

**You're listening to Imaginary Worlds, a show about how we create them and why we suspend our disbelief. I'm Eric Molinsky and joining me is my assistant producer, Stephanie Billman.**

SB: Hey! Hey!

**Hey! And in today's episode we talked with one of the most famous actors you've seen while not realizing you've seen him. His name is Doug Jones and he is one of the top creature performers, and by creature performer I mean the performer who's inside a monster or some kind of other creature costume or make up, brining that character to life through their physicality.**

**When did you first start to notice Doug Jones?**

STEPHANIE: I mean, I was consuming his, his performances way before I realized who he was. I mean, you know, the Mac Tonight guy from the McDonald's commercials, I think like in the late, the late eighties, early night.

**Yeah. That was the like half-moon guy that was playing the piano. Like he's like a jazz lounge guy.**

STEPHANIE: Exactly. Yeah. And they kind of had Jay Leno's chin.

*CLIP: MAC THE NIGHT*

STEPHANIE: And then, you know, he was, he was Billy, the zombie in Hocus Pocus, which, you know, I loved, I watched every Halloween. I had no idea. These two are the same people,.

*CLIP: HOCUS POCUS*

**Well it's funny, I was also thinking, you know, you and I have been really excited about this interview and it was, it was actually, it took a long time to actually finally get ahold of him for people who may be listening are thinking, Oh, okay. So he plays a lot of monsters and aliens. Like I'm like, why are we so excited about Doug Jones?**

STEPHANIE: You know, there's always that actor that, that he just completely disappears into a role. And that's what I find fascinating. It's like what type of person is able to basically kind of be like a chameleon to some extent, and how does that person

approach each performance and how are they able to just completely let, like, even every iota of themselves go and just completely accept and absorb a character. Because if you think about it, even to some extent, like if you watch a Harrison Ford movies, there's still going to be like a little bit of Harrison Foard's a little swagger in there, but like Doug Jones, just as invisible when it comes to these roles. And I find that fascinating.

**Yeah, and on top of that, and the fact that he has so little dialogue in these movies or TV shows but has still become a celebrity. He's like the Lon Chaney or Boris Karloff of our time. I mean, that's, to me is also, what's kind of amazing.**

STEPHANIE: I know!

### *MUSIC TRANSITION*

**So here is the interview that Stephanie and I did with Doug Jones. He grew up in Indiana. And when he was in college, he trained to be a mime. He was also a contortionist, but when he decided to become a professional actor, he wasn't thinking about sci-fi fantasy creatures. He was actually going for minor comedy roles.**

DOUG: It wasn't until I moved out to Los Angeles and started my acting career, thinking that I was going to be a goofy sidekick on a sitcom or do funny things in commercials, which I did do, but I also, I had no idea that, that, um, the mine background on my resume and my flexible legs that I could put contortionists on my resume. I had no idea that, that, that, that coupled with being six, three and a half and 140 pounds would be a tall lanky moveable palette. That creature effects people who love to build things on. I had no idea that that was the thing. And again, being able to wear something is one thing, but having a sense of, of your entire body from head to toe to move in it and to make it come alive and to think like an actor, not just like a, uh, somebody with talented elbows,

**He does have an usually lanky body with a very sculpted face. I can see why creature performers thought of him as a great canvas to work on. But they also found him incredibly easy to work with.**

DOUG: Well, you know, as actors, we all have a reputation for being divas and being like, you know, this is not, I'm so hot, this is uncomfortable. Can you change that? Whatever, Oh, so you put them, you put an actor in a five hour makeup application and discomfort for the rest of the day. And I can't go to the craft service table or getting a

drink of water is, is, is problematic or takes a village of people to get me squared away. Going to the bathroom is out of the question until a certain time when, when they can take a hand off and I can get, get to my, my flap that's built in or not. So you put most actors in a situation like that. You're going to hear complaining and, and rightfully so. You know, there's always a time to say, to look out for yourself, but I haven't, I've had a work ethic from the very beginning that if I say yes to a role, and I'm saying yes to all of those discomforts and all of those challenges that come with crazy makeups, so to complain is just kind of futile. If anything, I'll I will gently tell the team around me from the creature effects shop. Ooh, something's poking me in the neck. Is there any way we can get, I think it's drawing blood. So, so that goes a long way because as my career has built over the years, most of the jobs I've gotten, and most of the offers I get for the next movie or the next TV show is from the creature effects world referring me.

**Every part is different – and he does a lot of research into every role. But his training regimen is mostly the same. It starts when they show him an illustration of what his costume will look like.**

DOUG: I'll see concept drawings ahead of time and be like, Oh, okay, that's easy. I can see how intricate or, or involved it's going to be or uncomfortable. It's going to be. I can usually tell that from a flat piece of artwork. So, between concept art and finished pieces and glued on the Dougie, Dougie goes to, uh, my 24-hour fitness where the, the, the aerobics room where there's a big wood dance floor and a wall of mirrors. And I take all the information that I have so far and try to work out. How does he move? How does he walk? What's his, what does the script call for lunging crawling up a wall, squatting, intimidation, or weakness. I need to start building his ecosystem in my, in my mind, in my heart then comes the, uh, costume fittings and makeup tests. And then you'll see what enhancements you have that make a movement or a tilted, the head more pronounced, or a flick of the fingers, more pronounced or restrictions where I can't raise my arm as high as I thought I could, or I can't move my head at all. Or I want a squat deep knee bend. And I just can't. So what, what alterations can I make to his ecosystem that now fit my capabilities

**One of the first times I noticed Doug Jones without realizing who he was, was when he played arguably the scariest villain on Buffy the Vampire Slayer. He was the leader of a group of demons called The Gentleman. This was an episode Joss Whedon wrote and directed that had almost no dialogue because The Gentleman stole everyone's voices. They were ghoulishly white with hideous teeth, but they dressed sharply, like undertakers.**

**Originally, the actors were going to have plastic smiles glued on. And some of them did, but he and another actor named Camden Toy had such creepy smiles in their auditions, the make-up team decided to use their real faces with metallic teeth. And they ended up being the leaders of the Gentlemen.**

DOUG: Camden, and I had to hold that smile, you know how you're at a wedding and your face starts getting twitchy when you've been smiling for photos.

**Yeah,**

DOUG: We did that for two weeks. Yeah.

*CLIP: BUFFY*

**But what made The Gentleman really creepy was that they were so exceedingly polite to each other, while doing horrible things to everyone else.**

DOUG: So I think one of the most disturbing moments in that episode for me to watch is when we are going down the hallway of a dormitory, we ended up finding the perfect room. We, uh, we knock on the door and this, this college kid answers the door. And it's this, this young, young fellow basically, uh, our, our goons on the ground, um, gang kids by him by the elbows back to his bed, pin him down. And then we kind of float in gently and, you know, open the doctor bag and pull out the instruments. Oh, no, you first. Oh, how about you first? That's why that was hard nonverbal dialogue that Camden and I would talk about ahead of time is, Oh, no, you first. Oh, no, please. You.

**And that episode was so beloved by Buffy fans, they made an action figure of Doug's Gentlemen character, while all the other action figures were the stars of the show.**

**It's interesting that he was getting noticed playing a character who stole people's voices because the struggle to have a voice would soon become a theme in his career.**

**In 2007 he played The Silver Surfer in a Fantastic Four movie. When you watch the film, the Silver Surfer looks like he's CG, but Doug was on set wearing a full body metallic skin tight suit. And he always does deep research into each role, and he was so moved by the Silver Surfer's tragic backstory and stoicism, he felt very attached to him. Then when filming was done, he learned that his voice would be dubbed over by Laurence Fishburne.**

*CLIP: SILVER SURFER*

DOUG: That was a bit of a sore spot. Love Laurence Fishburne is a brilliant actor. So his voice was, was lovely, but I think mine was too. And you know, when, when you are an actor, you know, I don't think any actor wants to see half their performance, uh, removed or replaced. I didn't want to see my voice go either. And I, I wish you could have heard the original, uh Trek. Cause I, I did all of the, um, onset, voicing. I, you know, I was playing the part onset as any other actor would do with my co-stars been in post-production. I came in and did, uh, I laid down all my dialogue and ADR voice looping session to clean it up. And we did, we did two runs of it. We did one where I, where I spoke in my superhero voice down here. And then I did another, another run of the same dialogue with a whisper. So when you ran the two together, it was really, Oh, it was goosebumpy good. So I'm sorry that I'm sorry. You and the public did not get to hear that.

**Doug was also dubbed over by David Hyde Pierce when Doug played the intellectual fish-man Abe Sapien in the first Hellboy movie.**

DOUG: And again, David Hyde, Pierce, brilliant actor love him, absolutely love him, but again, but it was, it was painful to see my, my, my work, my voice replaced. And it was basically a studio. I, I asked, was this a performance issue? Or what was it, a, a studio decision? And I, it was more of a studio, like decision to tie, a bigger name to that role. When I was I'm more of an unknown then.

**But he did get his voice on screen for the sequel, Hellboy II: The Golden Army.**

*CLIP: HELLBOY 2*

**Now, he has the clout to put in his contracts that if he's playing a character who speaks English, his voice cannot be dubbed over. And yes, he has done non-English speaking roles. In Pan's Labyrinth, he played the Pale Man – which was the creature whose eyes were in the palms of his hands, but the bigger role he played in that movie was the mysterious Faun, which looked like he made out of tree bark. Doug learned Spanish to speak his lines, but he was happy they used a Spanish actor dub over him and bring out the nuances in the language.**

*CLIP: FAUN*

**The director of Pan's Labyrinth and the Hellboy movies was Guillermo del Toro. Doug has worked with him in six movies, and Doug will often play multiple roles in those movies. There's a long history of directors finding their muses in actors,**

**like DeNiro and Scorsese, Johnny Depp and Tim Burton, David Lynch and Kyle McLaughlin. But the pairing of a director and a creature performer -- that's unusual. And what made Doug's career take off is that Guillermo del Toro saw so much potential in Doug and created most of these roles with him in mind. They also have great on-set shorthand communication.**

DOUG: The shorthand, he knows with me personally, he knows that he could get, if he can make me chuckle, whatever he he's, he's staying will sink in better, uh, friends. Uh Hellboy, Hellboy II: The Golden Army. Oh, it was a scene that he couldn't cut away from. It was going to be a visual moment where the camera was on a track circling around me. Then I had to do a bunch of business with my hands and some props, and he had to get it all completed in one swoop of the camera with no editing options. So just keep the, keep the action moving. So I'm going through all of this, this action. And then all I heard after take one was gut Dougie. You're boring me to tears. And so of course I doubled over laughing and said, all right, I got to take two and make them on. So, but not, not every director would know to say those words to me.

**Sometimes, Guillermo del Toro doesn't have to use any words, like in that same movie, Doug played a flabby demon called The Chamberlain.**

DOUG: And Guillermo just with, he said, when you play the Chamberlain, I just want to give him sort of a, he swooped his fingers inward into a clasp in front of his. And he said, that's all I said. And I was like, got it, and we never talked about it again!

**Doug isn't the only creature performer Guillermo del Toro works with. He sometimes shares the screen with an actor named Brian Steele.**

DOUG: He's my height, but much more muscly. And, and he is a powerhouse and he can channel like those animal visceral, intimidating, dangerous characters. And Guillermo said, that's it. He goes to Brian for those. And The, and those are suits that also weigh 150 pounds on top of you, what you already wear? And he said, but he comes to me for the more, uh, uh, genteel, uh, artistically poet, poised characters. So he, he, he just kind of creates to our specialty. Uh, and if they, he creates them for Brian Steele, it's the big, like the, the big thing built, like an ox that comes bursting through a wall and goes, I've played things like that before in other films, but it's not my strong suit.

STEPHANIE: The fact that the fact that Guillermo Del Toro kind of like, as he said, plays to each actor specialties, is that one of the reasons why he's one of your favorite directors to work with or your favorite?

DOUG: Yes, absolutely. Right, of course the movies that have that, that live in my heart the most are there things like Pan's Labyrinth and The Shape of Water, where he wrote the script himself, and he created those roles with me in mind. You can't ask for a more dreamy situation as an actor then to have somebody create a, a role for you that is gorgeous in every way and ends up at the Oscars both times.

**The other movie he referred to, The Shape of Water, was Doug's biggest role with Guillermo del Toro. Doug played the Amphibian Man – a sort of sexy creature from the black lagoon that Sally Hawkins's character falls in love with. It was one of the rare genre films to break through at the Oscars and even win Best Picture.**

**When Guillermo del Toro told Doug about the part, Doug thought it sounded like the other fish-man character he played in the Hellboy movies, Abe Sapien.**

DOUG: Is this an Abe thing? Is this a prequel or something? No, no, no, no. This is its own story. And Dougie, you will be the leading romantic role of this movie. And I was, I was taken aback by that concept of like, I'm going to be in a, in a Fishman costume as the romantic leading male of this film. And again, only Guillermo Del Toro could pull that off as a director. So I knew I was in good hands, but, but the big difference was that Abe is very, very well spoken and very he's, he's got huge vocabulary and he's very smart. He can read three books at one time. He gestures with his hands a lot. He's very a refined gentleman the Amphibian Man from the shape of water is an animal from the wild, completely different.

*CLIP: AMPHIBIAN MAN*

DOUG: The two, the two body types between Abe and the Amphibian Man were different as the Amphibian Man that they gave me a much more athletic musculature and a great, but I have, and, and, you know, when the, when it was in the sculpting phase and the creature shop, and they were, you know, all the approvals and sculptures color palettes changes, no, try this add more to that, take away some from that. But those that went on for an honor, and a lot of that was concentrated on his dairy air because, because he had, you know, you just wanted it, you wanted it Guillermo wanted and wanted to an ass on this thing that you just wanted to grab and take a bite out of it. And in fact, a little side note, um, Octavia Spencer, one of my costars in that movie who was also brilliant in the film, whenever we were on set together and I would stand up from my chair to go walk away, I would hear her. She loved watching me walk away on TV. All I would hear would be that's how I knew it was working.

**The Shape of Water came out in the Fall of 2017. That was a big year for Doug because he had just begun his journey on Star Trek, which would become the biggest role in his career. We'll get to that after the break.**

**BREAK**

**I first finally realized who Doug Jones was – after watching him for decades without knowing it – when I saw him play Commander Saru on Star Trek: Discovery. Saru is a Kelpien which is a new species to Star Trek. They're actually a rare species on their home planet because they're vulnerable to predators. So, each Kelpien is born with sensors on the back of their necks that rise up whenever they sense danger. But Saru is not overly emotional or neurotic. He's strict and compassionate.**

*CLIP: SARU SPEECH*

**As I mentioned in my creature makeup episode -- I prefer Star Trek aliens that have minimal make-up. But Saru is an exception. They re-imagined every aspect of his body from his neon blue contact lenses to his flattened sculpted face to his brown fingernails, but the prosthetics are very flexible, and Doug wears them like a second skin. And his inspiration for the Saru's body language didn't come from the animal world or previous Star Trek shows. He thought about the butlers in Downton Abbey.**

DOUG: Yeah, what motivates Saru and how he behaves, uh, you know, being the only in first Kelvian to ever join Starfleet and to ever go through the Academy and come out with high ranks. And he learned like 90 some languages that he learned, and he's just, he's gone above and beyond to prove that he is worthy of being a part of this, you know, the Starfleet he has. So he has a lot of stake. Anyone, any, any helpings who want to come in, join Star Fleet in the future? It all depends on what he does now. So I think that's why he watches his P's and Q's he crosses his T's and dots, his eyes, everything is proper, proper by the rules book, book, book, book, because he wants to get everything right. And as commander Saru being second in command, and he's the one that is the go between, between captain and crew. Uh, so very much like a Butler in a, in a big manor or like that, uh, you know, the, the, the lady and gentlemen of the house, uh, if they want something done, it is the head Butler that will take that information and then take it to the staff and say, here's what they were planning a party. Here's what has to happen? You go, there you go. There you go. That you dust that you, you make those curtains go, I've done all that. And it all the while being very respectful, he knows how to tilt his head in the right moments. I'm constantly patting myself down,



straightening my jacket, padding the sides of my legs to make sure everything is in place that is through, wants to know that everything's in order.

***Now that you mentioned that yeah. I'm, I'm flashing on you doing that a lot.***

DOUG: Yes.

**In my episode about retconning, I talked about how Star Trek: Discovery has been a tough sell for some fans because the show made some changes to the Star Trek canon. But the character of Saru has been universally embraced.**

DOUG: I've been to, you know, uh, uh, several Star Trek specific conventions. And, um, and you know, as, as a member of a newer show there, what I kept hearing at, at my signing table for an entire, my first weekend, I was welcome to the family. Welcome to the family. Oh, thanks so much, Doug. Welcome to the family repeatedly more times than I can count. So they do have a sense of family about them and, and to be welcomed into it was, was, it was like, Oh, good at work. They're accepting me. They want, they they're, they're happy to have me.

STEPHANIE: It's been a journey because quite honestly, I wasn't a huge fan of Saru to begin with. But as the story arc went on, I fell in love with him as I did.

DOUG: Yeah. He heard Saru has to grow on you. He's got to stick up his ass to begin with. Yeah.

(LAUGHS)

***Are there ever any pitfalls or sort of clichés that you ever want to avoid or something that you start to do something and think, you know, what I've I keep relying on this is starting to become one of my kind of bag of tricks as an actor, and I need to do something, make a new choice.***

DOUG: Oh yeah, sure. Um, uh, you know, after, after 34 or 35 years, I've played a couple of similar characters. They aliens from outer space fishermen. Right? Two of them, I played two kangaroo men

STEPHANIE: Oh, that's right!

DOUG: Yeah. I played two large insects, one in Mimic, one in Bug Buster, believe it or not, there's a story. But, uh, but so, so, so my, the challenge is how do I make this one different than that one? And the, the, you know, the older I get in the more characters that are built up, the harder that gets, I'm sure. I'm sure I have habits that I, that I rely on when I don't know what else to do my hand gestures, especially, I'm kind of known for my hands, I guess. And, you know, there might be a splay of fingers and, uh, in a certain gesture that, that, that, that looks familiar between a couple of characters. When I, when I, if I've fallen short that day, I played a character in the show called Falling Skies. I was a character; my character was named Cochise. I was a Volme alien. He also much like Saru was very well-spoken. Uh, and he had a culture clash with these, with these renegade humans, you know, in a funny sort of way. Uh, so there's, I was

thinking like, Oh, geez, I don't want Saru to be a duplicate of Cochise. So how do I make that difference? So channeling the prey species thing, I have hoof boots. So he has hoven feet.

***Saru does -- Saru has hoven feet.***

DOUG: Yeah. And so when, when I put those boots on for the first time, in my first fitting, it kind of changed my posture a bit. So in order to keep my balance on them, I had to push my hips a little, a little bit forward. And so that kind of changed my posture into like more of a supermodel pose. And so when he walks, he, I, my, my arms naturally sort of just started flowing side the side instead of front and back, like a normal person walks. That kind of a thing was like, okay, there's something new. I love it. And nobody ever told me not to so that it stuck.

**As a performer, Doug Jones is famous for his versatility – and his ability to pull off difficult physical performances, like in Pan's Labyrinth to play the Faun he had to walk on stilts that looked like animal legs. But he's facing a new challenge: aging.**

DOUG: just turned 60 and I'm proud to say so, uh, but, uh, the older I get, the more restrictions or more limitations I feel, yes.

***Is this something you think about a lot in terms of physical limitations and, um, wanting to play characters where you are doing more subtle things and less like super physical? Yeah,***

DOUG: Yeah. Uh, well, sure. You know, um, I, um, if it's a jumping like a frog and taking a tumble out of a window, uh, those are things I'd have to discuss with people ahead of time. You know, how much of this do you really need me for? Is there a stunt double involved or is it, should we just cast somebody younger, but those are all questions that, that come up in conversations now. And that's fine. Those are great questions that have actually my, my, what a year, you're going to laugh at me, but I'm kind of, I'm kind of, I'm a hallmark channel junkie and I love their Christmas movies. I love all of it. So, and now that I'm aging into the father of a grown daughter, kind of role re though that's what I'm dreaming of more is to play the wise gray hair. Dad who has some great advice over a cup of cocoa, wear it while wearing a Christmas sweater.

***That's what I did because I was going to ask you, like, what kind of roles would you want to play? And I thought you were going to say something like, Oh, he's wanting to play. You know, I don't know something incredibly outrageous, but, but that is such a subtle, real grounded character. That's so interesting that, you know, you're like why, you know, think of it***

DOUG: For me for those roles. I would love if I did a couple of few of those a year, I'd be the happiest thing. But now had you asked me, you know, 10 years ago, is there a

creature or a heavily made up character that you have not played yet? That we'd love to? My answer would have been a classic vampire of sorts and hopefully Nosferatu.

STEPHANIE: You would make an excellent Nosferatu!

DOUG: Well thank you because a, the reason I said 10 years ago is because now we have filmed the remake of that, and it is a it's in post-production as we speak. Yeah, I know. Thank you. Thank you. I love that reaction. We, uh, uh, David Lee Fisher, the director writer, he called me up one day. Not knowing that no strike two was my dream role and said, Hey, Hey, Doug, let's see your friend, David. I haven't talked to him about how you been good. Hey, I got an idea. If you don't want to do it, then I probably won't make it. But if you do, I would do, have you ever heard of Nosferatu, would you want to, right. So he's been, he's been spying on my dreams, so I told him I freaked out and told him yes, yes, yes. Oh my gosh. Yes.

***It's funny. Cause you have such a sweet sunny disposition and then you're also so good at playing these dark characters. Is this, do you enjoy reaching down to find that super dark part of you to play those kinds of characters when you are cast to play those characters?***

DOUG: Yeah, I here's the thing, I think that all of us, we have the entire color palette of all the paints. They're all in there somewhere. And how we behave today is what is it depends on what brush or, uh, what pallet we're dipping our brush into. So, uh, so I tend to do, uh, all the happy colors as the real Doug Jones, but the dark colors are there. If I need, if I want to do them in a safe environment of a fictitious character. So that's how I look at it. It's, it's a great way to explore those, those darker colors within humanity, uh, in an environment that's safe. And hopefully it's in a story that, that we're, uh, where there's a positive uplifting outcome from it. Some good trying them triumphing over evil and or some kind of a, of a message where we learn something from it.

***Have you ever had a physical feature that you got from one of your characters that you've always wished you actually could keep or could sort of magically turn and make real every so often?***

DOUG: Well, sure. That would be, uh, the physical, uh, uh, the athletic body of the silver surfer and the, uh, and the ass of the, like, if I could just combine those two and wear to the beach, I'd be the happiest thing.

(LAUGHS)

***It's funny, one of the reasons why Stephanie and I wanted to talk with Doug Jones was because we couldn't believe all these characters were played by the same guy. But now that we've talked to him, whenever I look at his body of work, I can now see his signature as an actor so clearly, no matter what kind of makeup or prosthetics he's wearing. I see the smooth elegance of his movements, and the fine attention to detail he puts into each character's body language – which goes back to his training as a mime. And I can always spot his rail-thin tall physique***

and sculpted face that inspired the imaginations of so many creature designers and directors who thought to themselves, I could do a lot with that guy. Let's see if he's up for the challenge.

That's it for this week, special thanks to Doug Jones!

My assistant producer is Stephanie Billman. You can like the show on Facebook. I tweet at emolinsky and imagine worlds pod. If you really like the show, please do a shout out on social media. That always helps people discover the show. I also put a slideshow of some of Doug Jones's most famous roles on the Imaginary Worlds Instagram page.

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