

DEVELOPMENT HELL:
THE ADVENTURES OF A NEW WRITER IN HOLLYWOOD

by

NAMEE BAIJAL

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818-641-5212

(1) THE EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

INT. TWO ZOOM SQUARES. DAY.

Two zoom squares. In the empty one, a perfectly coiffed blonde woman, in crisp white, the EXECUTIVE PRODUCER is bringing in some post lunch dessert. In the other, a dark haired woman waits patiently, possibly nervously to begin.

WRITER

Hello

EXEC PRODUCER

(Not impressed by what she
is seeing)

Hi.

Images freeze. Text appears. Box 1 - New Writer. Box 2 - Executive Producer. Former Executive. Last and only producing credit in 1990.

WRITER

(Sincere)

Tonally, it's ironic and self-referential. Basically it's an allegory about how the movie business considers itself to be the center of the world. There is a romantic triangle and...

EXEC PRODUCER

What is the plot?

WRITER

(Chastened)

The plot. The plot revolves around a film academic who discovers that Steven Spielberg had contact with aliens during the making of Close Encounters and...

EXEC PRODUCER

(Imperious. Matter of
fact)

You can't write that.

WRITER

What?

EXEC PRODUCER

You can't write a movie about Spielberg. You will never work in this town again.

WRITER

But. It's a satire. Mr. Spielberg will realize that. Surely. Won't he?

EXEC PRODUCER

(Schooling this newbie)

Listen. I've worked in this business for 30 years. I know everyone. You can't joke about Steven Spielberg.

WRITER

But...

EXEC PRODUCER

(Steamrolls over the protest)

I like the romance. But don't make them film people. Nobody wants to see film people. Put her in a theme park. She works in a theme park. She loses her job. Goes back to her hometown. Works at a Christmas fair. He is an old classmate. He is the journalist covering the fair.

WRITER

But that's a Hallmark movie.

EXEC PRODUCER

(The dessert is almost over. Why is this meeting still going on!)

Write up a treatment and send it to me.

WRITER

Can I think about it?

EXEC PRODUCER

Can you get it to me tomorrow?

WRITER

Tomorrow?

Exec Producer starts to gather her lunch things. Preamble to wrapping this thing.

EXEC PRODUCER
I'm having breakfast with this
Israeli director. I want to pitch
him something.

WRITER
Ok. Sure. I can do that...

Exec Producer has started to get up and push back her chair.

WRITER (CONT'D)
Do I sign a contract or something?

Exec Producer sits back down

EXEC PRODUCER
Ok. Let me lay this out for you.
You are a new writer. I don't know
anything about your work. You're
going to need to do this on spec.
You need people to open doors for
you. You can't go around demanding
things.

WRITER
Oh. OK...Sorry.

END

(2) THE JUNIOR EXECUTIVE

INT. TWO ZOOM SQUARES. DAY.

WRITER

Hello

JUNIOR EXEC

(Too cool for school)

Yo

Images freeze. Text appears. Box 1 - New Writer. Box 2 Creative Executive. Just promoted. Former investment banker. Mildly sleazy.

JUNIOR EXEC (CONT'D)

So what have you got for me?

WRITER

It's an allegorical satire about an academic who is researching aliens and...

JUNIOR EXEC

(Excited)

Like The Da Vinci Code.

WRITER

Er. It's a satire. So. I was thinking. Maybe a little bit indie.

JUNIOR EXEC

Hmm! What else have you got?

WRITER

Um I'm writing this project for a producer. It's a romance. About a girl who loses her job because of the pandemic and has to return home and work in the same job she was doing when she was in high school and-

JUNIOR EXEC

Hmm. What else have you got?

WRITER

Er. There's this sci-fi short story I really like.

(MORE)

WRITER (CONT'D)

It's about a fourteenth century poet who tries a magic spell and time jumps in three people from different times into his world And also a dog.

JUNIOR EXEC

The dog's interesting. One sec.
(Checks phone)
Can you write the next Harry Potter? I am looking for the next Harry Potter.

WRITER

Er. Harry Potter was based on a book.

JUNIOR EXEC

Do you control any IP? Is there any IP you want to work on?

WRITER

I would love to work on anything by Ursula K Leguin. I love her writing.

JUNIOR EXEC

Have you optioned any books?.

WRITER

No. I can't affo-

JUNIOR EXEC

What about graphic novels? Have you optioned any graphic novels?

WRITER

I don't.. I'm not into graphic novels.

JUNIOR EXEC

(Checks phone)
Oh my 11 0' clock is online.

WRITER

I thought I was your 11 o' clock

JUNIOR EXEC

Great ideas. Bring me what you do next. See you later bud.

END

(3) THE DIRECTOR

INT. TWO ZOOM SQUARES. DAY.

In one, DIRECTOR, an artiste. In appearance at least. In the other, Writer.

WRITER

Hello

DIRECTOR

(Artistically casual)

Hello there.

Images freeze. Text Appears. Box 1 - New Writer. Box 2 - Director. Self-described auteur. Credit: One play in a 20 seat black box theatre. One short film.

WRITER

I've never collaborated with a director before. I'm really excited to be meeting you. My script is-

DIRECTOR

This doesn't mean we will be working together.

WRITER

No. No. Of course not. I mean yes of course. I'm not sure what I mean.

DIRECTOR

I'm very picky. To work with me, you have to be very sure of yourself.

WRITER

Of course.

DIRECTOR

But also pliable and not stuck in your opinion.

WRITER

Not at all. I am no-

DIRECTOR

Because on my set, I am the one who calls the shots.

WRITER
Absolutely.

Pause. It's awkward.

WRITER (CONT'D)
So my script is a-

DIRECTOR
I don't believe in scripts.

WRITER
Oh.

DIRECTOR
I want to make an avant-garde,
film. Like Eraserhead meets Lynch.

WRITER
Eraserhead was by Lynch.

DIRECTOR
Like Maya Deren meets The Clock.

WRITER
What would that movie be?

DIRECTOR
You're the writer. It's your job to
figure it out. My job is to shape
it and make it brilliant.

WRITER
Yes. Of course. So my script is a
satire-

DIRECTOR
True art cannot be scripted and
boxed in labels. Art must be
devised. It must be lived and
breathed. And film is art. Make no
mistake. It must spring from the
human spirit and not be mediated by
machines.

WRITER
But you use a camera to shoot your
movies.

DIRECTOR
What kind of negativity is that!

WRITER

Sorry. I was just er. Machines.
Never mind.

DIRECTOR

Send me some of your stuff and then
we will talk. I am a Pied Piper. I
will lead people out of their
comfort zone. I am going to set
fire to the skies. I am going to
scorch the earth.

WRITER

I don't know if I have anything
like that.

DIRECTOR

I need you.

WRITER

Oh. Sure.

END

(4) THE ACTOR

INT. TWO ZOOM SQUARES. DAY.

In one square, ACTOR, carefully curated disheveled look, crosses frame wafting smoke from a smudge stick. In the other the Writer. Actor sits down.

ACTOR
Just cleansing the zoom.

WRITER
Very nice to meet you.

ACTOR
(Hand on chest, bends
head)
Hau.

Images freeze. Text appears. Box 1 - Writer. Box 2 - A-c-t-o-r.

ACTOR (CONT'D)
(Folded hand, bent head)
It's the greeting of the Lakota
people.

WRITER
Oh! Are you Lakota?

ACTOR
No. I'm Irish Italian

WRITER
Oh.
(Searches for something to
say. Comes up short)

ACTOR
I am looking for scripts with women
in the lead. Who will lead the way
if men will not.

WRITER
You are? That's very enlightened.

ACTOR
That's my brand. I am the male
actor who supports women. So I need
something that's on point.

WRITER

Oh!

ACTOR

I sense some anxiety.

WRITER

It seems a little...it takes away the magic and the idealism when one starts talking about brand.

ACTOR

I don't understand. That's my social media brand.

WRITER

(Awkward)

So this script is a sendup of Indiana Jones and Close Encounters.

ACTOR

Oh you cannot make fun of Steven Spielberg.

WRITER

But it's an homage. It's from a place of admiration and love for Steven Spielberg and his chutzpah when he was young.

ACTOR

Nah you can't. Why don't you write me something else. Can you get it to me next week?

WRITER

A whole script?

ACTOR

Yeah. You guys are always doing rewrites on set the day off. How hard can it be?

WRITER

Sure. Not at all. Not hard at all.

ACTOR

I had a crisis of faith on my last film.

WRITER

Really?

ACTOR

They were making my character wear a black shirt. And what does that say about my character. I felt my character should be wearing a white shirt. It was epic.

WRITER

So what happened?

ACTOR

They had to get me another set of shirts.

WRITER

What colour?

ACTOR

Grey.

WRITER

Oh.

ACTOR

Send me your script. Two things. I am not losing in the fight scenes and I need to be a good guy. Even if I am the villain.

WRITER

I can do that. I think.

ACTOR

You are beautiful. Hau.

END

(5) THE REALTOR TURNED FINANCIER

INT. TWO ZOOM SQUARES. DAY.

In one, Writer. In the other, REALTOR TURNED FINANCIER, slicked back hair, low level gangster's low level henchman vibe, leans back in his chair.

WRITER

Hello

REALTOR-FINANCIER

(Tony Soprano-esque))

What's up.

Images freeze. CHYRON: (In courier font) Box 1 - New Writer. Box 2 - Financier-Producer. Real Estate Entrepreneur. No credits.

REALTOR-FINANCIER (CONT'D)

I am looking for something that award winning and will make lots of money.

WRITER

That sounds great. I have a sci-fi script that would be perfect.

REALTOR-FINANCIER

Hmm. Will it make any money?

WRITER

It's a satire about an academic, who discovers that a big movie director is mixed up with aliens.

REALTOR-FINANCIER

No.

WRITER

No?

REALTOR-FINANCIER

No. I don't see it making any money. Or winning awards.

WRITER

It has aliens. It's about Hollywood. It's got sci-fi and action. It's funny. It's intelligent.

(MORE)

WRITER (CONT'D)

It could straddle art house and commercial cinema. It can be little movie that could.

REALTOR-FINANCIER

Eh. I don't know. It sounds weak.

WRITER

What would make it better? I'm a good writer. I just need someone to take a chance on me.

REALTOR-FINANCIER

I like you. You know what I'm going to do? I'm going to take a chance on you.

WRITER

Wow! Thank you!

REALTOR-FINANCIER

I am running a contest. The submission fee is just 80 dollars. You win, you get a development deal. You should apply for it.

WRITER

Wow! What does the development deal entail?

REALTOR-FINANCIER

We give you a loan to develop your movie and when the movie gets made, that loan is paid off by the studio making the movie.

WRITER

What if the movie doesn't get made?

REALTOR-FINANCIER

Then you pay back the loan.

WRITER

Is there any interest on this loan?

REALTOR-FINANCIER

Yes. Prime rate plus 19%. It's a great deal.

END

(6) THE NEW PRODUCER

INT. TWO ZOOM SQUARES. DAY.

An shaggy haired NEW PRODUCER in one zoom square. The writer in the other.

WRITER

Hello

NEW PRODUCER

(Eager)

Hey! How's it going

Images freeze. Text appears. Box 1 - New Writer. Box 2 - New Producer. Fresh out of film school.

WRITER

It's an allegorical satire about the movie business. An academic is researching aliens-

NEW PRODUCER

Like Indiana Jones. You know what would make it original. Throwing in some horror.

WRITER

Horror? Sure. Supernatural horror, like a ghost or something real, like a stalker?

NEW PRODUCER

I love that! Let's do both!

WRITER

Aliens, a ghost and a stalker. I can make that work.

NEW PRODUCER

And let's make sure we have a little girl! Around ten or eleven. Precocious. And we can cast a someone with a big instagram or tiktok following.

WRITER

A child, an academic, a reporter, aliens, a ghost and a stalker.

NEW PRODUCER

Let's make it a family of ghosts!

WRITER

It's getting a bit crowded.

NEW PRODUCER

Your two people can be married and the girl is their daughter. And they have a stalker so they move into a new home but there is a family of ghosts in the new home. Then the stalker follows them there and the ghosts won't let them go out. And then it turns out they are aliens.

WRITER

Who are the aliens?

NEW PRODUCER

Let's make them lesbians. No. *The Kids are All Right* did that. Let's make them gay dads. But they are aliens. And let's add a monkey. They have a pet monkey.

WRITER

An academic and a reporter, who are gay dads and aliens, their child, their stalker, the family of ghosts that is haunting them and their pet monkey. Is the child an alien too?

NEW PRODUCER

No. That would be too much.

WRITER

Ok. Does it have to be a monkey? Could it be another animal?

NEW PRODUCER

No. I am obsessed with the monkey. We must have the monkey.

WRITER

Ok. I can make it work. I'm sure.

END

(7) THE VICE PRESIDENT

INT. TWO ZOOM SQUARES. DAY.

WRITER

Hello

V.P.

Welcome Welcome.

Images freeze. CHYRON: (In courier font) Box 1 - New Writer. Box 2 - Vice President of Development and Production, Major Studio. His assistant is Writer's roommate's cousin's friend.

WRITER

Thank you so much for seeing me.

V.P.

I am sorry we had to move it so many times.

WRITER

It's totally fine. It only took a couple of years. Quick by Hollywood standards.

V.P.

Really did it take that long. And I'm so sorry. I only have ten minutes to give you.

WRITER

Of course. I'm just-

V.P.

I loved your script.

WRITER

You read it!

V.P.

I started but didn't finish it. But my reader read it and I have her synopsis and comments here.

WRITER

Oh ok.

V.P.

She liked it. She said it had a lot of set pieces and trailer moments.

WRITER

Oh.

V.P.

All I care about are set pieces and the second act break.

WRITER

Second act break?

V.P.

The dark night of the soul when all is lost. Here are my thoughts for you. Tighten it. Punch up the dialogue. Punch up the comedy. And raise the stakes. Also make the characters more likable.

WRITER

Was there any particular scene or scenes-

V.P.

It's an overall note. I'm a big picture guy and you know this is an informational.

WRITER

Oh. Yes. Of course

V.P.

And you know. Armando Iannucci. Hal Ashby. Robert Wise. Billy Wilder. Richard Ayoade. Taika Waititi. Edgar Wright. Miguel Arteta. Christopher Guest. Peter Bogdanovich. Taikia Waititi. Stephen Frears. Danny Boyle. You know.

WRITER

That's just a string of directors' names. Taika was there twice

V.P.

Exactly. You get it. You must know what sword you will fall on.

WRITER

I'm not sure I do.

V.P.

Great. Let's set another meeting. Keep in touch.

END

TITLE SEQUENCE

(Before each episode. Courier Font. Letters being typed.

- DEVELOPMENT HELL

- Hell is erased. Replaced by PURGATORY.

- Purgatory is erased. Replaced by HADES.

- Hades is erased. Replaced by ABYSS.

- The words of ABYSS slide off as other words start cascading down.

- New title gets typed in. ADVENTURES OF A WRITER IN HOLLYWOOD.

- The word NEW is inserted before Writer.