

Eye Contact Over Truk

Interview with Narrator Steven Molony



Q. What from the three short snippets of Eye Contact Over Truk prompted you to choose to audition?

A. When I auditioned for this book, I was invited by Andy at Spoken Realms. I've worked with her several times before, and she thought I might be good for this. But when I read for it, I remember it hitting me pretty heavily on an emotional level. It took me a while to temper it so I could be coherent in my narration, instead of a weepy mess. A challenge I relived when narrating the first chapter; it's a heavy one.

Q. In this multicultural story, you flawlessly transitioned between male and female characters, child to old age, and dialects from American, British, Japanese, Micronesian, Australian, German, to Scottish. How did you master so many vocal traits and accents; and how much rehearsing did you do for those scenes that were filled with wide variations?

A. Recently, a mentor of mine articulated that there really isn't the opportunity for preparation and rehearsal in voice over that an actor can get with film or theatre. It calls on an actor's improvisational chops a lot more than most other mediums for this craft, barring improv itself. My mentor went on to say that all the training and work done leading up to the gig IS the preparation for the gig. This is all a roundabout way of saying that I didn't rehearse for this book. I read through it once beforehand and made notes about the characters as well as little clues about what their voices might sound like, but I didn't workshop it; I just did it. The preparation came from years of study and work leading up to the moment that I stepped into the booth and hit record. I grew up in a house of voices. We were always putting on different accents and we watched a lot of SNL, Fawlty Towers, and pretty much anything with a lot of fun character work. I've been an improviser for years, which is a great way to build characters in a moment. I've studied with the master of accents and dialects, Eliza Jane Schneider. I'm a lifelong student and I will always have more room to learn and grow. Perfection is the goal, and since perfection is impossible, the work is never done.

Q. The two main characters went through very emotional events. Your performance conveyed how you felt their pain and anguish. As an actor, how do you deal with putting so much of yourself into these roles, and how do you pull yourself back to your real life?

A. I try to just let myself feel it and go through it, and if it's a heavier day, and I'm emotionally exhausted by the end of it, that's okay. It's a rewarding, and oddly energizing kind of exhaustion. These are very human stories in this book, and I think we can all relate to the themes throughout. As actors, we have to dive into these things with our whole hearts. It's just about being open, empathetic, and honest. I see a little bit of myself in most everybody, which is why I often gravitate toward hermitage. It's exhausting to see my flaws reflected back at me so many times a day. In a vacuum, I can just be. I don't try to distance myself from the pain of my characters. I own it and live in it, because I already know it within myself. It's therapeutic in a way, being able to explore my own feelings within the confines of an imagined story.

Q. In college, you studied acting. Since then, you've thrown yourself into the entire spectrum of the entertainment industry. When did you discover that this was your passion?

A. When I was just a little kid, I'd seen *The Good, The Bad, and the Ugly*. Afterward, I would act like I'd been shot, play out a death scene, and then ask my mom if she thought it was realistic. When I was a slightly older kid, I would make little backyard movies with my friends. This has been a lifelong passion of mine, but it wasn't until I was a teenager in the ninth grade that I started to claim acting as a lifelong pursuit. It was my mom who forced me into it. She made me audition for the school play. I really didn't want to do it. Despite my childhood leanings toward the dramatic, I really didn't think theatre was the vibe I was going for. We argued. She insisted I try out for the play. She said I absolutely had to. I asked her, "And what if I just...forget to show up to the audition?" She fixed me with a look that would corrode batteries and said, "Then your ass is grass." So I auditioned. Ended up getting the lead, and had such a fun time that I dropped my Spanish class and took Drama in the next semester. The rest is history. (And I still can't speak Spanish.) So, depending on a person's opinion, you can either thank or blame my mom for my becoming an actor.

Q. From a personal perspective, rather than that of a job, what do you get out of acting?

A. Everything.

Q. You've performed in film, TV, theater, and audiobooks. Theater provides an audience. In film and TV, you work with other cast members. Audiobook narration, in this case, is a solo effort while you are recording. Do you find any differences in how you prepare and deliver your performance?

A. I've touched on the notion that there isn't a lot of room for preparation in any given VO project. It more so calls on my improv muscles. Audiobooks take a long time to just get the words out. For a brand new narrator, it isn't uncommon to spend ten hours of studio time to produce one hour of finished audio. Even seasoned narrators can take between three and five hours to produce one finished hour. We just don't have the time to spend on preparation and rehearsal because the job itself is so time consuming. Beyond that, I look at it like a one-person show. Almost like one massive monologue.

Q. You added screenwriter and film producer to your resume. How did pursuing these aspects of a production affect your acting, and how did acting affect these efforts?

A. I describe myself as a tape-and-glue producer. I cobble a group of talented people together to do the work necessary to keep a production afloat while I focus on acting. I'm more hands-on for pre and post production, but for production, it's all about performance. Being a real producer is a kind of work that I am simply not cut out for. And I'd probably wind up in jail for accidentally committing fraud or something. I dunno. My eyes water when I look at a spreadsheet. I'm just not fit for the things those people do, and I respect their work immensely. My methods may keep a boat from capsizing, but the boat is covered in duct tape. The people I bring together are the type to make that boat seaworthy. Writing is a different beast. That's just plain fun when you can get out of your own way and sit down to actually write the damn thing. Nothing is holding you back. There's no concern for budget or anything - it's just playing in a sandbox. The crushing realities of production can be someone else's problem.

Q. We've talked about the variety of dialects. Your vocalizations of the Japanese words rolled off your tongue like a native. Can you share your process from receiving the manuscript, preparing the roles, through the final recording?

A. I've spoken to the limited time for preparation and rehearsal, as well as the journey of cultivating these skills over time, but I will add that when I'm learning a new dialect, or doing an accent I'm not really comfortable with, I prefer to look up videos of native speakers of whatever dialect I'm trying to replicate rather than, say, a person putting the accent on, however expertly. I like to hear it from the source.

Q. Is there a specific type of role that you're wanting, the kind that once you do it, you say to yourself: I did it!

A. My answer to this question has never been very specific. I've never been hell-bent on the idea of playing any one particular character. Rather, my dream role is any character that can help me learn, grow, improve as an actor and person, and better understand the human condition. By that metric, I've already played a few dream roles, and I hope to play many more.

Q. A couple of fun questions: If you could go back to anytime period, what is one role that you wish you could have played?

A. In 1888, Richard Mansfield was the first actor to portray Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde. His performance was so convincing to people at the time, that they were unnerved to the point that he literally became a suspect for Jack the Ripper. I don't think there are any awards that say "good job" more than that.

Q. 1.What is one place or activity on your life's bucket list you want to experience and why?

A. I would love to visit Ireland. It's the motherland. My ancestral roots specifically go back to Clare.

Q. What are you working on now?

A. There's not much I'm allowed to talk about yet, but it's been a fun year.

More information on this talented actor can be found:

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