

Desert Island Dildos Transcripts

EPISODE 201: JEM ZERO- INTIMACY AND TRAUMA

Quenby

Hello and welcome to Desert Island Dildos, your friendly neighbourhood podcast about sex and sexuality. With me today is Jem, tell us a bit about yourself.

Jem Zero

Hi. So I'm Jem Zero. I typically describe myself as an autistic and disabled trans masc. I'm pretty gay. I'm writing from a place of both neurodivergence and physical disability. I also am a painter. I do either completely wholesome pet portraits or like people's kids or something, or I do nude nude paintings of queer people who want their selfies to be prettier. And that's that's really rewarding. And that's really fun. I i've been trying to get established in publishing, I did along with yourself win an award for short erotica piece that I published in orato by the new smut project. It was sci fi, which is a which I'm a huge fan of. And so the book that I'm releasing on September 28, two weeks away. It's called Home Within Skin and it is a sci fi kind of alternate universe earth with aliens who came here, we're digging into the theme of trauma and intimacy for this episode, if we're discussing that, having self esteem about your body when you have dysphoria and be able to see yourself gender validated is something that is important and I actually go into that in Home Within Skin. My main character Jax is a trans man, I'll dig into that a little bit a little bit later. But yeah, that that does come up and as I am a trans person, it really important to me to like show that and the feedback I've gotten from Home Within Skin so far, all very positive mostly trans. I think all of the readers have been trans and they're they're my target audience you know, people who need who need this like, vibe of trans positivity and validation in like a really hopeless landscape for a lot of people. You're in the UK? Yeah. The shape of the shape of trans health care. I know a lot of trans people in the UK feel completely hopeless. You know, there are people who're stuck between surgeries

Quenby

Yeah, we've we've got our current state we've trans healthcare is I think, roughly the state you know, a lot of the US is in with like, anti trans legislation. Because we haven't had too much anti trans legislation we've just had a lot of generalised hatred and completely fucked medical system. Yay

Jem Zero

Yeah, yeah, yeah. So in Home Within Skin Jax for for the entirety of the book he does not have access to hormones. And that is the case for I'd say the majority of trans people they don't have hope that they can achieve their transition goals. I'm trying to to show validation through love and support on a personal level even when you're being denied that by the greater world

Quenby

Yeah, you're here to talk about your book, which uh god. I mean, I feel weird, like saying how much I loved it because like, you know, this is my podcast, you are a guest on it. I kind of even if I didn't like it at all, I would have been like, I really loved the font choice. It's great, but Jesus, ahhh it's so fucking good. Yeah, if, if I managed to get this out before the publication date, you should pre order it. If, if I haven't managed to get this out before the publication date. You should just go and buy it and bully your local, queer independent bookshop to stock it

Jem Zero

That would be incredible if if there was a queer bookshop that actually had my book in stock that would that would be mindblowing. I would never don't even have the ability to hope for that.

Quenby

I I am friends with someone who runs a queer sci fi themed bookshop, who stocks a load of my badges,

Jem Zero

Oh my God, if you can make that happen, cos this is queer sci fi.

Quenby

It's very queer. It's very sci-fi. It's very good. Yeah, so you've already touched on a bit, but yeah, give a give us the elevator pitch.

Jem Zero

So my book is called Home Within Skin. It started as a novella in 2016, which just dealt with the homeless trans men and the alien sex worker, meeting, ruining each other's nights. And then they end up filming a porn movie together. And I showed, I

was quite proud of it. And I showed a friend of mine who is a sex worker, and they said, "Jem, this is really good, but I have a problem. At the end, they fixed each other after like, one night to one week, you know, of story. That's, you know, especially for a sex worker. That's, that's kind of problematic." I was like, You know what, you're right. And then I turned into a full length novel to address some of the shortcomings of this novella. It is set in an alternate universe, earth, in which there was a species of aliens called Rrhi, who, to escape their dying planet, came to earth, hoping to find a safe place to live, it did end up for them that they were able to immigrate to Earth. But the story deals with, even though they're allowed to come, they're not treated very well. And so we have our main character who has been kind of indoctrinated with the stereotypes, the stereotypes about the Rrhi being dangerous and unstable. And so he's very scared, he has really severe PTSD from childhood and teenage abuse from his step family. And you see some, some examples of how I play with that in the narrative. With the point of view, I decided for the story, which is second person present tense. And so that reflects the trauma Jax experiences. So Jax automatically is nervous, because he's dealing with these prejudices. And he reconcile has to reconcile that with the fact that he is trans and also experiences these negative stereotypes. The plot is Jackson's emotional journey, there is a connection of events, but it's kind of these events as he's growing, strung together. So that's, that's what people are getting into a lot of lot of queer feelings, but of just processing emotions.

Quenby

One of the things I love about it is that characters do feel really real and really nuanced. And like they- they very much- they both come at it with, you know, certain prejudices, certain trauma responses, and like them navigating that, and like that it felt like such an honest representation of queer relationships, to be honest, is it's something I really related to, like, Oh, yeah, it's, you're mapping out one another's triggers. You're learning by fucking up quite often, and being like, I'm really sorry. And like working out how not to do that again. I just I just really love that. And like you were saying about the, the trope of kind of you know, you know, all everything is fixed in a week. And that's something I think you definitely see around Oh, around all of the intersections around sex work around homelessness around transness, all of these things is like, "Oh, you just need one moment of support one moment of love and they'll show you it will show you the way"

Jem Zero

Other stories they the characters meet and within a week, they're in love for maybe they have a month or three months tops, and there's a proposal already and I'm like Yeah, that's cute, but I don't like to do that in my books. My stories take weeks to months, I rarely rarely have a story where the couple is already saying I love you that just doesn't ring very true to me and I know that does lie in queer behaviour a lot of us do that but I think that trope also came from toxic heteronormativity

Quenby

I think it's very much tied in with this kind of narrative you get so much and romance around like the one true love trope and I mean among other things I'm poly. I do not buy into that and I think there is definitely a thing of Yeah, I think there's also a degree of knowing yourself and being like, am I actually in love with this person or did we just have really good sex and my brain is swimming in chemicals. Not that that isn't a form of love or a form of intimacy but just like maybe not one to rearrange your life around

Jem Zero

You know, and I've been there I you can see a lot of the themes that show up in Home Within Skin were taken from my life. They're shuffled around and applied to different contexts, but they were all things that have affected me to some different degrees what I've experienced or what I've witnessed in my intimate life, so Home Within Skin can really channels a lot of personal experiences. And, but that queer, everything is fixed within within just a short amount of time. really does get exhausting when I you know, my wife and I moved in together that fast and you know, it affected our ability to form a strong base for our relationship and we're still kind of dealing with emotional consequences of that and so I I worry in those stories. It makes me anxious and it's like, how did you have the time to build a foundation for your love, you know, healthy patterns and Home Within Skin deals with these two people who fell in love like that. Now they have to deal with the fact that they started in love on sand. So love isn't enough you have to build up healthy relationship habits and communication so the book is what happens when you have that clear I fell in love with you in one night. Now what

Quenby

A lot of people have had a wild fling where it's just magical and everything's amazing over the course of the weekend . There's different ways that can go and one of them which like you know is okay we fell head over heels and love them but now we need to work out how we work together we need to we need to be we need to find out if we like each othe. And I think that's something which gets overlooked a lot and unfortunately I think it's a really common thing is something you see quite a lot of people you know, they fell in love, they got married, they had kids and then like once they kind of settle down and you know once you know, brain chemistry normalises a bit more you realise Oh, we don't actually have that much in common. We don't actually like each other that much. So something which I really enjoyed in the book was one of the dominant themes that I found in it was the relationship between trauma and intimacy and like, distinct from trauma and sex because you know in the book, Jax is much more comfortable when fucking than when cuddling. I think is a good way to put it is being emotionally vulnerable is when you start to see like the

trauma. Things start to flag up and I think that's something which is isn't really talked about because it's something I've experienced in my personal life, but it's it's not something which you know, people really recognises how hard it is accepting love and support when you are coming from a place of trauma.

Jem Zero

Jax is very dissociative due to his PTSD. and due to that experience, Jax has kind of dissociated his entire sense of self away from his physical body. In essence, the second person is Jax telling the story to himself. He can't think in an I point of view, because his sense of self and his physical form are not united, he's constantly trying to go away, you know, if something bad happens to his body, and mentally, he's like, I'm fine. So that's where the second person comes in. So yeah, when it comes to a physical boost, such as something that's not permanent, as you know, sex, sex ends, you know, it's an activity, he does it with his body, it's like taking a walk to keep warm on a winter night, his mind can go away from that physical reality. And, but when it comes time, to engage with a situation with his brain, and with his emotions, and who he is, as a person, he baulks, he does not know what to do, he's scared, he's insecure, and she's ready to hoof it at any sign that he might be being controlled, that he might be getting too invested in a way that harms his lifestyle, or that the other person may be getting too invested in him in a way that harms them, or puts him under too much pressure.

Quenby

Yeah, it's worth talking about the second person thing because that I think, is, I think it's something which a lot of people have a very negative, like feeling of, and I think it is, because it's less the norm. I think it's harder, but I, I really enjoyed it. I I think, especially when talking about this, because it touches on discrimination, it touches on a lot of difficult stuff and like having it as the second person so saying, you feel these hunger pains you feel the panic rising, you feel whatever. I think that very, very much places for reader in that. It's almost like Jax is dissociating from it. And instead pushing that immersion on to you as a reader.

Jem Zero

I love that Yes.

Quenby

And it's it. I think it really does help but it's really hard writing that sort of emotional experience in a way which is it's really hard connecting to that I think as a reader, especially if it's not your lived experience. I found it really immersive and there's there's a specific scene where Jax is hardcore dissociating, where you kind of see

snapshots. And then like a timeskip, snapshot, a timeskip and that's something you know, as someone who's you know, been through dissociative episodes that just felt very honest to what it feels like. Sorry, there's no question I've just fangirled at you. Fanbied at you! I've fanbied at you.

Jem Zero

I love you describing as immersive. And one thing you just said, I think was very, very accurate. I think I can't speak for cis het people but for queer people. When we read a story about ourselves, we are looking for ourselves in the story, because we have so little out there. And the thing that I tried to do with the second person in this book is like you said, Jax is himself withdrawing from what's happening. And for a reader who is psychologically empathising with Jax, suddenly Yes, they are filling in the blank spaces that Jax is leaving. It's definitely a romance, it's definitely not erotica. There's a long plot and emotional depth. I actually thought it was higher heat than it was I was like, oh this is such high heat. And then I was like well it was only a couple of the sex scenes that were extremely graphic a lot of the other ones were just kind of like normal high heat

Quenby

Yeah, I definitely thought you know, I definitely view it as a romance story overall, but there's some excellent, there's some very well written erotic scenes within that. And it was in my- I was reading it on my laptop in a cafe because where else would you read erotica. I was having a reading day with my partner. And she was looking at me and I was like "Why are you looking at me" "You were making little soft growly noises" I was like "I don't wish to be perceived"

Jem Zero

Hilarious

Quenby

Fairly or unfairly- I'm not gonna I'm not going to start shit with the romance writing community because they're very terrifying very scary people if you get on the wrong side. But yeah, rightly or wrongly there is a perception i think that that you know romance and erotica are very formulaic and I think it's really it's really interesting seeing you know taking that creative risk as well as well as like bringing a difference perspective that is a creative risk you know, going at it in a different way and I think it really pays off. So something that weirdly hasn't really come up in talking about the book so far is one of the characters is an alien, regular listeners will know from the 45 minutes I spent talking to Charlie Knight about how much we both very horny for aliens that that's that's something I have a lot of feelings about

Jem Zero

Shout out Charlie

Quenby

Fucking amazing person, horniest episode we've made so far. It's something we've definitely talked about before on the podcast. But why are queers so horny for monsters and aliens?

Jem Zero

What from from my own experience and my experience with other queer people who are in the monster fucker gang. We have spent our whole lives being ostracised, and alienated from what most I would say most environments treat these heteronormative mores as the only right way to be a human, not just the only right way to be a member of their society, but the only right way to be a human. And that gives us dysphoria. The restrictive norms apply to our bodies race, sexuality behaviour, to the point where just being human feels alienating, you're being told that your whole existence is a genetic violation. That's a lot to handle, especially for young queers coming to terms with their identity. And on the other the other hand are examples of non traditional sexuality or gender behaviour are almost always through monsters or villains. So we are shown to be monsters were shown to be not something that fits in with nature. And I think it's it's really kind of like, clear as day how we take that and turn it into a desire for like monstrous features or non human features, you know, those have existed since the beginning of art and culture, you know, you have monster fucker graffiti and from like, Mesopotamia, you know, it's just this fascination with the, the nonhuman The, the unknown. You know, it's you get bored, you get bored, you're alienated from society. You're told you're not a good human. And you're like, you know what, fuck you. Now I'm going to write about someone fucking a dragon. It's all your fault. You feel stupid don't you. Take that

Quenby

To horrendously bastardise very beloved sci fi franchise. to boldly ho,

Jem Zero

To boldly ho!

Quenby

Thank you so much for coming on the show. Everybody go buy the book.

Jem Zero

I love how unsubtle the title is. It's like not like a common phrase. You have to think about it for a second. As soon as you think about it. It's like, you're like here. It's about a trans person, like oh, a trans person learning to feel at home in their skin. So subtle! Nuance.

Quenby

Before you go, I'm gonna ask the question I asked every guest. If you're stuck on a desert island with plenty of lube and condoms. Something to keep the sand out of lubes and condoms. Power to run any toys you bring with you. What sex toy would you like to be stuck there with and why?

Jem Zero

So if we're talking about non human genital it would be a gender affirming tentacle dick strap.

Quenby

Yes!

Jem Zero

They don't exist, they don't exist, but I can hope I can have one day. You know, they have they have that gender affirming. You know, though those for trans masculine people who have bottom dysphoria, where you can literally apply a phallus to your existing smaller phallus and use it much like assigned male person would their penis. And that, that just sounds fantastic. Except what if it was a tentacle instead and like prehensile, you know? And, and, if anyone else is into that, there's a little bit of that, more than a little bit of that. In the book. you'll, you'll probably want to check that out

Quenby

I really want a gentacle of any kind: packer, genuinely like a real one, strap on whatever I want a tentacle. Thank you so much for coming on. Where can people find you and your work,

Jem Zero

if you want to read my book, which please do, you can, you know, search Home Within Skin on Amazon, and you'll probably pop me up, just look for the book with the alien on the cover. You can also reach me on twitter @jem_zero Oh, you can also find me on Instagram, @jemzero, no underscore for that one. And then my website, www.jemzero.com , pretty easy to find me. It'll have all the information there, content warnings, how to buy. It's currently on pre order. There's a good reads page. First reviews from the ARC Readers should be trickling in soon. So hopefully there'll be a bit of something to look at and get a feel for what readers are feeling about the story. And yeah, that's where you can find me. Thank you so much for having me. This was a wonderful conversation. And just between you and me, I am really excited to see how you carve this up and make it into a coherent conversation. Because you have got your work cut out for you, my friend. The joys of talking to ADHD.

Quenby

Oh, yeah. It's conversations between two ADHD people is the thing. Yeah, you can see my review of the book which I will putting out soon I yeah, I have a lot of feelings about the book and I will be writing them down somewhere. And that should go out before this podcast episode, but also I have ADHD. So who fucking knows. Thank you so much for coming on the podcast Jem. I've been Quenby and in many ways I still am. You can find me @quenbycreatives on social media. You can follow the podcast @DIDildos and we now have a Patreon which you can you know, throw money at us and we might dance for you. I might dance for you. Jem is under no obligation to dance for you. I am. If you liked the podcast, then please like it rate it five star wherever you're listening. Show it to your friends, hire a plane and go sky writing and just say listen to Desert Island Dildos. It changed my life. It was just so beautiful. However you want to get the word out there you go for it. Thank you to everyone for listening. Thank you to our patrons for supporting this. Your homework this week is to go and read Home Within Skin by Jem Zero

