

Sabr / Patience

Faryal Velmi

Sabr is an Arabic word that is also used in Urdu and means patience and/or resolve.

Praying for *Sabr*, for patience for either for yourself or others, during testing times is a regular plea to God made by Muslims.

It is no doubt something – a quality (if you can call it that), a personality trait, an armour – that all screenwriters must have to work in the game of Snakes and Ladders that is the film and TV industry.

It's a tough place to survive. Especially if you come from a working-class background, or don't have the financial security blanket of parents or partners.

Getting your script to screen is a journey something akin to scaling Everest (or, to use the mountain's pre-colonial Nepali name, Sagarmatha).

That peak – where your script is actually realised as a piece of TV or film – is a long, long way up.

It can be a hard-old slog, and the famous Hollywood saying comes to mind – ‘Nobody knows anything!’ There’s no blueprint for success; and of course, success means different things to different people.

Sometimes, established projects with established names fall apart, whilst other times projects made on a shoestring and always on the precipice of not happening get made and shine.

One thing I have seen is that you can earn a living writing scripts that never get made. The green lights just don’t shine for you. The ultimate frustration for a screenwriter where credits are your currency.

Sometimes I think perhaps that the path upwards is paved with those unrealised scripts, that didn’t quite make it but were liked enough by producers and commissioners to remember your name and push you along to the next level.

It leads me to believe that it’s not enough to just be a good writer. You have to be a lucky writer, too. A lucky writer who is able to hustle and get the right script to the right commissioner or buyer at the right time.

Perhaps you make your own luck? The only thing under your control is to keep writing.

And once you’ve reached that peak, once you’ve written your script then re-written it many times over, perhaps then you do see those shimmering green lights on the horizon. When you hand over your script and its next journey begins. Your script is translated by the director, the actors, the cinematographer and then the editor.

I have been thinking that perhaps success for the screenwriter is to be able to disappear. Where the audience becomes so engrossed in what they are seeing and hearing on screen that they forget there ever was a script in the first place.

Then your hope, your dream becomes what you see when you press play or the lights go down in the cinema; your story has been brought to life in way that takes your breath away.

Till you get there – *sabr*.

Faryal Velmi

Faryal is a screenwriter based in London. Having spent a decade running the Disability rights charity Transport for All based in Brixton – her work is inspired by campaigns for social justice and the multi-cultural tapestry of city life. Faryal's credits include writing on the Channel 4 drama *Ackley Bridge* and she is currently developing a number of TV and film projects.

A recording of this talk can be found at **writersmosaic.org.uk**

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