

Even audiobooks aren't safe from the advent of AI

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AI voices are expanding the audiobook library

Audible announced that it is partnering with a number of publishers to produce audiobooks using AI voices. The idea is simple: Many books never make it into audiobooks because hiring human narrators is expensive and time-consuming. By using AI-generated voices, publishers can release more titles faster and cheaper.

There are over 100 AI voices to choose from. Initially, English, French, Spanish, and Italian are the languages ?? of choice. Essentially, the virtual voice will tap into Amazon's advanced AI capabilities.

Publishers can choose between two paths. The first is **Audible-managed, end-to-end production**, where the company handles every step. The second is **Self-service production**, where publishers control the production process.

Audible also plans to launch a beta for AI-powered translation later this year. It will convert English books into Spanish, French, Italian, or German. Publishers can also work with human translators to fine-tune the output.

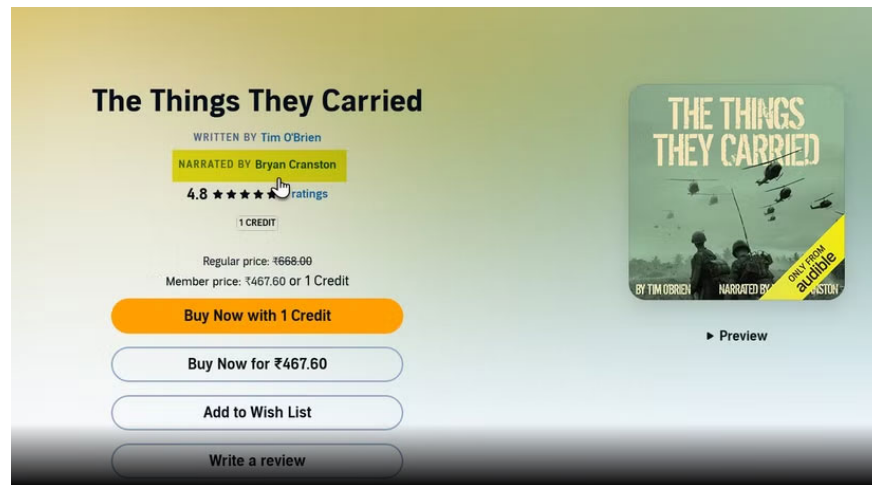
Audible CEO Bob Carrigan says audiobooks only make up a small fraction of all published books. That number could grow with AI, especially for indie or niche titles that otherwise would never have an audiobook version:

We'll be able to bring more stories to life—helping creators reach new audiences while ensuring listeners around the world have access to special books they would otherwise never hear.

Why is this important to you as a listener?

For most listeners, this change means more books to choose from. If there's a book you want to listen to but can't find in audiobook form, it may now be available on Audible with a virtual narrator. And if you're listening in another language, translation tools can open up even more options.

Hopefully, this won't replace professional narrators for major releases. There's nothing like Bryan Cranston's narration in *The Things They Carried* or Morgan Freeman's voice in *Ishmael*. Bestsellers and popular memoirs will still be handled entirely in-house. But for smaller books, or ones where publishers can't recoup the costs, AI could fill the gap.



Does an AI voice have the same emotions as a human reader? Probably not, at least not yet. But for some books, like nonfiction, how-tos, or business books, this may not matter much.

AI-generated podcasts are here and they're dividing opinion. Audiobooks could have a similar effect.

People have been talking to chatbots like ChatGPT when they need to absorb information while walking. They're not perfect, but they're getting better. And if that means you can listen to more books you're interested in just as you walk by, then by all means. For more serious titles, a real human voice would be better.

Only time will tell whether AI audiobooks flood the market and become the rule rather than the exception. Let's hope Audible implements a cataloging system where we can differentiate between AI audiobooks and human-narrated audiobooks. Until then, keep an eye out for the 'Narrated by' section below every Audible audiobook.

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