

GREEN QUEENSLAND  
ON AIR  
EPISODE 3

*BEYOND STRANGE LANDS*

EPISODE 3  
DRAFT VERSION 3  
RUN TIME 43:39  
HOST Aimée Lindorff  
(AL)

GUESTS Simon Taylor Writer  
David Peterson Writer  
Hannah Ariotti Director  
Amy Ingram Actor  
Danielle Redford Producer

DESCRIPTION: In this episode of SQ On Air, we interview the creative team behind Audible Original series *Beyond Strange Lands*, and explore some of the myths and opportunities about working with sound.

Guests:

- Creator and writer Simon Taylor
- Creator and writer David Peterson
- Director Hannah Ariotti
- Producer Danielle Redford
- Actor Amy Ingram - plays lead role of Fiona

References:

- Listen to *Beyond Strange Lands*: <https://www.audible.com.au/pd/Beyond-Strange-Lands-Audiobook/B086Q2LGBM>
- Folklore Sound: <https://folkloresound.com/>
- Audiocraft: <https://www.audiocraft.com.au/>

- *Beyond Strange Lands* Press: <https://www.brisbanetimes.com.au/national/queensland/aspiring-filmmakers-pivot-to-pandemic-podcasting-20200514-p54syt.html>

	<p>Welcome SQ On Air, presented by Screen Queensland, sharing the issues and news affecting the industry and culture of the Queensland screen sector.</p> <p>I'm Aimée Lindorff, and in this episode we're talking to the team behind the Audible Original series <i>Beyond Strange Lands</i>.</p> <p>I talked to writers Simon Taylor and David Peterson, director Hannah Ariotti, actor Amy Ingram and producer Danielle Redford about the development and production of the series, and explored some of the myths and opportunities about working with sound</p> <p>Launched in April 2020 it's one of the first Audible commissioned scripted series from Australia, and features a stellar cast of voice actors. including....AI MF PP AMC RD GW</p> <p><i>Beyond Strange Lands</i> is an action-packed and fantastical multi-cast audio drama that journeys across the Australian outback - it's 12-episodes of adventure, rogue kangaroos, mysterious (and missing) relatives, recovered audio tapes, and Australian accents filled with 80s nostalgia and classic genre tropes.</p> <p>Think Stranger Things crossed with Blair Witch Project going somewhat Round the Twist.</p>
	Tell us how the series came about.
David Peterson	I come from a film and TV background, so I graduated from Griffith back in 2012. Simon and I actually started working together more intensely when we were doing the masters program and working on a co-

	<p>production, a feature co-production with a Korean film school and Griffith. That's when we started working together. I was actually a producer on that and Simon was a writer.</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>I'm primarily a film and TV, working film and TV development. I like to think of myself as just a content creator now. I write novel, well I'm trying to write a novel, doing my first one now. I work in quite a few features. I've done a series as well. I like to do as much, anything I can do is what I like to do, across any genre. I like to be genre agnostic, too, but SciFi is my favorite.</p>
	<p>I've always wanted to do a X-Files type show set in Australia because we've got such an ominous landscape at times it kind of lends itself to it. This particular version grew out of re-watching the Bush Tucker Man from the '80s. Then going, "What would happen if there was a Mulder-type character who had his own TV show that was traveling around?" The early versions of Beyond Strange Lands is literally an '80s found recorded show, like on the ABC or something. It kind of grew from there.</p> <p>I like to call it the Australian version of X-Files, except instead of FBI agents we have a paramedic and her teenage son. As they travel the Outback encountering all ghosts, monsters, and all things that go crazy in the night.</p> <p>Story-wise they're propelled by the search for the main character, Fiona, search for her father, Grant Peterson. He was this famous documentary filmmaker from the '80s who disappeared while filming a paranormal TV show. Many years later, the unveiling of the tapes from recording of the show resurface and launch our characters on their journey.</p>
David Peterson	<p>Simon had pitched it to me a couple of times. Then Screen Queensland had a podcast initiative. We were kind of casting around for some ideas that might work for that. That one came up as one of the options and</p>

	<p>we were like, "Yeah, that could work." We kind of took the basic premise and then started fleshing it out. It was at that point that we created Fiona and Ethan and sort of the whole back plot for that side of it.</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>In 2017, Screen Queensland had an initiative with Brian Reed, the creator of S-Town. It was coming to Brisbane and doing a panel. They had an opportunity for people to come in and do a one day workshop with him. We did that back in 2017. As part of that, we also got development funding to work on a pilot script for the first episode and a Pitch Bible. That kind of set us up really nicely to take it to places.</p> <p>And then we ended up entering an initiative of Audible. Audible have, as part of their working with AudioCraft, they have a retreat. We went down to Sydney for a couple of days and workshopped with Audible sound engineers and podcast producers from around the world. That was really cool. It was like three days. It was a three day intensive workshop. It was on the Quarantine Station down in Sydney, so it was a really cool weekend retreat.</p>
	<p><i>Beyond Strange Lands</i> was a real education for myself, in terms of that it taught me how you need to pivot in order to be able to survive in the industry. It actually began as a web series, where you had an interactive website where people sent in clues and discoveries. It would air clips of the old '80s show. Then it evolved into more of a half hour show. After I talked to David, it came to audio. The show's pivoted quite a few times to be different things.</p>
David Peterson	<p>The archival footage was always part of Simon's show. We realised that, "Yeah. Okay. We can take the audio from that, and if we just strip it down to only the audio then it makes total sense for it to be an audio drama."</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>- Then as we discovered more audio drama and went back and looked at a lot of classic BBC stuff, we transitioned. Quite honestly, I'm glad we did.</p>

	David discovered binaural audio and that's kind of kicked off the direction we headed.
	Binaural audio is not commonly used in podcasting - Why that format opposed to direct narration or radio play?
David Peterson	One of the things that caught my attention about binaural was that it gives you a real sense of place. You can hear a lot of the environment, which I'd never really heard on a lot of audio recordings before. It seemed like an ideal setting to have it set in the Outback, spooky stuff happening, and feeling much more immersed in the sound. That kind of set how we wrote it. We ended up writing the series like you were a listener standing in the room with everything that's happening.
	Hannah, as director, what was appealing about binaural format?
Hannah Ariotti	it essentially replicates 3d experience. So it uses two microphones kind of overlapped inside this, the same casing to pick up audio from, from a spatial area. So it's, it's picking up directional audio and essentially replicating the direction of where that audio is coming from in the recording. So you could put, you could put headphones on and we've recorded someone walking in a door, 20 meters away walking over to the microphone saying, "Hey Aimée, how are you"? And the person listening is going to hear that audio coming from the same direction that the door was. You're going to hear the door opening and closing all the way off-microphone. So it's kind of softer. And it has this, it has this sense of it's far away in the same way that when you're really listening to someone open a door, 20 meters away, it sounds a certain way. It replicates that same, same spatial awareness, I guess.
	Danielle, as producer, when did you enter the development process?
Danielle Redfor	I was working with another writer-director, Clare Sladden, and we were in the midst of a feature film we were developing, looking at how we could start to position that for the market. I was watching what was happening in the US with a lot of really traditional studios and companies starting to move into the

	<p>podcasting space on an IP front. Clare and I started working on that and connected with Screen Queensland who let me know about Simon and David's project.</p> <p>I came into <i>Beyond Strange Lands</i> quite late. The scripts were finished. We were moving into production rapidly. It was a bit of a whirlwind to sit down with Simon and David and go, "So 12 episodes across all of Australia with a bunch of monsters and a bunch of characters?" They're like, "Yep." It was really fun because it meant that we got to get our hands dirty really quickly</p>
Hannah Ariotti	<p>Danielle and I have been friends for a couple of years</p> <p>We'd actually not worked on something of this scope and scale together before. It's funny because all of the people who are connected to this project are actually Griffith kids. So we're all connected to Griffith uni, but I'd not met any of them except Simon before</p>
K	<p>It was one of those stars aligning moments where there was enough, I would say, curiosity and risk appetite in a really incredible way to go, "Let's move into this space. Let's find some ways to test what these workflows look like, what this could mean for the Queensland space and what this means for our storytellers."</p>
A	<p>She was approached with <i>Beyond Strange Lands</i> and just her, just her description of events is that she reads <i>Sci-fi, Outback, Action</i> = Hannah Ariotti that's, that's kind of the space that I really, I really long for. I love, I'm obsessed with the Outback, action and scifi are my favorite genre is that that's what I write. We're writing another show that it's in that kind of space. It's Outback action adventure. And yeah, she just</p>

	<p>immediately thought of me, called me, as soon as she said those words to me, I was like, yeah. I mean, that's a hard yes for me.</p>
R	<p>This was my first scripted podcast, which has opened a door that is a really interesting world that's coming on the other side of it. There's a lot of people in Australia who are moving into this space and rightly so. It's been a bit of a massive learning curve in coming into a new format. I had been working in the distribution space. I've been producing in short form, teaching, and then looking to diversify across the audio space, as well.</p>
A	<p>I'm a director, so I have been doing that in many different iterations over the last, maybe three or four years. That's been sort of my sole area, primarily in advertising, but also in branded content and, you know, storytelling like short films and that sort of thing.</p> <p>I hadn't really considered it until recently before, before she called me. So yeah. It was just a whole-hearted Yes. Like I, I will dive into something that's new, that's going to stretch me creatively. There's also, you know, the marketing business part of me, that's like, this is really exciting because it's a growth area and it's rare these days that you can be at the, at the top of a wave, you know? So that was that part of me that was like, yes, absolutely. Let's do something new. Let's throw ourselves into it. Let's experiment with the technology that's still quite new. Let's bring filmmaking techniques into an audio space a hundred percent. Yeah. So from that point, it was just that not hesitation. We dived right in.</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>One of the things that I learned is that when it comes to writing for audio, you need to really embrace the actual format, as well. For David and myself it was a huge learning curve that we had to learn a new way to write. We didn't have the usual visuals that we were used to. We only had audio and things that we assumed people would be able to hear the sounds don't actually correlate when it's just sound. It was a huge learning curve.</p>

David Peterson	We got notes back from Audible and basically all the notes we got in the first couple of rounds were like, "No one will know what this is. Someone has to say it." We've had to learn new ways of writing dialogue that explained what was going on in the scene without sounding too hokey. You're allowed to use sound to enhance that, to help sell it, but if it's sound by itself, it's just not enough to completely convey what's happening, to have dialogue backing up everything that happens. That was definitely something that I still have room to improve on, put it that way.
	My proudest moment working on <i>Beyond Strange Lands</i> was getting my first set of notes back for episode 12, where it went, "Simon, you've gone too far. This is way too expositional and the dialogue just doesn't work" because it's a complete opposite from where I was when I started the process.
	There's the discussion that audio is a visual medium, the way sound is used to convey story is inherently visual - what are your thoughts on that?
Danielle Redford	That was something that Hannah, and I had to really get comfortable with very early on. One thing that really changed the game there is when we were working with Folklore Sound, who are based in West End, was a relationship where they said to us, "Think of us like your director of photography, think of the mic like the camera." What that did is allowed Hannah to bring her directing tools in terms of perspective and whose voice it is we're leaning into and which character we're sticking with for the conversation or the moment. It just completely changed the way she approached breaking down those moments because she didn't have to develop a new set of tools so much as just shift her framework a little bit into how to bring those tools into that space. It was just really cool to watch her make the most of understanding microphones as viewpoint, particularly in a binaural medium.
Hannah Ariotti	We sat down early on and we were like, look, we're filmmakers, let's use that to our advantage. I don't want to put that part of me. That's that visual storyteller aside So what are the techniques and skills that I have as a film storyteller that I can bring into the room? And that, as you mentioned before, that's what led us to that the style of, of treating the, the microphone, like it was the camera



	<p>Binaural was always something that we held as being aspirational, because we knew that it would increase the complexity, it would increase the cost of producing it, but it was really great to see Danielle and Hannah and Folklore come onboard with such enthusiasm.</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>Yeah. I'm watching Folklore Sound work and observing some of the production process and the final result. They're lessons I'm definitely going to take through to the next audio piece we do because treating the microphone as that's the audience or that's what people see.</p>
	<p>For the scriptwriters in the room, how was that process different from a film or even a web series?</p>
David Peterson	<p>One thing I found, we'd written 12 episodes, 30 minutes, it's like, I don't know, 600 pages or something of audio, and I started going back to writing visual stuff again and caught myself just writing like a whole scene with just dialogue and no action, no nothing. It was just like I wrote two pages of solid dialogue. I was like, "Okay, I gotta go back and revisit this." When you have to lean on dialogue, it definitely makes you write better dialogue, I think in general. You tweak it a little bit, obviously. There's things you don't need to say out loud when you can see them on screen, but overall it's definitely given me a lot more practice in writing dialogue.</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>I think for myself, personally, it was not in terms of learning about writing audio per se, it was getting the experience to basically plot and evolve a 12-episode TV show. That was a huge learning curve to the point now where stuff we're coming up with we have a better idea of how to approach it and plan it, how to utilise outlines. I still pay David out because every time we do a draft, he wants to go into an outline. I do it because I know he's right, but it's still frustrating. It was like a low risk learning experience for us. I've learned a lot and grown a lot from it.</p>

	<p>I still don't like dialogue. I'm one of those writers who prefers, if I don't have to say it, I'll just do a look. I definitely write dialogue a lot better now than I did when I started the audio project. To anyone who writes plays, you will be able to transition probably a lot easier to the format than most.</p>
	<p>Danielle, I think there's an assumption that podcasting is a streamlined version of screen - was that the case?</p>
Danielle Redford	<p>Scheduling Beyond Strange Lands was about the equivalent of scheduling five features worth of content and trying to do that in a way that remains within budget.</p>
	<p>Sorry!</p>
	<p>Yeah. Thanks. Every time one character said one line in a scene I was like, "You buggers." That was a really big thing to figure out, and that's not just in terms of producing, it's always the creative and the practical hand-in-hand for me. You can't sacrifice the creative for a better practical outcome. That was quite challenging. Once we cracked how to approach that schedule it then became a really connected conversation with Folklore, honestly the other team of creatives, who without them, we would have we would have a very different outcome. I think that we benefited from their expertise, their creativity, their curiosity, their entire team were as committed to figuring out this process and finding workflows and strategies and creative solutions as we worked.</p> <p>It's a funny space to be when you're back in emerging formats, which we just haven't faced a lot in screen for a while, which is just a fun time.</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>The amount of work that Danielle and Hannah, it seemed it was just insane. We came across with, when we started the process, that very naive view of, "Oh yeah, we can have as many characters as we want.", but then you realise the production value of it where you still have to get actors and audiences in. It's amazing that you go into audio thinking that you don't have to worry about a lot of production stuff and as I said</p>

	<p>before, we thought it was low, but then you get to recording and you're just like, "Oh shit, it's just as complicated."</p>
	<p>Amy, you play Fiona - mother and one of the point of view characters. What was your expectations going into recording a podcast?</p>
Amy Ingram	<p>I just imagined, just the regular old jump in a booth, record your bit, someone else records their bit, vice versa. I know that they wanted to probably rehearse it a little bit more traditionally, but sort of once I'd started talking about the project a bit more, you realise, "Oh, wait a minute, this is going to be different". It became like a staged rehearsal reading in some aspects, because of the way everything was picked up. We had a couple props for sound, but it was basically, so we rehearsed it, we read everything together as much as we could beforehand. And then when it came to record, basically it was just about positioning in front of the microphone to pick up like, so if you're in a car, there'd be two of us sitting next to each other in the actual car configuration because it would actually pick up the direction of your voice.</p>
Annah Ariotti	<p>One of the most enjoyable parts of the process for me was how fluid and responsive we could be in the moment. We worked hard on that and we set the expectations for myself, the team behind the scenes and the actors that we were going to have to move really quickly. Cause we had a lot of characters. There was 30 something characters - might not be right on that - but there were a lot of characters written into the story, which means the schedule was really tight. We had a very short amount of time record each scene. And again, instead of me going, Oh, how am I going to do this? This is so hard. I'd usually have two hours to do one scene, you know, it was alright opportunity. How do we adapt? How do we adapt our process as actor and director to deliver this scene the best we possibly can. And instead of it being like a compromise and throwing quality out the window, we developed this really fluid, responsive, natural performance style that actually I think was really, really fun to play with. And the difference between, the biggest difference between shooting on set and recording in a studio and you can stop in the middle of the scene and go, let's just do that line again. You don't have to go back and reset the dolly shot. You don't have to get makeup in to come back and undrench someone's hair. You can literally just stop and start again. And because you can</p>

	<p>do that, it means the actors are still feeling what they were feeling. They can just quickly, quickly reset, they can make a new choice. And the trust that we had built meant that we could do that. So we integrated some really basic improv methods and it brought the life to the lines, it brought the liveliness to the performance that we needed.</p>
Danielle Redford	<p>The beauty of binaural is that any time one of our actors decided to fall to the floor or slam into a wall or whatever, we were getting all of that performance in their voice. So they had a lot of control in terms of using their traditional skillsets in this new medium, and every single one of them when they left, whether was someone like Amy and Michael who were there with us as Fiona and Ethan the whole time, or someone who came in for a day, they said "that was so much fun".</p>
	<p>How do you go about casting a series when audiences don't see the characters?</p>
Danielle Redford	<p>We were looking for people who, just who had something in their voice that you wanted to keep listening to, particularly for our main characters Fiona and Ethan, you hear from them a lot, so building that relationship between mother and son was crucial in terms of them creating the world that our audience could come into, creating empathy, creating humor. And once we had the casting of Amy Ingram and Michael Fryer, we were able to build a world from there.</p> <p>Audio is great because you can also look to cameo roles and you can bring in some incredible Aussie talent to play in spaces who... It might just be a half day of recording, they can call in from... At one point we had Rick Davies, who Jimmy from <i>Offspring</i>, who's fantastic on the line playing, oh do I spoiler who his character is? I won't, playing a key cameo in Melbourne. We had six cast in the room in Brisbane, and we had a cast member called Liam joining us from Sweden in the middle of his night, doing a scene with eight characters together. So the casting space, look it's a budget consideration in terms of bringing multiple studios, but you can play further afield and you can mix and match in a way that's pretty exciting.</p>

	So no big sets, no travel expenses - are podcasts actually cheaper to produce?
Danielle Redford	<p>We recorded 55 hours over seven days in the studio to end up with five and a half hours at the end. So there's an economy of scale that happens, but there's also just, you then end up working, you're working in an episodic space. So it was not my favorite thing to discover that it's still not cheap.</p> <p>But we probably saw a significant spend across our cast and across then the time that it takes to bring five and a half hours to life via sound design that says, and because Folklore's team had just incredible, every sound in there is built from scratch. You would not believe how many different sounds and what those sounds are, that make up some of the monster noises. We've got all kinds of things going into the blender to create these unique soundscapes.</p>
David Peterson	<p>Something that I've been thinking about lately with regards to the budget is one of the advantages of audio is, well it obviously still has a cost. You don't pay a bit, there's not a big difference in cost between writing a paranormal sci-fi show compared to a domestic present-day city set show in audio because you're not paying for all the extra visual effects, locations, et cetera. So it kind of gives you an opportunity to push out into other genres that aren't necessarily cost-effective, particularly in Australia. And I think that's where audio has a key strength is you can write audio set anywhere in the universe, doing any crazy stuff, and it won't cost you more because of where you're setting it. The thing that costs you more is how many people you're putting in the scene.</p>
	<p>I so agree with that from a producing and a creative level. And I think that what that does, particularly for us as Australians is we're playing as storytellers and content creators within the English-speaking territories. And so the pool of competition that we're up against is pretty intense. We're all trying to constantly create more inroads with audiences and more patterns of discovery and engagement.</p>

	<p>And I think that what David's speaking to is a sense of a level playing field in audio that we can sustain the story landscapes and the story scope in audio in a way that can be prohibitive or challenging on screen in Australia. And even if we want to play and have a bunch of talent who are all working with American accents, we then are playing in that global space in a way that we just can't in the same way on screen.</p>
	<p>You've all come at podcasting from other mediums, what was one element of audio storytelling that changed the way you approached your craft?</p>
David Peterson	<p>I guess for me, there's specific tricks that you learn as you're writing. And a lot of it comes from feedback from our editors as well, they were invaluable. But things like if you're going from scene to scene, make it a different location because otherwise it's difficult to pick up that you've changed scenes. If you end one scene with some characters and then you start the next scene with the same characters in the same place the listener won't know that time has passed.</p> <p>Action was super hard to write, to be honest. I spent so many times rewriting our action scenes. In the opening two episodes when they end up in the cave and there's this sort of tussle going on, it's like how do you make it clear what's happening in the room when people aren't saying, "oh no, he's grabbed my arm." That kind of thing. It just gets super clunky if you try and explain what's happening through dialogue, but at the same time, you need it to be clear to the audience. So that was really challenging and I can't tell you how many times I rewrote some of those scenes just trying to make it clearer without it sounding terrible.</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>The other thing to do is working out the heads and ends of scenes. You couldn't just chop here, chop as you are when you're writing a visual script in terms of your locations, you've got to give your audience time to catch up to where you are and where the sounds are. So one of the ways we did it is we did it through the characters.</p>

	<p>The characters would introduce where they are and what was happening and then once you identified where the sound or a place was, it was easier to kind of do it. I'm one of those weird people, like even now, I once got stuck on a plane where it one of those cheap flights, so I didn't get headsets. So I had to watch an entire movie with no sound, so that taught me how the visuals kind of carry it. So now when I actually watch things and I turn the video off and just listen to the sound and it's kind of a completely weird experience. But you kind of do have to close your eyes and you have to imagine you're there. I know that Hannah wore... She closed her eyes a lot when she was recording because-</p>
Danielle Redford	<p>She wore sleep masks. It was a hilarious visual. And we both had one and we felt like idiots wearing them. And so we took them off for a bit and we realised that we weren't as effective. She wasn't monitoring performance simply via audio. She was watching for the body cues. And so she had to then, we've got plenty of behind-the-scene shots of her directing with a silk sleep mask on. And that was a tip from Liz Rigby, who's a BBC UK radio director who said to her, "don't look, look away, wear something because you need to rely on the senses that the audience is experiencing too."</p>
Hannah Ariotti	<p>So she just had a lot, a lot of advice about just little techniques and sort of the more technical stuff about translating a script to the actual functionality of a studio space. And that was all really helpful, but she gave us that little tip of put blindfolds on and it was almost a throw away comment from her, but we, we were like, yu, that sounds like a great idea.</p> <p>But originally we didn't have them on cause I was, I was looking at the script and I was looking at the performance and it also, we had the option to be outside of the room in another studio. So, you know, it's kind of hearing it feed through and directing that way. I can't do that. I've, I've got to be there with actors. Like I, I need to make eye contact. I need to gesture. I mean, I'm gesturing all the time. Like, that's just, that's just how I am. So I needed to be there with the actors and connect with them, especially because we were moving so quickly, it relied so much on them being able to trust me straight away. And vice versa. I</p>

	<p>needed to be in there with them. So originally I wasn't, I wasn't putting the eye mask on. And then once I did, I was like, Whoa, I get it. It's not even just closing your eyes. Like, you're actually something about having you, just your brain switches to like, okay, the only option I've got right now is to listen. And so you hear, everything you hear things that you're excusing because you're seeing, you know, you might be seeing a facial expression that sells the tone of voice. Well, like you really hear the nuance of like inflection and, and all those sorts of things that you just don't really tune into when you're watching</p>
	<p>That adds an extra layer of complexity to your risk assessment on set as well if the director's walking around with a sleep mask on.</p>
	<p>I'm sure there'll be an insurance in the future for podcast producing that has sleep mask accidents. So that'll be fun to pay for.</p>
	<p>It's one of the first Audible Original podcasts from Australia. Where did Audible come into the process? What was it like working with them?</p>
David Peterson	<p>After we'd done our initial pitch and pilot development with Screen Queensland, we sent it out to a few different places. And then this opportunity came up for a workshop through Audiocraft. There was a group of us, probably 12, 13 of us, I think, So we spent time with them talking about our script and talking about our story and all that kind of stuff. And they obviously had our contact from that point on. So they got in touch with us a couple of months later and then it went from there.</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>So Audible has been a really huge champion of getting more Australian voices and stories on the screen there. And that workshop was a kickoff for it.</p>



	<p>Their notes were great. We did four episodes at first, just to test the water with them and get notes back. As we began to outline the rest of the series and to work on the other scripts, Audible got us to work with David K. Barnes, a UK based script editor. And that was absolutely fantastic. And all the notes throughout were actually really, really, really good.</p>
Danielle Redford	<p>From pre-production onwards, we worked really closely with Audible. They were incredibly supportive in terms of key creative decisions, problem solving, and just making sure that we were making the same thing from start to finish.</p> <p>But at every point there was this on-tap support. And I think that Audible's involvement across the project really brings a creative ownership that makes projects better because they understand where the end consumer will listen and experience this content.</p> <p>When we're having creative conversations about the production process, they bring that ownership and authority across understanding the experiences of their member base and making sure that that's informing the creative choices we're making at this end.</p>
	<p><i>Beyond Strange Lands</i> launched on 14 April on Audible - at the height of demand for content - thanks pandemic. What was the response like?</p>
Danielle Redford	<p>Look, it was a bit of a surprise to do as well as we did in the Australian charts. David, you can remind me, where did we land at the peak in terms of overall?</p>
David Peterson	<p>Well, the highest I saw was number six overall in Australia, and we were number one in our category for quite a while, once <i>Outlander</i> stopped being free, we were able to claw our way back to the top.</p>

	<p>Look, the responses. Some of them have been amazing. People are having a really great time. A lot of the content that's consumed on Audible is Sci-Fi, so it really fits in with a lot of the demographic in terms of their fan base and what they're looking for. We have had some people who can't get around the binaural because they don't use headphones, even though they've been warned to multiple times, which is just really interesting. In terms of the comment I made earlier about using an emerging art-form is that you win in terms of getting to play in a space that is interesting and evocative and different, but then you've got to factor in an audience just getting used to it.</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>I was surprised by how well we did in the UK as well. That was amazing.</p>
	<p>We were doing well in the States too. I think end of the 12th of June, we were number three across the board and we're still number one, I think in dramatisations and then also TV entertainment, which is really cool.</p>
Annah Ariotti	<p>That's a huge reward to everybody that works so hard on it, but I'm just really proud of what we delivered and that we, that we delivered it so well and had such a good time delivering it so that even if it had absolutely bombed, even if it had tanked and everyone hated it and you know, it was just like, we never saw or heard of it again. I still would have been so proud of the team. And so grateful, like there was not a single person who didn't bring a hundred percent, every single person showed up and gave their best and honestly, dream team, dream production.</p>
	<p>I love that we have the capacity to introduce Australian regions, Australian voices, Australian experiences, a way that people might be more interested in consuming, or I guess in that risk taking phase, working with audiences who... Maybe they've never watched much Australian TV before, but suddenly something pops up in a known space in Audible and we can pull them in and invite them into an experience.</p>

	<p>It's such an interesting opportunity to not only engage new audiences and elevate Australian stories, but also to experiment with a still emerging format.</p> <p>In terms of the future, or even now, where do you see podcast sitting in the screen ecosystem?</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>I'm excited. Because it's a place where, as an Australian writer, I can experiment with science fiction more. Generally I find it hard here to get more science fiction or more genre based projects going, but Audible and places like this, just provide a space where we can experiment. We can play in that genre more. And I think that's absolutely fantastic because there are so many fantastic genre writers around in this country.</p>
	<p>It's a really great testing ground. It's a testing ground for, I guess, story viability, interest, character development, all that sort of stuff. So I see a lot of people probably testing stuff out through podcasts and that kind of audio book world, in order to see if it'll sort of transfer over into film and TV. So yeah, I do. I think it's going to pick up a lot. For a lot of probably early filmmakers, a cheaper way to get things produced as well.</p>
	<p>What would you advise folks looking to explore podcasts?</p>
Simon Taylor	<p>I will say that one of the things that I think that's important for people to remember is, like I said before, for us it was a learning curve of learning to really appreciate the format we're writing in. But as a general rule when you're writing for TV or you're writing for web or a feature, is whatever format you're working in, learn how that format works and appreciate the format for the format. That was a huge learning curve for us. And I would say to anyone going into it, take that advice, because it's one of the most important things. And that goes across any form of writing you do.</p>
David Peterson	<p>And avoid action scenes. That's my tip.</p>

Simon Taylor	<p>And kangaroos. And actually, no, don't avoid them, they're cool.</p> <p>Animals are tough in audio though. And having different types of animals, the amount of different animal species I had in a draft, which were cut is huge. And that was one of my continual notes, particularly kangaroos. Apparently people couldn't get their head around what they sound like, but that's not to do with audio. That's just to do with animals.</p>
Danielle Redford	<p>I think kangaroos can take the blame for that one</p>
	<p>Demonic kangaroos aside, Hannah, any advice for filmmakers considering podcasts?</p>
Hannah Ariotti	<p>You have so much opportunity and so much greater scope and so much, so much more to play with in terms of like, there's no tangible restrictions, there's no tangible restrictions in terms of location, budget, production, value, you know, you, you don't have the same things to think about. So you've really got the world at your fingertips. You can create absolutely anything you want to.</p> <p>My advice with that would be don't let the format restrict you. I think that the automatic responses to go, okay, you've only got one sense. You've only got your, your ear is available. That's so restrictive. It's so minimising the experience that we know and love of consuming stories, but actually the limitations are huge opportunities. When you make that mental shift the world just comes alive with the possibilities of what you can do and create</p>
	<p>There are a heap of Australian production companies who are hot on the heels right now and who are moving into these spaces as well. And you look to the US and you are seeing the best of the best work in this world. So I think that it's remiss to treat it as something that is not equal to, but at the same time, one of the beautiful gifts of it is that if you've got a really fantastic story, and you can build that team around you, the trust needed to move into that space is probably a little bit different and so are the turnaround times. We went into production in January and we delivered in March and that alone just changes the game</p>

	<p>when it comes to the scale of what you can do in say a year. So yeah, there's pros and cons to looking at it that way. And there's some very pragmatic elements to it. But I think that the best thing for all of us to do is to expect that those at the top of the game, in the screen industry, are going to find merit and capacity in this space and you need to bring your A game.</p>
A	<p>There are so many incredible Australian storytellers and we've just been limited by, you know, different circumstantial things. Sci-fi, action and period, a notoriously expensive to produce for film or television. And the fact that it costs pretty much exactly the same to make a sci-fi show as it does to make a relationship drama in a podcast form, cause you're doing the same thing you've got the actors in there for just as long you've got the studio for just as long, it's just maybe a little bit more in post production. You literally have your entire imagination at your fingertips and any intergalactic space story you can think of, any central Australian sci-fi you can think of, any underground like Labyrinth-esque story you can think of, it's all available. It's just write a good script. Like that's all it is.</p>
	<p>You can listen to <i>Beyond Strange Lands</i> now through Audible - it's free to members, so check it out. It's definitely a lot of fun, and worth your while</p>
	<p>And thanks to you for joining us on SQ ON Air, don't forget to check out the latest screen industry news on screen Queensland's website at <a href="http://screenqueensland.com.au">screenqueensland.com.au</a></p>