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2023-05-10 Pit Stop Travis Baldree.mp3

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DURATION

1h 7m 26s

4 SPEAKERS

Karen Commins
Anne Flosnik
Travis Baldree
Speaker4

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:04] Karen Commins

Well, I do want to welcome everyone to Pitstop. It's your fortnightly mid-week rest area to refuel your drive. I'm Karen Commins. I'm an audiobook narrator and I'm the chief cartographer for NarratorsRoadmap.com. And I'm your host for Pitstop. And with me in the copilot seat is my lovely friend and award winning audiobook narrator Anne Flosnik. She hosts the Narrator Uplift show here on Clubhouse. How are you today, Anne?

[00:00:30] Anne Flosnik

Great. Happy to be here.

[00:00:32] Karen Commins

Well, I'm so glad you are. Every other Wednesday audiobook narrators who do more than narrate Pull into the Pit Stop. They're sure to inspire you to follow your interest and use all of your talents and gifts. I want to let everyone know we're recording this conversation so you'll be able to relisten or catch parts you missed and do feel free to comment in the chat and raise your hand in the app if you want to be part of the conversation, because we'd love to hear from you. And I just thank everyone so much for joining us this afternoon and I'm especially excited to welcome today Travis Baldree to the Pit Stop. Travis is a New York Times bestselling author and he's also a full time audiobook narrator who has lent his voice to hundreds of stories. Before that, he spent decades designing and building video games like Torchlight, Rebel Galaxy and Fate. He lives in the Pacific Northwest with his very patient family and their small nervous dog. So hello, Travis. Thank you so much for joining us this afternoon.

[00:01:33] Travis Baldree

Hello, Karen. Thank you so much for having me.

[00:01:35] Karen Commins

You know, as a dog lover, I have to ask about the small nervous dog. What kind of dog is this?

[00:01:41] Travis Baldree

Well, we think that she's some sort of rat terrier, dachshund mix. She's a rescue. And I think you combine both of those dogs and you probably get like, a perfect storm of barking at the door, but not being able to do anything about it.

[00:01:56] Karen Commins

Yeah, And probably on constant CSI of Squirrel Chipmunk and Chipmunk Squirrel Investigation.

[00:02:04] Travis Baldree

She's a pretty good lap dog, though, you know, She really doesn't like to be anywhere but the couch most of the time, so.

[00:02:10] Karen Commins

Well, and I know even from that description, but just from what I've seen of things you've posted in the Facebook groups for narrators that I know about your background, I know a little bit about your background in games. It seems like you were a game developer for 20 years. Are you still developing games or is that all in your past or not really?

[00:02:30] Travis Baldree

I think I've basically retired. I thought I might have some vague inkling that I wanted to go back, but it just never materialized, not for a nanosecond. So I think I wrote my last line of code a couple of years ago as I was still kind of I was making the switch to full time narrating, and I just kind of have never looked back.

[00:02:49] Karen Commins

Because it's so interesting because, you know, for so many people, game development would be the ideal job there. You know, that would be like the dream job. Yeah.

[00:02:59] Travis Baldree

Yeah. Well, I mean, it's like it's like narrating, you know, everything's got multiple sides to it, right? You you've lots of people like games, but making them is nowhere near the same. And you know, there's, there's, there's challenges to every industry. Um, it's a really young industry. It's not a very diverse industry and it's a hard industry that moves very, very fast, requires a lot of time, a lot of blood, and the outcome is usually in doubt.

[00:03:31] Karen Commins

Sometimes that sounds like narration.

[00:03:34] Travis Baldree

So one of the nice things is that when you, you know, there's a real contrast to like shipping something as a game and shipping something as a narrator. When you make a project as a game, it's usually the product of years and millions of dollars, and maybe the world has moved on by the time you actually get around to shipping it. And once you do, you're not really done because people want you to change it once you've finished it. Oh, it doesn't work on this machine or I didn't like this or I found this bug or whatever. And so then you go through this post-release period of addressing people's grievances. Um, and narration doesn't, doesn't work like that. You start a project, you have a reasonably good idea of when you will get done, like we all know, kind of our, you know, what we can get done in a day unless you get a cold, you know, this is going to take me X days, you ship it, you finish it, it goes out into the world and you kind of dust your hand off and you're done. There's nothing else to do. And if people like it, they like it. And if they don't, maybe they give you a negative review and then they get on with their lives, which could not be more different from the experience of making games.

[00:04:37] Karen Commins

Well, they may have grievances, but you don't have to address them. You don't have to address them.

[00:04:41] Travis Baldree

It doesn't have the same expectation that, you know, if you don't like a book or you don't like an audiobook, you don't demand that someone make a new ending, you know? It just it is what it is. It's a completed piece of art. You evaluate it on its merits and you move on with your life. The expectation in the audience relationship are just super different. Also, I think it's hard to overstate the fact that if you're listening to audiobooks or you're reading books, you're a book person. And I think book people overall are just good people. And generally if you read, there's a certain like baseline amount of empathy that you develop as a person. If you're a constant reader because you're reading about other people's lives and relating to other people, you know, it's just I think it's kind of the price of entry.

[00:05:22] Karen Commins

So how did you move from game development to audiobook narration?

[00:05:27] Travis Baldree

I started doing narration on the side on as a hobby. My kids didn't need me to read to them anymore, and I had some of the equipment. I had assembled it for doing voice work for games so they didn't have to rent studio time. And I stumbled across and I was already a fan of audiobooks. So I started doing it and discovered that I liked it. So I just kept doing it on the side. And then there came a point where I just decided, You know what, I like doing this more and I can do this as an actual full time job, so I'm just going to retire from games and switch.

[00:06:00] Karen Commins

I mean, that sounds so easy, but I know there's a lot more to it than that.

[00:06:04] Travis Baldree

I mean, was the process of years I mean, I think it took me I feel like it took me at least four years to get to that point. Um, some of it is just having enough ongoing work and feeling like feeling confident that you know what you're doing and that you can schedule the workout and, and, and the other is deciding to actually sunset what you decided to do with your life. You know, you have a lot of inertia after a couple of decades. It's like I've invested all this time and energy being good at this. Do I really want to switch? Um, yeah.

[00:06:33] Karen Commins

And that seems like a really hard decision to come to and.

[00:06:37] Travis Baldree

It's a yeah, it's once I made the decision, I didn't feel bad about it at all. But there's a certain amount of especially if you've got a I'm married, I've got kids, you know, there's, you know, you you're not just balancing your own life. You're balancing the livelihoods of people that you know are close to you. So there's definitely some friction in doing that.

[00:06:56] Karen Commins

But of course, I you know, I have to agree with your approach of staying with one foot in games and the other foot in audiobooks until you could just totally leap. It's kind of like, yeah, a ship leaving the dock. You know, you you've got one foot there and one in the direction you want to go. And it finally the ship takes off and you've just got to go with it.

[00:07:17] Travis Baldree

I'm a fairly risk averse person. I like to feel reasonably assured that I'm going to do is going to work and make sense. And I think as with most things, there's a point where you can kind of feel the plane starting to take off, the wheels are starting to leave the pavement. You're like, Yes, this will work and this is fine. I have a good understanding of how I can do this job, how much people want me to do this job, what kind of money I can make and how sustainable it is. And once you kind of have a good feeling for that and you're comfortable with it, it makes it a lot easier to make kind of that switch.

[00:07:51] Karen Commins

Have you been narrating the whole time on Discord or is because it seems like discord is something really known to the game world, and I know some narrators are doing it. Is this something that you started early on or is it something that came later?

[00:08:05] Travis Baldree

I came to it late. I think the real pioneers for that were Andy Passino, and I feel like there was somebody else who was definitely a sound booth theater were both doing Discord. I only started doing it after COVID hit because the world suddenly got a lot lonelier. Mhm. Um, but I pretty quickly discovered that the real value for me wasn't just like having people around, it was having treating it like an office where I had hours that I was expected to be in there and it kept me from just working at bizarre hours of the day. It increased my, my, my, my, the regularity of my production and my output overall just to say here's my hours, I'm in the booth and I do it and I get out and I'm done. And there's just this very mild pressure of knowing that someone could pop in at any second or is there right now when you go out to get a snack, I.

[00:09:01] Karen Commins

And see, I've not been on discord. But do they actually communicate with you while you're doing this?

[00:09:07] Travis Baldree

They do via text. So the way that I have it set up is I have a channel that's my audio channel. It's also got video so they can see me and hear what I'm doing and I can see it on a little iPad mini next to my script. I can see all of the text chat that's associated with that. So I have regular people that hang out all the time. I announce what I'm going to do stuff. I keep people updated on books and they can text and animated gif me all they want and then I respond to them in audio.

[00:09:39] Karen Commins

Because if you respond in audio, then that stops the flow of the narration.

[00:09:44] Travis Baldree

For me, it just doesn't matter. I mean, I do it on a punch, you know, I'll like, you know, if it's a punch and I feel good, I'll just say, okay, I'll respond and then I get right back to it. But I don't in general, I don't have a big issue of like staying in a flow state to narrate. Um, and for the same reason that punch and roll isn't like doesn't really like disengage me. A lot of people feel like they need to just keep going and they can't have anything interrupt them and that really bums them out. I've I've never had that big of a problem getting back into the flow. So it and again, I can ignore it all I want. There's no requirement for me to respond and people fully understand that if I'm in the middle of something I might not. So there's not there's not a huge amount of pressure.

[00:10:26] Karen Commins

And it's interesting to me that you started with ACX and now you have become such a fan favorite and you do so much work with Podium Audio that they've hired you to be one of the initial people in their Audio cCollab. And when I read the press release, I thought, Well, that's fantastic that an audio publisher is doing that. But basically they were telling the world that they thought they could keep you busy enough that they want to have some kind of it's, I guess, not totally exclusive, I guess, you.

[00:10:57] Travis Baldree

Know, not totally exclusive at all. So I have a kind of an odd setup with Audio Collab, too. I don't use most of the services that they do. My agreement is really I will guarantee them this many hours a year for X years and that's it. They don't schedule for me or do anything else for me. So I was already pre scheduling with them over years anyway. So honestly nothing changed.

[00:11:23] Karen Commins

But that's, you know, that's really exciting in an age where AI seems to be creeping in on more and more people, I read more and more narrators who are worried about this coming and people even now saying, Oh, I'm in the longest dry spell I've ever had. So to know there's a publisher out there that is actually proactively scheduling narrators into the future, that's really, I think, a very hopeful thing for all of us.

[00:11:50] Travis Baldree

Yeah, I really like working with podium. They care about their books, they they will actually edit their books, you know, instead of just pulling things from Royal Road or whatever. They'll actually do real editing passes on them. They're deliberate about their choices. Um, it's not quite so much of a shotgun approach, which sometimes happen at some publishers. And I really, I just think that people are lovely to work with. So I really like working with podium. I also work with a lot of other kind of like small and mid presses and I do some stuff with audible studios and what have you. Um. And all of them seem to be pretty focused on actual narrators. And a lot of this probably has to do with the kind of genres I do. They're all very character heavy. Um, and I really don't do nonfiction at all. So there's like. They already have kind of a focus on things that would be very difficult to do with AI anyway, unless you're planning to go through and manually tag all the dwarf's lines. Maybe that won't be the case in the future, but at present it feels somewhat sequestered.

[00:12:59] Karen Commins

So it seems like most of your work is sci fi fantasy. Is that right?

[00:12:59] Travis Baldree

Yeah, I do a.

[00:13:03] Travis Baldree

Lot of sci fi fantasy, and I do a lot of game lit and lit RPG specifically the drowning in it. So I have just an unbelievable amount of it. And one of the one of the phenomena that's happened within the last year and a half is that if you're not familiar with it, there is a site called Royal Road where people write ongoing web serials. These are hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of chapters, millions of words that they write serially and they have patrons and they're releasing like a chapter every couple of days, and they've started basically harvesting these books, converting them into Amazon books, and then removing those chapters from online publication. And then they'll do an editing pass and they'll get audiobooks made and they're massive. And these are like 20, 25, 30 hour books. Wow. But they'll release 4 or 5 of those in a year because they've already been pre-written. So there's this sort of gold rush of harvesting these and getting them out there. That is just a massive amount of work. And also the series tend to not end because they're invested in maintaining their their patrons. So they're generally ongoing. So it's a huge amount of content that's being with an audience that wants audio. This is kind of ongoing and also pretty rapidly locks up your schedule because if people are releasing five, 25, 30 hour books a year in their series and they're doing it every year for four years, that's a lot of audio to produce. You know, I've I've had books last year where I think I did like 100 and 160, 170 hours just for one series. And that series is nowhere near done. Um, but I have multiples of those because it's just such a genre staple at present, so. It requires a lot of pre scheduling because unlike kind of what people are used to, where people write a book and they put it out and then someday they're going to finish the sequel, all the sequels are lined up.

[00:15:02] Karen Commins

And these are solo narrations more than multicast, or they tend to be solos.

[00:15:07] Travis Baldree

Occasionally they'll do a dual, but they tend to be solos. And I the amount of effort and money required in making one of these multicast, given the length they are what I think be prohibitive. And it would also be time prohibitive given the rate that they want to release them. That's not always the case. But in general, I think that's one of the reasons that they're probably going to stay primarily solo. Narrator.

[00:15:31] Anne Flosnik

Are these all American things, Travis?

[00:15:35] Travis Baldree

No, no, no. There are. There's plenty of writers in other countries also. There's lots of translations. A lot of web serials originally are from China or Korea or Russia and have been translated. But there's also tons that are coming out of the US and the UK. It's just a it's just a vast quantity of words. Some of these series he Who fights with Monsters is an example which is I think regularly hits number one on Amazon. Primal hunters another one regularly really high on Amazon these. They're really popular. There also because of their size and because of the Amazon audible credit system. There's a lot of perceived value from listeners because people have this idea of value for credit. One credit and I can get 30 hours of audio. Heck yes, that's what I'm going to spend my credit on. So there has been also in conjunction with this, even for books that aren't released serially, there has been a massive push over the last year, year and a half to have all of the books tip over the 20 hour mark, which means most books are 210, 220, 230,000 words plus. Wow. Because I'm getting tired.

[00:16:48] Karen Commins

Just hearing that. Right?

[00:16:49] Travis Baldree

Because as a as an audiobook, as a rights holder, you get about \$2 more per audiobook if that happens. So if you're regularly writing pretty long books, you want to make sure they pass over that 20 hour mark because it's real money. Because you don't get to set the price. And because Audible's credit system isn't more granular than it is so. It's something I would say that about two years ago, my average book length was maybe 8 or 9 hours. Now it's probably more like 16 to 18. Wow. And that shift happened over like a period of about a year and a half. Gosh.

[00:17:28] Karen Commins

And that's probably a good segue to my next question, because you've written this fantastic book, by all accounts called. Legends and Lattes that it has. I mean, it has won awards and it's up for a Nebula Award for best Novel this weekend. So we'll be crossing our fingers for that. You're winning on that. But I mean, people love this book. They love it in print. They love it in audio. And I'm wondering, given the time that you're spending in the booth narrating other people's words, how are you finding time to write your own?

[00:18:05] Travis Baldree

Well, that's been an interesting challenge over the last year and a half. So the Legends and Lattes was written during National Novel Writing Month, so I wrote it in the evenings in my booth. So I would work for the day, go to dinner.

[00:18:18] Karen Commins

I'm sorry to interrupt, but backing up even before that, what made you want to write a book?

[00:18:24] Travis Baldree

I mean, I've wanted to write a book for a long time. I've tried any number of times, if you're not aware of it, National Novel Writing Month is every November for the month of November. There's basically a national it's not really a competition. Everybody just tries to egg each other on. It's it's an event where you try and write a novel in the month of November, which means you think you have to clear 50,000 words or something to be to qualify as a novel. And I've tried to do this any number of times and I have failed every time. And I always tried to do it by the seat of my pants. But in 21, Aidan Shaw fell in. Narrator Some of you may know Avon. She's awesome. She convinced me to do it again. And we were writing buddies, and we both completed our books in November. And that's what Legends and Lattes is. It's my book from November. So wouldn't have done it without Avon. It's also the first time I ever outlined a novel because I was sure I could just make it happen. And apparently I can't. I have to outline. So I and I also I chose to do something that was more reasonable in scope than what I had tried before. So it's not a particularly complicated novel, and I really didn't expect anything much to come of it except I was happy that I got done and. It was middle of COVID. And so I just wrote something that I wanted, which was something to make me feel better.

[00:19:43] Anne Flosnik

Oh.

[00:19:45] Karen Commins

Yeah. Because it's it's described as I had this right in front of me. I have so many notes. It's the I know. It's the low stakes, high, high fantasy, low stakes. Thank you.

[00:19:59] Travis Baldree

And people kind of stapled up.

[00:20:00] Karen Commins

I have so many notes in front of me. I'm sorry. Here it is. High fantasy and low stakes.

[00:20:04] Travis Baldree

People have kind of put like a label on the genre, calling it like cozy fantasy, which I think has existed for a long time. I mean, I think every Studio Ghibli movie ever made is cozy. I think Terry Pratchett is Diana Wynne Jones, lots of other stuff, but. I think it just turned out that everybody wanted that kind of thing right now for the same reasons that I did. Notably, this book is absolutely nothing like what people hire me to read. I wish people hired me to read this kind of book, which is part of the reason, I guess, that I wrote it. I really like I like fantasy romance. I like cozy mysteries. I like. I like stuff that makes me feel good after I've read it. And that doesn't have that doesn't last for 30 hours. I like a succinct story that gets to the point and and comes to an end. I really like that. But I don't get much of that. And they don't cast a lot of people who sound like me to read fantasy romance or cozy mystery either. It's just not it's not a genre staple. So I wrote what I wanted to read, but nobody was going to let me read.

[00:21:05] Anne Flosnik

And what are you kind of is it fighting? There's a lot of fighting goes on in what you primarily read.

[00:21:11] Travis Baldree

Travis or it's usually just lots of very high stakes adventure stuff. It's almost always got a male protagonist and there's usually probably some snarky side character, the comic Relief, and there's generally a wide array of creatures of various types and and world ending stakes and. And also they tend to not end right to go and go and go and go because people want long series and they want long books, which is just not my that's not my personal preference. I like I like brevity is the soul of wit and all that.

[00:21:50] Anne Flosnik

Right. Right. That's interesting. But it does sound like fun.

[00:21:54] Travis Baldree

It can be. It can be. I get some really great books. I get some really fabulous books. But I like variety, too. I you know, my my reading becomes largely dominated by what people hire me to read because I'm narrating almost every day. So I have very little time to, like, read. I don't know, maybe the rest of you have the same experience. It's hard to carve out time for reading what you want to read. Yeah, When you've got something, somebody's paying you to read with a tight schedule. So I read a lot of novellas, but I also, you know, I, I would love to get more variety into what I'm narrating because I like that variety just for myself.

[00:22:29] Anne Flosnik

Yes, indeed.

[00:22:32] Karen Commins

Well. And so then you wrote this during novel writing, November Novel Writing Month, and you thought, I like this and I want to publish it. And I know that you've shared all you've learned in your publishing journey with your Self-Published Book Launch A to Z, and I've linked to that on my Audiobook Resources for Authors. And you're you go through so much and I and I loved how you said at the beginning like you kind of compared it to games like people would come to you when they wanted to write a game back in your game development days and they'd have some big, you know, fantasy world like you're just talking about with audiobooks. And you'd be like, No, can you write Tetris? Because that's what you need to start with, is something that's scaled down, easy to understand and that you can fully articulate. And you've always been very generous to share your knowledge and your skills, because I know you did the Adobe audition Punch and Roll feature, which was such a godsend to people. But you published, you decided to publish this book. And thank you for sharing all your steps with it. But there's a lot to it. And so, you know, talk us through that. What made you decide, yeah, it's good enough, I'm going to publish and then the success that the crazy success and I don't mean that in a bad way. It's just for a debut novel, it seems like, Oh, it's ridiculous. You've obviously hit it out of the park and it's obviously I would think it's probably excelled way past what you thought it might do.

[00:23:59] Travis Baldree

Yeah, I didn't expect anything, so I published it largely because I just wanted to go through the process because I work with so many authors at this point and I've seen what they go through from the other side. But I like to learn things and I figured I got it done and there was no real barrier to publishing it, so I might as well learn these steps and do it and treat it like I was doing it professionally. Um, and I have a lot of experience shipping products and commissioning art and doing, you know. At least adjacent sort of tasks. So I thought I would do it. And I just I so I did it largely just to do it, to publish it. And then I wanted to be able to go to my local bookstore and say, Hey, could you order one copy? And so I could take a picture on the on the bookshelf because that'll be cool. But and that was really the extent of my ambition. I really did not expect anybody to really unless I asked them to read it. So everything after that was definitely unexpected and I certainly couldn't have predicted it. I, I think that I only have a marginal amount of responsibility for it because I think a lot of it is just fortuitous timing. And there's just a there's a huge component of luck and happenstance to anything like that. I did I think I wrote a solid book. I think I didn't drop the ball. But that doesn't that only gets you so far, which I think as narrators we often see, right? You read a book and you're like, Oh my gosh, this is the best book I have ever read. And somehow it seems not to find its audience. And you're just kind of taken aback. Like I read this book that was terrible and everybody loves it. But then I read this amazing book and nobody seems to want to pick it up and you just can't figure out why. So there's just there's a lot of unknowns and good fortune to anything happening.

[00:25:45] Karen Commins

But did you release the audiobook concurrently with the Kindle version?

[00:25:50] Travis Baldree

I did because it was easy. How did it.

[00:25:51] Karen Commins

Feel to narrate your own book? Were you like other authors? Like, Oh, why did I say that? And start wanting to change.

[00:25:57] Travis Baldree

The narration I'd ever done? Oh, easiest narration I've ever done. It was really pleasant. It was like dancing. I don't know what your experience is, but mine is that when I'm narrating the closer I am to being on the same wavelength as the author, the easier it is for me to narrate. Like there's there's certain authors where I'm always transposing two words. The sentence means the same thing, but I'm always transposing them because my mind is just wired a little bit different. Or I, you know, they'll have certain things how they'll use a comma and how they'll break the pace of a sentence just is not my first instinct. So I'm always subverting my instincts to read it the way that I need to read it for them. But for yourself, it's written the way that you would you would read it so you just don't have that leap to make. I already know what every character sounds like. I know what every how everything is pronounced. I know the tone that's intended. You know, I don't have to find the author's truth. It's just right there.

[00:26:48] Karen Commins

So did you read it aloud as you were writing it?

[00:26:52] Travis Baldree

I didn't. But I have found after narrating thousands of hours of stuff that I hear my voice in my head while I'm reading. Anyway, so when I'm writing, I'm basically already pre narrating it out loud again. I don't know if this is everybody else's experience, but when I'm reading anything right now, I know how it will sound aloud if I were to say it because I'm comfortable with my voice at this point. I'm comfortable with what I would do. And your brain gets rewired? I think so that as you're reading texts, you've got this superpower that other authors don't have. A lot of authors say the best way to edit your work is to read it out loud to yourself. I don't have to do that because I know exactly what it sounds like when it's read aloud, which is really cool. Um. So.

[00:27:40] Karen Commins

And why did you decide to let Macmillan Audio publish the audio instead of you?

[00:27:45] Travis Baldree

Instead, I did self-publish it first. I self-published it first. So everything was self-published first. I put it up on Amazon. I went through R.c.x. I had it simultaneously released or close to I got it in bookstores through Ingramsark. I did the whole thing myself and it ran that way for several months. So I did not have any plans to go to Macmillan or anybody else. And didn't have any plans to have it traditionally published. But after it was published, it did really well. Yeah, and it kind of virally spread on Booktok and Booktube and Twitter and everything else. And booksellers were hand selling it. And I just can't take any credit for any of this. This happened really organically and it was other people, other people's kindness that made that happen. But after I think this is happening more and more often, I had three agents approach me after that, and I think a lot of them are both publishers and agents are using Booktube and Booktok as kind of a way to take the temperature on indie released books and find the ones that they want to try and capture for conversion to traditional, because you can't predict whether a book will sell itself. But if you already see one is selling itself, you can magnify that and you can capitalize on that.

[00:29:03] Travis Baldree

So I've seen a lot of books that that's happened to. Atlas six is an example, for instance, and Rage of Dragons and Senlin Ascends. And there's others. So agents approached me and at that point I was like, Well, it's been really successful and I could just keep going along. Or I could just see what happens. It doesn't cost you anything to get an agent. It doesn't cost you anything to find out. So I just picked the agent that I vibed with best and said, okay, why not? Let's try. And then I think within 48 hours of taking it out, Tor UK had come back and had an offer on the table. Wow, I really like Tor. I'm a big fan of Tor as a publisher. I like the books that they put out and so I thought about it and it was a really good offer. And I said yes, and I have not regretted it. I had some initial, like, trepidation that I just didn't know what the experience would be like. I like having control over things. I'm really anal retentive. I'm detail oriented. I like to have my fingers in and I didn't know how much of that I would lose and I was worried about it and I was worried about the editorial process.

[00:30:12] Travis Baldree

Like how much would they want to change? Would they not be happy with the book? Would they want me to rewrite parts of it? I didn't know. Well, they didn't. So we changed maybe a few words, several that I wanted to change. And most of it was punctuation changes for their house style, like some people like for periods and an ellipsis at the end of the sentence. And some people like three and some people never use end dashes and only use em dashes. Every publisher has their own house style, so but as part of that acquisition, audio rights were part of that. So they, they basically had to buy my audio from me because I'd already recorded it. So they bought it like I had narrated it. And of course I got to keep everything I'd made beforehand when I published it myself, but then it transitioned over to Macmillan. And then part of my agreement is also that I can be the narrator for any of my books, no questions asked. And here's my rate.

[00:31:06] Karen Commins

Oh, because I do notice you have a book coming out in November. Bookshops and Bone Dust published by Tor and Macmillan Audio and were you planning that second book before or did it was mostly planning of this?

[00:31:21] Travis Baldree

I had I thought I would do it again, and I had my basic plan for a book, which is not that book. Oh, the book I. But so I had a I had an idea for one, it was going to be a cozy fantasy mystery set in the same world and it was going to be really great. It was like fantasy murder, she wrote. I still liked the concept. That's what winter required it. It was for two books. It was the book that I already had, and they wanted one more from me. And I said, Sure, because I already knew what I was going to write. And I it only took me a month to do the last one. No big deal, right? I even know what this one is. And I wrote a 10,000 word outline and I was so sure it was the right thing and I wrote 30,000 words of it. And then I hated it, just loathed it. And so I then I restarted three more times until I found the book that I wrote, um, which was really horrifying. And for me, it was there were there was, there were it was complicated because the first book I wrote in isolation just for me and the second book I wrote, knowing that people were interested in it and expected something. And so I had I could not untangle for a while my trepidation and my horrible feelings about disappointing somebody with a book that maybe it wasn't what they wanted. And my own feelings about whether the book was any good. And it took me three tries to figure out how to separate those feelings because I haven't had to contend with them before. And they were both awful, but they were a different kind of awful. So eventually I separated that out and which at some point I would have had to do. And as many people say, the second book is like the hardest book. It was. It absolutely was. But, um, yeah, I think I really went off the beaten track with that answer.

[00:33:04] Anne Flosnik

But no, not at all. And did the reader reactions, Travis, when you wrote the second one, um, did you have kind of reader reactions that things that they'd reacted to in the first book that you thought, HM I'm hearing this again and again and again. They like how I blah blah blah, blah, blah. So when you're writing the second book, did you find ways to give them more of what the things that they were looking for? So I didn't.

[00:33:28] Travis Baldree

Really get I didn't really have many people read the second one until it went to the publisher. And I really only had people read the first one when it was all kind of done. So I didn't do them kind of like as a developmental thing where I was changing the book based on feedback as I was writing it on either book.

[00:33:44] Anne Flosnik

No, no, no, no. Did you get feedback from the first one that kind of informed. Yeah. How you would. There were certainly.

[00:33:50] Travis Baldree

Things that I worried about, which is part of what I what I fretted over because I knew people, things that people did like about the first book. And I was like, Well, if I don't have it in the second book, are they going to hate it? Certainly not going to be about coffees and coffee shops, because I don't want to write that for all eternity.

[00:34:04] Karen Commins

You wrote that already.

[00:34:05] Travis Baldree

You know, does it have to have, you know, a, you know, a little Sapphic romance in it? What does it have to have? And eventually I just had to say, look, for me it. Just has to have a relatable human experience that I had that I think maybe other people would relate to. And I have to like the characters and spending time with them. And that's what ultimately had to be important for me. Um, gotcha. So, and it took me a bit to kind of figure that out, but I definitely did worry that it wouldn't have things that people wanted. Um, I mean, guess what? Time will tell whether people like it or not, but. So far the response has been good, but.

[00:34:46] Anne Flosnik

I'm sure long may it continue.

[00:34:49] Karen Commins

Yeah, people obviously love Legends and Lattes. I mean, I mentioned that it's up for a Nebula award. For those who don't know, the science Fiction and Fantasy Writers Association have these awards. And so it's up for best novel and they're awarding that on Sunday. But it also was a finalist for the Audies in Fantasy. And, you know, that's part of just when I say crazy success in a very, very wonderful, good way that you don't usually think of that happening. But even beyond that, you've got people doing fan art and and you've got your lapel pins. And it looked like somebody had built something. It wasn't Lego, but it was it kind of looked like Lego. Oh, I got a Lego made.

[00:35:33] Travis Baldree

Somebody made custom.

[00:35:34] Karen Commins

Lego coffee shop. Yeah.

[00:35:36] Travis Baldree

And they sent me they sent me a little kit of it, which has professionally printed instructions. People have had made tattoos and sculptures and miniatures and just a scads of art. It's been really crazy. Somebody wrote a song. Oh, someone in their musical theater class wrote like musical theater songs for their lyrics, writing class and sent me all the lyrics. And it's nuts. Oh, wow. It's nuts. It's very humbling. And it's a really nice feeling to know that anything you put out got, like touched somebody in some way that they felt compelled to make something. It's just it's crazy.

[00:36:14] Karen Commins

Oh, in a very good way.

[00:36:15] Travis Baldree

It's a really it's really nice. It's just it's and it helps that it's a book about basically people being kind and like, doing the hard work and choosing kindness. And so if people relate to that, they're usually people who are interested in that. So there's like a, like an automatic kind of feedback loop, I guess.

[00:36:35] Karen Commins

Yeah. So you mentioned these massive audiobooks you're narrating and then you're working on the novel. And so how are you finding time to do both of these things?

[00:36:46] Travis Baldree

Um, it's hard, so I just have to split my day so I haven't taken I have I've never been able to take a pause to write. I was always I wrote in the evening. So what I would do is every evening after dinner, I would come right back down to my booth where there's again, no distractions. And I would sit and I'd write a chapter and I'd do it until the book is done with no days off. And that's how I have written so far, and that's what works for me. Um, I am attempting to I've been doing a lot of work trying to tend to my schedule and reschedule things and pass off some future booked projects and to make more room for writing. Because the way that the last year and a half has gone is not really tenable because just writing the book and shipping the book is not the only things that happen. There's book tours and podcasts and signings and other events that take time that I did not plan on at all, just even apart from writing them. And that's just not a it's not a good balance. So I've been doing a lot of work trying to get to the point where it is balanced. So like last weekend was the second weekend that I've had in. A really long time. A really long time. Because I had to work to get back to being able to have weekends again.

[00:38:05] Karen Commins

Oh, well. And even when you've had weekends, you've been doing other things. I saw you were there was a get lit festival in, I guess you lived near. I lived there, which helps. Okay, that does help. But I can picture the way this is going that people will ask you to travel for their events. But, you know, and I wondered, have you have you been presenting about audiobooks or is it all been. And that wasn't even that. It was weren't you like a player in a D&D game they had going?

[00:38:34] Travis Baldree

It was, it was a one shot. So it was the first time I'd played D&D since high school. They were very kind, but it was just part of that. Yeah, yeah. Um, most of the stuff right now is often mostly book related and audiobook is secondary. Um, as far as people asking me to do anything, um, my audiobook was mostly just audiobook work. Because I saw him done.

[00:38:57] Karen Commins

Yeah, well, I saw on Friday, two days from now, as part of the Nebula conference, you're on a panel of authors going through gaming.

[00:39:05] Travis Baldree

Yeah, I was surprised by that.

[00:39:07] Karen Commins

And and by the way, if anybody wants to attend, that's an online event. And if you go to events sfwa.org, you can sign up and you can, you know, actually attend the session that Travis will be in. So how did that come about? They asked you or you said to them. I actually thought I hit.

[00:39:28] Travis Baldree

I actually thought I unchecked the checkbox to make me available for panels because I felt way too much like an imposter being there. But I guess I didn't. Or they ignored it because they just sent me an email saying I was on that panel. So I'm on that panel.

[00:39:40] Karen Commins

Who's up for an award and has already was a finalist for the audience for the the audiobook. And there was some other book that was Locust that you were on their list. So you're you're gaining so much attention and so much fan following. As an author, you're certainly not an imposter. So they're thrilled to have you, I'm sure.

[00:40:03] Travis Baldree

I mean, and I'm happy to help. I just felt I'm it's I don't feel like an author. I feel like I just stumbled in the side door and that everybody's going to figure out that I don't belong here any day now. And I'll just go right back to my audiobook cave. It's mostly how I feel about it.

[00:40:22] Karen Commins

Well, that kind of answers one question I had. Do you have a big why of why you do what you do? And. And maybe you do, but maybe it's just interconnected in a different way.

[00:40:33] Travis Baldree

Like a big Why? Of why I wrote or.

[00:40:36] Karen Commins

Yeah, why you? Why? Why you do both of these things? Because now you're narrating and you're writing and and not having a lot of outside time for anything else, apparently.

[00:40:47] Travis Baldree

I mean, it's hard. I really like narrating. It's great. It's there's, it's really rewarding to take somebody else's work and be able to just add a little bit more to it to, you know, or to bring it to people who wouldn't otherwise experience it. Um, and to be able to care about it and ideally uplift it in some way. It's really, really great. And you don't have to do all of the creative heavy lifting, you know, it's already been kind of excavated. You're just dusting a little bit more sand off of the bones. Um, writing is very different because you have to do all of that heavy lifting. You got to dig the whole thing out of the ground. Um, but when you're done, if people are responding to it, they're responding to something that you put in there, that's all you. And I find that for me, writing has been really personal. I mean, the book, okay, so I wrote a book. I spent 20 years making video games into my 40s, and then I discovered that I wanted to do a different kind of job. So I retired from games and I started doing audio books. And I discovered this amazing community of people that I didn't know that was there that was so diverse and wonderful and it changed my life. So I wrote a book about somebody who does the same job into their 40s and then stops doing it and retires and moves to another industry and discovers a whole community of amazing people they didn't know were there that, you know, are really essential to their life.

[00:42:11] Travis Baldree

So there's a lot of there's a lot of me in parallels and things that were important to me in the book, which people related to because other people have those kinds of experiences. So the really rewarding thing is like you put something like that in a book and then somebody comes back and says, Oh wow, that meant something to me. It's like it's this. It's really hard to articulate how connecting that is and that all of us kind of, I think, feel lonely in our lives and all sorts of ways that we feel alone and that we're only experiencing the thing we're experiencing in isolation and other people don't fully understand it or see it. And so when you write a book and then that happens, it punctures that in a kind of a pretty profound way that is hard. It's hard to overstate how cool that is. Um, so while the work is much harder than narrating, it has, like for me, it's been kind of like a higher reward. I would never give up narrating because narrating is schedulable and is not quite as stressful. And, um, and it's.

[00:43:11] Travis Baldree

And I can finish a project in a couple of days. It's great. But I kind of now I don't think I can imagine not doing both because. It also helps that as far as work, they're really interconnected. My for me personally, narrating other people's books has been a really good way of highlighting what I like and what I don't like and what I think is important about writing for when I write. It just makes it crystal clear what I respond to and what I don't respond to. And that's all work that I would have had to write, God knows how many words to figure out. And it feels like I don't want to say a shortcut, but it's a it's a certain kind of iteration that allows you to figure out things that you need to discover as a writer. Mm hmm. It's kind of like going to a critique group, right, where everybody reads their work and you're talking about other people's work, because not only is it exposing you to new ideas, it's also exposing you to bad work or mediocre work or amazing work or whatever. And all of those exposures are really important to refining your own voice and what you think is important. And so I think I feel really fortunate that I have been an audiobook narrator because it made it easier to write.

[00:44:31] Anne Flosnik

Yeah. And it probably rewired your brain, you know? Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. I can feel it.

[00:44:38] Travis Baldree

Yeah. I think that a lot of narrators would probably find that they know a lot more about their own voice and what they would put on the page if they sat down to write a book than they thought they knew.

[00:44:53] Karen Commins

Yeah, it's just the finding the time. And that's where I'm just in awe that you are doing these massive books and yet you're finding time. Well, it helps that my creative.

[00:45:05] Travis Baldree

Journey like 65,000 words you know it's it's not long and I removed all the parts that were boring and the book is effectively it's a simple book. It's not a complicated book and it has something to say, but it's not it's not a thousand characters and you know, five different POVs and it doesn't have to be an epic. It's a it's a story that tells its story and it gets done. So it's when I tempered my ambition a lot, I was actually able to get something done and. I think small things can still have value. It's like the Tetris example that I that you mentioned that I'd mentioned earlier. Tetris is a really simple game. Any first year like programing student can make Tetris because it's not that complicated, but it can be executed well and it's one of the biggest games in all of history and everybody can play it and everybody understands it, and it's hard to overstate how much value it has as a thing. But it didn't have to have a team of thousands working across multiple countries for five years to create and billions of dollars, but it still has value. So I think that you can look at your ambitions and what you want to do and you can say, I can do something small that has value that I can complete.

[00:46:16] Anne Flosnik

That's gold, right? There it.

[00:46:18] Karen Commins

Is.

[00:46:19] Anne Flosnik

Yeah.

[00:46:19] Karen Commins

And I want to tell our audience that we are coming up on the end of our time with Travis. So definitely, if you want to chime in on the conversation, raise your hand and we'll get you on stage. Travis I have what I like to call the pit Stop hotseat, and it's a question that you're not expecting. And I would like to know if you went into the witness protection plan, what identity would you like to assume?

[00:46:45] Travis Baldree

Oh, clearly a bookseller.

[00:46:47] Karen Commins

Well, that was easy.

[00:46:49] Travis Baldree

It was easy. Yeah. Would be a bookseller. Absolutely.

[00:46:53] Karen Commins

Well, then I'll ask you another question. What is your most trivial, useless or flat out counterproductive superpower?

[00:47:01] Speaker4

Wow. Um.

[00:47:04] Travis Baldree

Remembering commercial jingles from the 80s.

[00:47:09] Karen Commins

That's pretty good. Why? Why? Just the 80s. Why specifically that decade?

[00:47:14] Travis Baldree

I think it's like it's the I was. I was a kid and I watched, you know, you watch TV and there was so much kid marketing and so many little jingles like the Cabbage Patch Kids theme song. Why do I know this? I really don't want to. If I could evict it from my brain, I absolutely would. But I heard it enough and it stuck there.

[00:47:33] Karen Commins

Now I fortunately don't know it, but I'm thinking if you sang it, I would know it and then it would become an earworm that I wouldn't be like. That would be an.

[00:47:43] Travis Baldree

Act of aggression.

[00:47:49] Karen Commins

Well, I know you were talking a little bit about putting things together. Do you have any kind of assistant or anybody helping you? I mean, because narration is a solo thing and writing is a solo thing? Nope.

[00:48:04] Travis Baldree

I think about it every once in a while. The real thing. So one thing that happens after you release a book is people start asking you to blurb books. Uh huh. Can I send you an arc and get a blurb? And I must have been asked 20 times, and it's really hard to say no, but you very quickly have to. Crafting a polite no to that kind of question is incredibly hard. And I find myself it's just very taxing because I want to be really kind and give an infinite time, you know? Sure, I would absolutely do it, but it's not possible. So I think I think that a lot of people get assistance just to be able to answer all their emails that say no. I haven't. I haven't folded and done it yet, though.

[00:48:48] Karen Commins

But it sounds like it's something that's in your future, like some kind of perhaps who could tend to that and maybe tend to scheduling requests at these literary festivals or panels where people are wanting you to participate and you can't do all of them.

[00:49:03] Travis Baldree

I have thought about it because the emails are just it's just a lot of emailing. There's a lot of administrative and calendar work of just making sure that everything gets done and that you don't forget things. I mean, once upon a time people could ask me to do something. It's like, Hey, could you do this for next month? And I would just remember and those days are long gone. Anytime anybody asks me for anything, it goes on the calendar immediately or I guaranteed will forget because it's just I'm like super saturated with information at this point.

[00:49:33] Karen Commins

Well, and with requests and they're only going to continue. And the more books you release and the greater your fan base grows in both places where you live, both in narrator and as an author, you're only going to get more of this kind of stuff.

[00:49:51] Travis Baldree

Well and we'll be able to say, we knew you when I slope off. You know, it's quite possible that we'll slope off and I can, you know, slide back into obscurity. That would be that would be fine, too. I it's been a really cool year, but I don't. I will be just fine if it if it doesn't persist into the future, it's okay. Who knows? This book may come out and nobody will read it and everybody will forget and it'll be fine. Or not.

[00:50:18] Karen Commins

I mean, if you have people making Lego sets of your coffee shop interior, I mean, that's a pretty high level fan. I mean, that's not somebody who's just casually interested in what you did and read this book. That is somebody who is your devout follower now.

[00:50:36] Travis Baldree

Well, and the thing is, if people, you know, do those sorts of things you don't want to like. Displace that connection. You want to answer that with kindness and, you know, thought because I just don't ever want to be in a position where I feel like I'm ignoring people who are genuinely. You know. Gesturing genuinely like that. So I would kind of hate to defer that and pass that off to somebody else, you know, somebody sending thank yous on your behalf. That's the sort of thing I feel like I don't know. I don't know. I have a hard time with it. I have a hard time with that.

[00:51:13] Karen Commins

Well, but somebody who could maybe gather them up and say like, yeah, you know, here are your requests for blurbs, here are our requests for and this is how I handled the blurbs. This is how I think you want the calendars handled. And here are some people you probably want to respond to personally, just somebody who divides it all up for you and sorts it and categorizes it. So it's something manageable and meaningful to.

[00:51:38] Travis Baldree

Imagine somebody else reading my email. It's so weird. So weird. Can you imagine just giving somebody else access to your email inbox and saying, okay, just just make sense of this for me? Okay.

[00:51:48] Karen Commins

Well, you could set up rules to auto forward certain types of things, but then of course. Figuring out that rule takes some time too.

[00:51:56] Travis Baldree

So, yeah, Yeah. I don't know. We'll see. Right now I'm winging it. But, you know, I can't say it wouldn't be nice to have a certain amount of administrative stuff taken care of just on all fronts. You know, scheduling is a thing. I do a lot of scheduling.

[00:52:10] Karen Commins

Do you have advice that you could share with other people who want to expand their horizon beyond narration? And I don't mean necessarily writing a book, but just doing something else beyond being in their booth every day.

[00:52:24] Travis Baldree

I mean, I guess it just depends on if you want to do it for fun or as a business. I was reasonably just doing this for fun, but I was doing it for fun in a professional way. But that's how I kind of stumbled into a lot of my jobs. Like the same thing with narration. When I switched to narration, it was the same thing. It was something I pursued because I enjoyed it, but I tried to do it in a professional way and eventually, you know, just time and attention, and then it becomes something else. I'm I'm like a serial hobbyist. I love trying things out and getting expertise and learning about things. So just doing that in general and cultivating that it has a habit is is I think great if you've got something you enjoy doing and. Then then just do it. And any information you can treat it as a as a learned skill where you're constantly learning more about how to do it and how to do it well. And the industry that it's in, if there is one. And then maybe at some point it develops into a thing that you want to pursue. It's like watching a fruit grow, you know, like tend it. And if it gets big enough, like, oh, maybe I want to pick this, I don't know. Or you know, or not.

[00:53:33] Karen Commins

But it sounds like at the key in the base of it all is to do what you enjoy because you don't have to make money from it. It could be just something you enjoy and it could be some other creative pursuit.

[00:53:44] Travis Baldree

The balance switch is when you make it a job. So, you know, you might not want to, you know, hobbies, you know, aren't the same once you make them your livelihood. So I think hobbies still have value as hobbies.

[00:53:59] Karen Commins

We have a couple of comments from the audience. Regina Hopper would like to know. She says, Your positive attitude is so great, I wonder if you can talk about what made you think you could be successful on X?

[00:54:14] Travis Baldree

So initially I really just did it on a lark. So I.

[00:54:21] Speaker4

Um.

[00:54:24] Travis Baldree

I had done some test recordings. I think I did some stuff from LibriVox just to see if I liked it. And I just came across and I and I had listened to enough audiobooks of various quality that I thought I could do it. And I just thought it would be fun to try. I just to even learn about it. And and I think that. As far as believing that I could do it. You get the audition, you produce the book, and you listen back and you just decide, you know, can I gauge the quality of this versus other things? I think that's a really vague answer. I'm going to try and give a better one. I think one skill that I actually have that I think is a useful skill is an ability to to judge relative relative quality of things and to break it down into why I like something or why I don't like something which maybe is even further reduced to just being I have. I understand how my taste functions. Like I can listen to something and listen to something else and I can say, here are the difference between these things and here's why. And here's why I respond well to this thing versus this thing, which I think as a just a baseline ability to cultivate is the ability to compare and break down and understand why two things are different and why you might value one thing over another. It's applicable to everything, and it's a key to the ability to iterate and decide how to get better at doing something. And I thought I could do that in audio. And and then I went about doing it and I can kind of track for myself having done that over time and I can articulate the kinds of things I learned and why I learned them and why I chose to do them. So that just sort of intentional assessment, self-assessment, I think. Maybe. And again, I'm not sure if that's the right answer for this. It feels like there's a couple of ways I could have answered it.

[00:56:12] Karen Commins

And Christine Rendell says she can't say hello as she's walking in New York City, which we all know is a dangerous thing in and of itself. But she's been really enjoying listening to you and she thinks she'd be dangerously distracted in the bike and car traffic. But it's been really humorous, informative and enjoyable conversation. And she wants you to know you are an inspiration, Travis.

[00:56:34] Travis Baldree

Well, thank you very much. That's really sweet.

[00:56:35] Karen Commins

And Regina says that was a great answer. Very helpful. Mosh Pit wants to know what genre doesn't usually have cozy books would you like to see? Would you would you like to see produce some cozy books?

[00:56:51] Travis Baldree

I think you can do cozy just about anything. I think you could do cozy horror. Honestly, you could do cozy, scary stories. Um, and I think you could do cozy sci fi. Really? Honestly, I think you can make anything cozy when it when it's really about. So ultimately, I think cozy breaks down to generally being about like human scale, like personal concerns, ultimately having a happy ending. And the same way that most, you know, romance needs to have the happily ever after and that the. There's an element of comfort to it in either relatable surroundings or events or or or activities that allow you to feel. I don't know just to let your to let your your pulse drop. The fixer upper is cozy, right? The show fixer upper is cozy. Great British bake off is cozy. But I think you could do that in all kinds of genres. But I would say sci fi and horror are good candidates.

[00:57:51] Karen Commins

And it's interesting you say that because. Cozy. Cozy. Excuse me. Cozy. Mystery lovers are really looking for clean and wholesome. I mean, if you have any kind of curse words in it, they'll take off points and and, you know, leave you nasty audible reviews. And so I always think of sci fi and horror as being full of curse words and and also cozy mysteries. You know, you come across the dead body. We don't actually see it happen and we don't get a description of how gory it actually is. And and there again, I think what I think of sci fi, I think of it being more gritty and yeah, you know, and so it's surprises. It's surprising. There's a lot you.

[00:58:36] Travis Baldree

Can do with tone. I think there's a lot you can do with tone. For instance, legends and Lattes got a few F-bombs in it, and the sequel has at least 16.

[00:58:44] Karen Commins

ooh, you counted!

[00:58:47] Travis Baldree

One of the main, one.

[00:58:47] Travis Baldree

Of the main characters is she runs a bookstore and she's just incredibly foul mouthed. Um, and, but it's still cozy because I know lots of really lovely, wonderful people that all swear like sailors. I don't think the two are mutually exclusive. I agree with you. That cozy mystery as a genre has kind of like calcified its expectations. But I think that's what's cool about other genres is that those expectations have not been solidified yet. You can do whatever you want and people who traditionally enjoy those genres and might want something a little softer right now have different expectations. So, um, I think that's one of the cool opportunities about writing something new or smashing two new things together is that you get to either set some of the expectations or ignore them entirely.

[00:59:34] Anne Flosnik

That really hits on something very, very profound. Travis Because before I even started narrating romance novels, I didn't realize that there were rules. You know, it didn't occur to me. I thought people just go ahead and they write whatever they want to. You know, it's their book. Go ahead. But then you see that there's this whole structure of rules. So good for you.

[00:59:56] Travis Baldree

I think they can almost always be broken. You just have to be you just have to break them in a way that people enjoy.

[01:00:02] Anne Flosnik

Well, there's the art that you've obviously got.

[01:00:06] Karen Commins

Yeah, clearly there are a lot more people enjoying your work than hating on it.

[01:00:11] Travis Baldree

I mean, think about I'm going to bring up Guardians of the Galaxy. Guardians of the Galaxy is almost cozy science fiction. It's about a found family of misfits and goobers. And it's honestly, I mean, James Gunn writes stuff that's it's profane and gory and weird, but it's also, like, charming and heartwarming. And I think part of the reason that it's successful is because it's breaking rules in ways that people enjoy. It's taking things that people don't expect and they're putting them together. And so it feels novel, but it's also relatable and understandable. You understand these component parts, but you delight in seeing them put together in this new way that you haven't seen, Right?

[01:00:49] Anne Flosnik

And you said, you know, about discernment or whatever, that, you know, you very much know what you like and what you didn't like and all those and it's all coming together in what you're doing. Hmm. It's magic.

[01:01:04] Travis Baldree

It feels like it just it also feels like it's the product of just like a million iterations over years, right? It's just this slow accumulation of decisions that ultimately results in something. In this case, accidentally. You know, the concept for this book was a joke. It was a joke in my discord. The joke was that I was reading something predictably high stakes with some snarky antagonist. And I was like, What I really want to read is a Hallmark movie set in a fantasy novel. That's just what I want right now because I just want to feel good at the end and I like narrating fantasy, but that's just that's what I wanted. And so I made the joke that I would write a book about this dwarf dwarven executive that goes back to save her dad's failing mine, you know, and Podunk dwarf land, and she meets all the quirky denizens and she's really kind of upset about it. And but also she runs into this really handsome guy wearing a sweater and maybe he bakes cookies, you know? And Dobby says, It's not what I wrote, but that was the joke. But so ultimately it's kind of accidental, but it's just a collision of things.

[01:02:09] Anne Flosnik

Yeah, but you've been taking note. That's. That's what I'm. I've received from hearing to you talk. You know, you have you've done so much stuff, but you have kind of found out what works for you and take a note. And with all these iterations you are you're taking notes and then you're bringing that making art out of that. And did you create a brand new genre? Travis I.

[01:02:32] Travis Baldree

Don't. I think this genre existed. I think that I don't think I've thought of it as such when I was writing it. I think that the genre, I think Terry Pratchett basically wrote this kind of fiction in a lot of ways. He used a fantasy world to talk about like human things, like the Post Office or, you know, what it was like to actually be a police officer or whatever. He wasn't writing about fantasy wars and demons taking over the world. He was writing about human concerns using fantasy to illustrate that in the same way that sci fi often you think about Star Trek. It's using like sci fi to talk about these big ideas about the future and society and progress and, you know, culture. And I think Terry Pratchett did that to talk about human things. And I think you look at stuff like, you know, Howl's Moving Castle again. I think this stuff existed. I think that the name Cozy Fantasy just got mashed together and I happened to be in the in the region when that happened. So I don't think I really invented anything. I think that legends and Lattes was if I'm going to give myself credit for anything, it's that I think it was well targeted and well articulated what exactly you were going to get. So that if you look at the book and you see the cover and you read the tagline, you're like, Oh, that's what that is. And then when you open the book and you read it, it's exactly the same thing as what you expected it was going to be. Which is worth a lot if you're trying to get somebody to pick something up. So I think I did that well. Yes. But as far as any of the rest of it, it's just the right place and the right time.

[01:03:59] Anne Flosnik

So there wasn't much marketing involved in all of this?

[01:04:02] Travis Baldree

No, I didn't really do marketing because everybody told me it didn't work. And also I didn't really again, I didn't really expect anything. So when I first got the cover artwork, I just posted it on Twitter because I thought it was cool and somebody tweeted around and then Seanan McGuire saw it and said, Oh, this looks great. And she has a boatload of followers. She'd never read the book, but it gave it like a big boost of like interest because the cover really did articulate the concept of the book.

[01:04:32] Karen Commins

That cover is wonderful. It reminds me of the troll dolls of my childhood.

[01:04:37] Travis Baldree

Well, and it.

[01:04:38] Travis Baldree

Crosses a lot of things. So D&D is a big thing right now. People watch Critical Role. It's a very kind of like social public thing that people do. It also doesn't cost that much money. People can do it together and connect to each other, but you also have nostalgia for that from people who are not from are not doing that now, but played it when they were kids. And then you've got gaming, you've got World of Warcraft and Blizzard and this sort of there's so many angles that people come in at this that it can that you get kind of like a nexus of people who wouldn't necessarily read the same thing. Yeah.

[01:05:11] Anne Flosnik

It's really mind blowing the whole thing. You're very, very clever.

[01:05:14] Travis Baldree

I don't know about that.

[01:05:15] Anne Flosnik

But no, you are. You are get talk in.

[01:05:17] Travis Baldree

Retrospect about all this now so I can make it sound that way.

[01:05:20] Anne Flosnik

No, no, no, no.

[01:05:21] Karen Commins

All the the fan reviews and ratings and the awards, I think we can say we have evidence. You're very clever.

[01:05:31] Anne Flosnik

In a nice way.

[01:05:35] Karen Commins

That's right.

[01:05:36] Anne Flosnik

In a nice way, because it's all heart. Your cleverness is coming across to me as it's coming from the heart, coming from the soul and genuine. Yes.

[01:05:46] Travis Baldree

Well, it's very nice of you.

[01:05:48] Anne Flosnik

That's the truth. You earned it.

[01:05:53] Karen Commins

And on that happy note, I see we're already running over the hour. So I think it's probably time for everybody to get back on the road. And we'll conclude today's pit stop. I want you to know the recording will be available on clubhouse later today and in the near future. I'll post a transcript and the recording on narrator's roadmap.com. And who's the guest tomorrow on your narrator uplift show?

[01:06:18] Anne Flosnik

Iris McElroy from Penguin Random House.

[01:06:22] Karen Commins

Oh, that's going to be excellent. I think people will be lined up for that. Travis, I'm really excited about your being a finalist in the Nebula Awards, and I'll be hoping that you win. Do you have any final words or any thing else you want to pass on to people.

[01:06:40] Travis Baldree

Or just thank you so much for showing up. I just really appreciate it and I hope everyone has a wonderful week.

[01:06:47] Karen Commins

Well, thank you so much and I hope everyone will join us in a couple of weeks on May 24th, because that day, musician, business coach and audiobook narrator Jennifer Jill Araya will be here with us on Pit Stop. And in the meantime, I hope you find joy in every journey and live the life of your dreams. Thanks again, Travis, for this delightful and wonderful conversation. And thanks to Ann for your excellent observations and support. And thanks to all of you in the audience who've spent time with us this afternoon. I hope you have a wonderful week and we'll see you soon.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



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