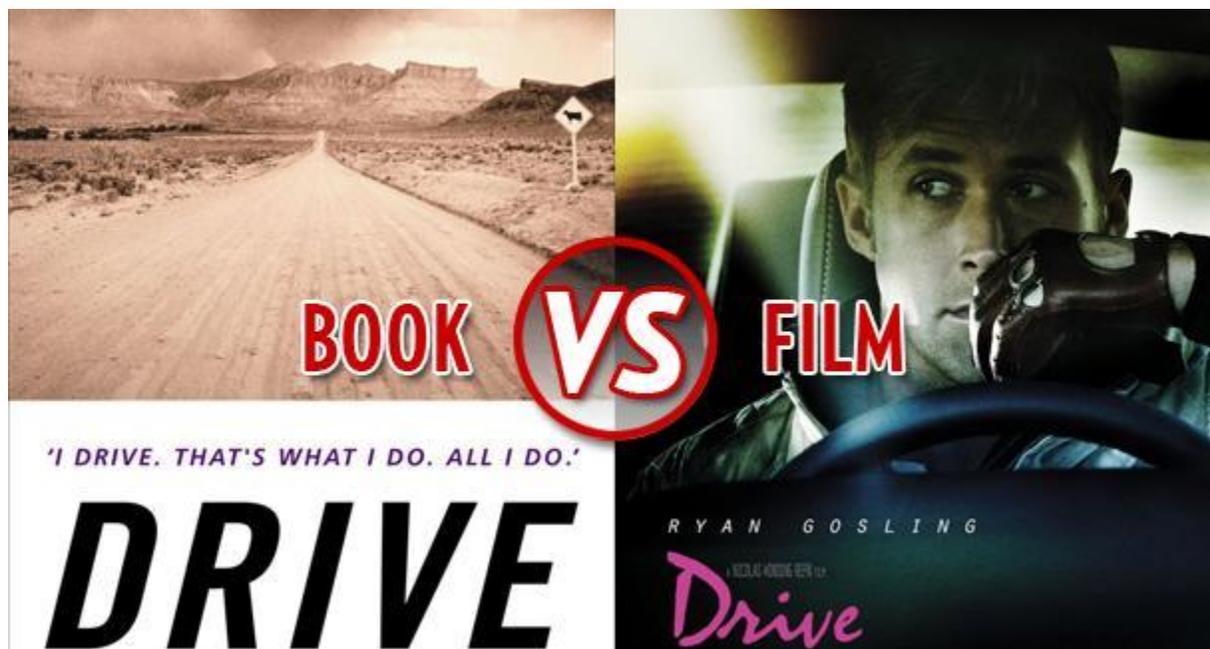


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I'm not the type of reader who obsesses over whether the film adaptation of a novel is true to the original text or not.

At one time I was. I remember reading *The Shining* by Stephen King and then watching Kubrick's adaptation and practically having a stroke. Because even though all the principal characters were the same, almost nothing else was. Fourteen-year-old me wanted to kick Kubrick's ass for completely butchering King's classic ghost story. Of course, at the time I didn't realize that *The Shining* was one those novels that was basically all but un-filmable, and that Kubrick was actually doing us a favor by not sticking closely to the text.

As I grew older, I began to realize that most novels are completely un-filmable. There's too much detail, too much internal wrangling going on for a filmmaker to capture it all. Plus, once an author sells the rights to their book, they usually have zero control over how the screenwriter and the director interpret the material. Hell, when you talk to most writers about one of their literary babies making it to the big screen, you find out that most of them could give a shit what the filmmakers do, because, hey, that movie money is pretty goddamn nice. And if the filmmaker does happen to get it right (or even if they completely fuck it up), the adaptation is most likely going to cause a **HUGE** spike in the source materials sales; so it's kind of a win-win for an author.

But when I heard Nicolas Winding Refn was adapting James Sallis' *Drive*, I had high hopes he would get it right, especially since Refn has spent his career making (mostly) crime films. He knows the pacing, tone, and nature of his subject matter. Even Refn's self-indulgent Viking

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flick, *Valhalla Rising*, possessed the same sparseness of a crime film. And at a scant 157 pages, *Drive* is the very definition of sparse.

Sallis writes small. He's one of the few novelists working who understands that not every minute detail needs to make its way onto the page; he doesn't paint a picture, he sketches it and lets the reader fill in the blanks. It's a writing style perfect for film, because the screenwriter can do the same thing as the reader and still manage to capture all the details the author included in the script.

But enough of the bullshitting. Let's get to fucking up both the book and movie for you.

***SPOILERS BELOW**

The Plot

Both the movie and book's plot are virtually identical. Driver is a part time stunt driver and wheelman who becomes involved in a robbery gone wrong, and then Driver decides to get his revenge on.

Simple enough, but it's the details of how Driver becomes involved in the fatal heist that get muddied in the adaptation.

In the film, Driver jumps into the job as a favor to the ex-con husband of his next door neighbor, Irene, who Driver's become emotionally involved with. The husband, Standard, owes protection money to some piece of shit cons and they want him to stick up a pawnshop to pay it off. Standard is pulling the movie con rap that he wants to go legit for his wife and four-year-old son. Driver knows that with his badass behind-the-wheel skills, there's no way the cops will catch them as long as Standard makes it past the 'put up your hands, this is a robbery' stage of the heist.

Of course, this doesn't happen and Standard ends up taking a couple of rounds to the chest. But their wingman, Blanche, manages to make it back to the car with a much larger haul than they were expecting. They speed off only to be followed by a second car, which Driver manages to ditch in spectacular fashion. The duo hole up in a motel room, but obviously Driver isn't as crafty as he thought he was, because Blanche ends up getting her head blown off in one of the most realistic close range shootings ever filmed. Driver comes to the conclusion that his crew was set up and he then sets out to find the how and why of the situation.

Driver ends up tracking down a small time L.A. gangster named Nino. Nino's a party waist who's tired of living in the shadow of his east coast paymasters and wants a bigger piece of the pie. Of course, he doesn't really want them to know he wants a bigger piece, so he sets up a crew of nobodies to pull the job, thinking he can kill them and get away with the stash. Perfect

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set-up, except Nino's a fuck up who can't cover his own tracks and he's pissing himself because Driver not only lived, but has the mob money.

All Driver wants to do is give the money back to Nino and call the whole thing even Steven, so he can get back to mooning over Irene. But Nino sees Driver as a loose end and decides to come after him. After Driver stomps in the head of a would be assassin, Nino panics and goes to his business partner, Bernie, who's plenty pissed because Driver's supposed to be piloting the race car he's recently invested in (via Driver's handler, Shannon). Bernie goes after Driver, kills Shannon in the process, almost manages to kill Driver, but ends up getting gutted instead, and Driver cruises into the sunset battered but presumably alive.

Now with the book, the heist in question is actually two separate incidents. The robbery involving Standard happens early on in Driver's career. He doesn't go along with the job because he feels the need to protect Standard, therefore protecting Irina (I'll be getting to the name and race change here in a second) and her young son from any undo harm. Driver takes the job because it's a job, nothing more, nothing less. And Standard isn't being shaken down to do the robbery, either. He's doing the robbery because he's a crook and he needs the dough to get the hell off his ex-wife's couch. That's right, ex-wife. In the novel, Irina doesn't stand by her man, because her man is a natural born fuck up who only ends up at her house because he has nowhere else to go. Standard does ask Driver if he would look after Irina and the boy in the event of his death, which Driver has no problem with because you get the impression that Irina and his connection is far more than an emotional one.

Yes, Standard buys it, but Driver doesn't go looking for his killers, because he knows if you're a lifelong criminal, you're either going to end up dead or in prison. He does keep his promise to look after Irina, but she ends up taking a stray bullet to the head in a drive-by gone wrong.

The second heist is where we see Nino and Bernie get involved. The set-up is virtually the same, but the only emotional connection is that Driver obviously doesn't like people trying to kill him. And that whole race car subplot with Shannon, that doesn't happen in the book. There is no race car, and Bernie and Nino have zero connection to Driver.

Let's move on to the characters of *Drive*, because let's face facts- both the novel and the film are character based, and it's the liberties that Refn took with the characters that drew the most ire from fans of the novel.

Driver

In the film, Driver is painfully guarded; so much so that you can barely get a word out him. And if you do try talking to him—much like the con who tries striking up a conversation about a possible job—chances are he'll threaten to kick your teeth in. The man is a shadow. He's the

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type of guy who, if you spent an hour or a day with him, chances are you wouldn't remember a single detail other than the fact that he's a dead ringer for Ryan Gosling. But because of the nature of his work, it's better that he doesn't form any bonds in case he has to skip town suddenly.

In the novel, Driver is guarded; he's weary of striking up friendships and establishing emotional connections, but not because he may have to skip town in a hurry. It's because it seems like every time someone gets close to him, they end up dead. His father, mother, (both of whom do not appear in the film), Shannon, Standard, Irene, Doc (yet another lost, but pivotal character who I'll get to in a second)- all dead. But Driver isn't so guarded that he doesn't have any friends. In fact, Driver's a fairly affable guy; he just happens to be a man of few words, which is common enough and therefore makes him a far more believable character.

Irene/Irina

In the movie, Irene is the focal point. All of Driver's actions are not for his own self-preservation, but a means of protecting her and her son, Bennicio. I mean, who wouldn't want to protect that pretty, blonde haired, blue eyed white girl from harm? Seriously, hasn't she had enough trouble raising a son on her own while her fuck up husband's in stir? And you really can't help but admire the fact that she is standing behind her convicted armed robber of a husband. Isn't that shit just down right noble?

In the book, Irina, as stated earlier, doesn't stand by her man. She knows Standard is a fuck up and more or less has nothing to do with him. She lets him crash on her couch so he can spend time with their son and hopefully get his shit together. Oh, and Irina doesn't need anyone to look after her, she's hard and hardworking. A single mom who works three jobs and strikes up a relationship with Driver because she's lonely, and, hell, if I was a woman I'd sure as hell want to get friendly with my next door neighbor who just happens to be a dead ringer for Ryan Gosling.

And here are a couple of more things about Irina:

- A) She's Mexican
- B) As stated before, she dies.

Shannon/Manny/Doc

In the film, Shannon is a retired stunt driver who got into some bad business with Nino and had his pelvis shattered. Now he owns a garage and acts as Driver's stunt agent/heist job handler. He's also put together a race car thinking that with Driver behind the wheel, he's sure to make millions on the Nascar circuit. Shannon's also a pretty big screw-up who tends to tie himself to all the wrong people in his business dealings. He's a sad, albeit likable character.

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In the book, Shannon's a blip on the radar; there is no garage, there is no race car. He's a legend on the Hollywood stunt circuit, and after Driver befriends him, he takes Driver in and helps him to get stunt gigs, before he promptly rolls his car and dies. The Shannon of the movie is actually an amalgam of the three pseudo father figures who appear throughout the course of the novel. The first being Shannon, the second being Driver's screenwriter friend, Manny, and the third being Doc, a disgraced alcoholic former physician who patches up criminals for beer money. I more or less think that the Shannon character from the film was written just so Refn could cast Brian Cranston, which was more than okay with me, because he does add to the overall body of the film.

Bernie

In the book and the film, Bernie's a straight up badass. He doesn't take shit off of anyone and he's incredibly likeable as a person. But there's something around the eyes that let's you know this isn't the type of guy you want to screw around with. Albert Brooks really was the right choice for this role

Nino and Standard

I combined these two because they're both fuck ups in the film and the novel. True, Standard in the film is far more articulate and intelligent, but he's still just another ass clown who muddies up the water, and it's the same deal with Nino. And when it comes right down to it, both of them get what they deserve.

Blanche

Yeah, she gets her head blown off with a twelve gauge in both. Ah, but what a waste of perfectly good eye candy.

The Verdict

Much like Kubrick's interpretation of *The Shining*, Refn created an entirely singular piece of art with his adaptation of *Drive*. The essence of the story is there, but he takes the novel and shapes it to his own vision, and this isn't necessarily a bad thing. The opening heist scene where Driver is dodging the cops around Staples center, that was all Refn and screenwriter Hossein Amini. Same goes with the strip club scene. These were beautifully crafted; wholly original pieces of filmmaking which made *Drive* one of the few watchable wide release films of 2012.

But I'll tell you this, there are few novels—crime or otherwise—which have had the effect on me that *Drive* has. The novel is a wonderful throwback to the hardboiled revenge novels of the 1950's, but it is also something entirely different. This happens to be one of Sallis' true

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strengths as a novelist, taking a well-worn plot or character device and giving it a completely new spin.

So if I was to chose between the two, that's actually a pretty easy one for me, because I'll pick the novel every single time. But don't get me wrong, Refn's *Drive* is still very much worth your time, and besides, with the nature of Hollywood and their obsession with remakes and properties, there's a better chance than not that some hot, new director will come along and want to make a word-for-word adaptation of the novel in the next five-to-ten years.

Alrighty, gang, that's all I've got for you today, but I did want to give you a reward for making it to the end of this bad boy, and here it is:

The good folks at the Poisoned Pen Press were kind enough to donate **TWO** signed copies of *Driven*, the forthcoming sequel to *Drive*. And all I want from you is for you to tell me what your least favorite book-to-film adaption is and why.

As usual, the contest is open to U.S. and Canadian residents only.

Column by Keith Rawson

Keith Rawson is a little-known pulp writer whose short fiction, poetry, essays, reviews, and interviews have been widely published both online and in print. He is the author of the short story collection *The Chaos We Know* (SnubNose Press) and Co-Editor of the anthology *Crime Factory: The First Shift*. He lives in Southern Arizona with his wife and daughter.