# Salman Rushdie moves on from knife attack with renewed focus on fiction



Sir Salman Rushdie demonstrated remarkable resilience at the recent Hay Festival, declaring that he has moved on from the traumatic knife attack he experienced in 2022. Hadi Matar, the individual responsible for the assault, was sentenced to 25 years in prison for attempted murder. Matar's motivations, rooted in a long-standing fatwa against Rushdie issued by Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini, revealed the continued peril faced by authors who provoke controversy. During the attack, Rushdie suffered life-changing injuries, including blindness in one eye and significant damage to his liver and hand. In reflecting on his journey, he expressed a powerful sense of agency, stating that a pivotal moment for him was returning to the site of the attack with his wife, Eliza. “It will be nice to talk about fiction again,” he said, emphasising his desire to focus on literature rather than his ordeal.

This sentiment is particularly important given the long shadow cast by the fatwa against him, which has made him a high-profile target for extremists for over three decades. The stab wounds he sustained that day not only represented a physical assault but also a broader attack on artistic freedom and expression. According to a statement from the court during Matar's sentencing, the protection of free speech is paramount, reflecting the societal implications of attacks on writers and artists. Rushdie’s comments on the matter resonate with those in the literary community, who view such assaults as threats to creative expression.

In the aftermath of the incident, Rushdie published a memoir, "Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder," detailing not only the event but his recovery, both physically and emotionally. He credits the unwavering support of his wife, family, and the global community for aiding his healing. This work seeks to reclaim his narrative amidst the violence, portraying his writing as an act of defiance against his assailant's intentions. “It was my way of fighting back,” he remarked, underlining the therapeutic nature of writing for him.

In a broader discussion about contemporary societal issues, Rushdie addressed the current state of free speech, articulating a concern over the eagerness to suppress dissenting voices. He recounted a past experience with a film that nearly faced censorship, arguing that “letting it out and trusting the audience” is essential for the health of public discourse. Speaking candidly about the tumultuous landscape of US politics, he lamented the stark contrast between the hope represented by Barack and Michelle Obama and the current political climate, which he characterised as disappointing. Despite these challenges, his inherent optimism shines through, as he stated, “I think I suffer from the optimism disease."

Finally, Rushdie's commentary on the impact of technology on literature—including his dismissive view of artificial intelligence—illustrated his commitment to traditional narrative forms. He joked about feeling out of place in discussions dominated by AI, asserting, "I try very hard to pretend it doesn't exist." His unique perspective remains a vital contribution to ongoing conversations about the role of writers and the realities of living under threat in a world that often challenges the boundaries of free expression.

As he continues to navigate his recovery while preparing for the release of a new short story collection, "The Eleventh Hour," Rushdie’s experience serves not only as an inspiring tale of resilience but also as a clarion call for the importance of artistic freedom in tumultuous times.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c98pwpdj7kyo), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/d9da211d681f5e110d22bac07f3c896b), [[4]](https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/apr/13/salman-rushdie-knife-attack-survival)
* Paragraph 2 – [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/d9da211d681f5e110d22bac07f3c896b), [[6]](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/aug/12/rushdie-attack-book-festival-scene-chautauqua-ny)
* Paragraph 3 – [[3]](https://www.hayfestival.com/p-22015-knife.aspx), [[7]](https://apnews.com/article/salman-rushdie-stabbing-memoir-694ffbbc6460bb9fd2bf7fa78d7ae197)
* Paragraph 4 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c98pwpdj7kyo), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/d9da211d681f5e110d22bac07f3c896b), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/hadi-matar-guilty-attempted-murder-novelist-salman-rushdie-2025-02-21/)
* Paragraph 5 – [[1]](https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c98pwpdj7kyo), [[2]](https://apnews.com/article/d9da211d681f5e110d22bac07f3c896b), [[5]](https://www.reuters.com/world/hadi-matar-guilty-attempted-murder-novelist-salman-rushdie-2025-02-21/)

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## Bibliography

1. <https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c98pwpdj7kyo> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://apnews.com/article/d9da211d681f5e110d22bac07f3c896b> - Hadi Matar, the 27-year-old man who attacked Salman Rushdie on stage in 2022, has been sentenced to 25 years in prison for attempted murder and assault. The attack left Rushdie, 77, blind in one eye and caused significant physical and emotional trauma. Matar admitted to the knife attack, justifying it by labeling Rushdie a 'hypocrite' and accusing him of bullying through his words. The sentencing took place in Mayville, New York, where Judge David Foley emphasized the importance of protecting free speech. Matar also received a concurrent seven-year sentence for injuring another individual on stage. The assault, which occurred at the Chautauqua Institution, was captured on video and played during the trial. Rushdie did not attend the sentencing but submitted a victim impact statement. Matar now faces a federal trial on terrorism-related charges, stemming from his belief he was fulfilling a 1989 fatwa issued by Iran’s Ayatollah Khomeini against Rushdie following the publication of 'The Satanic Verses.' Prosecutors allege Matar was influenced by Hezbollah's endorsement of the fatwa. If convicted in the federal case, Matar could face life imprisonment.
3. <https://www.hayfestival.com/p-22015-knife.aspx> - Salman Rushdie's memoir, 'Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder,' offers a deeply personal account of the brutal attack he survived in 2022. The book delves into the traumatic events of that day, his journey towards physical recovery, and the healing process facilitated by the support of his wife, Eliza, his family, medical professionals, and his global community of readers. Rushdie reflects on life, loss, love, art, and the resilience to stand up again. The memoir is available for purchase at the Hay Festival website.
4. <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2024/apr/13/salman-rushdie-knife-attack-survival> - Salman Rushdie has revealed an abiding sense that his survival after a brutal knife attack two years ago was a miracle, despite his lack of spiritual faith. He recounted the attack during an American television interview for the 60 Minutes show, describing his assailant as 'a squat missile' coming at him 'hard and low' in black, 'the last thing my right eye would ever see.' The attack occurred at the Chautauqua Institution in New York State, where Rushdie was about to give a talk on writer safety. The assailant, Hadi Matar, was arrested and charged with attempted murder and assault. Rushdie's co-interviewer, Henry Reese, was also injured during the attack. The incident underscored the risks faced by writers and the importance of protecting freedom of expression.
5. <https://www.reuters.com/world/hadi-matar-guilty-attempted-murder-novelist-salman-rushdie-2025-02-21/> - Hadi Matar, who attacked and partially blinded novelist Salman Rushdie onstage at a New York arts institute in 2022, was found guilty of attempted murder. Matar, 27, stabbed Rushdie multiple times, causing serious injuries to his head, neck, torso, and left hand, and blinding his right eye. The incident occurred during Rushdie's talk on writer safety at the Chautauqua Institution. Rushdie testified about his harrowing experience in court, showing his blinded eye to jurors. Matar, also found guilty of assault for injuring another individual, faces up to 25 years in prison and sentencing on April 23. Additionally, Matar faces federal charges for attempting to murder Rushdie as an act of terrorism and for providing material support to Hezbollah. Matar did not testify at his trial, and his defense argued insufficient proof of intent to kill for a murder conviction.
6. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2022/aug/12/rushdie-attack-book-festival-scene-chautauqua-ny> - A man dressed in black rushed the stage and attacked Salman Rushdie during a lecture at the Chautauqua Institution in New York. Witnesses described seeing the assailant repeatedly stabbing Rushdie, who was subsequently airlifted to a hospital. The attack occurred just before Rushdie was to discuss the importance of writer safety. The assailant, identified as Hadi Matar, was arrested at the scene. Rushdie's agent reported that he was on a ventilator and faced the possibility of losing one eye, along with potential liver damage and nerve severance in his arm. The incident underscored the ongoing threats to Rushdie following the 1989 fatwa issued by Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini in response to his novel 'The Satanic Verses.'
7. <https://apnews.com/article/salman-rushdie-stabbing-memoir-694ffbbc6460bb9fd2bf7fa78d7ae197> - Salman Rushdie has announced the release of a memoir titled 'Knife: Meditations After an Attempted Murder,' which details the attack he survived in 2022. The book, set to be published on April 16, offers a personal account of the traumatic event and its aftermath. Rushdie stated that writing the book was a necessary step to take charge of what happened and to respond to violence with art. The memoir is expected to provide insights into his recovery process and reflections on the incident.