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2023-08-30 Pit Stop with Joe Hempel.mp3

DATE

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DURATION

58m 8s

3 SPEAKERS

Karen Commins

Anne Flosnik

Joe Hempel

START OF TRANSCRIPT

**[00:00:04] Karen Commins**

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

**[00:00:31] Anne Flosnik**

Great. Happy to be here.

**[00:00:34] Karen Commins**

Don't think that was you! I think that must have been one of Joe's dogs.

**[00:00:38] Joe Hempel**

Yes. I have three dogs in here right now, and.

**[00:00:42] Karen Commins**

They want their airtime, too.

**[00:00:44] Joe Hempel**

Yeah, I'm going to go ahead and kick them out. Oh, gosh.

**[00:00:52] Karen Commins**

Every other Wednesday audiobook narrators who have vocations beyond narration pull into Pit Stop and they're sure to inspire you to follow your interests and use all of your talents and gifts. I want to let you know this conversation is being recorded so you'll be able to re-listen or catch parts you missed. 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 would love to hear from you. So thanks so much to everybody for joining us today. I am so thrilled to welcome Joe Hempel to Pit Stop! For over a decade prior to beginning work in audiobooks. Joe honed his acting skills as a referee in professional wrestling, and he inspired people as a National Academy of Sports Medicine certified personal trainer and endurance coach. He's best known for his captivating, rich narrations and uncanny ability for pulling listeners into an immersive experience. And Joe has entertained listeners with over 500 audiobooks. He currently lives in Houston with his wife, Maria, and their three dogs. He is the 2018 Independent Audiobook Award winner for Best Horror, the 2021 Independent Audiobook Award winner for Best Horror as a publisher, and along with many extremely talented co narrators, Joe was the 2022 SOVAS Award winner for best narration in Short Story Anthology. So welcome to Pit Stop, Joe. I'm so glad you're here.

**[00:02:23] Joe Hempel**

Thank you very much for having me. I'm excited to do this.

**[00:02:27] Karen Commins**

So you have such an interesting background. I saw on your LinkedIn that when you were in college you were studying audio and video technologies. So what were you dreaming of doing at that point?

**[00:02:41] Joe Hempel**

I forgot I even had a LinkedIn. First of all, um, um, yeah, I. I just. I wanted to work in television. I wanted to, like, make movies and, you know, work and work in television and behind the scenes and things like that. So that is what I went to school for. Um.

**[00:03:06] Karen Commins**

Did you. Did you do work in television or.

**[00:03:10] Joe Hempel**

I worked at a television station as an engineer, which kind of wasn't the direction that I was wanting that to go. But, you know, I ended up working out for the best. I ended up staying there for, like, 15 years, and before I made the jump to full time audiobook narration.

**[00:03:30] Karen Commins**

Well, somewhere in between there, though, and we said this in the introduction about you being a referee for professional wrestling. How did that come about?

**[00:03:39] Joe Hempel**

Um, I wanted to do sports productions, and there was a local professional wrestling organization in Cincinnati called the Heartland Wrestling Association. Um, they were apparently I didn't know this at the time, but when I got there, they were a development territory for World Championship Wrestling, which was then during my time there, purchased by World Wrestling Federation, now WWE. And so I got there and worked in production and originally like training in the ring became a way to lose weight. And you know, the exercise was great. It was vigorous, it was fun, a lot of camaraderie. And so that transitioned to me doing referee ING, um, training as a wrestler under a mask sometimes. Um. And, you know, working with wrestlers on promos, things like that. I just got heavily involved in the business. And oddly enough, the guy who used to own it, Les Thatcher, just showed up in the book I'm narrating right now, which is a biography about Ric Flair, and he's been mentioned a couple of times in the book. So it's really neat when kind of like the work and the passion meet in fun ways.

**[00:05:04] Karen Commins**

Kind of full circle. Yeah. I was curious about the point that you said you honed your acting ability as a referee. So are you saying that's not real, that what we see, it's all.

**[00:05:19] Joe Hempel**

Predetermined. All all of the stuff in the ring is highly athletic. And it's it is. It hurts like. Like you get used to it, but it hurts. Um. The outcomes are predetermined. The matches are scripted, but everything you see hurts.

**[00:05:42] Karen Commins**

You can imagine it does. Regardless. Yeah.

**[00:05:45] Joe Hempel**

Regardless of if somebody's letting you pick them up and throw them to the ground, you're still getting picked up and thrown to the ground.

**[00:05:53] Karen Commins**

Right? I don't think that's a job I'd want to sign up for.

**[00:06:00] Joe Hempel**

That's like the worst of all worlds.

**[00:06:04] Joe Hempel**

Yeah, it's. It's very. It's. It's very, very, very physical. And I have so much respect for the people that do this day in and day out and have done it for, you know, 30 years.

**[00:06:17] Karen Commins**

Well, were you refereeing at the same time that you were also doing the personal training?

**[00:06:23] Joe Hempel**

Yes, I was. I was doing that. The personal training. Working in television at the television station. So, yeah, it was I was doing all of that.

**[00:06:34] Karen Commins**

So you've always been somebody who doesn't really like having any spare time.

**[00:06:40] Joe Hempel**

No. I fill up my spare time with things I enjoy doing. So, you know, working for the professional wrestling organization, that wasn't work to me. That was that was fun. And it felt it actually built a lot of friendships and actually had kind of shaped me into into who I am. So I owe a lot to it.

**[00:07:01] Karen Commins**

How did you move from those fields into audiobook narration?

**[00:07:08] Joe Hempel**

Um, so about 2010, the Heartland Wrestling Association kind of folded a little bit. Um, they folded, changed names, things like that. Um, just that industry was changing. And so that's about the time. Um, I got my actually, today is the anniversary where I just happened to see it on Facebook where I got my certification as a personal trainer nine years ago. So I kind of went from that to the personal training, and then I found audiobook narration because I was, you know, I worked third shift at a TV station, so I just read a lot and I ended up starting a review blog, as you know. You do. And. Somebody said something to me about because I didn't there was an audio book I really didn't like that much. And so I didn't review it in the most positive light. And they said, If you think you can do this so much better, why don't you go out and do it? So I did.

**[00:08:13] Karen Commins**

Challenge issued and accepted. Yes.

**[00:08:17] Joe Hempel**

So that was eight years ago.

**[00:08:21] Karen Commins**

Wow. Well, look how much you've accomplished in such a short period of time.

**[00:08:27] Joe Hempel**

I tell you, I never thought I never thought it would be a career, but. It's. It's here.

**[00:08:36] Karen Commins**

Remember when. When I first knew of you, you were talking about working that job in TV and doing narration and you've you've talked about it since, about how you went without sleep or so it seems mean or you would get very little sleep because you were doing both things and you were committed to both things and determined to be a success and totally move into narration.

**[00:09:02] Anne Flosnik**

Yes, maybe.

**[00:09:03] Karen Commins**

Expand on that a little more. Don't don't remember all the details. But remember, it's very inspiring.

**[00:09:09] Joe Hempel**

So I worked at the television. I've always been a night person, first of all. So working midnight to 8 a.m. didn't bother me. That was when I worked at the television station. So I had a lot of time on my hands. I used my. My degree to. Kind of do my do, like editing and mastering and stuff like that for myself and other audiobook narrators during that time. And I would go home. I would sleep for, you know, a few hours. I would go pick up my son from school and just repeat. And I was working seven days a week, just, you know, I was determined to get out of television because the pay was really kind of garbage. And. There was one year I was only working at in television, and it was myself, my girlfriend at the time, and her two kids. We were living together. And. You know, we were at the Dollar store for Christmas. Like, we just like there was just not enough money. And so I was absolutely determined to do something different. And so when I found that audiobooks was kind of a natural fit. I went 150 miles an hour. And I took all the royalty share I could and I recorded as much as I could every single day for like two years. And. It worked. And so like two and a half years after I started, I was able to quit my job and go full force into audiobooks. Wow. But I was absolutely determined to not have to walk into the dollar store and buy, you know, fake Hulk Hogan action figures for Christmas.

**[00:11:14] Karen Commins**

That's so impressive. And I know it made you feel like just a totally different person.

**[00:11:21] Joe Hempel**

Oh, for sure.

**[00:11:22] Joe Hempel**

Absolutely. Absolutely. So it was one of the things that, you know, I know people give a lot of crap for things and, you know, but it's one of the things I will be forever grateful for because that's how I got my start. And that's where. I learned the business and I still get you know, I still do royalty share to this day. It's part of my business plan. So, um. So you will you won't hear me talk a whole lot about talk bad about them a whole lot because they literally changed my life.

**[00:12:09] Karen Commins**

Yeah. Remember you wore ACX socks to your wedding?

**[00:12:12] Joe Hempel**

I did. I did.

**[00:12:16] Joe Hempel**

Sends me, like, these little gifts every year. Um, be it like hot chocolate or. I still have, like, this really nice blanket that they sent me. And then one year, they sent me a pair of socks, and I'm like, Oh. I'm wearing these too. I'm wearing these to my wedding because audiobooks bought it. Got me my wife.

**[00:12:37] Joe Hempel**

Wow.

**[00:12:42] Karen Commins**

That takes a romance story to a whole nother level.

**[00:12:45] Joe Hempel**

You know, but also the book that actually got it done, it was called Does It Fart?

**[00:12:57] Karen Commins**

And and and Maria, your wife heard this and heard you and said, That's my man.

**[00:13:04] Joe Hempel**

So we were friends on social media before before that book. And I had advertised the book that it was coming out. And, you know, we we had communicated a little bit beforehand and, you know, things were. Kind of a little a little flirty online, you know, before that. But. That book. She wanted a copy of that book. And I'm like, Yeah, okay, I can get you a copy of it. Hachette is the one that published it, but was like, I'll buy you a copy. So I buy the copy to send as a gift and I'm trying to send it to her through Messenger on Facebook and it won't let me. And I'm like, Hey, I hate to do this, but I can't send it like this. What's your phone number?

**[00:13:55] Karen Commins**

Now there's a pickup line, if ever I heard one.

**[00:13:57] Joe Hempel**

And, you know, she she was.

**[00:13:59] Joe Hempel**

Just, you know, hey, this is a pretty sneaky way to get my number, Mr. Hempel. And I'm like, Yeah, but you know, if you want the book. And then from there, we just started talking every single day and next thing you know, I'm moved to Houston and we get married.

**[00:14:17] Anne Flosnik**

Wow.

**[00:14:18] Karen Commins**

I love that story. I'm just grinning ear to ear hearing it because I didn't know the details there and I love it. Does she help you with your work? Because this is a big part of what we want to talk to you about is because you're not just narrating, you're now publishing. And yeah, and I'm probably getting a little ahead of myself, But does she help you with that or do you have other people helping you? No.

**[00:14:48] Joe Hempel**

I don't. I don't. I originally you know, there's there's a void in the horror genre and. For audiobooks and that's. What I wanted to fill.

**[00:15:04] Joe Hempel**

Um.

**[00:15:05] Joe Hempel**

I feel like it's a ground. Like it's just starting to take off. And there is a big ground level push for horror audio and it doesn't get a lot of respect in the industry from Amazon. They're starting to come around. It gets zero respect in awards season. Um, you know, the Audi's don't have horror movies, don't have horror. Uh, independent audiobooks were one of the only bigger awards that actually had horror as a category. Um.

**[00:15:42] Karen Commins**

So didn't realize that. Didn't realize that the awards were overlooking it. Yes.

**[00:15:49] Joe Hempel**

It's buried like three levels down on Amazon as a as a genre. So I want to flood the market with horror and create as much as I.

**[00:16:01] Joe Hempel**

Can.

**[00:16:03] Joe Hempel**

And just make it to where it's inevitable.

**[00:16:07] Anne Flosnik**

Yes. Yeah.

**[00:16:09] Karen Commins**

Well, I know that you started Fireside Horror in 2020, but then Pink Flamingo absorbed it in 2022, and you were executive producer. Are you still involved with this now? Fireside Audio? Are you still involved with that?

**[00:16:28] Joe Hempel**

No, I'm not. I'm not. Um, I broke away from that. Uh, you know, I just wasn't able to do the amount of work. That I wanted to be able to do for the horror community. There was a lot of restrictions from the union and just a lot of restrictions. To to push what I wanted to push. And so. After after about, I want to say two years. Two and a half years. You know, I figured that it was time for me to kind of break away from that. Um. You know, my sense of. Procedure and policy and things like that for me, and this isn't to say anything bad about them, it didn't fit with their infrastructure. Um. And it's not that they have a bad infrastructure. It's just I couldn't wrap my brain around it like it was more on my end, like, okay, what do I need to do? Where's this? Where's this? Because they have three divisions, you know, Pink flamingos taking the world by storm.

**[00:17:44] Joe Hempel**

So.

**[00:17:45] Joe Hempel**

Um, you know, and they're continuing to grow. So, you know, coordinating with all the proofers and the editors and, you know, getting things out, it was like, okay, if we get two books this month, it can probably be scheduled to edit in three months. And, and I'm just like, No, this, this can't we can't do it this way. I can't do it this way. And horror isn't built for that.

**[00:18:10] Anne Flosnik**

Joe, can.

**[00:18:11] Anne Flosnik**

I stop you right there and just ask you, can you define for us what horror is? Because imagine, too, that many of your books could you could put them into awards under another category.

**[00:18:23] Joe Hempel**

You can.

**[00:18:24] Anne Flosnik**

Yeah. That's why I'm asking you to define it for us. What it is. What is it that separates horror out and why? It's kind of a stepchild.

**[00:18:32] Joe Hempel**

So horror means many things to different people. Um, so for me, you know, horror is there to invoke some sort of visceral feeling.

**[00:18:45] Anne Flosnik**

Hmm. Um.

**[00:18:46] Joe Hempel**

And. You have a book like, say, um. Let's see what what I just did recently called, you know, a couple of years ago called Adirondack, which it's kind of a ghost story. It's kind of a, you know, mystery kind of thing, but it doesn't really fit or go up against. Like a.

**[00:19:10] Joe Hempel**

A Joe Ledger thriller or. Um.

**[00:19:15] Joe Hempel**

Or maybe, like, even. But, you know, like a oh, what's her name? Tami Hoag or something like that. It doesn't really fit in that sort of thing. And those all kind of get lumped together. So there are terrifying things about those books, but that's only part of the overall story. Um. So I think for me, horror is going to invoke a visceral feeling of. Disgust of you know, it's going it's going to tries to scare you. Um. And it's that sense of the unknown or, you know, the monster hiding under the bed or the thing you can't see out in the woods. Uh, or, you know, being caught in a madman's. Labyrinth of traps, things like that.

**[00:20:20] Joe Hempel**

But it could still really go under some other bigger umbrella genre to enter for awards and things. Yes. Yes.

**[00:20:28] Joe Hempel**

It can go under that. Yes. Um, they never get looked at, though. They never get looked at. There's the only horror book you will see in awards is written by Stephen King or Dean Koontz. Mm. So you will never see independent awards get get nominated or looked at or. Anything like that. It's been like that for as long as I've been in the industry, which I know isn't a crazy long time.

**[00:21:04] Anne Flosnik**

And that's so strange to me because of Frankenstein and, you know, classics, absolute stand out, literary classics are horror.

**[00:21:12] Joe Hempel**

Yes.

**[00:21:14] Karen Commins**

But they'd probably enter those under classics.

**[00:21:17] Anne Flosnik**

Yes.

**[00:21:18] Joe Hempel**

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

**[00:21:20] Joe Hempel**

At this point.

**[00:21:20] Joe Hempel**

Those would be considered classics. So, yeah, those. Those get entered. Under different things and it's it's more today's think it's more of a today's problem than it is anything else. And you know horror does not make the money something like romance does. There's still it's still considered a niche audience. So I think that might factor a little bit into it. But I think the visibility of it. By being in these awards can help.

**[00:21:55] Anne Flosnik**

Yes, it can.

**[00:21:56] Joe Hempel**

Help that a lot.

**[00:21:57] Anne Flosnik**

Yeah, fantasy is very niche kind of thing. Or it started out like that, but now it's huge. So you're going to make horror huge too.

**[00:22:05] Joe Hempel**

That's the goal. That's the goal. Yeah. You know that's the goal.

**[00:22:09] Anne Flosnik**

I see it. I see the vision.

**[00:22:12] Joe Hempel**

So and I will tell you from the amount of auditions that I get for the stuff that for the stuff that I've been posting, people want to narrate horror like there is a need and a want for this. And the level of auditions that I have gotten have blown me away because I'm a I'm a royalty. I'm a royalty share only shop right now. Um. But I will say with, you know, I only have like three titles to go off of and that have been released in the past three weeks. But I will say. And these are like 2.5 hour titles, hour and a half titles. So books that aren't really primed to sell a whole lot. They've each sold over 100 copies in, like two, three weeks.

**[00:23:03] Karen Commins**

So that's a good start.

**[00:23:06] Anne Flosnik**

Yeah.

**[00:23:06] Joe Hempel**

It's, you know, for those three, that's that's pretty good. And we have what's considered some of the best horror of the year coming out within the next. Well one just dropped today. The other one should drop September 1st. So I'm really excited to see where all of this goes. And you know, I still I kept some titles with the merger for Fireside, like when I merged with Pink Flamingo. And those some of those still do incredibly well years later in royalties. So people are buying well.

**[00:23:40] Karen Commins**

And you have a couple of some narrators in the chat who are fans. E.j. Lavery says she is so here for that horror takeover. And Barbara Hensley loves her to narrate and to listen personally. But you were talking about your auditions and you've recently started Fright Night Audio. And I think one thing that lures people to want to do it is you describe it as it will bring you a new level of terror to your ears. It will haunt your dreams. It's like, okay, yeah, sign me up.

**[00:24:13] Anne Flosnik**

Yeah. You know, you go through stuff like.

**[00:24:15] Karen Commins**

That, everybody's like, Of course I want to read that.

**[00:24:18] Joe Hempel**

Yeah, you got to get some buzzwords and things like that. You know, we we've partnered, we've partnered with Dark Lit Press, who is another up and coming book publisher. And they have such an amazing strategy to get not only the audio books and books that they published on Amazon and stuff like that too, but to get all of that into stores. So Barnes and Noble made it a lot harder recently, but they're still working on that. So we're hoping that we can get audio books in stores. We're hoping we can get the eBooks in stores. And we are the now the exclusive audio publisher for Dark Lit Press.

**[00:24:57] Karen Commins**

Or, as you described it, the unholy alliance, a match made in hell.

**[00:25:03] Joe Hempel**

That's exactly. That is all.

**[00:25:06] Joe Hempel**

That is all. Andrew Roberts from Dark Lit Press. He put all of that together. God love him. He's a great guy. And he busts his butt to get to take care of his authors.

**[00:25:17] Karen Commins**

Yeah. I mean, it's it's. I've never actually read a horror book, I don't think. But I was reading that. It's like, maybe I should check into this. I mean, it was just because it just makes your mind light up with the imagery.

**[00:25:35] Joe Hempel**

Yes. Yes. So.

**[00:25:40] Joe Hempel**

Yes, it's you know, if you can lose yourself into a horror book. All the better. All the better. You know, the things that go bump in the night. You know, you start hearing them. While you're sitting there listening. So.

**[00:25:58] Karen Commins**

And I love that you're posting auditions on the site and then you've been announcing the casting on Facebook. So those are brilliant ways to get even more visibility of people coming to you. And of course, joining us on Pit Stop, I'm sure some more people will be coming to you.

**[00:26:18] Joe Hempel**

You know, the more we get, the more opportunities for auditions that we have. Um. It's been really great and it's been really wonderful to see all the narrators that are auditioning or getting the books or things like that. They comment on everybody's posts and share and everything, and it really feels like a really great sense of community for when these books are going to release and come out and everybody is lifting everybody. And that's so wonderful to see.

**[00:26:51] Karen Commins**

Well, it seems a bit rare. I was thinking I don't mean people comment on narrator's new releases. We we all do that. But being moved to actually share it is the next step that I think a lot of people don't take usually. So that does seem like something different happening with you.

**[00:27:13] Joe Hempel**

It does. And I don't know what it is, but I love it. And I really would like to get a nice sense of community with Fright Night. Um. I don't know. Somebody told me this not too long ago. It was during a coaching session. We were going over one of the books and apparently there's a group of narrators that they all audition for titles and they bounce their auditions off of each other and they talk about different things and. So they go in and they like practice their auditions together. And it's just like that almost brought a tear to my eye. I'm like, That's so great.

**[00:28:02] Joe Hempel**

I love that.

**[00:28:04] Karen Commins**

Yeah, I mean, it's the community and then the impact and then knowing that that's kind of reverberating out into the world. You know, and totally building up what you are you're trying to do. I'm wondering how do you split your time between narrating and running Fright Night?

**[00:28:23] Joe Hempel**

Um. I there.

**[00:28:27] Joe Hempel**

There really is no split. I'm basically you know, I did take a little bit of time off from acquisitions and things like that because we've got like 30 books coming out, like right out of the gate.

**[00:28:40] Karen Commins**

Oh, goodness.

**[00:28:41] Joe Hempel**

Wow. Yeah, it's it's.

**[00:28:42] Joe Hempel**

It's really crazy. Um, like, I've got. I think one came out today. The one came out a few days ago and then we had the three short titles but have in the queue ready to go. Another two titles and then like another three or almost done. Um. And then yeah, we just we're October is going to be a big month for us, I think, because we have a lot of stuff coming towards the end of September. So and it's all it's it's so good. All of the narrators that that are showing up for these titles are so good. And I really hope that we can push these out, get people to buy so that so that the narrators and authors can can make some money and we can prove that the horror genre is viable.

**[00:29:42] Karen Commins**

Are the narrators producing raw files for you or retail Ready?

**[00:29:46] Joe Hempel**

Retail ready. Retail ready. And there are some exceptions, like if somebody is doing because I've got one narrator who is doing like four books for me and I'm like, Hey, just.

**[00:29:58] Joe Hempel**

You know.

**[00:30:00] Joe Hempel**

I'll take care of your post. You're already taking big chances on this. Or there was a book that was like 18.5 hours long, and I told them, Hey, this is a really big risk for royalty share. I'll take care of the post-production for that. So we'll you know, you don't have to worry about that because I know I know the risk in royalty share. I still do it right.

**[00:30:23] Karen Commins**

And beyond 6 to 8 hours. It's it's a huge risk. Right. Or it can be we should say.

**[00:30:30] Joe Hempel**

Yeah, you.

**[00:30:31] Karen Commins**

Have to pick, as we all know, you have to pick your books wisely.

**[00:30:35] Joe Hempel**

Yeah, you.

**[00:30:36] Joe Hempel**

Do. You do. And then sometimes there are ones that you do for fun that you don't think is going to make any money and they get an Audible Daily Deal. So.

**[00:30:47] Karen Commins**

Oh, you didn't. You. You had one recently, didn't you?

**[00:30:50] Joe Hempel**

I had two.

**[00:30:51] Anne Flosnik**

Yeah. Oh, my gosh!

**[00:30:53] Joe Hempel**

They were one of them. One of them was already doing well. The one that just came out recently. The Cursed among us. That one was doing really well already. And then there was another one that sold, maybe, I don't know, 40 copies. That was done last August, and in February it got a daily deal.

**[00:31:11] Karen Commins**

Oh, my gosh.

**[00:31:12] Joe Hempel**

So yeah, those those will bring in, in my experience, you know, a few thousand in one day. Yeah.

**[00:31:22] Karen Commins**

Because you'll you'll sell 2 to 3000 copies probably on that day of the Daily Deal or at least that's what I've seen other people sharing that. That's an average number.

**[00:31:32] Joe Hempel**

Yes.

**[00:31:33] Karen Commins**

Oh well if you've got some of that magic pixie dust that makes Audible choose a book for a daily deal, I hope you'll send some my way.

**[00:31:41] Joe Hempel**

I have no idea how this happened. Yeah, I have no idea. I want to say it's you know, they pull a book out of a hat, but, you know.

**[00:31:52] Karen Commins**

They might.

**[00:31:54] Joe Hempel**

So.

**[00:31:56] Karen Commins**

Yeah, because it doesn't seem like there's any rhyme or reason to them.



**[00:32:00] Joe Hempel**

Yeah. Yeah.

**[00:32:01] Joe Hempel**

Think I've seen. Don't quote me on this, but you know, when you don't when you when a book is deemed approved on and they put that generic cover on it.

**[00:32:13] Karen Commins**

Yeah.

**[00:32:14] Joe Hempel**

I want to say one of those got a daily deal a couple of years ago. What, like so that's why feel I'm like, Oh, this is totally random. But but yeah, royalty share is a risk. It's. It's one I'd gladly take. Um. But it's not something like don't expect to earn your back within the first year. Like don't think you failed at royalty share if it doesn't make it back in the first year. Remember, there's seven year contracts.

**[00:32:48] Karen Commins**

Yeah, and sometimes it takes a while. Rebecca Stern had commented in the chat when you were talking about the the narrators doing auditions together. She said, That might be my little peer group you're talking about. And yes, it is Bella Faiella. I probably said your name wrong. She says your auditions have been fun.

**[00:33:11] Joe Hempel**

Well, thank you. I'm glad the auditions are good. I'm glad their auditions are resonating. And Rebecca, it absolutely is. Because you are actually who we talked about.

**[00:33:22] Joe Hempel**

Uh, during the competition.

**[00:33:27] Karen Commins**

So many things just coming full circle and dovetailing with each other.

**[00:33:33] Joe Hempel**

It's so, you know, it's so wonderful.

**[00:33:35] Joe Hempel**

It's so wonderful.

**[00:33:38] Karen Commins**

Well, so what? I know you want horror to take over. I mean, do you have a game plan? Do you have a five year plan or something? Of what you want to see happen.

**[00:33:49] Joe Hempel**

I am a completely fly by the seat of your pants person. Um, in the words of of, you know, I take the Kevin Pierce, uh, the Kevin Pierce model. I did it when I started audiobooks and narration, and I'm doing it now. Um, I will either succeed. Or the fireball from the explosive failure will be able to be seen from space.

**[00:34:20] Karen Commins**

Oh, well.

**[00:34:23] Karen Commins**

Doesn't seem like it's going in that direction.

**[00:34:26] Joe Hempel**

No, not at all.

**[00:34:27] Joe Hempel**

Not at all. I don't know. Let's see. What. Guess I can say this now because it's. It's towards the end of August. Um.

**[00:34:37] Joe Hempel**

We're going to be in Publishers.

**[00:34:38] Joe Hempel**

Weekly next month or Publishers Month, Publishers magazine or whatever it is.

**[00:34:43] Anne Flosnik**

Congratulations.

**[00:34:45] Karen Commins**

That's exciting.

**[00:34:46] Anne Flosnik**

Yes. Yeah.

**[00:34:48] Joe Hempel**

Me and Andrew from Dark Lit Press, We. Get the we got together and he has some stuff there and we, uh, yeah, we did an interview with them and we should be in the print magazine in September.

**[00:35:04] Karen Commins**

Well, I'll look for that. That is exciting news.

**[00:35:07] Joe Hempel**

Yes, You heard you.

**[00:35:09] Joe Hempel**

This is this is kind of the the announcement of it. I don't know if I'm actually allowed to say anything yet, but, you know, we're we're heading in the right direction.

**[00:35:18] Anne Flosnik**

Absolutely. Yeah. The social media, you said already kind of I think, Joe, that social media doesn't play a great part in this. It's the quality of the book. Am I getting that right?

**[00:35:30] Joe Hempel**

Yes.

**[00:35:31] Joe Hempel**

It's the it's the quality of the book. It's the quality of the book. Um, not only from the narration standpoint, but from a writing standpoint. Um, I don't even really, when I look for books to try to put in audio, I don't even really. Look at Amazon rankings or anything like that anymore. Um, I look at. And this is this is how social media plays a part, like for authors and stuff and readers. I pay attention to what the readers are talking about. And if there's a lot of buzz for something, I pick it up. Or if there are authors who are doing really well. That pick up a book and say, Oh, wow, guys, you don't want to miss this book.

**[00:36:21] Joe Hempel**

I reach out.

**[00:36:25] Karen Commins**

Are you mainly using Facebook for that kind of research? Because you said earlier you've left Twitter and you've left TikTok. So don't are you watching or learning what the readers are doing?

**[00:36:38] Joe Hempel**

Saying mainly? Mainly it's select groups on Facebook. Um, Twitter. I don't I don't go onto it all. Um, TikTok. I feel like I feel like booktok is become extremely toxic. And so I actually don't, you know, I don't pay much attention to that because if something has gone viral on TikTok I'll hear about it on Facebook.

**[00:37:06] Anne Flosnik**

Mhm. Mhm.

**[00:37:08] Joe Hempel**

Um. But if I'm but you know, got to.

**[00:37:14] Joe Hempel**

I do pay.

**[00:37:15] Joe Hempel**

Attention to what the readers are saying about certain books. And so far. It's worked out pretty well. I also go to conventions. I was just up at, you know, the week that we launched. It was up at the Texas Author Con, and I think I signed. Five authors from there, if not more.

**[00:37:39] Karen Commins**

Oh, wow.

**[00:37:40] Joe Hempel**

Made a lot of and just, you know, you make a lot of connections that way. One of them, which is already out, you know, was one of those he wasn't sure if he wanted to do something with audio. And then we got drunk and we signed our names on a napkin.

**[00:37:55] Karen Commins**

And we're going.

**[00:37:59] Karen Commins**

To pull that out as the sound clip for this.

**[00:38:01] Joe Hempel**

So it's it's it's a fantastic it's called 100% match. It's like an hour and 15 minutes long. It is gross, but very, very funny.

**[00:38:13] Karen Commins**

So I keep a calendar for members on NarratosRoadmap of all these events. And I saw today that Stokercon is going to Los on San Diego next year. So it's at the end of May 1st of June. Or have you already signed up for that?

**[00:38:30] Joe Hempel**

Stokercon is.

**[00:38:31] Joe Hempel**

Going there.

**[00:38:32] Joe Hempel**

Interesting. Yeah.

**[00:38:33] Joe Hempel**

I have. I have not heard that. The next big thing that's happening is Scares That Care author con they sold their tables out in four minutes.

**[00:38:46] Joe Hempel**

Oh jeeppers.

**[00:38:48] Anne Flosnik**

Yeah.

**[00:38:49] Joe Hempel**

Um. I don't know if I'll make it out there, but. They sold their table out in four minutes. So people are people are absolutely.

**[00:38:58] Anne Flosnik**

Popular.

**[00:38:59] Joe Hempel**

Horror conventions and just selling it out. I mean, you know, there's a reason it sells out so fast. Every, you know, horror authors have almost become like the punk.

**[00:39:10] Joe Hempel**

Celebrities can see.

**[00:39:12] Joe Hempel**

It.

**[00:39:14] Karen Commins**

Do they wear the same type of clothes, like, you know, the leather jackets and mean, I don't know, envision them, you know, Come in. I'm here. Leather jacket, sunglasses and yeah.

**[00:39:26] Joe Hempel**

They do.

**[00:39:28] Joe Hempel**

They absolutely they absolutely do. They just they wear whatever they want. They're not trying to impress anybody. This is who they are unapologetically who they are. And that's one of the great things about it is. Regular standards and practices and, you know, going the way that everybody should go. It's like bucking up against the system. It's like we're here, we're loud. And we're coming, you know, like we're. We're invading your libraries, so to speak. Uh huh.

**[00:40:07] Karen Commins**

Do you get a good reaction from authors when you start talking to them about putting their work in audio?

**[00:40:15] Joe Hempel**

Generally, yes. There are some that are like.

**[00:40:20] Joe Hempel**

Mhm.

**[00:40:22] Joe Hempel**

You know, we're an up and coming genre. Are you just trying to take my money, which is a valid response because there are so many publishing companies that come up and then go away, you know, within the span of six months. But once they hear my passion. They're generally right on board and it helps.

**[00:40:44] Joe Hempel**

That.

**[00:40:47] Joe Hempel**

Almost everybody in the horror genre knows who I am.

**[00:40:50] Joe Hempel**

So.

**[00:40:52] Joe Hempel**

Um. There was a there was a woman, Candice Nola, at the Texas author Con was talking to her about audiobooks and she took my card and she was kind of not listening. And then she looked down. She was like, Jo Jo.

**[00:41:09] Joe Hempel**

Oh, you.

**[00:41:10] Joe Hempel**

Your job? No. Oh, my God. No. I know you. You just did, my friend. Okay. You know, and then once they catch on, they're like, yes. No, whatever it is, the answer is yes.

**[00:41:21] Anne Flosnik**

Fabulous.

**[00:41:23] Joe Hempel**

So it's it really works in my favor. And I have worked extremely hard over the past five, six years. To make that name.

**[00:41:35] Joe Hempel**

Um.

**[00:41:37] Joe Hempel**

Reputable.

**[00:41:40] Karen Commins**

Yeah. And have name recognition. And to have your reputation walking in the room ahead of you. I mean, that's huge.

**[00:41:49] Joe Hempel**

Yes. Uh, and so I.

**[00:41:53] Karen Commins**

Guess you were choosing more horror books to narrate. I mean, I know you narrate other things, but you were choosing more horror deliberately to to build that reputation.

**[00:42:08] Joe Hempel**

It's kind of interesting. There is a time where I was still considered kind of the the voice of horror, but I hadn't done a horror book in like four months.

**[00:42:16] Joe Hempel**

And.

**[00:42:20] Joe Hempel**

All of a sudden. I did a book called Come With Me by Ronald Malfi. And once that book hit, everybody started going back and looking at my catalog. And then got another one of his like, and he I'm becoming his narrator. Anytime a publisher gets a book, he's like, I want Joe to do it. And because of that. Over the past two years. What I have been trying to build for was starting to come to fruition. Because people started. Seeing my name. People were talking about the audio book and. Publishers started to take note. Oh, they started to take notice of some of the bigger independent horror titles, like, Oh, he's doing all of them. And so they started buying things up.

**[00:43:22] Joe Hempel**

Um.

**[00:43:23] Joe Hempel**

There's a press called Wicked House Press or Wicked House Publishing. Who is run by a friend of mine. And all of his books are now being bought up by publishers and they're getting he's getting really good advances and. He's he's actually gone so far. As to ask that I not do all of his books because he doesn't want me to narrate all the horror. Um.

**[00:43:50] Joe Hempel**

Which is absolutely.

**[00:43:52] Joe Hempel**

Fine. Did one for podium and he's like, I don't want you to do. This book is called Puzzle House.

**[00:43:58] Anne Flosnik**

Um.

**[00:44:00] Joe Hempel**

You know, I'm going to let them pick. But. You know, I don't want you to reach out to them for it. I'm like, That's fine. I was like, I'm not going to reach out. But there is a very good chance they're going to contact me for this book. You know that, right? He's like, Yes, I know. They reached out to me for the book. So did the book. Tantor reached out to me for the next one and I turned it down out of respect for him.

**[00:44:26] Anne Flosnik**

Wow.

**[00:44:29] Karen Commins**

It must be nice to share the toys with somebody else.

**[00:44:33] Joe Hempel**

Yeah.

**[00:44:33] Joe Hempel**

No, it's, you know, we're we're all in this together. And the guy who owns Wicked House Publishing is he's a friend of mine. And we kind of came up we kind of grew up together, not in real life, but in publishing. Um, he was starting his job as an, he was starting, you know, work as an author, as I was kind of just starting my trajectory for audiobooks. And so we were kind of figuring out all this stuff together. And now every time he publishes a book, it hits a number one bestseller. And, you know, I'm so thankful he's throwing some my way, um, for Fright Night to publish. So, um.

**[00:45:16] Karen Commins**

Yeah, it sounds like a wonderful collaboration.

**[00:45:19] Joe Hempel**

It is. It is. And I have collaborations with several different publishers. The biggest one being Dark Press, because we're we're trying to broaden our reach. But as far as a circling back to your five year plan, I don't have a five. I don't have a five year plan. It's just it will change by the week eventually. I would like to. Just be somebody who does outreach and let somebody else handle all of the accounting, all of the. You know, coordination, all of the scheduling and promo and, you know. Do all of that. But as of right now, it's me and I do enjoy it. But five years down the line, I'd like to just pay somebody to handle all that.

**[00:46:07] Karen Commins**

Well, and there are only so many hours in the day, and so there's only so much that any one person can actually do.

**[00:46:14] Joe Hempel**

For sure.

**[00:46:15] Joe Hempel**

For sure. It takes a lot less time than people think when you're actually focused and working. Like if I'm doing something, I get hyper focused and I will knock out a whole bunch of stuff and only two hours will pass. Um. It's don't know if that's a good thing or a bad thing to hyperfocus like that where the world just kind of goes away.

**[00:46:39] Karen Commins**

You're going to have people saying, Can I outsource some stuff to you?

**[00:46:43] Joe Hempel**

So but.

**[00:46:47] Joe Hempel**

You know, just you know, I do it as time allows. I will be in the booth for two hours. I'll get an hour and a half of audio done during those two hours. I'll come out, you know, put the put the laptop in the living room or on the kitchen table, do some Fright Night stuff. And then a few hours later, I'll go back in the booth for another couple hours, get another hour done, and then later that night go back in the booth. So. I'm always working and I'm okay with that. It's not for everybody.

**[00:47:23] Karen Commins**

Well. And we are coming up on the top of the hour. And I cannot let you get away without asking you a Pit Stop Hot Seat question. Oh, yeah. So the one I have for you today is if you could be the ruler for a day, what would your first decree be?

**[00:47:47] Joe Hempel**

Oh, wow. That feels like.

**[00:47:49] Joe Hempel**

A loaded question.

**[00:47:52] Karen Commins**

You have the power, Joe.

**[00:47:55] Joe Hempel**

I have the power.

**[00:47:56] Joe Hempel**

To do anything I want.

**[00:47:57] Karen Commins**

Yeah. So what's your first decree?

**[00:48:02] Joe Hempel**

Um.

**[00:48:05] Joe Hempel**

Everybody gets a base salary so they can follow their passion and not have to worry about whether or not they have to eat.

**[00:48:14] Karen Commins**

Oh, that's a fabulous decree. We might have to install you as ruler.

**[00:48:26] Anne Flosnik**

Yes.

**[00:48:28] Joe Hempel**

Yes. Nobody should have to suffer just for existing, so.

**[00:48:34] Karen Commins**

And Rebecca Stern had written in the chat that a few minutes ago that the author for the book she's doing collects venomous pets. So that actually makes me want to ask you another Pit Stop Hot Seat question. This is a first. I usually only ask one, but I want to know what is. Since horror always involves strange circumstances, what is your strangest possession?

**[00:49:01] Joe Hempel**

Um.

**[00:49:05] Joe Hempel**

There's no body that's in within the realms of legal here, is it? No, I'm kidding. Um, my strangest possession?

**[00:49:15] Karen Commins**

Your strangest possession.

**[00:49:20] Joe Hempel**

Um.

**[00:49:23] Joe Hempel**

I don't know that I would call anything I have. Strange.

**[00:49:27] Joe Hempel**

I have a. A scare bear.

**[00:49:31] Anne Flosnik**

Oh.

**[00:49:32] Karen Commins**

What is that?

**[00:49:34] Joe Hempel**

Is there?

**[00:49:35] Joe Hempel**

I can't post a picture in this chat, can I? No.

**[00:49:39] Joe Hempel**

Um.

**[00:49:40] Karen Commins**

You can post a link to it.

**[00:49:43] Joe Hempel**

I'll post it if you're. If you are not a member of the Legion of Hemple Facebook group, join that group and I'll prove it and I'll post a picture of it in that Facebook group.

**[00:49:56] Anne Flosnik**

Okay.

**[00:49:57] Joe Hempel**

It's basically a Gund teddy bear who has ripped his face off.

**[00:50:03] Anne Flosnik**

Oh.

**[00:50:05] Karen Commins**

Oh, that sounds scary. In more ways than one.

**[00:50:11] Joe Hempel**

He is? Yes, he is.

**[00:50:12] Joe Hempel**

Sitting in the corner of my, uh, of my bookshelf currently holding a audiobook called Ghost Land that I narrated. I got a physical copy sent to me from Tantor and myself and the author Duncan Ralston, have it signed. It's the only audiobook I have that's actually signed by the author and myself, and we haven't decided what we're going to do for a giveaway, but we're going to end up giving that away.

**[00:50:43] Karen Commins**

Well, that sounds pretty neat. And I'm assuming this bear came this way. This is not something that your dogs attacked and tore its face off.

**[00:50:53] Joe Hempel**

No, it's it is a piece of art that I bought probably six, seven years ago. Um, I bought it at a horror convention. Um, can't remember the guy's name. I don't think he's in business anymore, unfortunately. Um, his social media has been. I've. I've looked it up not too long ago, oddly enough, and I can't really find much on his on social media anymore, so I don't know if he's doing it anymore. But yes, that is probably my the strangest thing that I own that I can think of off the top of my head.

**[00:51:34] Karen Commins**

And do you have advice that you can share with other people who want to expand their horizon beyond narration? You know, to do more than just narrate the books to do. Some other thing as well.

**[00:51:51] Joe Hempel**

Um. Find something that's missing in the genre that you are passionate about or in the industry that you are passionate about and attack it. Like. That portion will go away tomorrow if you don't act. That way. Not only do you get the sense that you're doing something good for the industry, you will not be putting all your eggs in one basket.

**[00:52:31] Karen Commins**

That sounds like really good advice.

**[00:52:34] Joe Hempel**

So.

**[00:52:36] Joe Hempel**

And don't do it how I do it. Don't do it how I do it. Because I tell you as much fun as I have. It's exhausting.

**[00:52:47] Karen Commins**

You mean the all work, all the time approach?

**[00:52:50] Joe Hempel**

Yeah. Yeah. But, you know, it's it's it's a lot of it's play for me, you know? Um. I am I am I am the definition of work hard, play hard. So when I go to these conventions, you know, when I go to AIPAC, when I go to the author conventions, things like that, I am legitimately up until 4:00 in the morning.

**[00:53:14] Joe Hempel**

Um.

**[00:53:16] Joe Hempel**

Because that's just my. That's my style. That's my personality. I'm the first to arrive. The last to leave. And. I try to and I just try to have fun. And I think the more your personality shows and the more real you are. The better it is. And that's that's the other thing I'll say. Don't force it. Because if you force it and you try to be somebody or not, or who you think they want to see or want to be.

**[00:53:50] Joe Hempel**

Um.

**[00:53:51] Joe Hempel**

People see it a mile away and it just looks really fake and they lose trust. So. Be 100% authentic. And if you're an introvert.

**[00:54:06] Joe Hempel**

It can suck.

**[00:54:07] Joe Hempel**

This industry turned me into an extrovert.

**[00:54:10] Joe Hempel**

It really.

**[00:54:10] Joe Hempel**

Did. Like in an industry where everybody says they're introverts, this thing turned me into an extrovert, and now I will talk to anybody, anyplace, anywhere. It doesn't matter.

**[00:54:24] Karen Commins**

Including here with us today!

**[00:54:26] Joe Hempel**

Yeah. You know, I said I was going to ramble and I mean, 100% of that.

**[00:54:33] Karen Commins**

I didn't think you were rambling at all. Do you have anything you want to plug or any final words? And also, how can people contact you?

**[00:54:45] Joe Hempel**

Okay, so my website is broken and it doesn't work and I have no idea when I'm going to get that fixed. So if you want to contact me. My email is Joe Hempel at Voice of joey.com. If you want to audition for anything for Fright Night auditions, we only have two auditions posted right now. I expect there to be more in the next month, but we're gearing up for a lot of releases, so we want to make sure those authors are taken care of and not forgotten. Um, so we want to make sure, you know, that's one of the things that we want to do is we want to make sure that when release time comes, the authors and narrators don't feel like they're neglected. So.

**[00:55:33] Joe Hempel**

There is.

**[00:55:34] Joe Hempel**

So go to FrightNightAudio.com and you'll see auditions there and you can fill out the contact form there. Also I'm on Am on Facebook. Don't post a ton. I've turned into more of a lurker. Um. And unless it's about dogs or, you know, cool stuff like mentioning my friend in the Ric Flair book. And if you are interested at all in coaching for the thriller and horror genre.

**[00:56:07] Joe Hempel**

I have a Calendly link. But think it's too long.

**[00:56:11] Joe Hempel**

To say an audio. Like on clubhouse. So. Um.

**[00:56:18] Joe Hempel**

Just email me.

**[00:56:19] Joe Hempel**

And I'll send you a link to to book a session. It's \$75 for like 45, 45 minutes. And then we usually go on. You know, longer than that because we all like to talk about this stuff, so. Um.

**[00:56:36] Karen Commins**

Well, and we have really enjoyed talking with you today. But we're coming up on the top of the hour. So I think it's time for everybody to get back on the road. So I'm going to conclude today's pit stop. I'll remind everybody the recording is going to be available on clubhouse later today and in the near future. I'll post it with a transcript and links on NarratorsRoadmap.com and Pit Stop is also yay available on your favorite podcast platform including Apple and Audible. Anne who's coming up tomorrow on Narrator Uplift?

**[00:57:12] Anne Flosnik**

Marnye Young, the audiobook sorceress.

**[00:57:16] Karen Commins**

Well, that will be a good chat at 2 p.m. on Clubhouse tomorrow. And I hope all of you will take another road trip with us on September 27th when we'll talk with audiobook narrator and TV scriptwriter Jorjeana Marie. In the meantime, I hope you find joy in every journey and live the life of your dreams. Thanks again, Joe, for this fantastic conversation. It's really been a delight talking with you.

**[00:57:42] Joe Hempel**

I've had so much fun.

**[00:57:44] Karen Commins**

And thanks to Anne Flosnik for your great questions and support as always. And thanks to you and the audience for spending time with us today. Hope you have a wonderful week and we will see you soon.

END OF TRANSCRIPT





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