

Speak Easy

by John Royal

No one knows your face, but everyone knows who you are. That's the business for you.

When I was ten, when everyone else had decided their lives as police officers, firefighters, or the president, I knew I was going to be the best voice over guy in the world. It was my dream.

I practiced, a lot. I read long monologues to myself, experimenting with various emotions against single lines. Once you learn how to read emotion from just words on paper, you've either become insane or a master of the craft. There is no school for voice training. No one can teach you how to speak clearly; it's all talent.

Age nineteen, I was a master of the craft.

The first time people heard me, I was a college radio DJ. I spoke school announcements into the mic and played preapproved local bands. This was the first thing I had to put on my résumé.

Finding vocal auditions in a town as small as mine was, well, not easy. I'll tell you, I was more surprised when I got that call than I have ever been in my entire life. It was a local car lot commercial, and I aced it. I so fucking nervous, but I tell you, I did great; one take was all it took. Then they paid me my fifty bucks and I went home.

It's a hard business to break into, but once you're in, you're in. My foot was in the door, and soon enough I was providing just about every local voice piece needed.

You don't work freelance for long, in the voice world. Within two months, a voice agent spotted me. He knew I had talent, he told me; he's been in this business for years, and never had he heard someone like me.

This is how the voice work works: your agent calls you, tells you the studio you're going to be in the next day, and you go. My agent told me, be nice to the producers, do whatever they say, do however many takes they want, do not complain, and above all, do not piss them off. So that's what I did. I became the voice over world's bitch boy. They give you the script and tell you what you're doing this time – movie trailer, public service announcement, radio advertisement – and you go in the booth and you talk and you leave. You don't get paid much, voicing things, but you do gain a reputation.

I moved up the tier of vocal work fast. I was doing national commercials, audio books, phone automations, documentaries, all sorts of shit. Hell, I couldn't even tell you how many jobs I ended up doing back then. I'll admit, it made me cocky.

People you've never met before, they recognize you in bars, and they don't even know why. It's the weirdest experience in the world, but damn if it isn't wonderful.

Let me tell you something: you tell a gal you were the voice over on that shitty new chick flick trailer, her mouth will already be halfway towards your crotch. They feel like they're almost fucking a celebrity. That was the best period of my life.

The voice auditions for Clacky Sparks, the new robot adventure cartoon; that was where I fucked up. Misty Weir, ask anyone in the voice world, she's hardly ever satisfied with what anyone gives her. Feel sorry for her husband, huh? But she'll do take after take, for hours on end, just for one line. I thought I could handle her. That was my mistake.

After take sixty-one for dialogue line six, we got into an argument that she had to have something to use and that I was moving on. If she couldn't handle it, I was out of here. She called my bluff, and I ended up calling her an insane bitch for letting me go.

When Misty Weir tells you you'll never work in this town again, she's right. My agent dropped me, and then I was broke and homeless.

I had no other skills. All I can do is talk. It's my passion.

Under a new name, I started doing more voice work. The thing no one ever tells you is, starting over is harder than getting to the top the first time. You have to avoid anyone who could ever match your voice to your face.

The way to get back in was to start at the bottom again. I was doing local again. I provided oral favors to shoddy businessmen in shoddier sound studios.

I was a voice whore. A speak prostitute. But I could only be that for so long.

These businessmen, they don't know shit about the voice arts. I couldn't handle it anymore, and I so I moved back home. I've given up the art, and I'll doubt I'll get back into it anytime soon.

Moral of the story, if you need one: don't get paid doing art unless you want to end up hating art.