



A Q&A interview with Steven Camden

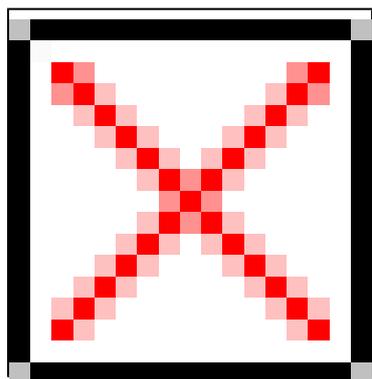
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Byline:

Steven Camden talks about his novel **Tape**.



Q1. How would you describe **Tape** to someone who hasn't read it?

If you went back in time and gave the 13 year old me the means to make a low budget independent film about family and friendship and love and the universe, **Tape** is the written version of that.

Q2. **Tape** is your first novel, but you are well known as a spoken-word artist. Why did you decide to write a novel and why now?

Spoken word was something that I fell into without planning and became excited about as I learned more and played with the form. The idea of writing a story that exists in a form you can physically touch has been a dream of mine since I was eight. In terms of why now, the answer is a story involving bumping into a friend, an unexpected link to an agent, then a very lucky case of Harper Collins thinking the start of my story had potential. I've been lucky.

Q3. Did you find the novel form restricting at all? How much did your experience as a spoken-word artist feed into **Tape**?

I didn't find the form of a novel restricting. New, different, deeper, consuming, are all things I did find it and I have loved the process, especially the dialogue that comes after a first draft where I was lucky enough to work with Nick, Lily and the other guys at Harper Collins to make **Tape** exactly what I wanted it to be. I think of the telling of the story in the novel as musical. I hope it doesn't sound pretentious to say that, but that's what I thought during the writing process and into the refining and editing. The back and forth and the affect of one scene on the next, in terms of pace, weight, tone and hints, felt how I imagined editing a film would feel like. In that sense, spoken word played a huge part, because I think the speaking of stories is completely musical and the timing, delivery and tone of what you say is what makes it uniquely yours.

I know my spoken word voice very well, now I'm getting to learn my written voice too and the two have an influence on each other that I hope benefits them both.

Q4. **Tape** has a complicated structure, was it a challenge to plan? How did you go about that?

I didn't plan the structure. I got to know the characters and the world they inhabited and then I just followed the music of their two strands. The sense of real time was important and that meant that the decisions of when to cut back and forth became very important in terms of communicating the idea of connection between then and now to the reader and the sense that so many details of Ryan's life echoed in Ameliah's.

Once both strands were rolling, it really was just a matter of listening to them and trusting my gut when to move. I had a sense of what I wanted to happen at the end, but not the fine detail. I wasn't interested in a 'twist' or a big 'reveal' as that wasn't right for this story. I wanted things to feel like an accumulation rather than a surprise. I really wanted it to feel like one of those independent films that either gets you or doesn't.

I think it would have been easy to write something that felt like a mystery that wanted to hit you with some revelation, but I just wanted it to feel real and hopefully make you care.

Q5. You write plays also. Would you like to see Tape performed on stage or as a radio drama? What elements do you think would work best in live performance?

I think a good story can work in any form. I have written for the stage, for radio, bits for film and to be honest the most exciting thing for me about writing is trying to play with what a form is, in terms of my own perception of the form anyways, so to me **Tape** is meant to be read.

That being said, the idea of somebody seeking to create something new through adaptation and/or collaboration to fit another form based on the story is definitely very exciting. I could for example hear a series of conversations between characters as a way to tell the story. Ryan speaking parts to Liam. Heather speaking parts. Joe speaking parts to Nan and every which way to piece up the story and make it feel like it had to be done live.

Q6. What are your favourite scenes in the book? What are you most proud of in it?

Wow. I can hear my mom's voice saying, 'keep this one short Stevey?'. I like the scene where Ryan and Liam are eating chips. I like the first scene with Ameliah at Joe's house. There are certain lines I feel proud of too, but to be honest what I'm most proud of is the fact that the book feels exactly how I hoped it would. The rhythm and sense of time feels just like I saw and heard it in my head. I knew the characters, I had an idea of things I wanted to happen, but I didn't set anything in stone and you always have to hope that where you end up feels like you hoped it would, well I do anyway, and **Tape** does. I hope it's the kind of story that will either turn you off early, or pull you in fully and if it does pull you in, I hope that what you're left with is a sense of how connected the past and the present is and how every tiny action has an affect. Sorry, mom, I indulged myself.

Q7. There's an interactive app of the book in development. How involved have you been in that? What is your vision for it?

Tom and the others at Harper Collins and the guys at Aardman have been brilliant in the process so far. The great thing has been the fact that the idea started based on the fact that people loved the story, which felt amazing. I have been completely involved from the beginning (even when things have clearly been way too technical for me to understand) and I've felt very lucky and inspired by how Harper Collins are trying to play and push storytelling with technology, but only based around something solid and that they believe is quality. The vision for the app is to create a space where ideas are shared, held together by the story and layered upon by anyone who gets inspired by the characters and their world. It's all about layers.

Q8. Do you believe that 'everything happens when it should'?

My nan always used to say, 'Nothing before it's time?', and I think I do believe that yes. Maybe I wouldn't be so quick to agree if I wasn't in a position where I've been given such great opportunities. Who knows?

The only thing I believe for definite is in trusting my gut. Everything that makes me the most proud and happy and excited has come as a result of going with my gut feeling and whether that's fact, or my own construct to boost my own morale, I don't know, but right now, I'm more excited than I've ever been.

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