

The Joe Hills Podcast

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The Joe Hills Podcast

by [Sixteenthdays](#)

Summary

[JOE]

Howdy y'all, this is Joe Hills, recording as I always do from Nashville, Tennessee-

[CLEO]

Why do you always say that? We're not even in *America*.

[JOE]

Look, Cleo, what you have to understand is that Nashville is not merely a place. It's a state of being. Wherever my physical body may roam, in my heart I am *always* recording from Nashville, Tennessee.

Notes

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Statement:



[Click]

[JOE]

Howdy y'all, this is Joe Hills, recording as I always do from Nashville, Tennessee-

[CLEO]

Why do you always say that? We're not even in *America*.

[JOE]

Look, Cleo, what you have to understand is that Nashville is not merely a place. It's a state of being. Wherever my physical body may roam, in my heart I am *always* recording from Nashville, Tennessee.

In any case, it has come to my attention that if I try to enter the Void Institute proper I will likely be verbally and/or physically eviscerated by the archival staff! So I figured I'd save them the trouble and my body the suffering and just record my own statement, and then have Cleo drop it off for me.

[CLEO]

I still don't get why you want to have a statement on file so badly. Like, maybe this is just *me*, but I feel like generally when people are searching for you, you want them to have as *little* information about you as possible.

[JOE]

Call it a desire for narrative presence! That's why you went in to give yours, wasn't it? Sometimes you just want to tell your own story and have it taken down somewhere somebody will hear it. Otherwise, you may as well be invisible in an uncaring world!

[CLEO]

Fine, yeah, whatever. On with it, then.

[JOE]

Well, see, now I'm not sure where to start. Where do people normally start these? Normally I would just start from my childhood, but that seems like it would take a lot of time.

[CLEO]

I dunno, just start from when things got weird? That's what I did.

[JOE]

That seems presumptuous. What if my life is perfectly normal?

[CLEO]

(Slightly exasperated laughter) I mean, I think in that case you wouldn't be making a statement, yeah?

[JOE]

I'm just interested in exploring this hypothetical. What if I came into the Institute to complain about a perfectly normal issue I was having? If I just wanted to complain about the fact that my car wouldn't start, would they still take my statement?

[CLEO]

If you told them the car was haunted, probably.

[JOE]

Interesting. So as long as I, or rather our theoretical hapless protagonist in this scenario, suspect a supernatural cause, I could give a statement on just about anything.

[CLEO]

You *are* aware that these tapes only record forty-five minutes per side.

[JOE]

Oh, alright. I guess we can skip through the rest of the preliminary comedic banter for the sake of efficiency.

I was in college when I met Death. At least, that's how she introduced herself. I assume she probably had another name at some point, unless her parents made some very interesting and possibly malicious choices at her birth.

I was working at the campus library at that time, mostly because it provided a lot of opportunities for reading instead of doing actual work. I had also recently been fired, for the same reason, so I was in the process of leaving before they could make me empty out my backpack when I ran into her.

She was standing just outside the library, sitting on the front steps and watching the people walking by. She looked up at me as I exited and called me by my name, which was surprising, because my friends all call me Joe.

[CLEO]

Hold on, is your name not-?

[JOE]

I said howdy and sat down next to her and asked her name, since she obviously knew mine, and that's when she introduced herself as Death. I said that was an interesting name, since I didn't want to be rude.

She told me I was supposed to die in an hour and twenty minutes. Normally, she said, she arrived a lot closer to the time of death, but she'd gotten here early and decided to wait.

Well, I told her I appreciated the forewarning. She smiled, and asked me if, since we had time and all, I'd like to play a game. She had a set of dominos, a deck of cards, and a pair of dice with her, and she set them all out on the stairs for me to look at.

Now, it's always been my policy, when dealing with nonhuman entities, to not agree to anything without fully understanding the rules.

[CLEO]

How did you know she wasn't human?

[JOE]

Oh, I always assume anyone I meet isn't human unless proven otherwise.

Anyways, I asked what happened if I won. She said I wouldn't die. I asked what happened if I lost, and she said nothing, I'd just die when I was meant to. So then I asked her what she got out of offering this deal at all, and she started looking a little shifty, but she wouldn't answer.

Thus, the conundrum: if I lose the game, I die. If I win, I live, but, as these stories tend to go, likely suffer some major karmic drawback. Which, while probably preferable to dying, is also not *ideal*.

[CLEO]

Do you just, like, live your life like you're in a fable all the time?

[JOE]

Of course. Don't you?

[CLEO]

No?

[JOE]

See, that'll come back to bite you if you ever meet the Baba Yaga and don't know how to answer her question.

[CLEO]

Yeah, I'll take my chances.

[JOE]

So the question was, of course: what game could I ask to play with Death where I would neither win nor lose, and thus be free to continue on with my life, presumably free of any painfully ironic downsides?

I asked her if she would play any game I wanted, and she said yes, so long as it was fair. She seemed a little suspicious of how many questions I was asking, but I was just trying to make sure everything was out on the table. The stakes were high, you know?

Well, first I asked her if she would be up for a game of Dungeons and Dragons, but I think somebody must have tried that on her before, because she shut it right down. She said we couldn't have a good game with just two players, which I personally disagree with, but she wasn't very amenable to my suggestion that we use heavy house rules.

So I asked her if she would be willing to play a more freeform sort of storytelling game with me. She and I would trade sentences back and forth, and weave a story together. If I ran out of ideas first, I would lose; if she did, I would win.

She agreed.

I had a beat-up old notebook in my backpack, so I opened it up and we started writing. We traded the book back and forth like that for a few hours, I think, until well after dark. Eventually, she pointed out it was well past time for me to die. I said the game wasn't done yet, but since I did need to go home and do my homework, could we just keep it going through correspondence?

Now, she said that wasn't standard, but when I asked her if it was against the rules, she had to admit it wasn't. I think Death actually doesn't operate by many hard rules, which is pretty interesting, theologically speaking.

So we kept it going, and it's kept going ever since!

That beat-up old three-subject notebook was the first book ever added to the Library of Joe Hills, you know, though of course I need to check it out every week to send it back to her. It's managed to not run out of space yet, presumably by some law of narrative convenience. I'm assuming it won't until the story ends, whenever that happens.

(Long pause)

[CLEO]

Oh, sorry, I zoned out a bit after you mentioned Dungeons and Dragons.

[JOE]

No problem! I expect that to happen whenever I start talking at length around other people.

[CLEO]

So what's the story about? The one you've been writing with her for the past... however long it's been.

[JOE]

Oh, it's kind of funny, actually. It's about a library! It's the Scheherazade tactic. So every time I hit the end of a plot, I just go back to the library, and start in on another book. And so the story can be about absolutely anything. Right now I'm just coming to the end of a space epic. I think I might start in on a tragic romance next.

[CLEO]

What happens when you run out of ideas?

[JOE]

Then I will pass beyond this mortal coil! But it hasn't happened yet, so I don't worry too much about it. By the time that happens, I'll have explored just about everything there is to explore. And really, isn't that the most any of us fragile little humans could ask for?

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[Click]

[MUMBO]

Er, Grian, somebody left a tape at the front desk? Said it was for the archives?

[GRIAN]

What?

[MUMBO]

Apparently it was dropped off by 'a very scary woman.' ...What are you looking at me like that for? I'm quoting here.

[GRIAN]

We're not a donation box!

[MUMBO]

Tell that to the very scary woman, I guess.

[GRIAN]

(Groans) Fine, give it here. I'll listen to it later.

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Supplemental:

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[GRIAN]

Of course it was Joe Hills. Of *course* it was Joe Hills. If you ever see a mysteriously-appearing book, or game, or *tape apparently*, it's *always* gonna be Joe Hills.

Ugh.

The contents of the statement itself was... interesting, though, once Joe Hills stopped rambling and taking potshots at the Institute and started actually giving it. I couldn't verify any of the details, of course, mostly because he didn't *give* any details. However, Death personified is a common theme the world over, which I find lends the account some credibility - credibility tempered by Joe Hills's definite knowledge of those stories, but. Credibility.

Not that I ever really thought he was lying. Joe Hills may willingly distribute cursed artefacts to the general public, but everything I've learned about him strikes me as the kind of guy who's almost *awkwardly* honest. He puts his *location* in the cursed books he distributes to the masses, for goodness sake! Even if it's apparently only his location "in his heart," whatever that means, that's not something anyone with the slightest shred of dishonesty in their heart would do.

Trust me on this one.

(*pause*)

You know, *I* at least wouldn't have eviscerated him if he came here. Much. Like, he's fascinating. A total nuisance, but *fascinating*. You wouldn't eviscerate a potential source of enrichment in the metaphorical enclosure, would you? Well, unless the enrichment was the act of evisceration, but-

I'm getting off track.

The point is. Don't tell the others, but I *really* want to meet him.

[Click]

End Notes

who's the man that conquers death?

this was a fun little interlude to write! not the scariest in the series by a mile, obviously, but i still had a lot of fun writing it. joe has a super distinct speaking style that's a HUGE pain to try and capture- i don't know if i did him justice, but i tried my best!

this is also the first statement that features a specific phenomenon slash creature from tma canon- specifically, the idea of multiple deaths who will challenge the dying to games where both outcomes are a lose. it fit too well with what i wanted to accomplish with this statement to not use it.

if you want to know a bit more about what cleo and joe are up to in this au, they first appeared in [The Statue Garden!](#)

Works inspired by this one

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