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NEWS FROM AFAR!

## **An interview with filmmaker Fathia Absie**

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**Editor's note:** *Fathia Absie is a Somali-American filmmaker. Her film [The Lobby](#) is to debut at the Minneapolis, St. Paul International Film festival on April 13, 2015. Fathia shared this interview with us to discuss her journey through filmmaking. It's with utmost joy we share this intriguing interview with our esteemed WDN readers. The interview was conducted by Yasmeeen Maxamuud for WardheerNews.*

**WardheerNews:** Fathia, your second film, [The Lobby](#) is showing on Mon, Apr 13, as part of the Minneapolis, St. Paul International Film festival, what can you tell us about your journey in making this film?

**Fathia Absie:** It was definitely an interesting step for me. My first film, [Broken Dreams](#) was a documentary which is basically interviewing people and letting them tell their own story in their own words. This film, [The Lobby](#) is a fiction narrative which means I had to write a script and tell a story in whichever way I wanted. Creating characters who then can act in it in order to tell the story and make it a real thing which is not that simple when it's your first time doing it, but it was fun doing it and learning on the job.



**WDN:** What can you tell us about the film [The Lobby](#) and what led you to create this story?

**FA:** Friends and I were invited to attend a luncheon in the same Lobby where the story is

taking place in the film. I just got captivated by the coziness of this place. The luncheon was in a separate area but I kept finding myself back to this spot while imagining drinking tea and sharing a conversation with someone. There was something very enchanting about it and I said to my friends, I need to find a way to utilize this space, I think I am going to write a story for it. I came back home that night and started writing the script. So it was the lobby of a building that inspired the film.

**WDN: The Lobby depicts the story of a Muslim woman and a Caucasian American man. Why did you choose this plot and what lessons do you think the story, characters and setting will teach society as a whole?**

**FA:** I guess it's true when they say that writers write about what they know. I often travel and do things by myself which I enjoy very much because it gives me the chance to venture out and experience new things and meet new people. I love talking to strangers because we are a dialogue away from being strangers to one another. I came to Minnesota 4 years ago and it looks to me as if the Somali community here and the rest of the other Minnesotans live a world apart in terms of knowing one another and learning from each other. Minnesota has people of Norwegian and Swedish origins and they are pretty reserved and of course the Somali community is still new compare to other immigrants here so they kind of keep to themselves as well. As an extravert who loves to delve in things, I thought a dialogue was missing and who is better to bridge the gap than a Somali woman. We are the masters of many hats and it became our job to break barriers. It's a universal story of friendship and the human connection which doesn't know barriers or borders.

**WDN: Where can people see the film The Lobby?**

**FA:** Well, the film is going through some festivals now and as an indie filmmaker, it takes time to build yourself and your brand in the global setting. I don't have a distribution yet and to be frank, I made this film to practice my craft and build myself first rather than the thinking that I will get a distribution right away. I am planning to have few screenings here in the Minneapolis area and then travel with the film this summer Insha Allah. The plan is to go to different cities in the States, Canada, The UK, Sweden and possibly Dubai. It's very hard to raise capital for films and I don't want to wait till I get funding to make movies. I have to make my own films in my own terms and traveling and showing the film this way, I can hopefully raise money for my next film.

**WDN: What do you want to share with people who don't know much about you as a filmmaker? What are some life experiences that people wouldn't know about you through your films?**

**FA:** As a writer, many times we write from experience. The one thing I have always been certain about was to be a storyteller. As a child, I was always looking out instead of looking in. I was lost in dreams even as a child. I created my own world of rainbows in the clouds that I could go to and hide in from everything. I was born a humanist and I always had a tender spot for all people no matter where they come from or what they looked like. I always knew if we shared our stories, we would be like a family. We would cry and laugh together and we would emphasize and protect one another because that's what families and friends do for their own. I am still dreaming.

**WDN: What did you learn from your journey into filmmaking? What is the process of writing, and directing and acting in a film like The Lobby?**

**FA:** Writing is the easy part for me. Not the technicality parts it necessarily, but the story part comes to me like a rain. I have so many stories that can be films or books and they are not only Somali stories but universal melodies. Directing comes easy as well because the story becomes your baby and you know that no one else can tell it like you can because you have a picture of it in your head. As for acting, I wanted to act when I was younger but it was never a big priority. I acted on *The Lobby* because we don't have an acting Somali community here and didn't have the time to train someone new.

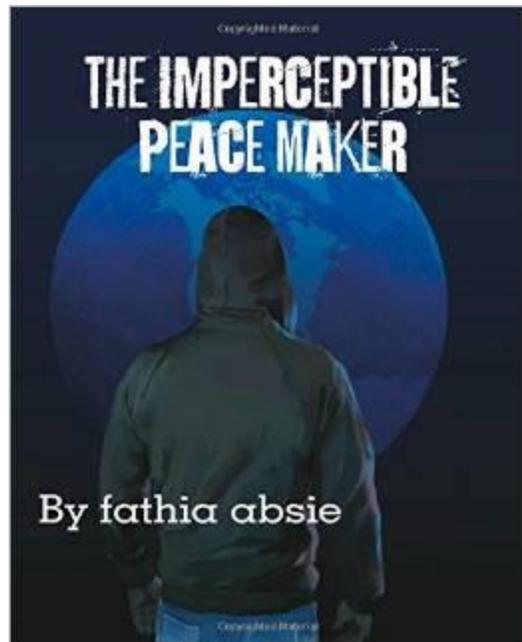
**WDN: Share the challenges and rewards of film making as an immigrant woman film maker?**

**FA:** This one is tough. It seems to me that as a community, we only give respect to the Arts and Artists after they become big stars. There is no support for the Arts in our community which is very sad because arts have the power to change humanity for the better. The arts in general whether it's writing, films, music or visual art, teach us about the past, present and the future. And as an immigrant woman filmmaker in the bigger community, I am a needle in a haystack. But I don't worry about it because if it was easy, then everyone will be doing it. Therefore I try to kind of keep it to myself and do my thing. It's only a matter of time before hard work strikes its luck. I am an optimist by nature and I am very excited about the future.

**WDN: As a filmmaker this is not your first film, your first documentary, Broken Dreams, featured the issue of young Somalis joining the terror organization Al Shabab in Somalia. Your film Broken Dreams was a breakthrough documentary on the issue at the time. With ISIS on the scene some four years after you made that film, what are some teaching moments in Broken Dreams that are still true today for youngsters joining ISIS and Al-Shabab?**

**FA:** There's not a day that goes by that I don't get an email that says thank you for telling this story. The film is used as a training manual and community outreach in many of the U.S Embassies in Europe, Canada and some parts of Africa. I hear that it gives concerned mothers and community leaders the courage to come forward when they see the film. To see others like them who are telling their stories assures them that they are not alone. We often don't show grief in our community and we discourage each other not to. But when you see mothers who lost their children and you see their tears, and hear the names of their children and the hopes and dreams that vanished in despair, it becomes all of us story. You suddenly realize that it's alright to cry and that there is no shame in showing our emotions. We need to cry and dwell in our sorrow more often so that we will do whatever it takes to stop this madness of constant death and destruction. We must eradicate the reasons that make us relived and revisit this culture of violence and pain as Somalis.

**WDN: If ever there was an energizer bunny you will be it. You are a woman always on the go and always working on something; tell us about your book The Imperceptible Peace Maker? What was the reason you wrote the book?**



**FA:** [The Imperceptible Peace Maker](#) is a graphic novel with a super hero character. Nuax is an orphan young man who was abandoned after birth by his teenage immigrant mother.

He becomes a super computer hacker and eventually with the help of a tech billionaire, they create a disguise that can make him invisible whenever he wants so that he can appear anywhere with anyone. His only mission is to bring about peace throughout the

world by forcing the hands of bad men making them relinquish power and walk away or pay the ultimate price. I wrote this book because when I was a little girl, I always wished for the power of invisibility or flying. Imagine what a good person can do with the power of invisibility. The world would be a better place.

**WDN: What is on the horizon for Fathia Absie the film maker, any other films you are working on?**

**FA:** I am writing The Imperceptible Peacemaker volume 2 as well as a script for a film called The Residual which is an Action/Drama. The book should be ready by Winter Insha Allah and the film hopefully will start shooting next spring or summer Insha Allah, depending on how soon I raise the money.

**WDN:** Thank You Fathia, all the best to you and may all your films inspire.

**FA:** Thank you so much Yasmeen.

Links for The Lobby

[Trailer: The Lobby](#)

[Film Societies of Minneapolis /Saint Paul](#)