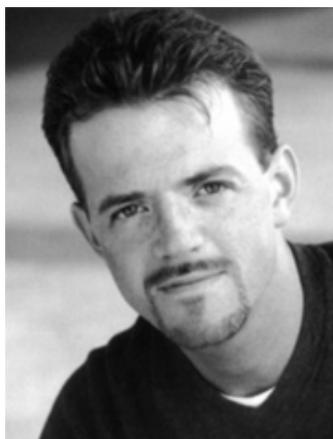


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Interview with Scott Brick

By Jonathan Lowe - *February 24, 2005*



Scott Brick is one of the most prolific narrators in the business these days. An actor, writer, and audiobook reader for many publishers, he can be heard interpreting authors from Clive Cussler to Nathaniel Philbrick. Awards and accolades have followed him, which is how I first met up with him, at the Audie awards ceremony in Los Angeles.

JONATHAN LOWE: Hello again, Scott. Now I know that you've been a stage actor, doing Shakespeare at various venues across the country. Do you still act on stage, and what led to your narrating audiobooks?

SCOTT BRICK: I've toured in various Shakespeare productions since college, and was out on continual tour for almost 10 years. Not a bad way to make a living, really, and what fun at parties -- telling people I was a professional Shakespearean actor! My high school English teacher nearly had a fit when I told her I was making a living playing Hamlet, and I still do the occasional play. I did "A Winter's Tale" recently, which was a real kick. As far as how I wound up narrating audiobooks, about

four years ago I found out an old college buddy worked as the assistant to the president of Dove Audio. He arranged an audition for me, and things took off from there, although Dove is no longer around.

LOWE: You've already passed the 150 mark on the number of audiobooks narrated for various publishers, like Books On Tape, Inc. Congratulations on that. When you read a book for the first time, I assume you take notes about the characters?

BRICK: I do, especially when authors make specific references to accents and such. Brad Meltzer, for instance, has a real ear for accents, and makes a point of assigning even minor characters the most obscure accents. He'll go into incredible detail about stretched or flat consonants, resonant vowels, etc. Then there are the accents: South Dakota, Chicago, Boston ... he even threw in a Greek guy who'd been raised in England, and if that isn't a direct challenge I don't know what is! I've gotten to know Brad these last few years, and I always accuse him of throwing those obscure details about the accents into the text just to mess with me. [Laughs] His latest book, "The Zero Game," has a few details that just seem so totally obscure! At one point in the book, the point of view changes, and a different character takes over the narrative. When we spoke on the phone before I went into the studio, Brad admitted to me that he did it because he couldn't wait to hear how different I would make the two characters sound. I somewhat sheepishly had to remind him, 'Uh, Brad, both those characters are ultimately gonna sound like ME...'

LOWE: Barrett Whitener told me that the hardest thing for him in narration was keeping the arc of the drama intact. On knowing how each character contributes to the conflict, and the timing of that. Is this hardest for you, too?

BRICK: I wholeheartedly agree. Knowing the arc of the story, and how it has to play out, is integral to the process. Ultimately, as the verbal interpreters of the work, we're entrusted with the keys to the puzzle, and are asked to dole them out at precisely the right time. If we're doing a murder mystery, we need to parcel out the clues in the proper order and at the proper time. I've done a few whodunits, and they require a lot of care. I may know whodunit, but I always have to remind myself that the audience doesn't, at least not yet. Sometimes the culprit will say something that's extraordinarily suggestive, a real neon sign if you know the ending. I need to know not to color that comment with too much meaning --- maybe I'll make it sound like a throwaway line so that it doesn't sound too ominous. If you fill the line with too much meaning, every listener out there is going to get it before they're supposed to get it.

LOWE: That's interesting, and scary in a way, walking that tightrope. What makes a reading most fun for you?

BRICK: The exposure I get to material I may not have read, ordinarily. I've been asked to read books I couldn't imagine myself reading for pleasure, and found some real treasures in the process. "What Makes Sammy Run," for instance, was a book I'd heard of but had no real interest in reading. Yet when I recorded "Sammy," it leapt to the top of my list of favorite books. I actually listened to old Sam Spade radio shows on my way into work each morning while recording it. I completely emulated Howard Duff's Sam Spade voice and inflections.

LOWE: Any other favorite titles?

BRICK: Frank Herbert's "Dune." I read the original six novels while in college and absolutely loved them, so when I was asked to record "Dune" a year or so ago, I was overwhelmed. Frank Herbert's son Brian co-wrote the prequels with Kevin Anderson, and he was so giving of his time. He spent four-and-a-half hours on the phone with me, guiding me through extremely difficult pronunciations.

After we'd done the first prequel, we recorded the original "Dune," and Brian shared all his father's notes with me, to ensure that all our pronunciations were correct. It's hard for me to convey just how special an occurrence this was. No one had ever gone to this effort before, and Brian was so appreciative that we were doing so. The time we sank into this series was immense, yet was completely rewarding. AudioFile gave me the nicest review I'd ever received. They said that when listening to "Dune," I sounded as though I were a tour guide for the planet Arrakis, all the words just flowed off my tongue as though I'd been saying them for years. I've never smiled more after reading a review. Brian actually gave me the most wonderful compliment, as well: "Scott, after doing all this work, I want you to know -- you're now officially a pillar of the Dune universe." When he pointed out that the main character's name means 'pillar' in the Dune language, I told him, "Geez, Brian, I feel like you just dubbed me with a sword!"

LOWE: I remember seeing you, Brian, and Kevin together at the Audie awards ceremony in L.A. That was fantastic.

BRICK: I've been lucky enough to meet a number of authors whose work I've recorded, and have become friends with quite a few. That's an incredible fringe benefit to this job. Although one time it happened backward -- I've known Orson Scott Card for years, long before I started doing audio, and amazingly have found myself getting to record his stuff. How cool is that?

LOWE: Chilling. Orson was my very first interview, years ago, back when Dove was around. So I take it you still keep in touch?

BRICK: He recently asked me to adapt his short story "Clap Hands And Sing" for the stage, so I'm hard at work on transforming that into a play. I get to record his stuff, adapt it for the stage, AND perform in it? A dream come true.

LOWE: In working with a number of different publishers, are you in transit a lot from L.A., and do you like to travel?

BRICK: Thankfully, yes, I get to travel fairly often. But I love it, so I guess maybe I should say not often enough! I usually head out to New York once or twice per year and record stuff back there. Time Warner is pretty cool about sending me to various locales to record, for which I'm very thankful. Whenever I get a call from them, I start smiling and looking around for my passport.

LOWE: Is there a difference in the way different publishers direct you, or do they now just give you the book and let you do your thing?

BRICK: Sure, each publisher has their own technique, their own approach to the work. Some are very hands-on; others just let me to do my own thing. As far as direction goes, I'm always happy to have other people's input. Sometimes directors will listen more for gaffes or mouth noises and ask me to go back and fix those. Others will sometimes tell me, "I don't think the meaning of that sentence came through," and ask me to pick it up. It's nice to have their perspective. One time, a studio manager told me, "Scott, I told our director that you've done a ton of these, so she should just stay out of your way and let you do it." Even though it was a compliment, I wished he hadn't told the director that. I never want anyone to feel like they can't correct me. What we do is a collaborative effort, and director/producers don't get nearly enough credit for their work. That being said, I've worked with producers who stop me every other sentence, and it drives me nuts! [Laughs]

LOWE: Narrating a book isn't easy, obviously, and it's not something anyone can do. Not even certain famous screen actors who shall be nameless. Some authors reading their own work can't really pull it off, either, because they're either afraid of making mistakes (and so end up rendering the text boring) or because they're not afraid when they should have been. One author who seems to do well walking this fine line is John Nance, despite his slight lisp. What are your thoughts on this?

BRICK: Well, I don't listen to anywhere near as many audiobooks as I should, but frankly, I'm in the studio so much that I don't have time. It's true there are several authors whose work should've been left to readers. However, three authors whose work sounds absolutely terrific when they read it themselves are Harlan Ellison, William Peter Blatty and Orson Scott Card. Check out Blatty's unabridged reading of "The Exorcist" sometime. So riveting that when I listened to it, I wouldn't leave it in my car stereo, I'd carry a Walkman with me and continue listening into my home. But I think it's no coincidence that each of those authors were trained actors in their youth. They know how to do it.

LOWE: Haven't heard Blatty, but I agree with you on Ellison, he's amazing. So, what's next for you?

BRICK: Well, I'm about to dive into a 1,200-page book about Alexander Hamilton for Penguin, which should keep me busy through 2004. [Laughs] I've also got "Hollywood Animal," Joe Esterhasz's autobiography, coming up. Beyond that, there are two projects that are really close to my heart. Science fiction stuff, of course. The first is Isaac Asimov's "I, Robot," the tie-in for the Will Smith movie coming out next year. Turns out the book has never been recorded before! Then there's the third and last installment

in the "Dune" prequels coming up. Now that audiobooks have become one of the primary ways people discover new books and authors, I feel like I'm giving back to Messrs. Asimov and Herbert for all the joy they've given me.

Novelist Jonathan Lowe also interviews for Cracker Barrel Old Country Stores, and directs Audiobooks Today's radio reviews and interviews heard on XM Satellite Radio. For news about how your local talk radio station can air these reviews for free, email Audiobookstoday@yahoo.com.

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