



A Narrator's Diary

If you think narrating audiobooks is a leisurely occupation, think again. Here's how one Golden Voice tap-danced his way through a busy schedule to squeeze an extra title in.

by Scott Brick

MONDAY, APRIL 18, 2005

Today I finished up [The Traveler](#) for Books on Tape. Whew, that was a tough one, schedule-wise. I had to finish by today so I can start [Raising Atlantis](#) tomorrow. Booked myself way too tight—I usually like to rest my voice for at least a day between titles. I feel very blessed to be this busy and love going to the studio every day but really need some rest. Next week, I hope.

Later: Hmm, spoke too soon. Dan Musselman from BOT just called. They received the final manuscript for [Dance of Death](#), the latest Agent Pendergast novel by Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child. Dan said the unabridged recording has to be finished by mid-May, only four weeks away.

"Problem," I said. "I'm leaving for a book conference on May 3, which means we've only got two weeks to do it, and I'm already booked for seven of those days."

Oy.

"Well, we can always give it to somebody else to read," Dan said, without much enthusiasm, giving me an out if I wanted one. But I love this series, and if they take it away from me, they'll have to pry it out of my cold, lifeless fingers!

What was that I said about resting? Feh. Rest is overrated.

TUESDAY, APRIL 19

Started two books today: [Raising Atlantis](#) in the studio, and [Dance of Death](#) at home, reading it in advance to see what kinds of problems we'll be facing once we start recording.

The previous book in the series, [Brimstone](#), was brimming with Italian words and phrases, just tons of them. If that's the case with this title, Dan said he knows a few producers who are fluent in Italian. Right off the bat, I can tell we're going to need more than expertise in Italian: so far, there's Latin, Greek, Italian, and even some German thrown in for good measure. And I'm only on page 4...! *Frisch weht der Wind*. Egad.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 20

After a long night of reading I'm about halfway through [Dance](#). A very cool plot: an FBI agent battling his serial killer brother on the streets of New York City, trying to prevent him from killing all the agent's friends and loved ones. Reading it, I sense every bit of the suspense listeners will feel when they hear it—provided I do my job, of course.

Some first impressions of the challenges:

Agent Pendergast is an awesome character with a buttery New Orleans inflection, highly cultured and languorous. This could be a problematic accent. Good thing I know many people from N'awlins, including my stepmother, and I've used them before to refresh my accent before starting one of these books.

[Dance of Death](#) has a plethora of words that I recognize yet have never had to say out loud. Armagnac, Brobdingnagian, chasseur among them. Thank God, they keep dictionaries in every studio. Man, even the *names* here are tough! Aloysius, Diogenes, Ambergris, Incitatus. (I'm starting to wonder: Do Preston and Child hate me or something...?)

Third and last, the authors throw around lots of languages here. Just a *ton!* In addition to Latin, Greek, Italian, and German, there's French, Gallic, Chinese, Japanese, and Mayan. Oh, and Old English!

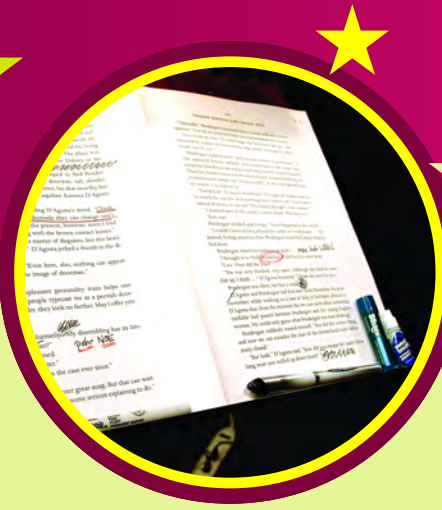
Hmmm, the Latin may be a problem. I can figure out *Dei gratia*, by the grace of God, *Ave frater*, Hail brother, but all these others...? *Qualis artifex pereo?* Man oh man oh man oh man.

Still, I'm probably facing an easier task than our producer. Pronouncing these words will be less complicated than looking them up. Technically speaking, that's the producer's job, yet I like to know as many as I can before we get in the studio.

Gotta ask Dan: Does he have any Gallic- or Mayan-speaking producers?

THURSDAY, APRIL 21

Note to self: Look up [Brimstone](#) in filing cabinet for pronunciations of characters' names and descriptions of their



accents. Can't remember: Viola Maskelene: was it MAS-keh-leen or mas-keh-LEEN? And, of course, Count Fosco: was it FOES-coe or FAHS-coe? Glad I keep the notes I make when reading ahead of time, as well as sample pages from each title. Really helps me remember each author's style, and guides me toward what kind of approach I'll take with their future titles.

Geez, toward the end of [Dance of Death](#) there's an appearance by Corrie Swanson, a character from [Still Life With Crows](#), two books back in the series. Do I even have notes for that one...? I seem to recall that it took place in the Deep South, so she might need an accent. Hmm. More research required.

FRIDAY, APRIL 22

What a great book.

Okay, I've finished reading, I've checked my files, and Dan says we're good to go. I'll be working with Cassandra Campbell, who I hear is a great producer. And, to make it even better... she speaks Italian, French, and a little Latin! *Domine gratias.*

Later: Just spoke to Cassandra, and we are going to work around my crazy schedule. I can only record Tuesday and Friday of this week, then Monday and Tuesday of next. Trouble is, this book is 451 pages long. To be done in four days, we'll have to finish 115 pages per day. Just doing 100 is tough. Is this doable?

I'll have to be.

TUESDAY, APRIL 26

First day at work!

Such a pleasure to come to BOT, which is in Woodland Hills, just north of Los Angeles, and an easy commute for me. They've got six brand-new studios, totally state-of-the-art, each of them big. But of course they give me the *biggest!*

Smiling, I told Cassandra, sitting on the other side of the glass, that they gave me the biggest studio because I'm their favorite reader. Paul Boehmer, recording the latest in the Shannara series in the studio next door, overheard me and said they had to give me this one—it was the only one that would fit my head.

Heh heh. Funny guy.

At the end of the day, I only finished 79 pages. Bad news. I'm already 36 pages behind schedule. We're just going to have to do this in five days, not four. But five days means 90 pages a day, and I'm even short of that!

Working with Cassandra is great. Some producers stop me a lot, wanting me to go back and try things a different way; others do it only a little, perhaps worried about offending me if they ask for changes. Cassandra strikes a balance. Because she is also a narrator, she can hear in her head how it should sound. She tends to let me keep going when I'm on a roll but isn't afraid to make me back up when necessary.

Of course, since we hadn't worked together before, we had to talk over stylistic decisions. Cassandra pointed out that I was pronouncing "either" both ways—EE-ther and EYE-ther. Didn't I want to keep the pronunciation consistent? I explained that I usually use EYE-ther when it's in narration and EE-ther in dialogue, because it sounds a bit more natural—and helps set off speech as different from narrative sections. Then, of course, when we got into a section where Pendergast was talking, I broke my own rule and pronounced it EYE-ther!

"Because he's so educated," I explained, "that's how he would say it. And it also sets him apart from the other characters."

"Good idea," she said.

Hmmm, I've got a slight sore throat. Two days off will do me good.

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 27

On a plane, bound for a two-day librarians' conference in Louisiana: Babies are crying and I can't sleep. Glad I brought [Cabinet of Curiosities](#), which is about four books back in the Pendergast series, before I started narrating them. These books are so good, I want to read them all—and fill in any blanks in my interpretations.

FRIDAY, APRIL 29

My throat felt fine when I got to the studio, but an hour into reading, it was sore again. Drank Throat Coat tea and



plenty of water, but it's persisting. When it gets really bad, it can affect the way I sound. I can get really gravelly like Tom Waits. From what Cassandra tells me, that's not the case yet. It's painful, but if I still sound the same, I'll just deal with it.

Okay, 163 pages down, 288 to go. In two days? Never gonna happen. We definitely need that fifth day. Fortunately, Cassandra says she's cool with working Saturday. Awesome! A one-day reprieve! Still, I've got to do 90 pages to stay on schedule, and I only did 84 today....

My flight out next Wednesday is looming. We *have* to be done before then. Things are looking bleak.

SATURDAY, APRIL 30

Woo-hoo! 109 pages, made it all the way to 272! Now we're cooking with gas!

Today I came across a character I hadn't recognized reading the book at home, but the name finally registered in the studio: Eli Glinn, who had been in [The Ice Limit](#). Problem was, I couldn't remember how I'd done Glinn then, back in 2000, before I started keeping notes on characters for possible sequels. If I'd recognized the name earlier, I could have listened to the title at home, but today there was no time.

Luckily for me, though, today's text described his voice as completely neutral, and that reminded me: In [Ice Limit](#), they always called him emotionless, so I had kept Mr. Spock's cadence in mind while narrating.

Thank God for that jog of memory. Once again, Eli Glinn sounds like Leonard Nimoy. Wouldn't have wanted him sounding like Shatner.

And now for my last day off. Boy, do I need it. Throat's killing me.

MONDAY, MAY 2

Man, am I glad I read [Cabinet](#). Reading [Dance](#) at home, I didn't pay enough attention to Dr. Collopy, a museum curator who appears occasionally in the series, but not too often in the titles I've already recorded. I saw him merely as a small-minded, mean-spirited kind of guy, but now, having read [Cabinet of Curiosities](#) on the plane, I realize that his character is more haughty and overconfident. More

Kelsey Grammer as Frasier Crane. Such references really help. I can keep someone's cadence in my head as I'm reading—not to do an impression, but just to make the characters sound different.

Did 95 pages today, and we're up to 367. Just 84 left! This'll be a piece of cake.

Except for the sore throat, of course. Oh well. Suck it up: Drink Dayquil to coat throat and kill the pain, don't sing along to Meat Loaf in the car, and turn off phone at home.

TUESDAY, MAY 3: LAST DAY!

Just when I was feeling confident about Pendergast's accent, I had to do two more N'awlins characters!

This is always the most problematic thing for me. Tough enough to make any accent sound accurate, but how do you make three similar accents sound different from one another? Fortunately, Preston and Child helped me out. They described Pendergast's great-aunt as sounding cultivated, almost British in her modulations. Kind of like combining Kevin Spacey in *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* with Peter O'Toole. And Diogenes, the agent's brother, is described as sounding like Pendergast, but his words are clipped, almost bitten off. That made them distinctive. Whew! The authors to the rescue!

In the end I was happy with how they all sounded. Now we'll see how the fans feel about it.

Anyway, it's done. After three abbreviated lunch hours, two late phone calls to Cassandra's husband to ask him to pick up the kids from day care, and one lengthy round of pick-ups to correct a few mistakes made along the way that were caught by our editor, Mitch Plessner, we are finally through. *Finis*. No more deadlines, no more pages, no more accents. I'm off tomorrow for another conference and some long-overdue rest. Amazingly, my throat didn't hurt so much today! Guess working on a great book has curative powers.

One cool final note: I got an e-mail from the authors, Preston and Child, which said they're hard at work on the next installment, provisionally titled [The Book of the Dead](#), due next summer.

Awesome. Can't wait. I've already penciled it into my datebook.