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2023-10-25 Pit Stop with Andrew Tell.mp3

DATE

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DURATION

1h 52s

3 SPEAKERS

Karen Commins
Craig Tollifson
Anna Maste

START OF TRANSCRIPT

[00:00:02] Karen Commins

Well, it's the top of the hour and I want to welcome everyone to Pit Stop. I'm Karen Commins, I'm an audiobook narrator and chief cartographer for NarratorsRoadmap.com, and I'm your host for Pit Stop. Anne Flosnik, who's my co-host, is usually here, but she's on vacation today and so we'll miss her. Every other Wednesday, audiobook narrators who have vocations beyond narration pull into Pit Stop, and they're sure to inspire you to follow all your interests and use your talents and gifts. But I want to let you know the conversation is being recorded and you'll be able to relisten or catch parts you missed, and feel free to comment in the chat and raise your hand in the app if you want to be part of the conversation, we'd love to hear from you and thanks so much for joining us. I'm very excited today to welcome Andrew Tell to Pit Stop. Andrew Tell is an actor and voice over artist based in Los Angeles, California. He's narrated over 200 audiobooks in a variety of genres, with an emphasis on sci fi, fantasy and thrillers. Away from the mic, he roasts his own coffee like a real Mister Fancy Pants and enjoys painting, drawing and wrangling his two kids. In a previous life, he was an Emmy Award winning graphic designer and animator for over 20 years. He also currently runs the audiobook industry websites Narratic.com and AudiobookScout.com under his real name Craig Tollifson. So Craig, I am so happy to have you here. I do wonder, are you painting, drawing and wrangling your kids? Or is the kids wrangling different from the painting and drawing?

[00:01:43] Craig Tollifson

Sometimes they all happen at the same time. Sometimes I wrangle them into a painting and drawing session and we all work together.

[00:01:50] Karen Commins

See, that's that's a new way to bring all your talents to the table.

[00:01:54] Craig Tollifson

Indeed, indeed.

[00:01:56] Karen Commins

Well, you're a man of many interests and abilities and talents and. Even before you were narrating audiobooks, you were doing very interesting things. Like I saw you wrote for Comedy Central's Mystery Science Theater 3000. I used to love that show!

[00:02:16] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. Me too. Obviously.

[00:02:18] Karen Commins

So how did that come about? And, you know, I always thought that the guy just ad libbed off the top of his head, but clearly that wasn't the case.

[00:02:26] Craig Tollifson

No, no, there are. There's a whole group of writers. I mean, I got involved with it pretty early on. So I was I had a group of friends, and we watched it sort of religiously, and it was kind of this weird cult thing that wasn't super popular at the time. And we would we would write to them constantly and like, send them weird stuff. And one time and then just randomly we got in the mail, we got something back. That was a writer's test for us to do our own version, you know, write a script for a short that they sent us and they gave us some parameters. And me and these other three people sat and wrote the script and sent it back, and they liked it, and they hired us to work on some episodes after that as well. But that was yeah, that's a crazy show, because you do think it looks pretty natural, but they're like, we averaged six jokes per minute, you know, and like so we're trying to like cram in, you know, as many as many jokes as we could. But it was a really fun experience. Yeah.

[00:03:36] Karen Commins

Did you write for just the host or also the robot and. Yeah. I mean, you can't think of the other character.

[00:03:44] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, there was Tom servo.

[00:03:45] Karen Commins

And oh, Tom servo, right.

[00:03:47] Craig Tollifson

We were this was back when Joel Hodgson was, was doing the show and there was Crow I think was the other robot or something like that. But we yeah, we write just sort of whoever you think is would, would say whatever joke you you have and they might reassign them as well. But they basically they would have their read and they would have your sort of remote writer script there and just it would essentially be pitching jokes for whatever was happening on the screen. I was pretty pleased, though, in the final episodes that a fair amount of my my lines did get in, so I felt pretty good about that.

[00:04:24] Karen Commins

Well, yeah, and it's so interesting how that even came about. I mean, that's kind of like the American Dream or something that you love the show and then you pitch them idea and they're like, okay, yeah, that's great. Come aboard.

[00:04:37] Craig Tollifson

It was it was super exciting. And I was doing comedy and improv and stage stuff at that time. So it kind of was like a really good, you know, it just was a perfect kind of moment for me. Yeah, I was really excited. I was like, my life is changing forever. I'm going to be a TV writer. And then I moved to L.A and I was like, oh, wait, this is hard.

[00:05:00] Karen Commins

Well, what what did you dream of doing? What were you wanting to be a writer or were you thinking some other career?

[00:05:09] Craig Tollifson

I mean, I got interested in filmmaking kind of in general, and I thought, well, I like writing and I love movies. And, you know, maybe I should just write my own movies and be an auteur, you know, a filmmaker. So I started going to film school in Milwaukee, which is where I was from and where that was happening. And. Eventually decided I wanted to transfer out to, you know, go to California and sort of start it up a little more properly, I guess. And I went to UCLA with the intention of getting into the film program there, but I just stayed in the in the fine arts program as my life circumstances continued to kind of evolve and change. But I was writing screenplays. I wrote, like, I don't know, a dozen screenplays at that time, and I had some. There was some sort of there was some activity. There were some. I had a manager and there was some things going on. But I got a little soured to the whole process and I was like, you know what? I just want to have total control over my own work. And I went back to just sort of writing fiction and focusing on my career and things like that.

[00:06:22] Karen Commins

Well. And you were an Emmy Award winning graphic designer and animator. So, yeah, that same period or did you kind of. Yeah, that's one or the other.

[00:06:33] Craig Tollifson

That's what it kind of morphed into. My last year in college, I got involved with a multi-media company. I was actually doing tech support for them originally, as I have a very computery background. And yeah, I just met a guy who was kind of creating graphics for them, and I was really interested in it, and I was like, that's what I'm going to do. And so I learned how to do it, and I started doing it, and I did that for like 20 years. Yeah, I have, I have an Emmy. I want to actually more. That's such a weird award to win in that. But that was for the X games, um, 1997 maybe. I can't quite remember, but I have other awards and I've been in some other books and things like that, and I had a good career with with that.

[00:07:21] Karen Commins

And your IMDb page doesn't seem to reflect all of that, because I saw you were a visual effects producer in the Bible Secrets Revealed show.

[00:07:32] Craig Tollifson

So that, yeah, I mean, like the whole IMDb thing, you know, when I was having during my career, it wasn't like vital that people were putting in every last person that worked on the show. And I mostly was credited as my company, which was my one man band that I would occasionally hire people to help me or do things like that, but it was mostly me doing everything, which was called Imperial Studio, so that might be credited in more things. And I mostly worked in TV doing shows for MTV and VH1 and I mean a lot of TV shows, the opening titles and the graphics that go inside of them. Reality shows I worked on dodgeball the movie dodgeball with, oh, I love that movie. Yeah, I did all the ESPN graphics within that, and that was a lot of fun too.

[00:08:26] Karen Commins

Yes. And we've, I think since then we've always thought of it as ESPN Ocho.

[00:08:30] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, I didn't come up with that idea, but I put the I put that whole graphics package together myself, which was.

[00:08:38] Karen Commins

Pretty well because it looks so realistic as I recall. So that's really. Yeah. Fantastic thing.

[00:08:45] Craig Tollifson

Thanks. Thanks. Yeah.

[00:08:47] Karen Commins

Well, so how did you get into audiobook narration? And it seems like you kind of started and then came back to it in full force later.

[00:08:57] Craig Tollifson

I would say what I mean, the story that I tell is that, you know, I had a book that that I published, I self-published a short book. And it got some very good attention. It was the first independently published book that got a starred review in Publishers Weekly. Oh, wow. Which was cool.

[00:09:20] Karen Commins

And this this is the book you're talking about is the Young Arsonist club.

[00:09:25] Craig Tollifson

The junior arsonist club? Correct. Yeah. And that's okay. And Amazon took an interest in it, and they brought it into their Kindle Singles program and just were like, here, we want to give you some money. And I was like, okay. And then they were like, hey, we're going to advertise this on all Kindle devices over Christmas. And I was like, I got real excited. And I was like, this is great. Hey, I should have an audiobook too. And so I went through, I found a narrator. I liked, the incredible Aimee McFadden, who I'm still friends with, and she's terrific. Yeah, and I would have maybe taken a crack at it myself since I have an acting background. But the the main character is a woman, and I was like, well, this this would be better if a woman voiced this, and she did a great job. And we were chatting about the whole process and, and she's like, you know, you would probably be really good at this. And at that point, my graphics career, I was pretty burnt out of and was kind of like winding down a little bit in a sense that it was becoming very competitive and I was becoming kind of old and not as cool.

[00:10:35] Craig Tollifson

So, you know, that can be a thing. And there were less in-person meetings. It was, you know, people were were doing this overseas. You know, the times were kind of changing a little bit. And I was just like, I'm going to do that. I want to just narrate books, and then I'll write my own books and I'll be narrating books, and it'll be a dream come true. And especially I was interested in royalty share because I thought, well, I can only write a couple of books, but boy, I could narrate a lot of books and that's that could be a lot of dough. So I had that kind of this particular mindset going into it. I took a crack at it. And, you know, I have I've done some really specific stage shows that sort of weirdly prepared me for audiobook narration, that the shows involved me narrating things, and I kind of took to it pretty, pretty good. And, you know, I just started to get work through and started pursuing indie authors. And, you know, it just kind of just took on a life of its own.

[00:11:42] Karen Commins

Yeah. Now you've narrated well over 200 books, but have you written any more?

[00:11:49] Craig Tollifson

You know, I wish that the career sort of took over. The audiobook part eclipsed a lot of other stuff. And with the websites and having a couple of kids and all this stuff, it kind of is like it kind of got put on the back burner. I have in the time written quite a bit. It's just having a book that I think is finished or ready for the world at large is a whole different question. So, you know, I was pleased with how my novella came out and, you know, that was great. I even had an agent from a New York agent contact me. I had Sigourney Weaver's production company contact me wanting to, you know, taking an interest in it and all this kind of interest in that. But I just wasn't quite ready for it with the next book, I guess you could say. And my, you know, it's my stuff is more literary. It's not. I think it just takes a little longer to sort of to sort of cook. So I've been cooking a few and I've still been writing and working on a few projects, but, you know, it's just hard to make it a priority when. Narration. You know, it takes up so much time. It just takes a lot of time.

[00:13:09] Karen Commins

Yes it does. Yeah. And especially I mean, it's not as we all know, it's not just the narration. It's so much of the job is actually finding the next job.

[00:13:19] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. Yeah. And there's well I think, you know, just the performance of it can sort of takes for me. It takes some of that creative energy is depleted in a way, and it's hard to go from reading somebody else's book for a couple of hours and be like, okay, now I'm going to sit down and write my own book. And I really admire the other narrators who have been able to do that more consistently than me.

[00:13:42] Karen Commins

Yeah, that splitting between things I find very difficult. And I've talked to people about this because if I am narrating, I can't really work too much on NarratorsRoadmap it because, like you say, it's like a different kind of creativity and being so immersed in somebody else's story in order to give the book the authenticity that it needs and the emotion that it needs, it does deplete you.

[00:14:12] Craig Tollifson

Absolutely.

[00:14:13] Karen Commins

I think, you know, I've read so many articles from authors who narrated their book and they're just surprised, shocked at how much energy it actually took to tell the story instead of just writing the story, because I think so many of them never read their words aloud until they actually sat down to do the audiobook.

[00:14:36] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, I actually it's part of my process before I even got into narration, was reading it aloud because I really wanted it to all sound right. I was I was always surprised when people didn't, you know, didn't.

[00:14:48] Karen Commins

Know because reading it aloud, gosh, you catch so much stuff. Yeah. Plot problems. You catch grammar problems, I mean.

[00:14:58] Craig Tollifson

Yeah.

[00:14:59] Karen Commins

It's better than a proofreader because you're hearing yourself say these words and, well, that's not what I meant.

[00:15:07] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, yeah.

[00:15:09] Karen Commins

What did I write that for? Why did I put this almost same paragraph 20 pages apart? I mean, you know, you'll hear it. And so I always encourage authors to read their words aloud.

[00:15:23] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, totally.

[00:15:23] Karen Commins

So you were working through and I know I've seen you a lot in that Facebook group, the narrator's Facebook group. Yeah. Um, and at some point you start it. And I had put your Junior Arsonist Club link on the page here, but I'm about to change that link to you had started one of my favorite websites. Narratic.com, which I always loved the play on words because we used to drive ourselves neurotic. Yeah, exactly. Looking at Audible.com for, you know, is my book there or their new reviews? What's happening there? And so I want to hear how you came up with this idea and, and decided to do something about it, and how you had the skills to dig into Audible's code and figure out how to display this back to the narrators who are interested.

[00:16:22] Craig Tollifson

I mean, from from early on, you know, I think especially I think coming from live theater performance, it's like you get immediate feedback and you know, you know how you're doing. Um, I didn't have a lot of coaching back then, and I was working through my first, I don't know, ten books. And I was religiously like, all right, let me check, check audible, see if I got any new reviews, any new ratings. What are people saying? You know, I need I needed some validation and feedback. And I got so dang dang tired of it that I was I, I just wrote I had my computer check instead of me in a very kind of primitive way. But my background for that stuff, you know, I started getting interested in computers in 1983 when I was 13. And I always had an interest in sort of. I think back then I wanted to like write my own games or something or, you know, but I always was very I just loved being able to manipulate the computer and have it, you know, things would pop back out after you told it to do something. And I just found it amazing. And I'd always kind of kept that up a little bit. I had done some websites for for theater groups that I'd been in and for and worked in tech support a little bit here and there. So I had this kind of hobby programing background and yeah, I just applied that there. I was like, I set up my computer to sort of man, it would check audible every morning or every night or something like that. And it would just I would send myself an email if I had gotten any new reviews. And it was so like such kind of a little burden that was removed from me. I was like, this is saving me so much time.

[00:18:15] Karen Commins

It does save so much time.

[00:18:17] Craig Tollifson

Because I couldn't imagine even getting to like, you know, 20 books or something like that. I was like this, just this problem just gets worse, you know, it doesn't get any easier. And I think I'm trying to remember why I decided to share that one. I think I might have been talking to somebody at one of the conferences, and I mentioned that. That I had this and they were like, oh, I want that. You got, you know, you know, share that. And so I started kind of fussing around with it and seeing if I could make it into something that I could share with other people. And I do tend to get really focused on, on things and get really laser focused on a project, and that's kind of a bad thing. No, it's not bad at all. And at that time, I apparently had enough free time between gigs and working, you know, a little bit around my narration. I think I just had more free time. I was still maybe doing both jobs a little bit. But I, I just made, you know, the website and I. Got it to where I wanted it to be. It was it was kind of a long process. Um, did some beta testing and people seemed to like it. Yeah. So I just I just taught myself what I needed to know.

[00:19:43] Karen Commins

You say that like it's so easy. I and I have a master's in computer information systems. I had to take programming classes in college. I've worked over 25 years in IT, but I was not a programmer. I was a programmer for a couple of years. Yeah, but I am saying all this not to brag or anything, but to say I wouldn't know how to do that. I mean, I know how to look at the code and see where something is displayed on a page, but you've gone beyond that because you're tracking what was displayed before and what changed.

[00:20:23] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. I mean, if you want to get into the I mean, that takes some complicated wizardry. Yeah, I mean I was into I was I got some I had a job that involved working with databases a little bit. So I, you know, a long time ago in the, in the 90s, I guess. So I had a little exposure to that. And, you know, that's a whole art form right there is, is working with SQL databases, SQL databases. Um, and then I also was doing stuff with scripting and Unix, you know, long, you know, way at the beginning of all this. So I think having that early footing on those early technologies, it's been easier for me to keep up with some of the changes and things like that. And that graduated to doing Unix scripting and then that graduated to like, okay, I need a more sophisticated tool learning PHP and then having a platform for neurotic. In particular, I picked WordPress and then building WordPress out to accommodate, you know, the technical stuff. So WordPress is like the front end, and the back end is the custom stuff. So, you know, it's been it's been an evolution. But, you know, I think having that. Deep understanding. And coming from that background, it's been a part of my life for such a long time. It does. It does come a little bit easier to me.

[00:21:52] Karen Commins

As soon as you said Unix scripting, I'm like closing my eyes, putting my hands over my ears, you know, like, no.

[00:22:01] Craig Tollifson

I mean, I was into that in high school and it was very early. I was on the college computers dialing in with a phone modem, you know, just to play weird text based games on the UW computers. I was a little hacker kid.

[00:22:21] Karen Commins

Did you ever have to use a card reader?

[00:22:24] Craig Tollifson

Not that far back. Okay.

[00:22:27] Karen Commins

My my husband went to Georgia Tech as a software engineer, and he tells of the days when he had to use the cards. And if you drop them and they went on the floor, heaven help you get them back in the right order.

[00:22:39] Craig Tollifson

Yeah.

[00:22:40] Karen Commins

And I never had to do that.

[00:22:42] Craig Tollifson

But no, no, not that.

[00:22:43] Karen Commins

Like working with the Unix machines was something I never really liked to do, although in some ways I think they were probably simpler than dealing with. Microsoft and all their registered changes and registry changes and all the things they do.

[00:23:00] Craig Tollifson

But yeah, well, that's that's a weakness I have. I'm not that familiar with all that stuff.

[00:23:05] Karen Commins

Well, yeah. And the fact that you but you built on that learning PHP and because so much of what audible is serving up is scripted. And so if you don't know where to look.

[00:23:18] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. I mean, that's just one big database with, you know, a media content behind it. It's like if you understand the fundamentals of what it is and then you know, this, this technique is generally called scraping where you're like, I'm going to just take some data from you guys and we're just going to do something with it. Um, so, you know, once you understand that, how that's structured, you know, then you can get into manipulating it to your own, your own ends. You know, anytime there's.

[00:23:47] Karen Commins

A movie or TV show and they show some hacker who's just like, in and there's this beautiful interface and we're like, no, that is so stupid.

[00:23:56] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, it's true.

[00:23:57] Karen Commins

But it'd be great if you could use your special powers and go in and change a few ratings. Yeah, right. Right. Maybe you shouldn't, because, well.

[00:24:08] Craig Tollifson

You know, what's funny is

[00:24:10] Karen Commins

That might not bode well.

[00:24:11] Craig Tollifson

For for Narratic. You know, I filter I actually my fragile ego. I decided after, I don't know, a couple of years I was just going to I only wanted the good reviews. And there's option, there's an option to set up an erratic where you can be like, I only want to see the good reviews. I only want to see three, four and five star. And I, to this day, I still only see those really. Now, occasionally, about maybe twice a year I'll go in and I have a way of looking at just the just the ones that have been hidden from me. So I'm like, all right, I'm going to take my bitter pill now just in case there's something I'm doing I should be aware of. But usually.

[00:24:50] Karen Commins

I mean, the bad ones do serve a purpose in that if they reveal a trend that you could do something with. Yeah, yeah. But most of them are just people who are pissed off because they wasted a credit, and the book wasn't what they thought it would be.

[00:25:03] Craig Tollifson

90% of the time they're critiquing the book. Honestly, unless you're a new narrator, it's it's like your ratings rise and fall with the books that you are doing. I mean, it's just the way it is.

[00:25:17] Karen Commins

Well, and what I've discovered is that and I discovered it early on, that of the people who listen to the audiobook, maybe 10% of them are going to be prompted to leave a rating or a review, and a lot of more of them will leave just the rating and not a review, but of the people that small percentage who are leaving a review, so many of them are wanting to be in the negative category as if they are the expert and warning people to stay away from this book because I have deemed it a terrible audiobook. It's either that or when it starts getting rave reviews, people are like jumping on the band wagon. Like, yeah, I loved it too.

[00:26:02] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, yeah, definitely.

[00:26:05] Karen Commins

Anna Maste wrote in the chat. "Wow. I feel like I've found my people narrators who are also recovering computer programmers."

[00:26:14] Craig Tollifson

Oh, I'm not recovered. Sorry, I'm in the wrong group.

[00:26:18] Karen Commins

No you're not, because in addition to Narratic, you have another wonderful site, which I'm going to add to the pinned link Audiobook Scout. So. After. How long did it take between the launch of Narratic to come up with Audiobook Scout?

[00:26:36] Craig Tollifson

Uh, probably a year or two. I can't quite remember the timeline. It's a similar thing where I was using personally a version of this tool which was like, why do I have to log into AC and I have to like look through every listing? You know, it was something I had to do, like every day if I wanted to catch a juicy, you know, job is to constantly go through their search, which was designed a long time ago. You know, it's not it's not modern. So I had another sort of tool that would just email me new listings, every every new listing I was seeing that came through and every morning and I was like, this is much easier. Yes. And so. It was another. It was just another thing where I was like, this is also something, you know, I wanted to to share. I was like, I think other people would be interested in this, too, because, you know, neurotic was having a decent amount of success. And so, yeah, I worked on that. That took a lot longer than the other site. But, um, yeah, I put a lot of hours into that, and it's a much more complex. Site and behind the scenes, I guess you could say and especially and it's continued to evolve. I had to add a lot of scam detection features and things like that. I added auditions materials into it to a lot of just a lot of little quality of life improvements. Researching rankings and tracking rankings on Amazon built into it. So that was a much more complex project. And I continued to to work on it weekly. I mean, there's always something. That needs to be addressed. So yeah, it was it was probably between 1 and 2 years of after neurotic I think.

[00:28:46] Karen Commins

Well. And so both of these are paid services, right? Audiobook Scaout is a paid one, but you've generously made the Author Snoop part of Audiobook Scout something that everybody can use.

[00:29:01] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, yeah. And there's there used to be. I mean, there still is. It's still accessible. There's a page two which will list all the ones that we've flagged as having a lot of red flags, you know, as being probable scams. And that's. Yeah, I made that available to everyone to I didn't it seemed like the right thing to do. Yeah.

[00:29:22] Karen Commins

I have both of those both the flag listings and the Author Snoop on my page of Projects to Avoid because there's so many scam things and so many of them have red flags. And both of these utilities are excellent parts of a narrator's due diligence to decide even whether you want to audition.

[00:29:44] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, and people have become a lot more skeptical, I think. And they they've seen all these posts about about people getting scammed and things like that. And it's been interesting to see people getting a little more savvy about this stuff, you know, but audible are really cracked down about a year or so ago. And they've really it's really cut back a lot on scams. But there are new approaches that they're using which are to do direct offers to new narrators. And so they bypass any public screening essentially of it. So yeah, there's always something to watch out for.

[00:30:30] Karen Commins

And I can't figure out what the new pay off for the scammers is, you know, it used to be that you would get promo codes and people were selling these things on eBay because they were good for anybody on Audible .

[00:30:46] Craig Tollifson

They're fully setting up bank accounts and getting royalties. Oh, absolutely. They've been doing that for a long time. That was what you're describing is less prevalent now for sure.

[00:30:57] Karen Commins

Right. Because they tied the code to the book and they've done some other things. But I mean, some people are actually narrating still. You think narrating these.

[00:31:05] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. And then people.

[00:31:07] Karen Commins

Are somehow making money off this. I mean, that's what really perplexes me.

[00:31:12] Craig Tollifson

They wouldn't probably be doing it if they weren't and I so I saw recently somebody posted Ilona Andrews, I don't know if I'm getting her name right, but she's a big like romance, fantasy or sci fi author. And one of her books she posted on her blog like, hey, this is not one that we produced. Don't buy this. It's a she called it a pirated copy, but in fact, someone had got a narrator create it, you know, and it was published, and I assume it was through ACA, but I'm not 100%. It could have been sent through some other platform. But, you know, that's I would guess was done through a direct offer. You know, it was. And they had another the same publisher had a second book up. And so that book, while it was up, it might have been only for a month or two months. It's still generating income. And and that first they're going to get that first check. And that's all that scammer needs to be to be like this is worth it. I just got \$1,000 for doing 15 minutes of work. Yeah. So it's it's it's still out there. And I'm sure that there are still many books on audible that were posted through by not the rights holder. And they are making money for, for people illegitimately, mostly books for authors that may have passed away or their rights aren't being, you know, handled actively by anyone. But but they're definitely they're.

[00:32:49] Karen Commins

Yeah, I know of one. In fact, I have thought about licensing it. And then I saw it there and it's like this. It's the only one that this narrator has done. And so I don't know what the story is, but I'm pretty sure that narrator didn't license that book. And so I don't know. I've thought about approaching the publisher. Like, I want a license to write, you know? Do I just pretend I don't know that's there? Or do I call it to their attention? Or do I just look for another book to do?

[00:33:20] Craig Tollifson

And Yeah, find another book. I used to spend a lot of time emailing authors and publishers and yeah, it was it was fine, but it became like a second job. So I sort of let that be their own problem, I guess.

[00:33:39] Karen Commins

Well in a lot of your websites are really a second job and a third job because you have more than one. So how do you divide your time between narration and updating your sites and any other projects you've got in the mill?

[00:33:56] Craig Tollifson

I mean, there's really just sort of my butt in the booth time, which is, you know, minimum three hours, maybe, hopefully more like four hours a day. Um, and it's that time surrounding it. It's it's the morning or the or the afternoon and even evening. Sometimes when I have to address issues or answer emails from the website, the website stuff is like it's sort of attacks me. It will just kind of come up where, you know, who knows? I mean, I had a I had a whole, um, the web hosting company that both my sites are on. They were like, hey, we're phasing out this version of PHP, and you have, you know, three weeks to figure it out and upgrade. And I was like, oh, man, have a nice day. Yeah. I was like, okay, let me upgrade. And then you watch everything break and you're like, okay, now I got to go through. And that was like, I think that took 2 or 3 days where it and it messes up my, my narration schedule as well. So then you're making that up on the weekend. I mean, it's a bit of a hustle sometimes because it's not a 9 to 5, it's not a certain number of hours. I can just be like, okay, now I'm going to sit down and do this, or trying to answer somebody's question about why something isn't working the way they expected on the website or asking for help. Um, you know, those are things I just try to get to quickly and get them done. But it's it's can be a lot to juggle sometimes, for sure.

[00:35:26] Karen Commins

And that's one thing I was wondering about. Do you have somebody help you? So when you're getting questions from users of your sites, are you the one not only fixing the problem, but also doing the responses back to the people asking?

[00:35:41] Craig Tollifson

Oh yeah, it's a one man band pretty much. Yeah. It doesn't, you know, they don't they don't make like that much money for me to necessarily hire and train someone else to, to be standing by to do something like that.

[00:35:55] Karen Commins

Um, really, because I had this vision of you, like the, you know, where they do this, it's raining money and you're just.

[00:36:00] Craig Tollifson

Like, you know, it's

[00:36:04] Karen Commins

Because I think all narrators — I'd think everybody would be members of those two sites.

[00:36:07] Craig Tollifson

I think that people cycle in and out of audio, audio book Scout in particular. Once they get a few jobs lined up, they may stop their subscription and then they pick it up again when they're looking, um, you get new people who are think you know, what new people who are interested in narration think and might use it for a little while. So it's a little bit transitory and neurotic, is kind of like has a core group of users that. We're dedicated and enough to keep the site up and going. Um, I actually have a sorry.

[00:36:41] Karen Commins

I'm sorry. Craig. You kind of dropped out in the middle of that sentence. You said there was a core group of users who.

[00:36:47] Craig Tollifson

Of Narratic, who are kind of, you know, it hasn't changed, so. But it's enough to keep the site worthwhile. I guess you could say. But I think I think, like a lot of professional, you know, like, I'm a full time narrator and you can only work so much. You can only raise your rates so much, and you're always looking for these other ways to augment your income. I think a lot of people turn to coaching and workshops and stuff like that. And I just am not a patient man.

[00:37:22] Karen Commins

You heard it here first, people. Yes.

[00:37:26] Craig Tollifson

And I mean, I have directed shows and I've done things like that, but I'm like, I just there are people who are better suited for that. Let me focus on this other thing where my skills, you know, shine. So I've kind of focused on that stuff. I even have a third website in development that I'm really excited about, but oh, tell, tell.

[00:37:49] Karen Commins

Well, maybe you don't want to.

[00:37:51] Craig Tollifson

Maybe I'm not sure I'm not. I have to think about, I.

[00:37:53] Karen Commins

Mean, because, yeah, before you launch it, you don't want people to perhaps steal your idea and get to market first.

[00:37:59] Craig Tollifson

It's a competitor to a very popular website in the industry that people love and hate. So I think that'll be a very interesting, interesting journey. But I have a different approach for it and I think could be really fantastic. But it's finding the time. It's exactly what we're talking about is I have a full schedule, I'm booked through March. And you know, I it's it's hard to to put in those hours and that would be required. It's another very complex idea that requires has a lot of moving parts. And you know getting it on its feet is a is an investment. So yeah, I mean, I hope I hope to I don't know when that's going to happen exactly. But it's going to happen.

[00:38:47] Karen Commins

Well I think the fact that you're even talking about it now, it's. Beyond the idea stage. It's somewhat in the implementation stage because I don't think you'd say that's something I'm wanting and I'm very excited about it. If there was no plan to actually finalize it and.

[00:39:08] Craig Tollifson

No, it's it's it's I mean, I've done my proof of concept and it's it's terrific. And I actually speaking of teaching myself stuff, I was like, I don't want to use WordPress anymore. I'm going to teach myself Laravel now, which is a whole. That was a big detour.

[00:39:24] Karen Commins

What is that?

[00:39:25] Craig Tollifson

Laravel is so very popular now with these languages is what's called a framework, which I never really used before, um, where they essentially make PHP an even higher level language. So it's kind of easier to quickly create websites and things like that. So Laravel is sits on top of PHP and allows you to sort of very quickly create dynamic sites and stuff like that. So but it's, you know, it's a big learning. It's like, okay, I've got to stop and learn this whole new sort of language and framework. Um, but yeah, it's, you know, when you're kind of have this obsession with making everything perfect, it can really slow you down, too.

[00:40:18] Karen Commins

Yeah, that could be a problem.

[00:40:20] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, maybe that's why I don't have any more books published either.

[00:40:25] Karen Commins

Well, but it goes back to, like you said, the the actual time of it.

[00:40:30] Craig Tollifson

Yeah.

[00:40:31] Karen Commins

And the mental concentration needed to make it happen for sure.

[00:40:36] Craig Tollifson

I mean, I veg out usually when I'm done narrating for the day, I'm like, I'm just going to play this video game for a while.

[00:40:47] Karen Commins

Well, I think it's time to ask you what I like to call the Pit Stop Hot Seat. And this is a question that you don't know, I might ask, so I have to decide which one is the best one for you. I have many I have many strange questions that. I like to ask. Oh, I just heard this one the other day. So if you had five minutes left to live. And I know that's very morose, and I don't mean to be that way, but if you had five minutes left to live and you could choose one final song to hear, what would it be and why?

[00:41:33] Craig Tollifson

I think. Weirdly, I think I would choose Working Man by Rush off their first album. .

[00:41:47] Karen Commins

Okay, that's very specific.

[00:41:48] Craig Tollifson

Which is a little obscure. The last song on their first album, which is before they had their master lyricist and drum master, Neil Peart, and they were just sort of a bar band. And it's just this he's Geddy Lee sings about how he's just a working man, and I really that was an anthem for me back when I was younger, man. I was like, it was just a kind of a tension release for me. And like, you know what? I did the best I could in this life. That's what I would do with my last five minute song.

[00:42:25] Karen Commins

That sounds like a great choice. I was telling Drew, my husband, I don't think that I would answer this all, this honestly in a public thing, because that the song I'd pick is actually special to me and him, and I don't want other people to know what it is. So I would my public answer would be, I Write The Songs from Barry Manilow because, of course he's my favorite. And that's the end of the concert, is I Write The Songs, so it's like, show's over, folks. That's it.

[00:43:01] Craig Tollifson

I have to say, just because you mentioned you're a big fan of his. I went to a wedding at his house.

[00:43:06] Karen Commins

Ooohh, really? Oh!

[00:43:10] Craig Tollifson

A family friend.

[00:43:11] Karen Commins

You've got to tell me about this! Whose wedding, and what house?

[00:43:14] Craig Tollifson

Well, I don't know if I could get it to that, but it was a family friend. Was has become good friends with him. And he got married to his his partner and asked Barry if he could use his his lawn. And he did.

[00:43:29] Karen Commins

Did you meet Barry?

[00:43:30] Craig Tollifson

Briefly? Yes, yes I did. Oh.

[00:43:36] Karen Commins

I haven't I haven't had that kind of personal interaction. I've seen him 55 times in over 20 cities from London to Las Vegas, and I've had several handshakes at shows, but that's about as much as it much as it goes. Well that's exciting.

[00:43:53] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, it was cool.

[00:43:54] Karen Commins

Well, you just you get around, don't you?

[00:43:57] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. Somehow I get out of the booth once in a while, I guess.

[00:44:02] Karen Commins

When did this happen? You could say that, because I wouldn't know who it is.

[00:44:06] Craig Tollifson

Um, I guess it was last year. Yeah, it was last year.

[00:44:10] Karen Commins

So recently? Somewhat recently?

[00:44:12] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. It was like, right after kind of the pandemic was was becoming, you know, we could get we could get together again. Yeah. My kids and my kids are, uh, it's my kid's godfather. So, you know, they were in the wedding.

[00:44:27] Karen Commins

Oh wow.

[00:44:28] Craig Tollifson

As well. And it was. Yeah, it was really fancy and nice. Amazing.

[00:44:33] Karen Commins

Was this the house in Malibu, or is this that he sold, or is it Palm Springs?

[00:44:38] Craig Tollifson

Palm Springs.

[00:44:39] Karen Commins

Oh, wow. Yeah, well, I have a whole new respect for you.

[00:44:44] Craig Tollifson

You can grill me in person. I'll show you some pictures.

[00:44:50] Karen Commins

Well, I'm just very impressed with the company you keep. In fact, I laughed at your line about roasting your own coffee like a real Mr. Fancy Pants. And. And then you tell me this. I'm like, well, you ARE a mister Fancy Pants, aren't you?

[00:45:07] Craig Tollifson

I put that in because I'm like, I'm so I've really, you know, with talking about all these, you know, the websites and the just the regular work and you know how narration is, it is also getting the jobs. It's running a business, really. I was like, I had to I was like, am I doing anything interesting outside of work? Is this I was like, well, I started roasting my own coffee. That's interesting. Well.

[00:45:32] Karen Commins

My husband would probably grill you about that because he's very into coffee and he keeps buying all these different coffee machines, and he watches coffee videos and he admits he's a coffee snob. And then I don't even drink coffee. So I mean, this is just him all his hobby.

[00:45:51] Craig Tollifson

I highly recommend the personal roasting setup. It's it's really. It's not that hard, actually. It's great. I.

[00:45:58] Karen Commins

I think he has a roaster.

[00:46:01] Craig Tollifson

Okay. There you go.

[00:46:02] Karen Commins

If he doesn't, this sounds like a great Christmas idea.

[00:46:06] Craig Tollifson

Yes.

[00:46:07] Karen Commins

So I think I'll mention then that this is, this was your, your bio and and and I'll just say, oh, you have a roaster, right.

[00:46:17] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. Fish around a little bit.

[00:46:19] Karen Commins

Exactly. Well we're we're coming up on our time. So I want to remind the audience that definitely we'd love to hear from you. If you want to say hi to Craig or ask him something. I did see that when we were talking about the scam titles on, Anna Maste wrote in the chat, "I got a direct offer to narrate the Narcotics Anonymous handbook a few months ago. It's got a high BSR on Amazon. I emailed someone at Na to let them know they should connect with if it wasn't them, and they replied and confirmed it was not." Of course, she wisely also suggested she could narrate it if they were interested.

[00:47:01] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, yeah, I mean, that one's it. I guess it depends. You'd have to look at that. I mean, that's a common target is these kind of nebulous manuals of, you know, these organizations like, well, is there one person that wrote it? You know, I would assume, though, that they do own the rights to it, and it's probably pretty clear cut. That that is not something that would be legitimate to do, but that's definitely a target like that I've seen before. I may have even actually seen that exact book come up a couple of years ago.

[00:47:38] Karen Commins

Yeah, and it probably will will come up again. And yeah, when when you were talking about people who are kind of off and on again with Audiobook Scout Kaleigh Kirby said she's one of those people, and it depends on finances, but it's worth every penny. She said.

[00:47:56] Craig Tollifson

I appreciate that. Yeah. I mean, it's I that's totally makes sense to me. There's never any I never have an issue with that, of course. Well, you know, I still use it every day. Even if I didn't have any users, I would probably still have it.

[00:48:12] Karen Commins

Well, I think that's. Part of what makes both of these sites so great is because it's something that you yourself wanted. And it wasn't there. And so you built it. And so much of any kind of innovation happens that way. It's something that I care about and I want and nobody else is doing it. So yeah, why not me?

[00:48:39] Craig Tollifson

It's kind of funny too. I remember I was working on an Audiobook Scout and thinking like, I'm going to put all this time in and then ACX is going to, you know, they're going to update their site and it's just going to make it totally not, you know, necessary to have something like this. But that hasn't happened.

[00:48:55] Karen Commins

They're going to update their site?!

[00:48:58] Craig Tollifson

They have you.

[00:48:59] Karen Commins

You thought that when?

[00:49:00] Craig Tollifson

They did well they did a little facelift a little. Yeah. And I was like, you know any time something changes I'm like on high alert. But I was like, oh, nothing changed. It was just.

[00:49:12] Karen Commins

Nothing that would affect your site changed.

[00:49:15] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. Well, it's still ultimately really was just a facelift. The core of their searching titles and narrator, all that stuff is really the same. They just changed, like the menu and the what contains it, essentially. So it literally, I would call it a facelift. So.

[00:49:36] Karen Commins

Yeah. Well they've they've had a few of these and I don't know if it's even a full facelift is, you know, really eyebrow tuck or.

[00:49:45] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, maybe an eyebrow tuck exactly.

[00:49:47] Karen Commins

A little bit around the nose or something.

[00:49:52] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. So what it is.

[00:49:56] Karen Commins

What's on tap for you beyond narrating and is there other than the website that you're working on, is there something else coming up for you?

[00:50:08] Craig Tollifson

Um.

[00:50:09] Karen Commins

That you can talk about.

[00:50:10] Craig Tollifson

For me, that I can talk about. I think I'm just really focused on getting through my current schedule. Sometimes when I'm so busy, I'll just stop scheduling stuff for a while and just be like, I'm just intentional. No work time, and then I'll have a couple of weeks off. So I think I'm working toward that. And then, yeah, I'll work on my new site. Which codename? Super duper. Oh.

[00:50:38] Karen Commins

Oh, there's a clue.

[00:50:40] Craig Tollifson

There's a clue. Super duper. And yeah, I don't know, I just I'm just kind of plugging away. I don't think I have anything special. I mean, I am working on some short stories and things like that to put together and maybe a collection, but it's not. There's no timeline on that.

[00:51:04] Karen Commins

Well, in our own projects so often don't have a timeline because having deadlines for other people, those come first people who are paying you to do things and yeah, kind of have to work our own projects around that.

[00:51:21] Craig Tollifson

Absolutely. I mean, just trying to. Schedule. Time to go tour high schools with my son. It's like trying to figure out rocket science. You're like, well, I'll have to put in an hour after dinner in the booth.

[00:51:36] Karen Commins

You have to tour high schools. I know people tour colleges. But this is your touring high schools?

[00:51:42] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. In LA, you know, we have a wide variety, and there's a magnet program where you can kind of just go wherever you want to say wherever you want. But you have a there's dozens of these quote unquote magnet schools that you could just apply to get in. And it's they have a specific area of focus. But, um, yeah, you kind of have some choices. So it's not just the neighborhood school, which is not always the best. Lausd is the second biggest school system in the United States, so it's pretty massive.

[00:52:19] Karen Commins

I would have thought it's the first what's New York? Oh, New York okay. Yeah, I would have thought LA was much bigger.

[00:52:27] Craig Tollifson

The most sprawled is L.A. But in terms of, I think number of students it's New York is first.

[00:52:35] Karen Commins

And what focus is he wanting to have.

[00:52:40] Craig Tollifson

We're trying to figure that out. But he's he is just like a really good student. So he'll probably be in one of the STEM programs. He was sort of interested in theater like his good old dad. But then we we looked, I was like, yeah, and then you have rehearsals and you might be in a musical. And he was like, stop. It's like, no.

[00:53:03] Karen Commins

Yeah. The finished product is one thing, but the preparatory work to get there is a whole other thing.

[00:53:09] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. Doing the same performance every every night, you know, maybe not exact after.

[00:53:14] Karen Commins

Night after night. Like I'm so tired of this.

[00:53:18] Craig Tollifson

Exactly. So he's he's got time, though.

[00:53:23] Karen Commins

Do you have some advice you could share with other people who want to expand their horizon beyond narration?

[00:53:29] Craig Tollifson

I mean, I think if you're augmenting, you know, I think it's very it's totally a common thing. You have this whole interview series. I think it's just like it becomes magical when it aligns with your particular, you know, skills and abilities. If you have another set of skills, that's. Um, runs in parallel or or augments, you know, the narration in particular and can work in harmony, you know, definitely don't hesitate. You know, you've got something special to offer. I was I wasn't sure if anybody would sign up for either of these websites. And, you know, I think for AudiobookScout, I hit over a thousand users that have tried it, not that are currently active. I wish, but yeah.

[00:54:22] Karen Commins

I feel you there.

[00:54:24] Craig Tollifson

Yeah. Yeah. Exactly. NarratorsRoadmap. And so I think, you know, it's just sort of. You do have to take a little bit of a leap, because whatever you're going to set up, it's another investment of your time. But. If you have some particular little special thing that's a little different than everybody else, I mean, go for it.

[00:54:50] Karen Commins

And we have an audience question or so I'm going to send the microphone to schoolgirl. Oh, Anna Maste. So come up to the stage, Anna. And you'll have to. There you are.

[00:55:06] Anna Maste

There we go. Hi.

[00:55:08] Karen Commins

It's good to hear your voice.

[00:55:10] Anna Maste

Yeah. It's lovely to meet you both. Um. Gosh, I feel like I have so many things that I could chime in on with this whole conversation. Um. And I'm sorry. Craig. Um, I. Yeah. Um, firstly, I'm a new narrator. I have about ten titles under my belt. I feel like I have a lot in common with you, though. One of my titles is a Grace Hamilton series that I'm doing. And I know you've done a couple of those.

[00:55:34] Craig Tollifson

Literally narrating one right now.

[00:55:36] Anna Maste

Yeah, I am the first in a series of three, so I'm feeling pretty lucky to have landed that so early in my career. But my congratulations. Thank you. My previous career was as a computer engineer, and I actually started sort of as a side project passion project with my mom, a tech travel website. So you talking about sort of combining your two passions, whether it be audiobooks or in her case, it was RVs and tech skills. And, you know, we built you know, I built a website originally, you know, PHP and using I didn't use WordPress, I used Drupal, I think for my first iteration.

[00:56:18] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, yeah.

[00:56:20] Anna Maste

And then like my the reboot did it all in Django. I learned Python and it was so much better to have a full framework. So good for you on the Laravel move. That'll make your life a million times easier. Yeah.

[00:56:31] Craig Tollifson

It's amazing.

[00:56:32] Anna Maste

Yeah. But, um, I mean, in my case, I ran that as a side project while I was like at home with my babies when they were like, you know, I was on maternity leave with them, and I did it as just a side project for years. And then it eventually grew to the point where I quit my full time job and like, we and we sold it during the pandemic because it really took off. So that's what has that's what has afforded me the opportunity to do this now, because.

[00:57:01] Craig Tollifson

I.

[00:57:01] Anna Maste

Don't need necessarily a guaranteed income anymore. So it's I just yeah, that's fantastic. And we're talking about, you know, finding things to to dovetail with your passion. And I am proof positive that it can work. So that's.

[00:57:16] Craig Tollifson

Fantastic. What a great story. Yeah. And you've clearly got a knack for it. If relay picked you for for one of Grace's books. So you know kudos to you.

[00:57:27] Anna Maste

Yeah it's the first one. Just went live like last week. So I'm still waiting on that first rating to show up there.

[00:57:33] Craig Tollifson

But yeah you got to get them all. You really got to get them all out and wait for the box set to really start.

[00:57:38] Karen Commins

That's that's.

[00:57:40] Anna Maste

Expecting.

[00:57:40] Craig Tollifson

Some royalties. Yeah. Yeah I've been I, I'm actually really late on book six which is the one I'm doing now. It's, it's the finisher for the series. And I got, you know, you get sick and all this other stuff and, but yeah, that's great. Anyway, I love that story.

[00:57:57] Anna Maste

Oh thanks. I like I said, I saw this interview with you and I knew we had lots of things in common. Yeah, come and listen and contribute. So it was really great chance to meet you.

[00:58:07] Karen Commins

Well, we're so glad you did. Oh. Is that. Guess that was all you were going to say. I mean, I could keep talking.

[00:58:18] Anna Maste

If you want me to, but that's really all I have to add. Yeah.

[00:58:23] Karen Commins

Well, thanks so much. I really appreciate you stopping by and adding yet another inspirational story. And we can use all of those that we can get.

[00:58:35] Anna Maste

And yeah, for sure, maybe, you know, eventually one of your projects will take off so much that somebody will buy it from you and you can retire and do something else. But it sounds like you still love it. So.

[00:58:47] Craig Tollifson

Yeah, I do like it. It's it's it's a passion project for me for sure.

[00:58:55] Karen Commins

And that sounds like a perfect time to tell everybody it's time to get back on the road. So I'm going to conclude today's Pit Stop. The recording will be available on clubhouse later today and in the near future, probably next week. I'll post it with a transcript and some links on NarratorsRoadmap.com. And I'm thrilled to also announce that Pit Stop is also available in your favorite podcast platforms, including Apple and Audible. So, Craig, do you have anything else you'd like to plug or any final words? And how should people contact you?

[00:59:32] Craig Tollifson

I mean, if you want to contact me, you can go to AndrewTell.com and hit the contact information or same thing on Audiobook, Scout.com or Narratic.com and nothing to plug. I mean, you can check out some of my books if you want. Sword of Kaigen is a wonderful fantasy novel, if you're interested.

[00:59:52] Karen Commins

And they could leave ratings and then you'll get notified from Narratic.

[00:59:58] Craig Tollifson

That's another way to contact me. Very, very roundabout way. But yes.

[01:00:04] Karen Commins

Well, I hope everyone will take another road trip with us on November 8th, when we'll talk with Teri Schnaubelt, who is a narrator and artist, and she's studying to become a Texas Master Naturalist. In the meantime, I hope you find joy in every journey and live the life of your dreams. Thanks so much to Craig Tollifson, aka Andrew Tell for this terrific and fun conversation. And thanks to everybody for your attention and support this afternoon, and I appreciate you spending time with us. Hope you have a wonderful week and we'll see you soon.

END OF TRANSCRIPT



