

One of the strangest and most frightening things we can do is stop and consider how we got where we are. How far our lives are from what we expected, and from what was expected for us. Imagine what it must be like for Sean Bean. How did this confused Sheffield welder, a tattooed tough nut from the football terraces, become one of the most sought-after narrators in the land, a stalwart of period dramas and, for God's sake, even a super-sophisticated adversary of James Bond? He and his family must live in a constant state of astonishment. And that's even disregarding the fact that, as the noble warrior Boromir in Peter Jackson's Lord Of The Rings trilogy, he's also one of the biggest film stars alive.

He was born Shawn Mark Bean on the 17th of April, 1959, in Sheffield. His dad, Brian, was a steel plater with his own business. His mother, Rita, was a secretary, so the family was not particularly poor. There would be a younger sister, Lorraine. Young Sean was a headstrong type, set on getting his own way and sometimes letting his anger and disappointment get the better of him. One story sees him as a youngster, making paper shapes with his cousin. When his playmate wouldn't give him the scissors, an enraged young Sean smashed a glass door, a long shard of glass embedding itself in his leg. There was blood everywhere, he was raced to hospital. They saved the leg, but he still carries a savage scar, which he jokingly claims was caused by a shark.

For a while after the accident, Sean couldn't walk properly - a very bad thing as all he wanted was to play football for his local heroes Sheffield United (not that having one leg necessarily disqualifies you from their First Team, you understand). Throughout his years at Brook Comprehensive, and growing up in Handsworth, football was his obsession, his life. He played inside right for the school team. But, as he came to realise how hard the training would become if he really took the sport seriously, he gradually became more a supporter than a player. So keen he was that in 1990, on the day Sheffield United won promotion, he had 100% Blade tattooed on his left shoulder (United's nickname being The Blades - the town being a stainless steel provider, and all).

Sometimes there would be trouble. Sean had led a local gang called The Union who were in a perpetual war with neighbours The Firm. There was the occasional scrap, but no weapons. At the football too there were confrontations, a bit of argy-bargy, and Sean was not one for backing down. Sometimes the police would keep him and his friends away from rival factions, but there were never any charges. Indeed, Sean was only ever charged once, with ABH (plus a £50 fine), and that was later when he punched out a fellow who tried to stop him gatecrashing a party.

At 15, Sean made a decision to channel his aggression more positively. His dad had won a couple of awards for boxing while in the Army, and now Sean took up the noble art of fisticuffs, at the Croft House club. For two years he worked out here, cleaning up considerably. From a young age, he'd been a smoker and a drinker. Now he (temporarily) quit the weed and drank only milkshakes.

Meanwhile, in 1975 and aged 16, he left school, armed with only two O-Levels (in Art and English - subjects in which, for some reason, he naturally excelled, and which would both serve him well). His footballing future now a no-no, he had no idea what to do, his indecision and continual mind-changing getting him a family rep for flightiness. He sold cheese in a supermarket, shovelled snow in the winter, eventually all he could do was go weld for his dad. It was a safe option. No chance of hearing the crowds baying his name, but he'd be OK.

But something in Sean rebelled against this easy progress. While on a day release welding course at Rotherham College of Arts and Technology, he came across an arts class in progress and felt his earlier creative fires immediately rekindled. He enrolled at Granville College but left at lunchtime on Day One, horrified by the place, or maybe just not sure of what it was he really wanted.

Sean was sure his future lay somewhere in the arts and, in September 1979, began a Fine Arts foundation course back at Rotherham College. And, near-instantly, he stumbled upon his vocation by coming across a drama class. THIS was it. His family believed it to be another fad, his friends began to question his sexuality, but Sean was undeterred. For the first time outside of football, he had found something to which he could truly devote himself.

Sean's acting tutor at Rotherham recalls being "astounded at the quality and pace of his development" and, with his stubborn determination here matched by a natural aptitude, his progress WAS incredible. At college he played in Arsenic And Old Lace and The Owl And The Pussycat, also facing the public by performing in Cabaret and A Murder Has Been Arranged at Rotherham's Civic Theatre. Within six short months, he had auditioned for and won a scholarship to RADA, where he began his formal training in the spring of 1981. On April 11th, he also finally married his childhood sweetheart, hairdresser, Debra James (the girl to whom he'd lost his virginity). Things were looking good.

At RADA, Sean enjoyed an all-round stage education. He debuted in *Fear And Miseries Of The Third Reich*, then moved through *King Lear*, *Twelfth Night*, *Julius Caesar* and *The Merry Wives Of Windsor* to *The Pajama Game* and *Three Sisters*. He was Agamemnon on *The House Of Atreus* and McMurphy (Jack Nicholson's character) in *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*. An outstanding student, he won a silver medal for his performance as Pozzo in his graduation play, *Waiting For Godot*.

1983 saw Sean on his way. He performed at RADA and Glasgow's Citizens Theatre, and in May made his professional debut, as Tybalt in a production of *Romeo And Juliet* at Newbury's Watermill Theatre (as Shaun Behan). There was also a TV debut, in an advert for Barbican no-alcohol lager (ugh!). The next year brought sporadic work. He had a small part in the TV drama *Punters*, about Seventies Yorkshire, and a short movie, *Samson And Delilah*. Then he appeared in *The Bill* and in his first TV movie proper, the airforce drama *Winter Flight*.

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In the meantime, he raised his cinematic profile too. He cemented his rep as a particularly dastardly villain by shining as Alec Trevelyan, Agent 006, in *Goldeneye*. Could James Bond stop him from destroying London with a big nuclear pulsing thing? Then came a perhaps more unlikely scenario in *When Saturday Comes*, where Sean played a hard-drinking brewery worker who dreams of scoring the winner for Sheffield United in the Cup Final and - no WAY! - does. Next he was excellent as Count Vronsky, Sophie Marceau's dashing lover in a remake of the tragic tale of *Anna Karenina*, and stood out as Spence, a freelance weapons expert and agent-type hired alongside Robert De Niro in *Ronin*.

Though all was going swimmingly in his working life, Sean's private life was once again in uproar. His well-known love of football and "bit of rough" image had made him a favourite of the New Lad

magazines, and he reportedly partied fairly hard. His marriage with Melanie Hill did not survive this period, and in 1997, at Hendon Registry Office, he wed Abigail Cruttenden, the actress who'd played Sharpe's lover, then wife over the latter few episodes (and had appeared in Anna Karenina). Together they had a daughter, Evie Natasha, but by 2000 their relationship was already over.

Release-wise, it appeared as if the 2000s began badly for Sean. He turned up in Essex Boys, but that was it for the opening year of the millennium. However, he'd actually been extremely busy, and 2001 took him to new peaks of fame. First, he played yet another vile villain, this time kidnapping psychiatrist Michael Douglas's daughter and demanding he wring some secrets from a catatonic woman in Don't Say A Word. Then would come Boromir and Peter Jackson's Lord Of The Rings, a trilogy that would keep Sean at the pinnacle of fame for the next three years.

Naturally, this would allow him to deal in more interesting roles, rounding out his CV. After filming LOTR, next would come Tom And Thomas, where he played the supportive and encouraging foster father of a young boy who has an imaginary friend. Sean thinks the friend is just the boy's way of dealing with the death of Sean's wife, but in fact he's the boy's very real twin brother, on the run from a children's home and some unscrupulous traders in flesh.

[Next would come another tough guy role in Equilibrium, a sci-fi oddity recalling Fahrenheit 451 and concerning a post-WW3 world where everyone is given compulsory doses of happy drugs to prevent further violence. Sean played a top Cleric, a policeman charged with rooting out and terminating Sense Offenders, his partner, Christian Bale, causing complications by falling for Emily Watson. Now with a firm foot-hold in America, Sean would move on to The Big Empty, a desert-set curio where debt-ridden actor Jon Favreau agrees to deliver a sealed suitcase to an outback town for \$25,000 where Sean's mysterious Cowboy is waiting. Favreau, though, misses his appointment, revealing Cowboy to be an increasingly crazy and wholly murderous son of a bitch.

Sean would now return to Blighty for a brief part alongside Ray Winstone and Helena Bonham Carter in the major historical drama Henry VIII. Here he would play Robert Aske, the popular Yorkshireman who led a rebellion against the King in opposition to his treatment of the Catholics. He'd then stick with period drama for a critically acclaimed run as Macbeth in London's West End. But the big time was beckoning again, and they come little bigger than Wolfgang Petersen's Troy, a \$220 million epic that saw Sean line up beside Brad Pitt's Achilles, Brian Cox's Agamemnon and Peter O'Toole's Priam. Here he was Odysseus, the cunning Greek who comes up with the notion of the Trojan Horse and brings about the downfall of Troy. After The Lord Of The Rings and Tom & Thomas, this was part of a purposeful Sean plan to avoid being typecast as a villain.

This couldn't last, though, and soon he was back as a rotter in National Treasure. This saw Nicolas Cage as an archaeologist whose family has for generations been seeking loot hidden by George Washington and his buddies, clues to which are hidden in the US Constitution. Sean played a British adventurer who offers to help Cage but then reveals sinister intentions by breaking into the National Archives. Now Cage and museum curator Diane Kruger (Helen in Troy) must race to prevent this wicked limey from getting his evil way.

Sean would now provide the voice of the bad lion, Dark, in the major TV animation Pride. Then he'd move on to Barry, a classy British production that saw Rachel Weisz as James Miranda Barry, the first woman doctor who, being a woman, has to masquerade as a man.

Sean Bean now has yet another tattoo - the figure nine, written in Elvish on his right shoulder, marking him as an official member of the Fellowship Of The Ring. Where before he'd been a reliable and impressive villain, that movie made him a star. His efforts since has shown him to be a fascinating and ambitious actor. Somehow, the boy from Sheffield's dreams have come true. He's made it in the big world, on TV, onstage and the Silver Screen - he's even played for the Blades. Does it GET any better than that?

Dominic Wills