

Episode 1 Script

How to be a Klunatic

Kirt: [00:00:01] So when did you first learn about TJ and his books?

Mia: [00:00:21] I had to actually go back and look into my goodreads account to figure out when I actually first started reading TJ, uh, it was back in August of 2014 and I was introduced to his books by one of the many MM Rec groups in Facebook.

I'd seen the cover for Bear, Otter & the Kid around, and it took a long time for me to go, "yeah, okay. It's possibly worth reading" because the cover for me was, being a very early Dreamspinner cover, was not the most appealing in the world, but then I started reading and instantly fell in love with these characters and TJ's style of writing.

Kirt: [00:00:57] Did the title put you off at all?

Mia: [00:01:00] No, it was actually the cover, like I don't...Bear, Otter & the Kid, I was like, "Oh, okay, so this is going to be some sort of weird sexual fantasy" because Bear, Otter & the Kid, what the fuck's going on? So it was actually quite a pleasant surprise to go, ah, it's not something super kinky.

And actually this is really sweet and endearing and Oh my God, there's so much angst and what the fuck is going on with these characters? And it was. It was such a delight actually, um, to read something that had so much heart.

So it was, it was nice.

Theme music

Kirt: **Welcome to The Klunatics Podcast. I'm Kirt Graves. I'm an audiobook narrator and podcast producer, and I will be your guide as we explore the wonderful, funny, angsty, heartfelt and, sometimes, downright weird world created by this guy.**

TJ: While my morals are not above me showing my penis on the internet. I'm nowhere near intoxicated enough for that to happen.

Kirt: **That's the author TJ Klune, and that clip was from a YouTube video from 2012, which is proof that nothing on the internet ever goes away. If it hasn't already been made clear, this podcast will explore some topics and use language that some parents may not want their kids to hear, so proceed with caution.**

So how did I end up hosting a podcast about TJ Klune?

Insert audition audio

I was introduced to TJ Klune's work in 2016 when he picked me to narrate his novel, *Wolfsong*. What you're hearing is my actual audition for that book, as cringeworthy as it is to listen to now, recorded in my basement in Sheboygan, WI, at a time when I was desperate to make a change in my life. And TJ came to the rescue. That book not only launched my career, it also introduced me to TJ's fans, aka The Klunatics. I've never experienced a fandom like the Klunatics before, but I immediately knew that it was something special. And I wanted to find a way to talk to more people from within that world and celebrate the friendships, the artwork, and the international travel that has happened all as a result of this one author. So I recruited some help. For the last few months, I've been working with a dedicated group of Klunatics to curate a batch of episodes that will dive into TJ's work and celebrate the people who love reading TJ's books. I've been talking with lots of them, and I have a lot more to talk to as this series unfolds, week by week.

And the timing of this podcast is no accident. The first episode of this podcast will launch the day before TJ releases his latest novel, *The House in the Cerulean Sea*, his first book to be published by Tor, a Macmillan imprint. In other words, he's a big fucking deal now. So if you're a new fan of TJ's work, we hope this podcast will help you dive into the world of the Klunatics. We hope it's a guide to reading his previously published novels and short stories. We want you to get to know the people who help TJ write these stories featuring incredibly diverse characters and fantastical places. Because to us, TJ, has always been a big deal. And we couldn't be more excited to welcome you into the fold.

So how did the Klunatics get started? For that, I have to introduce you to some ladies from down under (*bad Australian accent included*)!

Mia: [00:00:05] Sure. Hi, I'm Mia Sciberras from New Zealand. I live in Melbourne, Australia, and, um, I'm one of the admins of TJ Klune's Klunatics Facebook group.

Kirt: We heard Mia's voice at the beginning of this episode as well. The story varies a bit from person to person as they tell us the origin story of the Klunatics Facebook group. But from what I gather, it all started with Mia.

Mia: [00:02:28] So the Klunatics group came out of a conversation with Sita, Elaine, Lisa and I. And to give a little bit of, um, context to our history with the four of us, we met through another author, so

Penny Reid's Sharks of Awesome group. And so what happened was, um, Elaine and I were matched up for a Festivus. Um.

Sort of gift exchange thing. And we did that. We did that the first year and became friends.

Mia: And then I happened to go up to Perth, which is in Western Australia for a holiday the following year. And I had just recently read How to Be a Normal Person.

Kirt: **How to be a Normal Person is a novel that TJ published in 2015 through Dreamspinner Press. Let's get this out of the way early: The publisher, Dreamspinner Press, will be mentioned from time to time as they played a role in TJ's early career, but due to some ongoing financial and legal troubles, we won't be featuring anyone from that company nor will we be discussing any of those issues directly. Now back to Mia:**

Mia: And I, um, we sat down and had coffee and I was just waxing lyrical about Gus and how much I love this book.

And so she went and read it.

Elaine: [00:00:04] Hi, I'm Elaine and I live in Australia.

Kirt: **Elaine picks up where Mia left off.**

Elaine: [00:00:12] Um, I first learned about TJ's books, um, a few years ago, Mia was visiting my town and we decided to catch up over lunch. At this point we'd been friends for a few months, and, we were talking, and then she told me about this book that I just had to read.

She was so insistent, she, she made me promise that as soon as I got home, I would download the book. And I was like, wow, okay, sure. She was like, no, no, no, no, no. You have to promise. So I promised, and that book was How to Be a Normal Person and it changed my life.

Kirt: **You'll hear this a lot from TJ's fans. That his work changed their lives. Hell, you'll hear it from me. And you may think it's an exaggeration, but Elaine's friend Sita, another Klunatics admin, confirms that there was something special about this book in Elaine's life.**

Sita: [00:00:00] Uh, hi, I'm Sita and I'm in Wellington, New Zealand, and yeah, that's my New Zealand accent you can hear.

Sita: [00:00:15] I first learned about TJ and his work from Elaine. If you're, like, her friend on Facebook, you can tell she's enjoying a book when she starts quoting it in her status updates.

So she quoted a couple of his, um, lines from How to Be a Normal Person .

Elaine: [00:01:16] It's just that after reading it, I could not shut up about it. So I was, you know, telling all my friends about it. I was quoting it extensively and annoyingly probably, but, you know, people are very nice about that.

And it got to the point where some of my friends said, you know what? Actually, we'll read this book.

Sita: So I one-clicked the book and then I read it on Christmas Eve in 2016.

Elaine: And so Sita was one of those people who said that, you know, she'd read the book and she did, and the thing about, I guess the magic of TJ's words is that when you read his books, you are very likely to fall in love with them.

Kirt: **Meanwhile, Mia had brought another friend into the fold.**

Mia: So Lisa and I had met independently of, um, Elaine and I through a meet up here in Melbourne, and then I introduced her to the book. And so the four of us became really good friends as a result of sort of actually getting together at a book signing event in Sydney to meet, um, Penny, uh, the author.

And. We started talking TJ. Well, by we, I mean, I started really talking TJ and talking about some of the other books and they started reading. And then the following year, we all got together in here in Melbourne. And Sita, I think it was Sita who raised the question was going, well, why doesn't this TJ have a Facebook group?

Kirt: **Here's Lisa:**

Lisa: [00:00:20] ...we were discussing how TJ didn't have a reader group, didn't have, uh, a fan group or anything on Facebook. And Sita said, we should, we should start one.

Sita: And, um, we were already friends from other reader groups and I was like, where's the TJ Klune one?

TJ: [00:00:24] ...from what I understand, it was Sita's choice, Sita's decision to do this and put this together.

Kirt: **This is the man himself, TJ Klune, recollecting how the Facebook group got started. And this time, it's audio from actual interviews he did for this podcast, not from a YouTube video that he will certainly be mad that I found and brought back into the public consciousness.**

So everyone agrees that it was Sita's initial idea to start a Facebook group for TJ Klune fans. So obviously, she would be the one to reach out to TJ and ask permission, right?

Lisa: And then everyone said, well, you should ask if we can start one. And there was no way Sita was going to do that.

Mia: Sita and Elaine and Lisa were very reticent to contact an author about getting permission for something. And I'm like, Oh, fuck that guys, just, you know, just go, Hey dude, we're going to do a Facebook group if you don't like it, too bad. We love you, et cetera, et cetera.

Lisa: So, um, I don't know why I did, but I messaged TJ and asked, and he said, sure, that's great. Can I join?

TJ: But, um, I remember, I think I got like, when I still used Facebook messenger, I think one of them reached out to me and said, Hey, we want to start a group of people to worship you.

And I said, okay, that's totally cool. Do you want to, that's totally fine with me. Just as long as I don't. I don't really have to do anything. I know it's fine because I'd been thinking about that for a while, having like a specific group just for my books, because, um, I wanted to do something with my website to have like message boards or something like that.

But that turned out to be so much work. So I said, how can I make this easier on me? And then they came to me and said, Hey, we could just start a Facebook group. And I said, sure, why not? Let's see how that goes. And. Now all of a sudden there's like nearly 3000 people in this Facebook group and it's growing more and more and more.

Kirt: **Like TJ said, the group has grown a lot since it's inception a few years ago. Mia and Sita both shared their perspective on that.**

Mia: [00:04:55] We had a thousand members within I think, 8 or 9 months, which for us was quite incredible. And we're now closer to 3000 so the group's two and a half years old.

Sita: [00:05:59] When we first started it was pretty slow going. I think that's like most Facebook groups, and then I think TJ posted about it a couple of times on his blog and, maybe on Twitter, and then, um, I'd wake up and they'd be like a hundred people wanting to be accepted into the group. I'm like, what the hell. And I'm like, could he tell us before he does this?

Kirt: **And what about the name? For some people, this may be the first time they're hearing the word, "Klunatics," said out loud. As in "Klune" plus "lunatics" equals the Klunatics. Elaine clears that up for us.**

Elaine: I learned from the internet that TJ had used that term before, but we didn't know it at the time. And so what happened was that back in the days before we made the Facebook group to sort of ooh and ah about it, Sita, Mia and I had a sort of WhatsApp chat, and I think I might have named that chat Klunatics so when the Facebook group was made it just makes sense to call it the same thing that we've been calling ourselves.

Kirt: **As the group continued to grow, sure, there were some growing pains.**

Mia: [00:11:38] I'll be honest, Sita, Elaine, and I, you know, we've got our own little Facebook messenger group, which obviously we use to communicate with each other around the administration stuff. And

literally some days we're just hitting our heads against brick walls going, what the fuck is going on today?

Kirt: **But for the most part, the admins tell me that managing the group is more of a joy than a chore. And that's due in part to some of the rules that were established early on among the Klunatics. Here's Lisa and then Elaine discussing those rules:**

Lisa: [00:04:48] And, um, you know, a few, maybe 12 months ago, the standards sort of changed for Facebook, but we'd already, sort of, had no nudity, and, you know, we're pretty conservative in that respect and no politics and no religion, so I think, um, people just got the gist and went with it.

Elaine: [00:09:52] So when we first started the group, like, we decided early on that we all wanted this to be quite a safe place for everybody in the group. And that meant like, you know, readers, but also authors who might be in the group and, like any other kind of book professionals who might be in the group.

It just had to be a safe place for everyone. So our non-negotiable rules were like, that you had to be nice to each other, basically, you know, no political discussions whatsoever because that just always goes south really quickly. And also no bashing of any sorts. So no religion bashing, no phobic anything.

No people bashing, no author bashing. If you don't like a book, you can not like the book, but this is not the place to discuss why you didn't like a book, that sort of thing. So it was basically, let's keep this a positive space.

Kirt: **But that doesn't mean that they don't have any complaints. Here's an exchange I had with Sita:**

Kirt: [00:06:35] Um, is there anything that annoys you about managing the Facebook group.

Sita: [00:06:43] Not specif-. Oh, you know what's really annoying is I have to share my birthday with TJ Klune, but yeah. Apart from that, no.

Kirt: [00:06:53] Can you imagine a better person I have to share the birthday with though?

Sita: [00:06:57] Well, the thing is we're a day apart, but because of the time is difference it's the same time. So, in the Klunatics it's like.

Yay. Happy Birthday TJ, your books changed my life, colors are brighter and sounds are better and whatever, and like, Oh, yeah, you too Sita. Whatever.

So yeah, give my birthday back. That would be great. He can have like February 29th you know, once every four years or something.

Kirt: **The admins work hard to make sure that the Facebook group, and by extension, all Klunatics-related communication, is a safe place for all fans to meet. But they never**

could have anticipated how building this community had the capacity to create a positive impact.

Mia: [00:14:13] Oh, well, we just thought it would be a place for people to come and talk about how much they enjoy TJs work. We really thought it would just be like, you know, one of those fan clubs where people come in, they go, yep, just read this book. This book is great, and what do you think about this book or this character? And that would be it. But what it's really become is one big found family.

Elaine: [00:11:13] I think the biggest surprise is really how well it's all worked out and just how supportive all the members are of the TJ and each other. So, you know, we hear a lot nowadays that studies show how social media can contribute significantly to things like loneliness and bullying and depression. But we're, we've been really fortunate in the Klunatics group that there's actually a real sense of community that seems to be happening. So people have really opened up to each other. You know, when they go through a tough time they're, they feel safe enough in the group to share it with each other. And we've had members organize meetups in person and, you know, then they go on to become real-life friends.

And when group members are going through tough times, like illness, they're able to share it in the group and you know, you've really, we've really seen the Klunatics rally around them.

Kirt: **One of the other Klunatics, Angela, is also a producer on this podcast. And when she came to visit me, we talked about this phenomenon.**

Angela: I didn't understand online interaction. ~~I'm not going to say I didn't understand it.~~ I didn't understand how profound it could feel until the Klunatics. I used to tease my husband, he does online gaming and so he games with other, you know, does video games with other people.

And I used to lovingly tease him and say, okay, go, go play with your pretend people. And, and we'd laugh about it. But I was downplaying these connections and I, afterwards, I had to go back to him and say, I apologize. I really do. I didn't understand. Because he does care about these people. If they're sick, he knows about it.

If something happens in their life, he knows about it. So-and-so can't be here because X, Y, Z, and, and I, I thought that online interaction was superficial because it was online. And not only have I found that that's not the case, but also as a parent, seeing how my children and the younger generations interact.

I think they get a lot of flack for not seeing each other face to face, not, Oh, it's not real. But I've seen kids support kids halfway around the world and be there for them and say really loving, uplifting things and hold their hand. And that's. That is real interaction. That is communication. We just have to look at it in a new way.

Kirt: **And that positive impact hasn't just been emotional. It's been tangible, as Klunatics have proven themselves to be incredibly generous.**

Mia: You know, we, we've done fundraisers, you know, a few years ago, we raised over \$5,000 for the Trevor project, which is probably one of my proudest achievements within the group.

Kirt: **Maybe too generous, according to TJ.**

TJ: [00:06:01] yeah, we donated like five grand a couple of years ago to the Trevor Project, which was just mind-blowing. And I, I had, I had said that I would, I would match whatever the total donation was and then it kept going up and up and up. But I said, okay, well let's take a step back here and talk about how much money I actually have.

It's absolutely nuts that that. People are, are so giving and generous. So that's something that I think that we don't think about so much these days. Is that, for the most part, people are kind and giving and generous and all we, but all we hear about these days is just all the bad stuff. And so it's good to have every now and then to have a little moment in the sun where, where everybody comes together and does something good just for the sake of doing it.

Not for any accolades, not for patting themselves on the back just to say, Hey, these people need help. I want to chip in. So here we go. And that's all it is.

Kirt: **As the Klunatics have formed friendships that span the globe and have shown themselves to be incredibly supportive and generous, the admins have also created strong bonds.**

Mia: Um, w we really are very close. It's, it's been one of the best things that's ever happened. In terms of, you know, it's through TJ's work, really, that we've all become such close friends and there are many others, um, who we've become very good friends with, but there's nothing we can't say to each other.

Lisa: [00:07:17] Um, no, my favorite bit is the other admins. I just love them.

Kirt: [00:07:26] Do you guys talk every day?

Lisa: [00:07:28] Yeah. Every day. Every day, and um, yeah, every day.

Kirt: **Or as Sita puts it:**

Sita: [00:02:53] They're ok.

Kirt: **Which I've come to learn is pretty high praise coming from Sita.**

If you're new to the Klunatics, as I once was, as all of us once were, I want to make sure that you feel included and welcome. So I asked the admins for some advice on how to enter the group.

Elaine: [00:18:23] Someone who's just joined the group I would say to them. Sit back and enjoy the ride and what a ride it's going to be.

Lisa: [00:06:17] Oh, hang on. It's a bit crazy. It's a little bit addictive. And, um, I think that they should be prepared for some new friends because it's a really caring community.

Sita: [00:09:54] Um, just jump on in, man. Start talking. It's what I do in any new kind of group.

Just start contributing and. Yeah. We're pretty, we're pretty relaxed. Just talk. Have fun.

Mia: [00:21:01] Um, uh, you are more than welcome to contact any of us if you have any questions and we encourage you to reach out to the group if you have questions about TJs work, any recommendations of what you should read next, or if you want to discuss any of the characters or the themes or anything like that. Um, you know, we're, we're here to talk TJ's work.

Kirt: **How the Klunatics came to be is really just the first chapter in a story that I can't wait to keep telling you as this podcast continues. We've got a lot more to discuss, as we dive into TJ's work and talk to dozens of people whose lives have been affected by reading TJ's books.**

I mentioned earlier in the podcast that there are lots of people who will talk about how TJ's work has changed their lives. I'm one of them. I'll never know for sure if I'm a Klunatic purely because I love TJ's writing, or if some part of my psyche is subconsciously devoted to him because he took a risk on me and gave me a shot at a more exciting, more independent, more fulfilling life. But when I talk to Klunatics, and they tell me that they have been profoundly moved by the art that TJ creates, I believe them.

And if you're one of those people, we want to hear from you. First, make sure you're following The Klunatics Podcast on all social media @klunaticspod. We'll be sharing future episode ideas and seeking interviewees for specific topics. If you have something to say, send us a message or email us at klunaticspodcast@gmail.com. And if you're on Facebook, don't forget to join the Klunatics group. All are welcome.

I'm Kirt Graves. Thanks for listening to the Klunatics Podcast.