen?

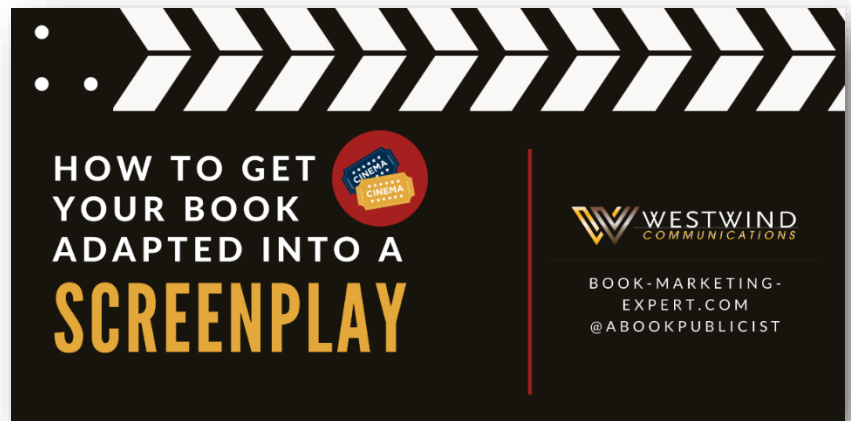
Oliver Tuthill and Tara Walker:

Robert Bloch wrote a novel in 1960 called *Psycho*, and Alfred Hitchcock had it adapted into a screenplay. It became the most famous movie of Hitchcock's career. Louisa May Alcott's novel, *Little Women*, has been made into feature films on three different occasions. Most recently, in 2019, Greta Gerwig adapted it into a screenplay, and the popular film created a resurgence of interest in the story.

Another well-known adaptation of a novel was Dan Brown's *Da Vinci Code* written for the screen by Akiva Goldsman which did 760 million at the box office worldwide. George R.R. Martin's novels, *Game of Thrones*, became one of the biggest television series hits ever, when adapted for television. One of the most popular novelists alive is Stephen King, and screenplay writer Frank Darabont adapted King's novella into the *Shawshank Redemption*, which was a monumental success. These are just some of the examples of writers who have been very successful, and this is a difficult endeavor.

Scott Lorenz: What kind of strategy can a book author use to have a book adapted into a screenplay?

Oliver Tuthill and Tara Walker: There is a method that every writer can follow that can allow for the opportunity for your book to be turned into a screenplay, then a film.



First, you do need to have a finished book, and assuming you do, your next step would be to find a professional screenplay writer with whom you could work to adapt your novel into script form. Professional screenplay writers are highly skilled professionals, who have spent many years, if not decades, honing their craft. Once you find a screenplay writer to work with you, the author must realize that a screenplay is going to be approximately 90 to 100 minutes in length, so it is impossible to cover every dramatic event in your book. The screenplay writer will work with you to include the highlights of your book to make it accessible as a cinematic experience, to be viewed within an hour and a half to two hours.

Scott Lorenz: Let's just say that you have hired a screenplay writer to adapt your book into a screenplay. Now what?

Oliver Tuthill and Tara Walker: If you're lucky, you might have hired a screenplay writer who also works within the industry as a film producer. In this case, the producer can represent your screenplay and try to find a production company who would be interested in producing it. Most successful screenplay writers are represented by a literary agent in Hollywood, with whom they can submit the screenplay. Then, their agent will submit the screenplays to production companies who are constantly looking for new screenplays to produce into feature films.

Most producers looking for new screenplays are much more likely to produce scripts that have been adapted from a book. Another option furthering your screenplay toward being produced, would be to enter it into film festival competitions. A producer could see it in this venue and might like it enough to option the screenplay from the author. An example of this was when writer Evan Daugherty submitted his script, *Snow White & the Huntsman*, to the Script Pipeline script competition. His script won the competition, and as a result, he sold *Snow White & the Huntsman* to Universal for \$3.25 million.

It was one of the biggest studio spec sales of all time, and its success turned Evan into one of the most sought-after writers in Hollywood. The film was also very successful and has grossed \$450 million worldwide.

Scott Lorenz: Can my book authors expect to get paid over 3 million dollars when selling their screenplays to movie studios?

Oliver Tuthill and Tara Walker: It is possible, but you would need a very good sales agent to help you close the deal. Also, a bidding war between film companies would be an ideal situation for the writer to make more money. As an example, Joe Eszterhas, who wrote *Basic Instinct*, sold his spec script for 3 million to Carolco Pictures. A spec script is a screenplay that an author writes without receiving payment upfront. Bill Marsillii and Terry Rossio were paid 5 million for their script, *Deja Vu*, which was also a spec script.

Scott Lorenz: This sounds exciting! How can people get in touch with you if they want help adapting their books into screenplays?

Oliver Tuthill and Tara Walker: We can be contacted through our website at www.CinemaWDS.com