

STARLOG's "THE LAST AIRBENDER" set visit: Shaun Toub

Written by Allan Dart
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In our third set-visit interview with a cast member from THE LAST AIRBENDER, we spoke with Shaun Toub, the veteran actor who you might remember as the trusted friend and scientist Yinsen, who saves Tony Stark's (Robert Downey Jr.) life in IRON MAN. In M. Night Shyamalan's film (now in theaters), Toub plays Prince Zuko's (Dev Patel) Uncle Iroh.

Zuko's dedicated Uncle Iroh aids the Prince in his quest. Iroh is an ex-general and veteran of many wars who acts as a mentor and confidante to his young nephew. Zuko's journey is fueled by the duties of family. After being shamed in battle, Zuko has been ostracized by his father, Fire Lord Ozai (Cliff Curtis). Now, Zuko is determined to win back his father's love and esteem by finding the last Avatar.

STARLOG: How do you view your character in THE LAST AIRBENDER?

SHAUN TOUB: Iroh is a man of honor, and you'll see in the first film a bit of looseness at times. You'll see him dancing with girls and partying down, whereas Zuko is solely focused on this hunt. You'll see how free Iroh is, and how he likes to enjoy life. But the personality is still there—if I make him angry enough, you see the general in him, the anger in him. He's a very interesting character.



STARLOG: Could you talk a little about the characters and their relationships, especially between Iroh and Zuko?

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TOUB: It's really interesting because I think it's kind of related to our lives these days, where finding the power to conquer others comes back to hurt you in the end, because it puts the world out of balance. My character is an ex-general, so he's used to being a warrior. He's very powerful, but he doesn't show it at all because he lost his son. Now, he's content with life, and Zuko has become like a son to him. It's an interesting relationship because Zuko's at an age where he's so hungry for his father's approval that he doesn't see anything else. And Zhao's always trying to—without being overbearing so he pushes Zuko away—keep Zuko focused and take care of him, because Zuko's in danger.

STARLOG: What makes Zuko special?

TOUB: He's the only person we've seen so far who has the power to create fire without a known source. Everyone can throw fire, but he's the only one who can make it and create it without a source. I think the special effects on this film are going to be magnificent—they'll create a very impressive world. I actually had to experience fire in my hand, which is kind of scary because you don't want to get burned. They have come up with this technique where you put gel on your hand and then you put the fluid on it, and the trick is that the fluid is good for 20 seconds, and after that, it will burn you. At one point I wanted to finish the scene, but couldn't, because I would've gotten burned, which scared me a bit.

STARLOG: Do you view Zuko as a bad guy?

TOUB: Zuko isn't a bad guy at all; he's just obsessed. I can think back to my own childhood and how kids are always looking for their parents' approval, and Zuko has this obsession for his father's approval. That's why he has so much anger in him. He isn't necessarily bad, he just has a great deal of built up anger and forgets to consider others. I think people will understand that he's not bad, he's just angry and hurting because he really wants his father to love him, but his father is too busy with other things.



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STARLOG: How would you describe your relationship with Patel? Is there a mentoring aspect to it?

TOUB: It's challenging in that he's an 18 year old with all this energy. I try to just contain it and keep him focused, and it's a little exacting. There's a lot of pressure, and I can understand how difficult it can be to come from nowhere and suddenly everyone knows about you and wants to take your picture. It's taught me a lot. It's made me appreciate the fact that I've been in this business for a while, that the attention has come later, and that I can balance it much better and control it. I can keep a hold of my personal life. Dev's a really good kid, a really good guy, and we talk about it a lot. I do try to, without getting into his personal life, kind of guide him. It's the strength of the business we are in—it comes fast, but it goes away very quickly as well. When it's here, you've got to enjoy every second of it, but you also have to be mindful that you're here to do a film.

STARLOG: If you've seen AVATAR: THE LAST AIRBENDER, the cartoon has its share of lighthearted moments and silly humor. What has been M. Night Shyamalan's comedic approach to this film?

TOUB: The movie is much more serious than the cartoon. There's still some humor for sure, and maybe in the future films there will be more, but in this one there isn't as much as the show. It's Night's vision, so it's much more serious. He's trying to pass on a message, and he's trying to make the movie so people from every age group can relate to it; it's not just a movie for kids. It relates to what's going on in the world right now, and how we live, family values and all that.

STARLOG: What's up next for you?

TOUB: I hope that we luck out and get to do a couple of these, because the story isn't completely told and there's much to be said. I always try to change things up, and right now I'm looking to do some comedy. It's been serious for a while for me, and I love what I do, but I always try to push myself to do new things. It's difficult at times, but I believe in the idea of working for as long as possible, and not just in the moment. I've been blessed so far, thank God. I've never been pigeonholed, and I truly believe as actors that you bring your life experiences into your work, and that's been my benefit because I've been all over the world, had a lot of experiences and can do a million different accents. So, hopefully I can keep

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challenging myself.

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