

A Moment Behind the Scenes with Eli (Colin Ford)

JENNY CURTIS: Eli is one of those characters you love to hate, but he's got a lot more going on beneath the surface than meets the eye. This is director Jenny Curtis. Here's an excerpt of when creator Chris Porter, executive producer Bill Curtis and I sat down with actor Colin Ford to talk about the twists and turns of CimmTech Mission Specialist Eli Wright.

CHRIS PORTER: Everybody goes through ups and downs. And I wrote this particular part of the show during a down period because of the pandemic and everything. And my family lives 3000 miles away in Maryland. I don't remember exactly what circumstances, it was like probably around my birthday or something, where like, we were zooming, and like I couldn't go out, and I live alone with just a cat. I was down. So like a lot of the stuff that Eli does say about like, 'I miss that Italian place with their stupid bread,' a lot of that was coming from me in that particular moment.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK BEGINS)

ELI: I miss clouds. I miss grass. I miss cocktails and friends and even that Italian place with their stupid bread and their stupid butter. And I miss you.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK ENDS)

COLIN FORD: I think a lot of the time we take things for granted, like the little moments, the little things that we do all the time, whether it's going to the grocery store with your loved one, or your family member, and picking out your food for the week and then getting to go eat at a restaurant and then ordering food at that restaurant and being like, oh crap, this isn't what I want and this isn't any good, until you literally don't have those options anymore. You can't do that. And it's been a long period of time since you did anything remotely that you enjoyed. And in that moment, you start to realize, wow, I was overlooking all of the things that are really special, the little moments in life that kind of make life what it is, beautiful and kind of just remembering those things and recollecting that while, okay, I was I was being selfish in that moment or I should have taken the time to enjoy this more.

JENNY CURTIS: I don't even know for me if it's like I should have taken the time to enjoy it more, but it's what it means to actually be cared about is small. It doesn't have to be big gestures. But I think what stands out to me most in the monologue is the dark liquor cocktail.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK BEGINS)

ELI: You knew I always wanted to drink the dark liquor cocktails, but it would make me feel worse the next morning. So you'd let me order what I thought I wanted, and then you'd order what I actually wanted. And then you just let me switch, and you knew I'd made a bad choice.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK ENDS)

JENNY CURTIS: And like that. Is someone truly paying attention and truly caring and so small and so beautiful that that always makes me feel all mushy inside.

BILL CURTIS: You So pulled off the idea that Eli is young, has a lack of respect for authority. Certainly. And then all of a sudden this monologue comes and, you know, you find out that he's got depth. The reason why I mentioned this part is because all of a sudden, about a third of the way through the monologue, you're like, oh, actually, Eli is whole. There is a lot to him. And the way Colin pulled that off was really amazing. It's one of those times during this show where it made me stop and change my mind about a character.

JENNY CURTIS: Snaps for Colin.

COLIN FORD: Stop it.

JENNY CURTIS: I could debate with you about when you see people's humanity because we hear his conversation with Wren before this, where he's just destroyed. And I see so much humanity in that, when someone's just shut down and angry and you can see how broken he is because everybody in his life has disappointed him, except for Will, whose message he deletes. So after he deletes the message, he makes a new message to Allyson. And we get the big reveal that Alison, who is the CEO of CimmTech, is in fact, Eli's mom.

COLIN FORD: Parent of the year over here.

CHRIS PORTER: I mean, it's definitely something that had been planted in episode six when you're booting up ALI.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK BEGINS)

ELI: She's just like my mother, cranked up to 11.

ALI: Who is your mother?

ELI: It's not in your files?

ALI: No.

ELI: Awesome.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK ENDS)

CHRIS PORTER: So like, that had been wiped from the system for some reason. And obviously it happened because she was the CEO of CimmTech.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK BEGINS)

ELI: ALI, you were never programmed to know who my mother is, is that correct?

ALI: That information was not provided to me.

ELI: Expunged from the record from the get go. Nice.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK ENDS)

CHRIS PORTER: And it just raises all sorts of questions. How much of this mission did she know was going to happen? And how willing was she to sacrifice her son?

COLIN FORD: Yeah, I think those are kind of the things that Eli starts to unpack in episode nine. He starts to realize, like, Mom, you've left me up here with no support. I thought, I think Eli probably in the back of his mind, thought, oh, well, you know, despite me not having all the answers upfront, I have a resource at home that I can depend on. And kind of the same thing with not wanting to contact Will, not wanting to lean on anything back home. I think it took a while, took a lot for Eli to get to that breaking point to go, Mom, I need your help. And when there's chirp, chirp, chirp no answer, it's very lonely and depressing.

JENNY CURTIS: Oh, God. It breaks my heart all over again. That's why Eli's so sad.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK BEGINS)

ELI: Mom, please respond to NASC. Please provide some instructions and answers.

(SOLAR PLAYBACK ENDS)

JENNY CURTIS: So we had, we had one rehearsal, I think. Right? So it was like a zoom call that we hopped on and we kind of talked through the script. It wasn't even officially a rehearsal rehearsal, but we kind of talked through like, where Eli is mentally in each of these scenes, and he is all over the map and he, you know, he's panicking because he doesn't want to die, but also he's on a whole bunch of happy pills from Jessa. And there's a lot for you to be juggling as a performer. And I would love to hear about how you juggle that or what your process was.

COLIN FORD: Well, I have to say that you both were a major help and guidance, and especially being in the room and kind of going through all these things with me. But I think it was just taking each things step by step. Is he like normal Eli now? Is he hopped up on these happy pills now? So kind of just taking those little things and injecting them little by little into Eli was helpful in me kind of creating the overall character from beginning to end. We see Eli changing kind of different ways, but still, deep down, he's the same person. I almost feel like as things get worse and things progress on the ship, Eli starts to kind of unpack his bags from home and unpack the things he left behind and everything starts to pour out.

CHRIS PORTER: Eli panics a lot, like the moment things go wrong, he panics. You as an actor, I felt bad for you watching you do those moments because I was like, oh, no, he's putting himself in emotional distress for this moment. Can you talk about how you got into those mindsets?

COLIN FORD: Yeah, I think I just tried to place myself in that environment. I tried to be like if I was literally at the edge of the earth or in space and I had no resources, nothing left to do, how would I act? And a lot of people either handle pressure really well and can kind of stay with a clear mind. And personally, I do not. Even Colin, I do not. I tend to panic and I kind of just put myself in his shoes and go, oh my gosh, if I literally had nothing left, no resources whatsoever, how would I act? And I probably would embarrass myself because I would be panicking like a baby. And that's how I saw Eli do it as well.

BILL CURTIS: Can you count down in four languages?

COLIN FORD: No, I can't. Eli can. You know, you know, was it Wren who only learned Russian in science terms? Yeah. So I think Eli learned all the Russian. Just to show off. And that's the thing. He's too smart for his own good, like I said earlier. But when push comes to shove and he gets put in these trying situations, his age really shines through. You see the lack of maturity and the innocence in being young.

JENNY CURTIS: There's a lot more to hear about our dear Eli. Be sure to check out the full conversation on the SOLAR Panel available only on our Apple Podcasts Premium Channel.