



Read with Pride, Episode 10, Somewhere Beyond the Sea

Transcript:

00;00;04;07 - 00;01;22;28

Voiceover 1

[VOICEOVER 1] Are you a student in 8th through 12th grade? Are you looking for a dress for your junior or senior prom? Or perhaps a spring formal or eighth grade dance? Then keep these dates in mind - this March and April, the Ocean County Library is returning with the 17th annual Prom Dress Giveaway. The Prom Dress Giveaway allows you to take home the dress of your dreams for free. Simply come to one of our participating branches. Find a dress and take it home. The giveaways will be from 4 to 8 p.m. at the Toms River Branch on Monday, March 17th, Tuesday, March 18th and Wednesday, March 19th. The Little Egg Harbor Branch on Tuesday, March 25th and Wednesday, March 26th. And finally the Jackson branch on Tuesday, April 1st and Wednesday, April 2nd. For more details, check out our website at theoceancountylibrary.org. Visit your local branch or call us at 732-349-6200. We look forward to seeing you there.

00;01;23;00 - 00;01;35;03

Voiceover 2

[Voiceover 2] Hello and welcome to Read with Pride, a podcast focused on LGBTQIA+ literature, brought to you by the Ocean County Library's Ocean Pride Committee.

00;01;35;05 - 00;01;41;27

Frank

[FRANK] Hi, my name is Frank. I work at the Lakewood Branch of the Ocean County Library, and I am a member of the Ocean Pride Committee.

00;01;41;29 - 00;01;48;04

Diane

[DIANE] Hi, I'm Diane. I work at the Toms River Branch of the Ocean County Library, and I am also a member of the Ocean Pride Committee.

00;01;48;09 - 00;02;22;11

Diane

And today we're talking about *Somewhere Beyond the Sea* by TJ Klune. Now, TJ Klune is a New York Times and USA Today bestselling, literary award-winning author of *the House in the Cerulean Sea*, *the Extraordinaries*. and more. Now, according to his official bio, being queer himself, Klune believes it's

important now more than ever to have accurate, positive queer representation in stories. I have a fun little anecdote, which is that at the 2023 National Book Festival in Washington, DC, I actually got to meet him.

00;02;22;13 - 00;02;50;06

Frank

[FRANK] He was giving one of the big Keystone presentations and talks because In the Lives of Puppets and just got out and he was teasing this book and said, "Oh, when you find out what I'm working on right now, you guys are going to be so mad and just know that I am going to be laughing evilly in the corner like this, 'Ha ha ha!'" And I got up and asked him a question and he commented on my rainbow shoes.

00;02;50;09 - 00;02;52;24

Diane

[DIANE] Amazing. That's amazing.

00;02;52;27 - 00;02;57;11

Frank

[FRANK] Diane, what is your like familiarity? What other stuff have you read by this guy?

00;02;57;13 - 00;03;20;12

Diane

[DIANE] So my first was the House in the Cerulean Sea and I loved it so much that I then dove in. I didn't read - because he writes a lot of YA - I didn't read the YA, but I read In The Lives of Puppets, Under the Whispering Door, and I am right now reading The Bones Beneath My Skin, which is so good. I'm halfway through and it's just very, very good.

00;03;20;14 - 00;03;21;10

Frank

[FRANK] That's really cool.

00;03;21;10 - 00;03;22;13

Frank

[DIANE] What about you? What have you...

00;03;22;14 - 00;03;54;17

Frank

[FRANK] I also started with the House in the Cerulean Sea and then we actually met before I was a staff member, when you were still doing the Read with Pride program, and there was a... It's also how I met one of our other, committee members, Sam, for the first time because it was the read with Pride Book Club, and it was the science fiction/fantasy day and one of the books was Under the Whispering Door. So in many ways, TJ Klune brought us all together.

00;03;54;19 - 00;04;28;12

Diane

[DIANE] And *Under the Whispering Door*, was that the one about death? Yeah. But it was so beautifully done. I do have like which, you know, I can rank his books and I'm like, "this is my favorite," and *Under the Whispering Door* I really love. But I do love things about grief. In the *Lives of Puppets* I liked, but didn't love. Yeah, yeah. So let's first talk about the *House of the Cerulean Sea*. So these two books are called *The Cerulean Chronicles*, right? We don't know if there'll be a third one.

00;04;28;14 - 00;04;33;13

Frank

[FRANK] I would read as much as he is willing to write. This is a great world and I want to live in it.

00;04;33;14 - 00;04;41;16

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah, it is amazing. So the *House in the Cerulean Sea*, which was published in March 17th, 2020.

00;04;41;18 - 00;04;43;14

Frank

[FRANK] Suspicious timing right there.

00;04;43;15 - 00;06;30;08

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah. Interesting. Wow. I didn't realize that. So let's talk a little bit about that. Right. So that was, a magical island, a dangerous task, a burning secret. I'm just going to read a little blurb. Linus Baker leads a quiet, solitary life. At 40, he lives in a tiny house with a devious cat and his old records. As a Case Worker at the Department in Charge of Magical Youth. He spends his days overseeing the well-being of children in government-sanctioned orphanages. Linus is unexpectedly summoned by Extremely Upper Management. He's given a curious and highly classified assignment: travel to Marsyas Island Orphanage, where six dangerous children reside: a gnome, sprite, a wyvern, an unidentifiable green blob, a were-Pomeranian, and the Antichrist. Linus must set aside his fears and determine whether or not they're likely to bring about the end of days. But the children aren't the only secret the island keeps. Their caretaker is a charming and enigmatic Arthur Parnassus, who will do anything to keep his work safe. As Arthur and Linus grow closer, long-held secrets are exposed. And Linus must make a choice: destroy a home or watch the world burn. An enchanting story masterfully told. *The House in the Cerulean Sea* is about the profound experience of discovering an unlikely family in an unexpected place and realizing that family is yours. So I love this one so much. There was a quote, it hangs on my desk at work from that book, and it is "There is beauty in the chaos if you know where to look for it." It's a great book. We love that book. So which was why we were so excited about this book, right?

00;06;30;11 - 00;08;48;26

Frank

[FRANK] Because if the *House in the Cerulean Sea* is a warm gay hug, which I think is one of the things that it's officially blurb-ed on the cover by, Victoria Schwab, if I'm not mistaken, *Somewhere Beyond the Sea* is your very supportive and possibly also queer parents coming and showing up and saying, "No, we're not going to let other people be mean to you. We are here as your family and we are going to

make the world better for you.” Somewhere Beyond the Sea’s official blurb, “A magical house, a secret past, a summons that could change everything. Arthur Parnassus lives a good life built on the ashes of a bad one. He’s the master of a strange orphanage on a distant and peculiar island, and he hopes to soon be the adoptive father to the six dangerous and magical children who live there. Arthur works hard and loves with his whole heart, so none of the children ever feel the neglect and pain that he once felt as an orphan on that very same island so long ago. He’s not alone. Joining him is the love of his life, Linus Baker, a former caseworker in the Department in Charge of the Magical Youth. And there’s the island sprite, Zoe Chapelwhite and her girlfriend, Mayor Helen Webb. Together, they will do anything to protect the children. But when Arthur is summoned to make a public statement about his dark past, he finds himself at the helm of a fight for the future of his family and all magical people. And when a new magical child hopes to join them on their island home, one who finds power in calling himself a monster, a name that Arthur has worked so hard to protect his children from, Arthur knows they’re at a breaking point. Their family will either grow stronger than ever or fall apart. Welcome back to Marsyas Island. This is Arthur’s story. Somewhere Beyond the Sea is a story of resistance lovingly told about the daunting experience of fighting for the life you want to live, and doing the work to keep it. So, right off the bat, Diane, since we were both fans of Klune’s work before this book came out, what were your thoughts going into Somewhere Beyond the Sea? Was it really a highly anticipated release? Did you have any like, fan theories or things that you were like, hoping to get confirmed by the book?

00;08;48;28 - 00;09;23;10

Diane

[DIANE] After I finished, House in the Cerulean Sea, I wanted more. I definitely wanted more, I loved it, it was such a beautifully written book. I guess I just wanted more of the story, you know? But I had no fan theories. I don’t do the like, fan fiction, I love that, but I just, I don’t know, there’s so many books out there, I don’t have time to write my own, you know? So I was waiting for it. And when they announced it, I remember telling people like, oh, it’s coming out. And I did another, like one of my reels and I, we made sure we announced that it was coming, but I had no really thoughts of where it would go, you know, what are you? Did you have, like...

00;09;23;10 - 00;09;52;08

Diane

[FRANK] I back at the National Book Festival as soon as Klune was like, “Oh, I’ve got a surprise for you,” I was trying so desperately to figure out, like, I felt like it was going to be a sequel, but I didn’t know if it was going to be for this or for Under the Whispering Door. And so I don’t remember why I signed up for emails from Tor, which is one of the major science fiction and fantasy book publishers.

00;09;52;10 - 00;09;55;02

Diane

[DIANE] I love Tor. I mean, I like Tor.

00;09;55;07 - 00;09;56;06

Frank

[FRANK] Tor books, great stuff.

00;09;56;06 - 00;09;56;28

Diane

[DIANE] Yes, I agree.

00;09;56;28 - 00;10;41;28

Frank

[FRANK] That's where this comes from. And when I got the email that announced this book, I was here at the library and I opened up my email, and then I immediately turned to my coworker and I was like, "You will not believe! When this book comes out, this is going to be my entire personality!" And my coworker that I shared office with has not read these books and was very confused. And then I went and I told some other people who got it, and we were just kind of mutually screaming and high fiving and being really excited. And as soon as I knew that this was the world that was being continued, I just wanted to watch Arthur and Linus get married. I really wanted that.

00;10;41;28 - 00;10;48;10

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah, well, and I almost want sometimes I wanted more of the children's stories, too. And maybe that would come right?

00;10;48;11 - 00;10;49;24

Frank

[FRANK] I think that would be, like, really cool.

00;10;49;25 - 00;10;55;18

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah. Like... you know what I just realized when we were talking? We didn't really talk. Have you read, like, all of TJ Klune's books?

00;10;55;19 - 00;11;20;24

Frank

[FRANK] No, I've read *The House in the Cerulean Sea*, *Somewhere Beyond the Sea*, *Under the Whispering Door*, and *In the Lives of Puppets*. I have not read any of the I think it's the *Green Creek* books - *Wolfsong*, something else. And I'm a bad YA library worker because I have not read the *Extraordinaries* despite having recommended it to so many patrons.

00;11;20;25 - 00;11;37;18

Diane

[DIANE] Well, I think because TJ Klune like after reading a few things, I'm like, oh, I love the worlds he creates. Like, he's such a great world creator. So I think we are both in love with TJ Klune. So I'm sorry, I just realized we didn't ask you that, you know, so it's important, so...

00;11;37;18 - 00;12;15;11

Frank

[FRANK] Some theories that I did have aside from like Arthur and Linus getting married, I really wanted more of the kids' development and the kids being more of the focus. And I do think that this book definitely delivered on that. We got to see a lot of the kids grow as people because time has passed. They're growing up. And also the introduction of David, the new family member. By the way, all of this podcast episode is going to have major spoilers for Somewhere Beyond the Sea. All right, now, spoilers aside...

00;12;15;14 - 00;12;18;20

Diane

[DIANE] I mean, David comes kind of early in the book anyway, so that's not really...

00;12;18;23 - 00;13;00;16

Frank

[FRANK] You know David's coming, but then he is such a sweet kid who, as soon as we meet this very dramatic yeti who loves scaring people and being a monster, but like in a thespian kind of way, who has very clearly been hurt and doesn't believe that people will want to be around him just because of who he is. When we meet him, I immediately was like, oh, he's going to fit in perfectly with the kids. But he definitely does cause some waves in the family because he acts, I think, as a really good foil for a lot of the different kids.

00;13;00;16 - 00;13;02;02

Diane

[DIANE] What do you mean by acts as a foil?

00;13;02;08 - 00;14;26;14

Frank

[FRANK] So a foil is someone who just kind of like reflects similar character traits at characters so they kind of are forced to handle what it's like to interact with them or reflect, like, here's your dark mirror. Here's yourself. So for example, Sal and Theodore are kind of foils for each other because Sal is very quiet and speaks up when it is needed. And he is also the oldest brother. He and Theodore have been together - the wiring - for a very long time, and we don't really understand Theodore as the reader until the characters around Theodore take the time to learn how to understand him, and then they're able to hear that he does have really profound things to say. In this case, for David, I think his most obvious foil is Lucy, the Antichrist, because they have very different ideas of being a monster. So the word monster is thrown around a lot in this book, both from the Department in Charge of the Care of Magical Youths, from people on the street, from David, from Arthur, and from Lucy. What did you make of David wanting to embrace being a monster?

00;14;26;16 - 00;15;02;08

Diane

[DIANE] You know, I think I always think of my children, you know, that is who I am, you know? And I think that some people you go through your life and you maybe try to conform. But then and I'm not saying being a monster, not being monster. I think that like David wanted to be who he really was, and his thought was like, I'll just be the monster they want me to be, kind of. So I like that David wanted to

be his true self, but I feel bad that he maybe felt like he had to do it in such an extreme way. So what do you think?

00;15;02;11 - 00;16;06;08

Frank

[FRANK] For me, I think about how when you are a monster, it's a very extreme form of like othering yourself. And when other characters use the word monster in the book, like Jeanine Router, who we'll talk about her. When she says that, or when the media says that in the book, in reference to Arthur and the kids and magical creatures as a whole, it's very much so, like an attempt to do humanize and an attempt to villainize these characters, but it also gives them a certain amount of freedom from societal norms that like, if I'm a monster, I don't have to be polite, I don't have to play by your good guy stifling rules. And I do think that in some ways that for David, like, embracing being a monster, being like, well, if I'm going to be a yeti, I'm going to be a yeti. This is who I am. This is what I am. I'm going to love it, even if it doesn't make sense for you.

00;16;06;10 - 00;16;12;07

Diane

[DIANE] Right. I mean, and that's who David was, you know? So, like, why shouldn't he be able to be who he was completely?

00;16;12;07 - 00;16;16;26

Frank

[FRANK] Yeah. Who do you think were the real monsters of this book?

00;16;16;26 - 00;16;23;20

Diane

[DIANE] I think the real monsters are the probably the Department in Charge of Magical Youth.

00;16;23;23 - 00;16;57;04

Frank

[FRANK] So there's the Department in Charge of Magical Youth and then in the beginning of the book, Arthur and Linus go back into the city to face four members of Parliament in the Council of Utmost Importance... There are different levels of councils depending on the situation. The Council of Insignificant Proportions, Council of Moderate Ideas, Council of Serious Inquiries. But Arthur's hearing is in the Council of Utmost Importance.

00;16;57;06 - 00;17;09;23

Diane

[DIANE] Right. I think the monsters are anybody that really wants to tear this family apart. Arthur has been with these children forever, and Arthur and Linus are trying to create together. I think those are the monsters.

00;17;09;26 - 00;18;02;10

Frank

[FRANK] Yeah, and I want to expand on that. The family that they're making is seen as radical, specifically because Arthur is viewing his charges as his family and because he is also a magical creature. And I think it's a very clear allegory for the radical idea of same sex parents and same sex families or nontraditional family units. No one bats an eye if they see a very heteronormative looking couple with a large family. But it seems like part of what makes our core protagonists of the book strange is that the kids are being treated as full people, as kind of peers with their adults.

00;18;02;10 - 00;18;08;24

Diane

[DIANE] Right, yeah, this is a spoiler obviously, do we know in the first book, I don't recall that Arthur was a magical creature himself?

00;18;08;24 - 00;18;12;11

Frank

[FRANK] It gets revealed towards the very end.

00;18;12;11 - 00;18;40;05

Diane

[DIANE] Okay. But obviously this one, it's much more that like, oh, so right, because Arthur was in charge of these children because they were considered dangerous and so they were sent to the island, and they were sent to Arthur to protect the rest of the world, say, right? So now all of a sudden, they want to maybe rip them apart or change things because they don't like that, oh, it's just they're a family. So, yes, those are the monsters.

00;18;40;08 - 00;19;13;14

Frank

[FRANK] This is a direct quote from the book. For those of you following along at home, we are on page 91, in which the Minister of Education, Janine Router, asks, "For the record, please make note of the fact that Mr. Parnassus did not answer the question asked. Mr. Parnassus, are you training an army of the most dangerous, magical children this world has ever known? Children you are now attempting to own outright through adoption, along with Linus Baker, former employee of the Department in Charge of Magical Youth."

00;19;13;17 - 00;19;32;10

Diane

[DIANE] I like how she's like, "own outright!" Like he didn't want to own these children... and I think that they were "Oh, he was making this army." But no, that wasn't what he was. A family they were building. And who was attached to that? Janine, yes.

00;19;32;12 - 00;19;52;01

Frank

[FRANK] I keep saying we're going to get into her. She was the Minister of Education. And in the opening hearing scene, she is also revealed to be placed as the interim Head of the Department in Charge of Magical Youth. So she is a very important character throughout the entire book.

00;19;52;03 - 00;20;27;16

Diane

[DIANE] So let me ask you the next. So because I'm sure you have some strong - so as you watch Janine Router grilling Arthur during the hearing, spurred by the dissolution of Extreme Upper Management, did any of her arguments sound familiar? When have you heard someone in power claim to be protecting children while they're actually harming kids? And what's the real motivation that keeps Router and Harriet Marblemount... so hellbent on their mission? What are your thoughts? Do you have any?

00;20;27;22 - 00;22;18;22

Frank

[FRANK] Diane, I have thoughts, feelings and opinions in fact. One of the things I noted in my little post-it note copy is I love a strawman and snowball fallacy. Going right back to the thing I just quoted about. So it's not only that you have these magical children, but because you're not keeping them under your thumb and lock and key, they're going to have autonomy. If they have autonomy, clearly they're going to take over the world. It is a very familiar line of argument for students of history to see oppressors be concerned that if the oppressed group gets rights, that then they will want revenge and/or assume that people will want to oppress the other group. There is a part of this book on page 67, where it's a very direct explanation of how the kids being magical is a pretty clear one-to-one discussion about or, metaphor for trans kids and LGBT kids as a whole, and the recent political turmoil surrounding the treatment of trans kids, and if they should be supported. The book actually has Janine Router starting as Minister of Education because she for a time supported legislation that would have made it illegal for children who come from queer families to talk about them, saying it would only confuse children who had come from "proper" families. There were even rumblings coming down hard on parents of transgender children seeking medical care. That is in the book on page 67.

00;22;18;22 - 00;22;26;25

Diane

[DIANE] Alright, I mean, we know TJ Klune is a queer author that wants to open the eyes of people and knows that these stories are needed.

00;22;26;25 - 00;23;58;27

Frank

[FRANK] Yeah. And I do think when you look at the book like this, the unique nature of all of the kids takes on, I think, that extra level of depth that it's not just, oh, we have an unidentified green blob with tentacles and who wants to be a bellhop. I love Chauncey so much. What a sweet little guy. We're aware Pomeranian or the Antichrist. Or a really fearsome garden gnome with a fabulous beard. But rather that these are all kids who are a little bit different and are just trying to exist and are lucky enough to have grownups in their lives who are willing to do whatever they need to be as supportive as possible. Arthur will frequently talk about how he reads up on the cultures of the different kids, like he considers himself to be an expert on gnomish culture because he wants to support his daughter, or looking into things about yetis so that they were able to make David the best room possible. Talking about like, learning how to speak Wyvern, everything is really, really wonderful and really, really sweet. And this family is

just trying to be a family. And I do think that, as Router would put it, these “proper” families probably wouldn't be threatened if they weren't told that it was.

00;23;58;27 - 00;24;53;06

Diane

[DIANE] Right, and anytime you throw something like “proper,” like, who knows what's a “proper” family? What's, you know, like adjectives are all subjective. That was rough, those pages. And I think that's where when I look, I felt like the House in the Cerulean Sea, it had some obvious talking points, but this goes harder. It definitely, you know, it's a heavier book at points you're like, oh as much is a fun fantasy and there's comedy and this and that, there's still like some really dark stuff. And I have to say, there are parts that TJ Klune we know is the anti JK Rowling, but there are parts that I do think of back to when I read Harry Potter that kind of, like, because when I read Harry Potter years ago, I thought like, oh, this is a it's an inclusive book. I felt like it was really inclusive. And then later on, as we find out more about the author...

00;24;53;06 - 00;25;31;09

Frank

[FRANK] It seems like she does not share the same values as the fandom she created, because I was a Harry Potter kid growing up and it makes me deeply sad because there is this person who created this world that I loved, and now I know that she is putting her money where her mouth is and actively supporting organizations that try to stop people exactly like me from living their lives.

00;25;31;11 - 00;26;27;00

Diane

[DIANE] Which we talked a little bit about since we ran into that because I don't think you can read it and not be like, “Wow, this is a fun fantasy.” It's got all these characters that are so like, interestingly made. I do think back to one of the most popular fantasy books is Harry Potter. It is. It still is hugely popular. But when I read his acknowledgments and there is one section in it, he says, “I do want to be remembered as something, and it's very specific, not the anti-Christ, but the Anti-JK Rowling. I want to be her antithesis, her opposite. I want my stories to fly in the face of everything she believes in, and at the end of the day, she has no idea who I am.” This is TJ Klune saying this, “and that's okay. I'll still be here, chugging away, making sure queer stories are told and I won't be doing it alone.” So his whole acknowledgments made me like, “Oh, I love you, TJ Klune.”

00;26;27;00 - 00;27;25;10

Frank

[FRANK] Yeah. By the end of the book, I was crying for many reasons. These characters are so intensely lovable and sympathetic and complex that when there is eventually that really cathartic, happy ending, I needed that release. I was so happy for everyone. Everything. There is this very particular thing that I won't spoil in the book that just gets me every time. It has to do with like found family really coming together. And then I read that and I felt really seen because a lot of queer fans of Harry Potter felt abandoned by this work. And it's nice to see another author who knows this and acknowledges that. And says, “No, I'm going to make it my life's mission to do better because we deserve better.”

00;27;25;12 - 00;27;43;19

Diane

[DIANE] Right. Yeah. I mean, I would think TJ Klune - I haven't read anywhere - that he was probably a Harry Potter fan, you know, like it wouldn't surprise me. Yeah, and it's funny because there's this part at the end and I want to spoil, but I don't want to spoil, you know, like it did have a nice ending. There's a spoiler but, um...

00;27;43;19 - 00;27;57;04

Frank

[FRANK] And we did we did already say spoilers. Let's do some lighter stuff because we have talked about a lot of the heavy stuff. What are some of your favorite moments with the kids in this book?

00;27;57;06 - 00;28;20;22

Diane

[DIANE] Alright, let's see. Well, I mean there's humor. Like they're fun. I think the kids do give it lightheartedness. Of course, when I look at my quotes, I always look back to it. I'm like, well, what did I write, anything? Like, I wrote more of the dark things. I can't think of anything glaring that sticks out of the kids, but you've got the book and all the tabs. So, tell me what you got.

00;28;20;22 - 00;29;02;23

Frank

[FRANK] Sometimes you have 24 hours and you have everything in existence. That's the magic of ADHD, folks. I liked Chauncey starting to eat pinecones and joking about it. I didn't realize he can stop anytime he wants. Because it makes his poops an adventure. The very first scene in the book is Linus's birthday, and Arthur and Linus wake up and they're like, wait, everything's too quiet. I'm not a parent, but I have to assume, Diane, that you have, since you have a couple of kids, that if you woke up and it was silent and the kids were supposed to be up and you got to sleep late, immediate suspicion.

00;29;02;27 - 00;29;35;20

Diane

[DIANE] Especially when they were young. As I got older then kids are up in the middle of the night, you know what I mean? Like, but when they were young, it was never quiet. They always woke me up. But on a side note, this is a little like one thing I wrote here was Linus's birthday's June 8th. That was what we learned at the beginning. And what's interesting, that's the birthday of the father of my children. So I wrote it in my journal because I was like, oh, Richard, I've always, you know, as I've said in the past, he passed away ten years ago. So like things like bring it back to other people. I'm like, oh, so the little connection there. But so that was fun for you because...?

00;29;35;20 - 00;30;01;05

Frank

[FRANK] I loved the chaos of the kitchen and all of the kids trying to make a fun "burt" because they misspelled birthday. So there, to, like, do a big gesture to be like, "No, we love you. You're our dad now, even if it's not official." And just seeing how much the kids wanted to do something kind and did it in a way that only they could do.

00;30;01;07 - 00;30;13;25

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah, very cute. I remember there was once that my children were making me something for Mother's Day, and, my post on Facebook that I see now just says, like, at least they didn't burn the house down, you know, like that. That's a very kid thing.

00;30;13;29 - 00;30;16;01

Frank

[FRANK] There was only fake blood everywhere.

00;30;16;01 - 00;30;18;04

Diane

[DIANE] That's right, that's right. Yeah.

00;30;18;06 - 00;31;18;02

Frank

[FRANK] I also loved the Saturday adventures the kids went on where every Saturday a different kid would get to choose the activity. So there was Chauncey going on a yacht. It was not a yacht, it was a sailboat, and David got to be captain. There was Lucy's trip to the mainland, where he let everyone go and do their own favorite thing, because he realized that he could make everyone do one thing that he wanted, or you could make everyone happy. And that was very much so his conscious choice. I loved Theodore being so protective of the little brass button that he took from Linus in the very beginning of in the House in the Cerulean Sea, that he had Linus hold on to it when the house was being inspected by Marvel Law because he was like, "I don't know what will happen. If she tries to take this from me, I'm not responsible." But in adorable little chirps and whistles.

00;31;18;05 - 00;31;20;11

Diane

[DIANE] You are very good at remembering details.

00;31;20;12 - 00;31;21;28

Frank

[FRANK] I read this again yesterday.

00;31;21;28 - 00;31;35;15

Diane

[DIANE] Well, that's true too. I read so much and sometimes I'm like, wait, what happened in that book I read yesterday? But obviously if you reread it in 24 hours...

00;31;35;17 - 00;32;43;27

Frank

[FRANK] Yeah. Also, when David first comes home to the island and is introduced to his bedroom, at first the kids led him to a door that said David on it, and he was like, "Wow, you named door after me. No

one's ever done that before." But he doesn't really get it because his whole life he's never had a room. So it wasn't even a thought that crossed his mind. And then when he opened it and it was cold and it looked like the northern lights and found out that all of the other kids had worked on it and helped make it something that would remind him of home and help make him comfortable on a very warm island. Because the temperature is set to appropriately freezing. He was so moved, and then the kids were able to say like, "Hey, we all didn't fully believe that this place was real when we got here. It is, and it's going to take a while for you to accept that. But like we've all been where you are right now and that's okay."

00;32;44;00 - 00;33;07;26

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah. And I think that's so like Arthur and Linus have this safety that all these kids then feel safe. And they want to make David feel safe. And that's so important that this found family, it's a real family. It's not just kids in an orphanage. You know, we're just living there. They're really a good family, and they have great caregivers, parents, dads.

00;33;07;28 - 00;33;13;21

Frank

[FRANK] What are some of the things that you think make Linus and Arthur such great dads?

00;33;13;24 - 00;33;25;27

Diane

[DIANE] Well, I think the accepting, you know, I think the nonjudgmental accepting, I think their own lived experiences, you know, Arthur's particularly because Linus was not a magical creature.

00;33;26;00 - 00;33;34;12

Frank

[FRANK] Linus is a human and a former employee of the Department in Charge of Magical Youth. Arthur is the last living Phoenix.

00;33;34;12 - 00;34;02;06

Diane

[DIANE] Right, and House in the Cerulean Sea, besides the family story, it's also Linus's story more. We see where Linus comes without having this family and how his life is regimented and kind of closed, and then it just brings to life Linus's life, right? So yeah, I think they're being nonjudgment, being patient, that they're going to love these kids no matter what avenue they take, is what I see is amazing with them. What do you think?

00;34;02;09 - 00;35;14;11

Frank

[FRANK] Speaking not as a parent, but as someone who has been parented, this is actually a thing that I remember from not parenting but as someone who works with teens, the head of our Teen Services at the library told me is that safe adults don't keep secrets. And I really appreciated that Arthur and Linus strove for like, transparency and threading that needle of being upfront and honest with the kids about

very difficult things that were happening while still maintaining their innocence that they were very upfront about, like, if you listen to the hearing, you're going to hear a lot of people say some very cruel things about me and also possibly yourselves. You don't have to listen if you don't want to, but if you do listen, I want you to be prepared for that. And I do think that it is a good way of balancing the fact that they know that they are unconditionally loved by their dads, but that is not the way that the world is everywhere, even if that is the way the world should be.

00;35;14;13 - 00;35;59;21

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah, yeah. And I think parents - I think - parents should just try to support their children. And in the LGBTQ community, again, as a parent, like you think you're helping your children or wherever you bring them up. But then at one point you have to be like, okay, well, it's their life, you know, it's not your life. And then just to be open. And I felt like Arthur and Linus are open. One question I have for you, because the House in the Cerulean Sea, one of the things when I first chose it, or what I felt like was really getting popular, I think it was the cover. It's a beautiful cover. The artwork is beautiful and I think that's what drew people in. And then they read it. They were like, this is an amazing book. Do you have any thoughts about the covers?

00;35;59;26 - 00;36;10;08

Frank

[FRANK] I love the style of TJ Klune's covers, specifically that these are all actual paper dioramas that get constructed.

00;36;10;08 - 00;36;12;07

Diane

[DIANE] They are? That I didn't know.

00;36;12;07 - 00;36;49;24

Frank

[FRANK] I believe so, that a lot of the elements are constructed. I love it because it adds that level of whimsy that things are not quite perfectly straight, and gives a bit storybook kind of feel. I do think that the House in the Cerulean Sea and Somewhere Beyond the Sea's covers really speak well to each other, and that we're able to see kind of the focus on Arthur with the Phoenix so prominently displayed on the cover. It's so good, it's so beautiful. And the jacket art is by Red Nose Studio.

00;36;49;25 - 00;37;00;10

Diane

[DIANE] And he, I think, I didn't know was Red Nose Studio, but they do all of TJ Klune's artwork now, I think for all of the...

00;37;00;10 - 00;37;07;09

Frank

[FRANK] That sounds correct. There's a similar theme and like design language across all of them.

00:37:07:09 - 00:37:23:11

Diane

[DIANE] Right, exactly. Red Nose Studio did all of the Wolfsong covers. They did In the Lives of Puppets, TJ Klune. So, okay, Red Nose Studio, take a look. I'm just writing myself a little note.

00:37:23:15 - 00:37:58:04

Frank

[FRANK] Yeah. We say all the time that you shouldn't judge a book by a cover, and I think that does a disservice to marketing departments, because I don't think you should judge a book solely by its cover, but they are there for a reason. And I do think that the covers and like the design of TJ Klune's books are this kind of warm, welcoming, but still like kind of weird invitation to this really wonderful, cozy fantasy world. And I think that that's an important part of going into the book.

00:37:58:05 - 00:38:20:13

Diane

[DIANE] Well, since we're talking about the cover of The Phoenix, I'm going to go to the question of like, hope is the thing with feathers, right? Yes. And hope is the thing with fire. I'm reading this. "The luminous closing line captures the spirit of the Phoenix, which provides an outlet for Arthur's righteous anger." Which of your emotions would you most want to express through magic? What would that magic look like?

00:38:20:13 - 00:39:01:12

Frank

[FRANK] Oh, golly. I think the feeling that I would want to express through magic would be, oh, this is really corny and sappy. I love my friends. I love love. I am a big marshmallow of a man, and I think it would be wonderful to be able to have some sort of magical ability to maybe for like, plants, like help things and people grow or feel like they can grow through the sheer power of love.

00:39:01:12 - 00:39:02:03

Frank

[DIANE] I love that.

00:39:02:03 - 00:39:03:01

Frank

[FRANK] Thank you.

00:39:03:03 - 00:39:38:06

Diane

[DIANE] I am also a sappy love person. So when I was reading this, I was like, oh, I feel like my emotions that I would like to express through magic in my brain, I feel like my love and acceptance. I go back to draw the circle wide from the Gay Men's Chorus singing for us, and they sing often is to like, as I get older, I notice that love is just ever, you know, expanding. And so I would love for like a big ray just to like burst out. I don't know what that magic would do, but just so that people could feel that, you know, love,

00;39;38;06 - 00;39;40;12

Frank

[FRANK] The aura of calm and welcome and love.

00;39;40;12 - 00;39;41;14

Frank

[DIANE] Wouldn't that would that be nice?

00;39;41;14 - 00;39;43;13

Frank

[FRANK] That would be.

00;39;43;15 - 00;39;46;04

Diane

[DIANE] I would love to walk in an aura of calm and welcoming and love.

00;39;46;04 - 00;39;47;28

Frank

[FRANK] You do project that already.

00;39;47;28 - 00;40;29;21

Diane

[DIANE] I appreciate that, but, but yeah, I think that there are so many people that are hurting in this world for so many different reasons. I go back to like in the library. We are open to everyone in the community. We draw our circle wide, and that's what I think I would love to, if I had like some kind of magical power, would be to like just feel that, you know, for people to feel that. And again, I grow. I try to grow in my world and I years ago I felt like this is how it was. And I'm like, oh no, we could change and expand, you know? So that was a good question. Alright, here's our five... do we have anything else to say about this book...?

00;40;29;21 - 00;41;03;28

Frank

[FRANK] I can keep talking about this book for hours because even though maybe it sounds like we've gotten very deep into the weeds, we have left so much for you if you want to. Hopefully at the end of this podcast, if you haven't read it, you're like, wow, this TJ Klune guy sounds pretty cool. And I should read his books. All of his books. And maybe you buy them or check them out from your friendly local public library. Things are available on Hoopla and Libby as well as in physical print.

00;41;03;28 - 00;41;24;03

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah. And again, I'm going to finish the Bones Beneath My Skin soon. And, Frank, put it on your list. It's so good. That's how I feel like you when you're reading, it's completely different characters are

probably in the same universe as the Cerulean Sea. That's what I think. No, they're not supposed to be. I'm sorry. Now I'm going to go...

00;41;24;03 - 00;41;27;13

Frank

[FRANK] But what if they were all in the same universe?

00;41;27;13 - 00;42;09;27

Diane

[DIANE] Because again, it's about a gentleman that's going through grief. He's going through it and he goes up to his cabin where his parents live that he got as they passed away. He's a gay man and he's trying to, like, restructure his life. And then, oops, there's this other guy there and a young girl, and he's like, what's going on? And then you find out that the gentleman that was there was in the Marines, and the young girl has special powers and it's very good. And now they're on the run because, of course, somebody needs to get this girl with special powers. So I don't know where it's leading. I don't know if that was a good little blurb, but read it. Okay. Okay. So here's our five quick questions. So would you recommend this book to someone on the street?

00;42;09;27 - 00;42;10;26

Frank

[FRANK] Absolutely.

00;42;10;27 - 00;42;15;24

Diane

[DIANE] Absolutely. Why wouldn't you? I would recommend TJ Klune to anyone anywhere.

00;42;15;26 - 00;42;44;12

Frank

[FRANK] Especially if you have someone who maybe wants to like fantasy but feels like maybe all of the like, high fantasy swords and sorcery is a bit much. This is a great way to, like, dip your toes into kind of a magical world that's still pretty firmly rooted in reality, or to get someone who's really into fantasy, into like maybe some more contemporary stuff where like... there's still a lot of magical elements. There's just also like ice cream and a fairy.

00;42;44;18 - 00;42;49;09

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah. But you definitely have to read the first book. You can't jump into somewhere on this, Beyond the Sea.

00;42;49;09 - 00;42;52;09

Frank

[FRANK] You could. You would be doing yourself a disservice.

00;42;52;09 - 00;43;02;12

Diane

[DIANE] Yes, I agree. If you could give this book a different title, what would that be? I would say something with the Phoenix, like Rising, or...

00;43;02;12 - 00;43;05;00

Diane

[FRANK] I would say Hope is the Thing with Feathers.

00;43;05;00 - 00;43;12;29

Diane

[DIANE] Oh, that's a good one. That is good. Yeah, that's, we'll leave it at that. What emotions do you feel when you read this book?

00;43;12;29 - 00;43;16;19

Frank

[FRANK] All of them. Every single emotion.

00;43;16;19 - 00;43;36;22

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah. I would think you probably had some much more strong emotions than I did reading this. I mean, not that... I just feel like your lived experiences might be different than mine. We know they are. And I just felt like, oh yeah, I could see as a transgender person that you might be like, wow, this is too close to real.

00;43;36;24 - 00;44;43;28

Frank

[FRANK] There were definitely points where I did feel kind of sucker punched. There are a lot of instances where it seems like supposedly well-intentioned characters like Harriet Marblemont, the inspector from the Department in Charge Magical Youth. It's like, oh, well, you know, you're a young girl, Talia, so you should shave your beard. When in gnomish culture, beards are an important symbol of, like, the individual honor and the health of their garden is supposed to be reflected in their beard. And it was just this stunning example of, like, you don't know anything about this person, and you're trying to tell them what to do with their body. The thing that really hit me the most was just the sheer amount of love and support and patience that all the kids were handled with. And, it seems like even when someone messed up, they always had the chance to talk about it. And it was very clear that if they had a strongly held belief, their adults were going to support them.

00;44;44;00 - 00;44;55;21

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah, and that's so important. They were able to be so open and able to talk because they had adults that supported them. You could tell you know? What format did you consume the book - print, digital, audio?

00;44;55;21 - 00;45;35;14

Frank

[FRANK] So once I start reading a series, I have to read all of the rest of the series in the same format. So Somewhere Beyond the Sea - I read the House in the Cerulean Sea as physical book. It was before I had gotten into audiobooks. So anything else has to be a physical book. And I did really enjoy it because it felt in some ways like I was returning back to the island because I was returning back to the same format, and I really enjoyed, just purely as a novelty thing, the first edition has like beautiful mustard yellow sprayed edges, and it just made me feel like I was holding a fascinating tome.

00;45;35;16 - 00;46;24;14

Diane

[DIANE] First off, sprayed edges. Now in the library we don't get as many of these. Like when you go into Barnes & Noble, we'll see these amazing sprayed edges now with artwork. We don't do that in the library. It's a little more costly and they're going to get ruined all the time. But books are so beautiful, like physical books. However, I consume most of my media, most of it through audio, and that is a two-fold. It's like, I like this so much I want to consume it. And I think also my ADHD brain likes that fast. However, and I did consume this book audio a few months ago, but then it does make it harder for me to remember. So I gave myself a, not a resolution. I don't like New Year's resolutions, but a challenge to read, besides graphic novels, one book in print every month this year, like...

00;46;24;14 - 00;46;25;24

Frank

[FRANK] That's actually a great intention.

00;46;25;24 - 00;46;44;21

Diane

[DIANE] Yeah, yes. To just slow down and read a physical book because I loved reading physical books when I was a kid. Just the coziness of it. And these would be great cozy. I mean, they're not completely cozy, but definitely that cozy feel, I think. So I do think if I read it again, it should be in physical format to really absorb more.

00;46;44;21 - 00;46;50;14

Frank

[FRANK] Did you really like the narrator? I've heard that people love TJ Klune's audiobooks.

00;46;50;14 - 00;47;00;10

Diane

[DIANE] I am not a good person to judge a narrator because I do it on 2.0... I mean, I don't always do it on 2.0, but like those poor narrators.

00;47;00;10 - 00;47;02;18

Frank

[FRANK] Like you're just zooming through.

00;47;02;18 - 00;47;12;28

Diane

[DIANE] Yes, some books I'll slow down. And actually, one of the books that we spoke about - Bliss spoke about it at our last podcast, Role Play.

00;47;12;28 - 00;47;15;03

Frank

[FRANK] I actually recommend it.

00;47;15;03 - 00;47;20;24

Diane

[DIANE] I know you recommended it. So that one, we don't have an audio. So I have the physical because I'm like, oh...

00;47;20;24 - 00;47;22;00

Frank

[FRANK] It's really cute.

00;47;22;00 - 00;47;32;08

Diane

[DIANE] It is cute. And it talks about older people finding love and demisexual. So I'm like, oh, I'm like maybe. So I actually have that physical book that's going to be my first one for January, based on the podcast.

00;47;32;08 - 00;47;33;24

Frank

[FRANK] I can't wait to hear you.

00;47;33;25 - 00;47;42;19

Diane

[DIANE] Isn't that great? So I know, like I said, it's based on I know it was Bliss, but I knew that you recommended it. So that would be my first because I'm like, oh, it doesn't look too...

00;47;42;19 - 00;47;50;23

Frank

[FRANK] It's not intimidating. I have so many recommendations for queer romance. I love that stuff.

00;47;50;23 - 00;47;55;04

Diane

[DIANE] Alright, so if you could pick a theme song, what would it be?

00;47;55;06 - 00;48;00;11

Frank

[FRANK] It's low hanging fruit, but I feel like it has to be Somewhere Beyond the Sea by Bobby Darin.

00;48;00;11 - 00;48;28;19

Diane

[DIANE] That's right. That's the title. As I was driving here, I was looking because I was going to relisten to a little bit of the audio coming up, but I couldn't get it for free on Spotify. That's why you use your local library, because you get it for free. But Spotify does have a music list... A playlist. And the first one is Somewhere Beyond the Sea. And it's a lot of music from that same era. So that was interesting to me.

00;48;28;22 - 00;48;54;25

Frank

[FRANK] That's really cool. That's delightful. And Lucy also talks all the time about loving dead people music. The deader, the better. So we have stuff by all of the music that's referenced on Linus and Lucy's records, like Lady Sings the Blues, Big Girls Don't Cry, Elvis Presley, you know, really, the deader the better dead.

00;48;54;25 - 00;49;15;25

Diane

[DIANE] The deader, the better. That's right. Yeah. It's such a good world. I do have like, let's see, I'm looking at, like, quotes. And one of them this says there is magic in the ordinary, but that says it was from book one, so must have been like, and of course I don't write pages because I'm listening to it.

00;49;15;25 - 00;49;43;06

Frank

[FRANK] Trying to see if there's any other big quotes and big takeaways. This one I really love. "Linus told me something once and I think about it a lot. He said, it's okay to not be okay, so long as it doesn't become all we know." And I think that that's really beautiful, to be like, it's okay, it's okay, you are allowed to feel your feelings, but sometimes you can also fall into the trap of getting stuck there.

00;49;43;06 - 00;50;14;27

Diane

[DIANE] For sure. Yeah. One of the quotes wrote was, and I don't know where it is in the book, but it's "Even the smallest things can change the world. If only one is brave enough to try." Because sometimes it is. When you look at the world, you're like, it's so gloom and doom and it's like, yeah, but if you do one little thing, if we all do one little thing, then we could change the world together. So I thank TJ Klune for writing these books because - I can't believe you met him. And I never have been like, I'm like, oh, if I went to this and he just seems like a cool, chill guy, you know?

00;50;14;28 - 00;50;50;24

Frank

[FRANK] He is a cool, chill guy. I really enjoyed - when I say I met him, like, I briefly got to talk to him at the National Book Festival because I asked a question that I choked asking that question. I was so starstruck. I had this like whole thing about like, what are your thoughts on the emergence of cozy fantasy as a genre? As many people feel like you have kind of really started it and created some of like the foundational books for that subgenre, how do you feel about the more problematic parts of what this has now come to and I was just like, "You wrote this book."

00;50;50;24 - 00;51;22;24

Diane

[DIANE] That's amazing since you're so good with words, I'm like, I go into a podcast with Frank and I'm like, oh, good. Frank will do all the work. [laughs] Frank will do it all. Give me all the words, Frank. Because I'm like, "and like and like." But it's great to talk about books with you, Frank, because you're so well read and you have very big thoughts - not big thoughts, even little thoughts. But like, you're good at talking about books, you know, so some of us are good at reading them on 2.0 speed.

00;51;22;27 - 00;51;25;29

Diane

[FRANK] I listen on 1.75.

00;51;26;03 - 00;51;45;27

Diane

[DIANE] Alright, yeah that's acceptable. There was a book I recently read. What was it? And I just, depending on the narrator, I bumped it like to 2.25. I could do that at the end of the night. When I wake up in the morning, it's too fast. My brain needs time to get to there. Yes. Not that I recommend that for everyone, but...

00;51;45;29 - 00;51;52;09

Frank

[FRANK] Whatever works. Any form of reading counts. Reading is reading. If you're getting a story in your brain, you're good.

00;51;52;09 - 00;52;03;02

Diane

[DIANE] That's right. Yeah. I increase our Libby and Hoopla circ stats, you know. Alright, anything else?

00;52;03;04 - 00;52;48;04

Frank

[FRANK] I hope that people come away from listening to us and reading this book with a renewed sense of hope. This whole book is about facing very daunting odds and overcoming through the power of community and family and love. And it's a scary time right now. It has never been easy breezy to be part of the LGBT community, and I think that continues to hold true. But there are people in the world like us who want to be there to support us, and we can support each other. And this book is a great reminder of that.

00;52;48;11 - 00;52;49;26

Diane

[DIANE] Well said.

00;52;49;26 - 00;52;51;00

Frank

[FRANK] Thank you.

00;52;51;00 - 00;52;54;09

Diane

[DIANE] Thank you.

00;52;54;12 - 00;53;16;23

Voiceover 2

[VOICEOVER 2] thank you for joining us today. Be sure to visit the Ocean County Library's website for more podcasts and events. All the titles mentioned in today's episode can be found throughout the Ocean County Library. Free with your library card. Until next time, happy reading!

00;53;16;25 - 00;53;47;02

Voiceover 3

[VOICEOVER 3] Hello adventurers! If you enjoyed this content, please take a look at the Ocean County Library's new podcast called Forge Your Imagination: A Guide to Immersive World Building. This new podcast is dedicated to helping creative individuals design their own expertly crafted worlds for books, games, Dungeons and Dragons, and more. Tune in on the first Wednesday morning of every month to learn more. Thanks for listening and safe travels, adventures.