

TMIR Chapter 7: “Paul, I’m going to tell you the same thing my drag mother told me when I was first starting out. Helena, Vagina Muffman said, You can’t worry about fisting until it actually happens. You’ll live your life in fear and you’ll never unclench your anus.

[00:00:08] **Kirt:** do you think you're funny?

[00:00:11] **TJ:** Yes, I do. Do I think I'm stand-up comedian, ha ha, funny? No, because that would just be a disaster that we would never, ever want to witness. But if you give me a laptop and a, and a blank word doc, yes, I can write funny.

[00:00:28] **Kirt:** I would like to witness your standup comedy set.

-Intro Music

**Kirt:** Welcome to the Klunatics podcast, I’m Kirt Graves. There’s been a thread running through all my interviews for this podcast.... Laughter. And that’s also one of the things that readers appreciate most about TJ’s writing. From a hornless gay unicorn, to a were-pomeranian, to three elderly women in a vespa gang who are either sisters or in a polyamorous lesbian relationship, TJ has the ability to use humour in over-the-top and ridiculous ways. Have I mentioned the 6-inch-tall naked man with wings who wants to get gay fairy married? In this episode we’ll look into how TJ uses humour, often in ways that defy expectations. Whether he’s writing a high fantasy, a story with a darker emotional theme, or a book about a gay learning how to be a normal person to impress an asexual stoner hipster...

*HTBANP Chapter 8 [02:56:56]-[02:56:57] “Oh, my God.”*

**Kirt:** We asked Klunatics from around the world to tell us their favorite funny TJ Klune scenes, and we’ll be hearing from many of them throughout the episode, as well as the narrators who brought those scenes to life in the audiobooks.

**Chris: BOATK Chapter 9:** Hi, my name is Chris. I'm from Brazil, but I currently live in Miami, US. To me, the funniest scene from a TJ Klune book is the seagull disaster from Bear, Otter, and the Kid. This series were the first TJ books I ever read, and to me they sum up why he's such a brilliant author.

[00:00:18] In this scene Bear is trying to apologize to Otter, and with the help of the Kid, he plans the most romantic and amazing dinner at the beach. Which goes, well - I mean, he was wearing a tux - until the horrible mean seagulls attack the table to steal their food. Bad, bad, bad seagulls.

*BOATK Chapter 9 [07:25:03]- [07:25:39] “I turned and saw that a seagull had landed on the table and was picking through the food that I had so elegantly and delicately placed out. My eyes opened wide, and I squawked in anger and ran toward the stupid bird that was ruining everything. Otter was laughing behind me, and I planned to kill the bird and then kill him. I reached the table and clapped my hands together loudly, trying to frighten the seagull away. It hopped up and then landed back on the table. I waved my hands at it, puffing out my chest to make myself look bigger. It startled backward and knocked over glasses and two of the candles. The candles fell over onto the table and immediately lit the tablecloth on fire.”*

**Chris:** Of course, it all ends with the most adorable and awkward vegan poem of history.

[00:00:43] And to me, this shows how TJ can take a visceral and dramatic story and make it even better with the most hysterical and well-written humor. It's amazing. I love it.

**Eloise: HTBAMS Chapter 2&3:** Hello, my name is Eloise Prime and I live in Port Macquarie, Australia.

*TLSH Chapter 19: Eloise, Yoo-Hoo Eloise*

**Eloise:** It was difficult to narrow down what I think is TJ's funniest scene. In the end, I chose the scene from How to Be a Movie Star where Josey and Xander are in line to see what Josey believes to be a poetry slam. Instead, it is a reading from Q-Bert of his latest monster porn book involving Sasquatch.

[00:00:23] In this scene Josey highlights just how often he is high and Xander shows his grumpiness, which is also funny. The chaos of comedy includes reference to fanfic from their friend Casey's poster, Poppit post-apocalyptic book series, Josey yelling at a poster and about people not being able to read and jump on a trampoline at the same time, and Josey remembering the time at the Folsom street fair, we have a guy sitting on a dildo on an on an exercise bike in front of a Korean restaurant.

[00:00:53] It's best trip. Thanks guys. And sending lots of love to all you Klunatics out there.

**John: TMIR Chapter 10:** Hi, my name is John and I'm from Albuquerque, New Mexico. And to me, the funniest TJ scene was, uh, from the first TJ book I ever read, which was Tell Me it's Real. And the scene was Paul and Vince's first dinner date, where, um, they had the waiter constantly hitting on Vince and Paul getting more and more flustered.

[00:00:35] And then when the scene about the hippos, uh, started, I lost it. Um, so apparently Paul and Sandy had gone to the zoo. And Sandy wanted to get a picture of Paul. So Paul had to get up on the railing and, and was worried about falling in. And Sandy just brushed it off, tried to get the picture, and Paul fell into the pool and, uh, was struggling in the pool with the hippos, which are very dangerous.

*TMIR Chapter 10: "Pretty sure a hippo just shit in the water! I'd really like to get out of here now! Hello? Somebody?" Tour guide: "Sir, please stop kicking and flailing your hands! You are attracting the hippos to you! Take a deep breath and calm down!" Me: "You fucking calm down! If I get eaten, I swear to Christ I will sue your asses off!"*

**John:** [00:01:20] But he was more concerned about the hippo poo, and getting the water in his mouth. And all the while Sandy's filming it and freaking out until the zookeeper comes, who's wearing short shorts and Sandy starts to hit on him. The whole scene was just utterly ridiculous and made me laugh so hard. Uh. That it quickly cemented my love for TJ.

[00:01:52] And then when I heard Michael Lesley do the audio version of it there, it was just sheer perfection. So that's my favorite and what I think is the funniest TJ scene.

**Angelica: TLSH Chapter 25:** My name is Angelica. I'm from Canada. The funniest scene from a TJ Klune book is the famous "I am so Sam" love making scene from The Lightning Struck Heart. Uh, essentially the scene is the protagonist, Sam, who walks into Gary the unicorn, and Kevin the dragon having very loud sex in the forest. Yeah, that's not a sentence I'd ever thought I'd say.

*TLSH Chapter 25: "My safe word is Muriel. My word to give me a moment to breathe is fondue. My word to keep on going because everything is amazing is Sam" - "Make me respect you so hard Sam. I am Sam Sam Sam Sam. What is that? Is that your penis?"*

**Angelica:** [00:00:28] That scene is forever burned into my memory, and I honestly could not stop laughing. It is something that I will forever remember as a scene that made me put down the book and

leave for five minutes because I could not process what had just happened. And just like Sam, I was mentally scarred, but honestly, it was probably one of the funniest books I've ever read at the time.

[00:00:53] And I just. Oh, I adore it. Thank you TJ for that lovely scene.

**Kirt:** FYI My safe word is also Muriel and my phrase to keep going is “Mystical Moon Magic” ....

*TMIR Chapter 10: “Oh Saint Janet Jackson, Mrs Jackson if you're nasty.”*

**Kirt:** As you can see there are quite a few laughs to be had in TJ's books. There's even one particular story many readers may not know about. Here is author and host of the Big Gay Podcast, Jeff Adams, to tell you about it.

[00:01:20] **Jeff:** Ghouls Gym. It is a hysterical story about the zombie apocalypse coming to essentially this gym full of meatheads. And to give you a little sample, cause I don't know how many people are aware of this piece of TJ. I will read just briefly this bit. "So here I am, a fitness center supervisor in a uniform as tight as Jimmy Dean's sausage casing with five wet naked bodybuilders, trying to convince a six, sixth wet naked bodybuilder not to freak out and die before an ambulance can arrive and try to fit him in the damn vehicle.

**Kirt:** So where does it all come from?

[00:00:49] **TJ:** I have no real idea how to answer that question because I was like this as a kid, and it was not a funny household that I grew up in. It was actually quite toxic. And so I think that I used humor as an escape, and I always. When I was in seventh grade, we had, I had two teachers, Mrs. Betts and Mrs. Phifer, and they gave us this assignment where we had to take a memory we had and turn it and write a short story about it, turning it into fiction. It didn't have to be, it could be anything we wanted. It could be happy. It could be sad, it can be anything. But we just had to create a fictional story out of, um, one of our memories, I do not for the life of me, remember what I wrote about, but what I do remember is I turned in my story and they gave us other assignments as they started to read through the stories that we'd submitted. And I was of course, completely overreacting and totally nervous and freaking out. And I saw my New Kids on the Block folder getting closer and closer to the top and knew that they were going to start reading mine.

So when Mrs. Betts picked that up and started reading it I was like literally watching her out of the corner of my eye going, please stop. Please don't get mad. Please don't. This is kind of sock. Please don't give me an F or a bad grade. I didn't think she would, but of course I was overreacting. She started chuckling when she was reading the story and then she started laughing and then she pulled Mrs. Phifer over and they both started reading and they were, by the time they had finished, they were laughing so hard they had tears in their eyes and it was at that moment, and that has stuck with me all these years later. At that moment, I understood the power of the written word, that it could bring happiness to people, that it could bring joy, that it didn't always have to be sad or dour or serious literature that you could make people laugh with nothing but a sentence or two.

**Kirt:** It's interesting to see how a moment can have such a profound effect on how our sense of humour is formed.

[00:00:00] **Cassie:** Hi, it's Cassie and I'm back.

**Kirt:** Where does your sense of humor come from?

[00:00:11] **Cassie:** so I was thinking about this one and I went down this like little rabbit hole in my brain about like nature versus nurture and like where does this come from and how do you even like pick apart the string that is, of something that feels like so intrinsic to your personality? Like how do you even identify where your sense of humor comes from?

[00:00:31] Uh, and I basically ended up being like it comes from kind of everywhere cause I think it's part personality and it's part upbringing. Like I really think the family or the people you grew up around can severely hinder or stifle a good sense of humor or they can really kind of bring one out.

[00:00:04] **Susannah:** hi, I'm Susannah Frigo. I'm from Adelaide, South Australia.

[00:02:21] **Kirt:** So where does your sense of humor come from?

[00:02:28] **Susannah:** Basically, my dad is a real nerd, and so he'd been writing down things that my sister and I said when we were, like from when we started speaking and then in 2011 he put it all into a spreadsheet. And so I found that again and I was reading through it and I think maybe Susannah was just born this way because she was saying shit at four. I think I was hysterical. But yeah, I was just born this way.

[00:00:00] **Mona:** All right. So my name is Mona Wiley and I am from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

**Kirt:** What do you usually find funny I should have started with? Like what is your sense of humor?

[00:03:39] **Mona:** It's quippy. Quippy banter, sort of, you know, anybody that can be really quick to, uh, just. Make a joke. Um, not necessarily like a, um, an inappropriate joke, but those are great too. Uh, but if, cause I don't tend to be quick to humor, like, it takes me a second to say something that's funny, but, um, when other people can do it so quickly, that's what I'm drawn to. So like, um, the Gary and Sandy characters, those are perfect examples.

**Kirt:** So let's take a dive into the nature of TJ's humour.

*DOD Chapter 1: "This is fun. I'm having fun. Please save me."*

**Kirt:** A sense of humour can come from different places. Whether its nature or nurture, our sense of humour is wrapped around our lives. So what is it about TJ's sense of humour that draws so many people in?

[00:12:46] **Mona:** It's genuine. I, I've read a lot. I've listened to a lot of books and sometimes humor is forced, a lot of times humor is forced and it's there to move the story along. Um, but not with TJ's work. Um, the, the characters are real and they, the humor they have is real and it fits in real life situations. So. It also is really dynamic where it's sometimes as subtle as like Gordo's eyebrows of judgment or is as intense as, um, Nana getting real detailed about some of the sex acts she has been involved in. And it's amazing that these characters have these really intense, um, humorous situations.

[00:23:44] **Cassie:** So many thoughts. I have notes. Um, I think, so in general, I kind of combined a few of these questions are really combined, I think. Like the, the, what's unique about his humor, the different types of humor he uses and the way he uses it, I think are all kind of intrinsically linked.

[00:24:03] And it all plays into kind of that, what I was talking about, and I think his recipe seems to be, you know, you've got over the top characters, absurd situations, and you end up shaking them like a two

liter and like ripping the top off and seeing what happens or like, like dumping Mentos into a Coke, like whatever your preferred soda metaphor is.

[00:24:26] Like it's just this over the top explosion of hilarity. Like for characters, we have people like the we three key Queens, sorry, We Three Queens, Gary, Kevin, Tiggy, Paul, Vince. I mean like the list is really long, Sandy, like all these wild over the top characters.

[00:25:51] And then you just shove them into these wild situations, like the car door incident with, with Paul and Vince, or the way he chokes on the spinach and like spits it on his face. Like maybe one of those things might happen to one person in the course of their life. And it is just this continuous stream of like, and plus he has a dog in a wheelchair and the dog trips him and he falls down the hallway.

[00:26:14] And like, there's just so many aspects of that. And so I think he kind of takes these dialed up characters and dumps them in these pressure cookers of situations and just like sees what comes out

And so you end up with a sort of merry hysteria as a thread throughout some of these books. Like everyone's having a good time. And it's very funny. So, um, you know, you, you think about, as you read it, like this is ridiculous. This is so over the top.

[00:27:35] And yet he manages to keep it grounded enough in reality that. It still feels like this could happen.

Another strategy that he uses is, is just sort of a defiance of expectation or a subversion of expectation. And I think the Tales of Verania are probably the best example or cleanest example of this.

[00:28:04] Uh, because like I said before, they sit on that genre of high fantasy that has all this established expectation on it, and he's just gently, not even gently, he just sends that up the whole time. Lovingly. That would be the right word. He lovingly sends that up the entire series.

**Kirt:** That's such a great way of looking at it. The subversion of expectations. Taking a topic with an established expectation and creating something that's... well... completely unexpected.

**Chelsea: Wolfsong:** This is Chelsea in Seattle. And the funniest scene in a TJ book to me is in Wolfsong when, uh, Joe, Carter, and Kelly walk out of the woods after run, and, uh, Ox looks up with an armful of tomatoes and sees Joe and literally walks into the side of the Bennett house and everybody sees him and so he tries to act cool and play it off, and then he leans against the side of the building, but misses and falls down again.

*Wolfsong : Insert audio from scene.*

[00:00:31] And I can see the scene so vividly in my head, and it's a small moment, but it always makes me laugh and smile at, uh, Ox's flustering at seeing Joe as, uh, more than a kid for the first time.

**Jennifer: Chapter 14:** My name is Jennifer Thurman. I'm from Louisville, Kentucky. The funniest scene from a TJ Klune book is from How to Be a Normal Person. It's when Gus and Casey have returned to Gus' house after their date to the strawberry festival and the conversation turns to Gus' screenplay "Monkey Island Adventures".

[00:00:25] The whole conversation is completely hilarious to me, but when Casey asks Gus about the movie and Gus replies that he gave up on it because monkey based movies were on the decline and he couldn't even imagine the budget because there was this whole bridge chase scene with penguins? I

don't even know. That line pops up in my head sometimes randomly and I just crack up laughing because.

[00:00:57] It is the most hilarious thing in all of TJ's books.

*HTBANP:*

*[06:19:47]-[06:20:04]: "Monkey Island Adventures." "Whoa!" Casey exclaimed. Then, brow furrowing, he said, "I don't get it." "It was about this monkey," Gus admitted. "Who had adventures. On an island."*

*[06:20:54]-[06:21:55] "Why isn't this a movie?"*

*[06:21:34]-[06:21:45] "I gave up on it because monkey-based movies were on the decline and I couldn't even imagine the budget because there was this whole bridge chase thing with penguins... I don't even know."*

**David: Chapter 5:** Hi, I'm David and I'm calling from Pittsburgh. There comes a time in every gay man's life where he discovers that one song, then no matter what, it will get him moving. And Paul, finding his gay anthem is one of my favorite moments ever. Paul and Sandy are in the college library setting in discussing what else they could be doing.

[00:00:16] When Paul hears the heavenly notes of a song he's never heard before, begin to fill the room. Before he knows it, he's taken a sip from the devil's cup as he's filled with the Holy Spirit and begins to dance around the library. At one point, he dances with Helga, the married librarian. Helga is so enticed by Paul's too hot to handle gyrating skills that she proposes they have a passionate affair down at the pay by the hour motel.

[00:00:37] Sandy chimes in to explain this important life defining moment Paul is experiencing, so important the years and jager shots later, Paul performs a mating dance ritual onstage to that song in celebration of his love for Vince, forever proving that the love between a gay man and his pop queen is real and forever.

[00:00:54] And who is that pop queen? It's Britney bitch. And don't you know that she's toxic?

**Kirt:** If there's any other person besides TJ we can credit for bringing smiles to so many of our faces, it's Michael Lesley. Michael has narrated more of TJ's books than any other narrator, and it's not hard to understand why. He absolutely gets TJ's sense of humor, and he knows how to deliver it.

[00:28:17] **Michael:** I think that with TJ has an innate talent for, is distilling the time it takes to impress a moment, not in, it's like, uh, you know, the terse style of like, you know. It's not a simple joke. It's a well-constructed joke that has many, many parts, and sometimes it's not even like a joke joke. It's just detailing the levels of a scene.

[00:28:36] But the more detailed and ornate you make it, the more elaborate it is. So that when you finally get to the punchline, you feel like all of the detail that was packed into the description was the leading up to the joke, which in part it was, but it was also just filling in the entire scene and imagery. And sensation so that you can just be there more for it, for when it actually hits, you know?

[00:28:59] So it's like with Paul seeing Vince for the first time, there's so much that's packed into, um, that moment and all the things that are going on in the club and the sort of elusive nature of who Vince

is. And Paul's like, uh, mystery with like, not understanding why his attraction is like, you know, instantly, like a.

[00:29:19] Hit him like a Mack truck, and it takes like eight pages to really describe all of that information. And then it's just like, boom. And you know, Paul does some kind of like stumbly thing and fucks it up. Uh, you know, to the degree that Paul fucks it up, which isn't really fucking it up, it's only fucking it up for himself.

[00:29:37] And then it's just like, okay, well that was your joke. And that was the scene. And that was the delivery. Like you need a punchline at the end. So that's the joke, but it really was about like setting up the scene, the mise en scene

when it's really cool is when you're like, ~~I know this is going, and then it's not what you thought it was going to be and was just like,~~ Whoa, man.

[00:30:40] You just took me on a ride and then spit me out the other side.

[00:31:35] **Michael:** I guess like, you know, ~~I'm going to, um, the~~ Cheesy Dicks and Candlesticks. I feel like that song has never made sense to me, but like, uh. The scene that it comes out of is such a buildup. You know what? Here's the thing, here's the, here's the fucking thing.

[00:31:59] TJ is like the queen of edging,

**Kirt:** Well then, *Mystical Moon Magic* \*stage whisper\* That means keep going.

*TQAHJK Chapter 23: "Oh my word, Y'all need Jesus"*

**Michael:** you know. Like on social media, within his dramatic books. He's like leaving you with cliffhanger cliffhanger cliffhanger. And it's the same thing with a joke where it's like one thing after another. That's like building up anticipation, building up expectation, and you know, finally getting to some kind of delivery.

[00:32:23] And I just think that it's like, it's a matter of, I guess. Patience and structure, like you're just by adding in so many details that are somewhat arbitrary. I don't know if that's like fair to say that because it's not. It's like it's just detailed. The devil's in the details, whatever the fuck that means, and the devil is, I guess, really funny.

[00:32:45] So it's like he just does a really, really good job of packing the scene.

**Kirt:** Ali Fisher is TJ's editor at TOR, you know that really big publishing company.

**Ali:** So I'm Ali Fisher. I am a senior editor at Tor/Forge books slash Tor Teen

[00:00:12] **Kirt:** Before we get to the humorous stuff, just tell me like, what do you do? Like what's your job?

[00:00:19] **Ali:** Yeah, so of course, so I'm a, I'm an editor, which means that not only do I do sort of the obvious thing, which is edit books, uh, I also acquire books, which means that agents, like Deidre Knight

[00:00:32] submit manuscripts to me. I read them, I fall in love with them, I tell my team that we would be crazy not to work on that book.

[00:02:59] **Kirt:** So what was that experience like when you were sent something?

[00:03:03] You know, your very first TJ Klune, what was that?

[00:03:06] **Ali:** Oh my gosh. It was a magical transforming experience as it is for everyone.

**Kirt:** It's great to get that confirmation on what we've all known. TJ is magical.

*TLSH Chapter 1: ...sunshine, and rainbows, and good feeling...*

**Kirt:** How does Ali describe Tj's sense of humour?

[00:16:28] **Ali:** Funny. Next question.

**Ali:** No, no, no. I can talk about that. I'd love to talk about that. Um, so his sense of humor is, uh. I was going to say wonderful. I feel like I've said that a lot of times already, but there he has a lot of different, he has, um, a lot of different types of humor that he employs when he's when he's working.

**Ali:** [00:06:01] there's a moment early on, and this was, I remember. I remember I was on the subway, New York subway, when I was reading this part, and, um, there's one of the main character, Nick, uh, who is just like delightfully awkward and you know, just very like heart forward kind of character.

[00:06:25] And he has a mistaken, "are we about to kiss" moment. Uh, and then it's with somebody who's very important to him, and it plays out so disastrously that I laughed out loud in public and was just, there's nothing better. There's nothing better in my mind than embarrassing yourself in a public place. Like my body just couldn't keep it in, you know.

[00:06:55] **Kirt:** Is that rare for you?

[00:07:04] **Ali:** Yeah, definitely. And it's the type of thing that, so when I'm looking at acquisitions I use, I can use my body as a little bit of an alarm for good work. Like if, I gasp I realize, Oh, I've made a sound, I am clearly invested. Or if I laugh, it's like, Oh, I was so invested in this.

[00:07:23] And like this really brought me to a place of, you know, this brought me out on an emotional journey of some kind. So you sort of, if I can trust my, uh, bodily noises, then I can, you know, follow through on that and acquire based on those things. It's done, it's done me well so far.

[00:07:39] **Kirt:** I love that as a barometer for good writing, bodily noises.

[00:16:53] **Ali:** So like the moment that I was talking about earlier, sort of that, um, mistaken, are we about to kiss moment is sort of the signature TJ, like relatable awkwardness, right? The moment where you're like, I've misread something and there's like sort of this, it's sort of delightful to experience it in a safe place as the reader.

[00:17:12] Cause you're like, I've been there in real life and it's terrible and I empathize really hard with this guy right now. Um, so that's always delightful every time that that comes up.

[00:18:20] Um, and then he does slapstick on the page, which can be tough, but there's a moment in his upcoming book Under the Whispering Door where a character is like, okay, gathering confidence and courage and, you know, mustering his dignity to just walk into the next room and you get like a full paragraph of that and then he trips and it's just like, it's perfect. It's classic. It takes.

[00:18:42] You know, it's almost shocking to not have seen it coming, but it feels like this set up, and then just that one moment of dropping that character status is just delightful.

[00:18:54] **Kirt:** It sounds to me, like you're describing a lot of situations where the humor is found in just subverting the expectation.

**Kirt:** This is podcast producer Susannah talking about another way that TJ's characters use humour.

[00:20:36] **Susannah:** I wanted to touch on, um, the way he.

[00:20:44] His relationships like in TJ, in relationships in TJ's books you can tell when people love each other because they tease each other. And I think that's really for me, that is, it's like almost one of my love languages. If I'm teasing you about something or you do something stupid and I bring it up for the rest of your life, it's because I love you enough to pay attention to you and I love you enough to have a recording on my phone that's you saying "cool", like it's for me. That's, that's just the way I say, yeah, I really dig you and I think you're funny, and I like having you in my life. So I like that TJ does that as well because it's, it's like saying you can tease someone without it being like bullying. I think I used to struggle with that a lot is like I was teasing people and I was thinking, am I being mean?

[00:21:37] Am I. Because for some people, they don't get it. They don't get that. It's, it's like a loving teasing because I haven't grown up with that, I guess. And so it can be really like, like I want you to know that I'm saying this out of love. I'm not bullying you. I'm not saying it to be mean. And so like in the At First Sight series, Sandy.

[00:22:01] When Paul falls into an animal enclosure at the zoo, Sandy films it and then uploads it to the internet. And if someone was doing that maliciously, that would be horrible. But if a friend does it, it's sort of like, I think this is really funny because you, because I love you and it's hilarious and I want to share this with the world.

[00:22:31] **Kirt:** One time we were at the County fair, um, and we weren't near the pig pens, and this was early when Jon and I were dating each other. And Jon saw a pig right next to me lift its leg.

[00:22:45] And instead of telling me to move cause a pig was about to pee on me, he grabbed my friend Christie's phone cause she was recording and pointed it at the pig just in time for it to piss on my leg.

[00:23:01] **Susannah:** That's love. That's what that is.

[00:23:03] **Kirt:** I guess. So I have a real life example of that happening.

[00:23:07] I didn't fall into a pit, but afterwards I was like, why didn't you say something?

[00:23:14] He's like, I don't know. I just knew I had to get it on film. I was like, great.

[00:23:21] **Susannah:** I would have. You know, you go to the shops or something. I would be with Matt and I'd just start talking about something. I'd be my normal awkward self and after we left I'd be like, why didn't you stop me? And he's like, I don't know. I'm okay with it. Like I can see it happening. I could see the train crashing, but I love the train when it crashes and when it doesn't crash.

**Kirt:** My husband overheard that conversation with Susannah and said I made it sound too much like I was the victim when the real story was how amusing it was for him. So, there's a glimpse into my marriage for you.

*TLSH Chapter 15: "This is fascinating. **Mama said.** Please continue to waste my time."*

**Kirt:** Don't lie. I bring joy and wonderment to your life.

*TQAHJK Chapter 1: "Denial isn't just a river in South America," **Vince said seriously.** "What?" **Paul said.** "Vince, no. It's not in South America." "Oh. Brazil?" "That's still South America."*

**Kirt:** It is apparent that there are a lot of different aspects of TJ's writing that are humorous. But how does he use them? How does TJ use these different types of humour? Producer Angela has some thoughts.

**Angela:** [00:01:11] So he uses humor brilliantly in that he controls the pacing through humor. So in, in lots of different other mediums, you know, in film and in television and in music and really any, any story, right?

Cause that's it. That's, that's that key component of all of those. It's about story reaches this crescendo or reaches a height. And. If you, you can't stay, when you're experiencing this, you can't stay there continuously. We talk a lot in group about Wookie Cry Face or, um, or - more Klune speak - or about the angst, the angst of it all.

It's exhausting to stay at that, at that level of angst or emotion for too long, then it starts to feel heavy, but TJ manages it brilliantly and he does it over and over and over. Even in his lighthearted books. When you're dealing with real topics, emotional topics, you'll see this catch and release, and especially in the angstier books, say the Green Creek series, he'll bring you to a certain level and then he'll inject that humor to give you that little breath before he continues. And it's one of the ways, he does it in many ways, but it's one of the ways that he takes the reader where he wants them to go. It's used as a tool and it seems from the outside effortless, it seems natural.

It seems, it doesn't seem like any kind of machination. But when when you see it used masterfully over and over again, you can see that he's using this humor as this tool to get us through it, to bring us where he wants us to go.

**Kirt:** [00:03:42] Um, the description also talks about how he will use humor to disarm the reader, to make hard topics palatable and educate them.

**Angela:** [00:03:53] Yeah.

**Kirt:** [00:03:54] That's a tall order.

**Angela:** [00:03:55] It is.

**Kirt:** [00:03:56] That's a lot to do.

**Angela:** [00:03:58] It is.

There's a reason why I think that. When Klunatics are trying to introduce outsiders, quote unquote, people who are not yet Klunatics but will be soon.

**Kirt:** [00:04:11] Future Klunatics

**Angela:** [00:04:12] Future Klunatics, all of the world is future Klunatics. Why we consistently recommend one of two books, How to Be a Normal Person or The Lightning Struck Heart.

Those are the entry points. I have in the past one time recommended Wolfsong as the first book. But that is only because the person told me they love angst and I said, that this is where you go. But we, we offer these two entry points because we know that even if, for instance, this new reader is not prepared to deal with asexuality, even if they are not perhaps the kind of person that is going to embrace this high fantasy queer story, that once TJ gets them laughing, it's all over. He has them, he has them, and once he has them, once he has them laughing, once he has them invested through humor, now he can tell the story. Now he can teach them through the story. Again, going back to, now he can lead them where he wants to go emotionally and so by using humor to open up someone's heart and open up their mind, they're willing to take in more information than they would have been if you just slapped it down on the table in front of them and said, now we're going to deal with this.

I want you to see this. And through exploring, often in a humorous way through his characters, them learning new things. We learn it, and it's not didactic because we're laughing through all of it. It doesn't feel like a lesson.

[00:33:51] **Cassie:** I was talking about earlier about the way TJ tends to use humor in, in a capacity to kind of, to deliver, um, more serious messaging or more serious themes, things like that.

[00:34:15] I mean, it TJ's humor is kind of like one of those pill pockets for a pet. You like. Wrap a more serious theme or emotional message in this like delicious pouch of comedy and are he just like rams it down our gullets and like we just, before we know what's happening, it's just like, okay, wow so much went on there and it was hilarious.

[00:34:40] It's like a sledgehammer and just like a precision scalpel all at the same time. It's, it's really kind of wonderful. Uh, and I think that is kind of the beauty of humor in general, but specifically the beauty and the way that TJ uses his humor.

[00:34:59] Because I think humor in literature in general is about accessibility because not everyone wants to or is able, or is willing to read a heavy tome of a book about, you know, the philosophical or moral implications of bigotry on children. You know what I mean? Like,

[00:36:04] Like you have to trick people into thinking about this stuff sometimes, and humor is the way to do that. People are very willing to consume humor.

[00:36:40] Um, and it's, it's a little subversive in a way. It's like you came here for the laughs, but I also got you this message. And that's wonderful. Uh, and I, I think overall humor makes messages and themes that are difficult or scary or overwhelming to discuss more, um, accessible, more ingestible, uh, more bite sized, um, and easier to, to talk about and think about.

**Kirt:** And there you have it. The ability to make difficult topics and hard moments easier to digest is extremely important. While I sit here recording this audio, most of the world is in a lockdown, trying to slow the spread of COVID-19. People are frustrated and angry and lashing out, making enemies of their neighbors, their governments, waging war against facts and reason. It is so easy to get upset or offended and lose the ability to communicate our thoughts or information in a way that penetrates the emotions of a conversation. But like Cassie said, humour can make something that's overwhelming seem manageable. I believe people would be more open to talking about those tough topics if there were a bit

more humour. Jeff continues to talk about different types of humour and how TJ expertly uses these types of humour throughout the wide range of books he writes.

**Kirt:** [00:05:54] Do you, do you see like different types of humor in TJ's writing?

[00:05:58] **Jeff:** Oh, absolutely. I mean, I think Normal Person is a comedy, for example. A comedy with some great romance and a whole bunch of stuff in it, but I think of that book as funny. Um, whereas if you look at Green Creek, for example, that's not a comedy by any stretch, but there are certain elements that are funny.

[00:08:24] **Kirt:** Yeah. And it's, he sometimes he writes with all different kinds of strokes, cause I think what you're talking about is more just a general levity and sort of a sardonic wit that kind of pervades a lot of what he does. But he also writes like capital J jokes.

Jeff: [00:10:15] And it's funny, what TJ doesn't do is rely on the characters to be stereotypically funny. You know, he never does. Relying on the gay character to be the stereotypical, you know, slap stick next door neighbor who's, you know, just there to get the laugh and then go away.

[00:10:43] He does inject humor to lighten things, but he doesn't move in my view in that way. That would trend towards offensive. Uh, and I don't think he would do that. I'll speak for him. I don't think he would do that. And I've never seen it in the work. And that's one of the things I like so much is the, the humor is organic and the levity is organic.

[00:11:03] It's not forced.

[00:11:05] It's, it's right for what he's doing.

[00:13:21] **Jeff:** There's, there's levity cause you need to break the tension. But I think that's different than being funny.

[00:14:00] I think my levity comes from more of a quips made kind of thing. You know, just in normal conversation. And it's different. Like I don't write banter like I think TJ writes banter and a lot of cases, cause he does get banter. I mean, especially in Green Creek, there's a lot of information that's in dialogue. And I mean, it's not all funny banter, but it's.

[00:14:29] Some of it you could view as almost walk and talk if we were talking like West Wing, because they put a lot of information out in those scenes and there are scenes where there's a lot of information going and dialogue. But then there's the characters who just view things differently, like Rico, again, who bring a levity overall.

[00:15:17] **Kirt:** And you're not only a writer, but you're somebody who talks to a lot of writers and you're someone who examines writing, and you're also somebody who examines the marketing of writing. Let's talk about that. Like that's gotta be a boon right. To write a funny book that's got to draw people in, especially in gay literature.

[00:15:39] **Jeff:** I think it does. I think it's a way to bring people in who may not know that that's what they want to read.

I think TJ draws so many people in. Because he writes so many different kinds of books.

[00:17:45] So he, I think, gathers up folks and introduces them to the genre because there's so many different flavors of TJ out there to get. Uh, and I think humor can just draw overall as can, you know, some lighter fare.

[00:24:05] **Jeff:** It kinda comes down to the organic-ness of the story itself and what it's trying to do. Like I like the humor. Where you kind of, it points to the kind of person the character is, are they snarky?

[00:24:28] Are they heartfelt? You know, heart of gold? Who's going to use their humor for good? Or, you know, do they quip when they're nervous and it becomes funny what they're doing to lighten their own load, which then lightens the reader's load. Like I love seeing that in romantic suspense books where, you know, they get nervous and they're like in that tense moment and there is some little quip or whatever that fires off, that lowers the tension for character and reader.

[00:24:59] Uh, there's so many ways to use it and it's such a good mechanism

**Kirt:** Even in TJ's darker, angstier books, he uses humour to help you through that angst. Humor helps to smooth down the edges of the sadness, but it doesn't undermine the emotions that TJ has established, either.

**Deidre:** Hey guys, I'm Deidre Knight, President of The Knight Agency.

**Kirt:** I recently got to speak to TJ's agent about his ability to balance humor and heart.

**Deidre:** But I was thinking about it earlier. I think part of what makes his humor so powerful is the very fact that it happens in the midst of such deep emotion for you. So you're, you're riding along and you're feeling this engagement in this huge, your heart is just being filled up, pulled apart, whatever, whatever stage you're at with TJ in the book that then the humor is such a relief valve that I think it's why it makes it so much more rewarding that you're just like, Oh my God.

**Kirt:** Mona shares another example of TJ using humor and heart in the same scene.

[00:26:41] **Mona:** Yeah. Right. That that series is also fantastically phenomenal. Then the scene in Ravensong, where Team Human takes Gordo to the bar because they're gonna find him a new man and they start listing off all of the characteristics of, um, the man Gordo is going to end up with and they're all Mark's characteristics.

[00:27:10] That's an intense book and just the Gordo/Mark relationship is also intense, but I found myself laughing hysterically at that scene.

[00:15:47] **Kirt:** I'm always so impressed with how he uses humor differently, uh, based on, on the situation and the book and the mood and, yeah. He, he tells outright jokes. He uses wordplay. There's puns. There's raunch. There is absurdity. There is situational humor. There's just funny dialogue. Um, yeah. He's, he is quite funny.

[00:16:14] I guess. I'm being forced to reckon with the fact that, I guess he's very funny.

[00:16:19] **Mona:** Yeah. Right.

*TQAHJK Chapter 1: "Right!!" (Sandy)*

[00:16:20] **Kirt:** Even though I am drawn to his angstier, sadder stuff, but there's humor. There's humor there too.

[00:16:27] **Mona:** Exactly. Yeah. You wouldn't think like the Green Creek series should be funny and have funny moments, but damn, there are funny moments in that I found myself crying and laughing all at the same time.

[00:16:42] How does he do that?

**Kirt:** [00:04:46] In talking to a lot of people about like how you use humor, the discussion has been like how much of your use of humor is sort of just innate that it just kinda comes out and how much of it is maybe more intentional that you like will intentionally use humor to teach a lesson or in the moments when things are getting kind of dark and heavy in a book, you'll insert a joke.

**TJ:** I can't really think of a time aside from Heartsong, that I ever was told or ever thought that this needs to be funnier, my editor in Heartsong.

Came back and said, this book is really, really dark. It doesn't have some of the same humor that the first two books had, and ultimately they were right. I bristled a little, I'll admit I bristled a little bit about that at first, and then I got over myself rather quickly because obviously if I'm being told this by somebody who's editing me and has been editing me for a while, then they're probably right.

So I can, I think that Heartsong was the only time that I've ever consciously gone back and added humor to a book. If there are scenes where a joke happens in a serious situation, it's because I either consciously or unconsciously knew that to, sometimes you need some levity to avoid making things way too dark.

And, um, okay. Yeah. I, I, for the most part, I would say 99.9% of the time, I am just going with the flow. When I'm writing, I'm not necessarily thinking, Oh, this needs to be, uh, made funnier. This needs to be better. Um. But, you know, again, there's going to be times like with Heartsong where I have to go back and actually do it because they were right.

It was too dark and sad and bleak.

**Kirt:** Susannah is definitely one who enjoys dark humour.

[00:09:59] **Kirt:** Yeah. Yeah. Well, are there any times where you've read TJ, his book to help you get out of a tough time?

[00:10:08] **Susannah:** When I was 15 I had cancer and I would joke about it at the time.

*HTBANP Chapter 2: [00:27:40]-[00:27:50] "I'm glad you're alive today. That's debatable. Gus Said . Every moment we live is another moment we're already dying"*

[00:10:27] I remember going into school after I'd lost all my hair and I had a teacher who was bald and I ripped off my beanie and said, look, Mr Uren were the same, and it was like he didn't know what to do. My classmates were just sitting there like, what the fuck is this? So I've always used humor to just to just be like, you know, this is a really shit thing that's going on, but I don't know.

[00:10:53] It's, it's not that big a deal.

[00:10:55] **Kirt:** But it is a big deal.

[00:10:57] **Susannah:** It is a big deal, but it's also like, I don't want it to be this huge gravity, this huge weight on my life. It's, it's a bad thing that I have to endure, I have to get through, but it can be funny. You can find light in dark moments. You can find humor in any situation.

[00:11:26] **Kirt:** When you were going through that, did you feel like it was your responsibility to make the people around you feel better? Like, cause you.

[00:11:38] **Susannah:** That's part of it is, you know, they don't know what to say. So you have to give them something to work with almost.

[00:11:45] You have to let them know it's okay and everything is okay. And you can talk to me like I'm not, you don't have to treat me with kid gloves right now because I can laugh about it. So there's that. I think it's also me being just inherently awkward is I will joke about things because I feel so uncomfortable.

[00:12:06] and now with my husband, my husband passed away ~~two years~~, two years ago, a year and a half. I don't even know. I've lost track, but I will make jokes about that. And he and I met because he had cancer. So we both had cancer. And then we met both had cancer at teenagers as teenagers.

[00:12:30] And then we met and we were together for eight years, and we would joke all the time about whose cancer was worse. Just make everybody else at the dinner party feel so uncomfortable because we would just be going back and forth saying like, Oh, no, but I had to have a bone removed. Oh yeah, but mine was leukemia.

[00:12:47] It was all through my blood. And then when he got leukemia the second time and he got his terminal diagnosis, it was just the two of us in the room. And he goes, I think I win now.

*TLSH Chapter Epilogue: "I am never going to win an argument because of that. Never"*

And it's like, okay. No, that's it's, it's funny to me. I think it's fucking hilarious, but I can understand how you would be sitting there and thinking, Holy shit, that's dark.

[00:13:10] **Kirt:** It is. But I appreciate it.

[00:13:13] **Susannah:** So it's, yeah, I don't know.

[00:13:15] **Kirt:** I thankfully have not been tested in that way, but I'd like to think that if I found myself in that situation, I'd crack a joke too.

[00:15:11] **Kirt:** Were there ever times when you used humor in a situation that afterwards you went, I wish I would've just let it go, or, or I wish I would've just been straight forward?

[00:15:23] **Susannah:** Um, yeah, probably. There are a lot of times when I, and I think it's particularly when I joke about depression and things like that. That can be a bit like, I'll, I'll make a joke, but there's a lot of truth to it. And my friends will pick up on that and then it will all of a sudden turn into them, sort of like, addressing the issue.

[00:15:52] And that can be uncomfortable, I guess. Um, I don't know that I've ever like laughed at a funeral or anything like that. I mean, I made jokes about Matt in his eulogy. So it's, I think I, I would hope that I'm pretty good at judging the time and place of things.

Kirt: [00:17:43] Yeah. And it's different for everybody. Um, and it's both a tool that can help you, but also sometimes I do, I do wonder if we don't, sometimes you use humor too to distance ourselves from people.

[00:17:58] **Susannah:** Yeah. Um, okay. A, but I also think it's a way of like talking about something without talking about it. It sort of, it can be comforting in that way.

[00:18:08] Like, I know what's going on. I get it. But we don't have to talk about it. Um, so like last night for example, I was watching a TV show with my sister and it was on a serious show, and I said like, Oh, those, that couple may have a really bad relationship. And she said, well, this is, I know people in glass houses.

[00:18:30] And I'm like, Oh my God. So my husband's dead. And that's a bad relationship. Like it was funny. It was funny. She's my sister. She wasn't trying to wound me.

*TQAHJK Chapter 1: "Oh my god. **Corey laughed.** This is so amazing. I love everything about this. Please continue"*

[00:18:44] It's like it's bad things happen. You can't just not talk about them. So I think maybe in my family you deal with it, but then you get to a point where you, you just joke about it because it is a real thing that's happened but it's a part of you now.

[00:19:05] **Kirt:** And it does open the door for some more serious topics from time to time. Yeah. I think TJ does that in his writing.

[00:19:14] **Susannah:** Yeah.

[00:19:15] **Kirt:** I think that's the value of what he does in his, in using humor is, he often uses it as the gateway to something more serious or more substantial and maybe not even serious, but something important.

[00:19:26] **Susannah:** Yeah. Or he uses it to take the seriousness out of a situation or, or just like add a little bit of light to something that's going on so that you know that you don't get bogged down in it, I suppose. It's not just all doom and gloom. There's a little, like someone making a comment here and someone making a comment there, and there's this awkward interaction here.

[00:19:51] So it's like you can take a breath and that's what real life is like.

**Kirt:** We talked in episode five about queer literature and what it meant for several of the Klunatics to see their real lives reflected in queer books. But is there enough humor in queer literature? I asked Michael Lesley.

[00:41:41] **Michael:** I would say that like, I would like more fun gay books. I feel like that's something that TJ has really tried to push for.

[00:41:48] Like, he, there's this epidemic in, in queer literature of, um, the people dying or the great tragedy befalling these like, you know, innocent, um, protagonists. And it's just like, well, you can do

happily ever after. And like, I think that the easiest, happily ever after is comedy. I mean, like, it's literally, the definition of comedy is that everyone wins.

[00:42:14] And it's like, it's just. I think it's harder for maybe, maybe it's harder for authors to wrap their heads around, like not having the climactic action being a death, because that carries such like grave, um, gravity or whatever. I don't know. But like you can, if you do it right, then it's just like all that you're trying to do is create something that's really enjoyable and it's like.

[00:42:42] Sometimes that climax can just be an absurdity happens.

[00:11:10] **Michael:** There's definitely something to that, I think. Um yeah, I feel like.

[00:11:22] Yeah, in regards to being queer, in regards to just being maybe like different or seen different. I feel like, I mean one of the things that queer people end up doing a lot that I feel like TJ is good at reclaiming, which is a, the projection that needs to happen with like hetero, for instance, romance.

[00:11:47] Mostly romance is, I guess what I'm talking about, where it's like, queer kids will have to project the, uh, I mean, if they're gay, then I guess like, like if it's a hetero couple, then they'll see the woman as a man in order to make the romance succinct within their identity. And I mean, if you're raised doing all that projection, then, um, I think that it's easy to see like how the fabric of what we see as like reality is bendable or complete bullshit.

[00:44:07] Like. Things happening one after the other, and I don't in, in, in the way that we started this too, talking about like being queer and subverting culture for the sake of like not recognizing it's a hegemony or whatever. Uh, yeah. You like. That would be cool. It would be cool to have like queer characters just trying to be like patriotic towards like, I don't know, a Norman Rockwell existence and, um, subverting it by, uh, allowing the hypocrisy to like, show through.

*HTBANP Chapter 12: [05:07:55]-[05:07:58] "Oh My God. Who the fuck wrote all of this"*

**Kirt:** He makes a good point though.

[00:11:47] **Kirt:** Do you, well, I guess I'll ask a more open ended question. Like. When it comes to humor in books. You, before we started recording, you said you love talking about humor and literature, so why?

[00:12:03] **Ali:** Like what do I like about, yeah. Yeah, so I think. One of the things that I love about, one of the things I love about humor, other than just the chemical hit, that's just great. Right? Cause like when you're laughing, I don't know, something goes on up there. Is it dopamine? I'm not a scientist. Wonderful. Um, this is happening in your brain and that's always great.

[00:12:25] Um, but also like, you know, you have your mouth open. It's sort of like eating a meal with somebody. It's very vulnerable. Um, it opens people up. When you're laughing and when you're like relaxed and whatever those chemicals are going, it opens people up to like thinking about and sort of considering issues from potentially a new angle.

[00:12:46] Um, so I think it sort of does this amazing thing where it magically transforms an issue from a stressful experience to a pleasurable experience, which is almost, I mean, that seems really wild to me. Um, but yeah. That's what I think is maybe the coolest thing about it.

**Kirt:** I also asked Ali about the importance of humor in queer literature.

[00:29:43] ~~Um, but I just,~~ one of the things that I think is maybe related to that is for a really long time, queer literature was sort of categorized by a lot of folks as like issue literature, right? There was like a lot of stories about coming out and, you know, a lot of times it was sort of tortured. Um, and. I think humor in queer literature is important just because a lot of queer readers deserve a fucking break.

[00:11:01] **Kirt:** Were you at all, I guess, concerned or excited about or neutral about the queer content?

[00:11:09] **Ali:** Oh, uh, excited about, I mean, I would say publishing in general can always, always has room for improving, like the number of marginalized characters or underrepresented characters.

[00:11:22] And I think. Finally, there's much more, many more queer characters, especially in, I work with TJ and both YA, young adults, and also adult books. And I think in way we're seeing, seeing a much, a really nice resurgence, or really nice, um, growth of sort of queer characters. Um, but yeah, I mean, it, it was wonderful.

**Kirt:** Humour. It can mean many things to many people. It's used in different ways, a joke, witty banter, to soften a topic, but no matter how it's used, the most important part is how you respond to it. A smile. Laughter. The humour he uses, as you can see, has made a difference. People turn to these books when they need a smile. What more could you want.

[00:16:31] **Jeff:** And especially in the times that we're living in now, where there's just so much angst in the world, you need to go off and have that good, genuine laugh at things.

[00:03:37] **TJ:** making people laugh is the best feeling. It is absolutely the best feeling in the world because it shows that that not only do they get your weird sense of humor, but that and that there's probably something wrong with them because of that, but that they also got a moment where they didn't have to worry.

They didn't have to be sad. They didn't have to be upset. They didn't have to be tired. They didn't have to. Flip off the news because there are too, the everything sucks and they can just have a moment where they get to be happy. And even if it's a, it only lasts a little bit. I hope that that would stick with them more than all the bad stuff.