

Interview with Jonathan Clements

In our line of work you get to meet many people; Some commercial, with a view to making a buck; Some clever, with a view to making an observation; Some self styled “otaku” with view to boring the crap out of anyone who will listen; Some passionate, with no greater wish than to share their insight. Occasionally you meet someone who defies classification, because they are, put simply, part of the fabric of anime & manga in the West. In January I had the good fortune to track down such a man, and with the audacity of the innocent (OK, slightly tainted), put some very impertinent questions to such a figure.

Some of you may have known him as the man who was contributing editor for *Newtype USA & Neo*; Or perhaps as the ex editor of *Manga Max*; Maybe as the biographer of Confucius? Most will know him as the co-author of the definitive book on anime, *Anime Encyclopedia* (sic). However he’s known, everyone who does KNOW him agrees on one thing- what he doesn’t know about Japanese media entertainment probably isn’t worth asking about. He is a man young in years, old in wisdom, an industry veteran and the consummate professional. He’s a writer, editor, author, biographer, scriptwriter, translator, TV presenter and all round good egg... Jonathan Clements.

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Part 1: In the beginning

It was about a year ago that I first ran into Jonathan. After that meeting I vowed to get an interview with him at some point in the future. Time passed, JC's restraining order against me lapsed, I pulled a few strings – thanks to Hugh@ADV - in order to get some quality question time with Mr Clements. He has a reputation for telling it like it is, so if you want it straight, he's the man to ask. Playing Devil's Advocate, I popped the questions that are good, bad and downright ugly in order to clear BS, debunk some anime urban myths and dust off the truth so that everyone could squint at it in the light of day. Grab a cold drink, hold your favourite plushie for comfort (you'll need it) and read words you'd normally pay good money to ponder. Join me, as I spend an evening gathering words from the wise...

PJ: You have a considerable talent for languages...

JC: I'm not sure my Greek teacher would agree with you! I barely scraped my A-Level.

...is that how you got into manga and anime, or was it the other way round.... how did it all lead you on a road to your chosen career?

JC: Japanese came first. I went to university to do a combined degree in Chinese and Japanese, and that year I found a copy of Frederik Schodt's *Manga Manga*. The first manga I ever saw was *Grey*, by Yoshihisa Tagami. I bought it because there was an endorsement on the back from Harlan Ellison. When I got back to England from my year abroad in 1992, *Anime UK* magazine had started up and I started selling articles to them about anime. Within a year, I had my first translation contract. I was actually late for my final Japanese translation exam because I had been in a studio in London recording *KO Century Beast Warriors*. It certainly beats "I overslept" as an excuse. I missed my graduation ceremony to direct my first anime dub.



PJ: What were those early Japanese titles?

JC: The first anime I ever saw was *Marine Boy*, and there's a little tip of the hat to that fact in the *Marine Boy* entry in the *Anime Encyclopedia*. I used to rush home to see *Mysterious Cities of Gold*, *Ulysses 31* and *Dogtanian*, unaware that these titles were linked by the common factor of Japanese animation. My all time favourites are several Gainax productions, the *Patlabor* TV series, *Grey*, and *Kiki's Delivery Service*.

PJ: I heard a story (from a man in a pub), that in your early days as a translator, you plied your trade in the Sex shops of Soho? Would you care to elaborate?

JC: There are a lot of assumptions about anime erotica, such as, for example, the supposedly self-evident statement that anime fans buy it. Actually, they largely don't. Hentai sells far too many copies for that. I went into every sex shop I could find and asked them if they had any Japanese cartoons. This was back in 1997 when I was working on the [Erotic Anime Movie Guide](#). None of them had any. Their policy was, if you have made the decision to cross over the line and come into a sex shop, why would you be happy with "just a cartoon". Look, they would say, we have "real" porn. So the sex shops weren't selling it either

PJ: During those early years, the choice of available titles was pretty sparse and very sex oriented. Would you say that this had a negative effect on its popularity?

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JC: You're talking about the mid-to-late 1990s, when actually less than 25% of anime in the UK was 18-rated (the US equivalent would be an "R"). The media perception, however, based largely on the *Urotsukidoji* press-pack, was that anime was a cavalcade of depravity.

Did this have a negative effect on its popularity? Hell, no. The sales figures for erotic anime outstripped all but a handful of titles. At the time, *Urotsukidoji* was selling in the tens of thousands, and UK anime convention attendance barely reached 500. The press was writing articles about how anime fans were perverts, but anime fans couldn't possibly buy it all. They would have to buy a hundred copies each! And I'd already found that the sex shops weren't selling them. In fact, they were being sold in the high street, to members of the public. 30,000 British men bought *Urotsukidoji*, in places like Tower Records. And somehow the British newspapers contrived to make this the fault of the Japanese.

I was hired last year by a Japanese trade organisation to do an in-depth analysis of the British anime business; we're talking hard figures, not convention hearsay. I had to find out exactly what sold, and to whom. And I discovered the supposed "scandals" of the 1990s had no appreciable negative effects on UK sales. Right up until *Pokemon* and the *Animatrix*, both of which skewed the figures, 19 of the 20 best-selling anime in the UK were from just one company, Manga Entertainment. And the bulk of the titles comprised the ones the press had complained about.

PJ: I understand you worked for the BBC as an Asian linguist and writer, what horizons did that open for you?

JC: I was a translator on the *Godzilla: King of the Monsters* documentary, transcribing about 18 hours of interview footage with directors, writers and actors from the golden age of Japanese cinema. Then I worked on a series called *Japanorama*. They put me on a retainer so they could call up in the middle of the night and shout: "We're interviewing Keiji Nakazawa in three hours! Tell us who he is and what questions we're asking him!" I found myself working as a kind of double agent on that one. I had Tsuburaya Studios emailing and saying: "Someone called Jonathan Ross wants to come and piss about in our studio. Do we want to let him?" I had to explain who he was, and that he wasn't one more gaijin coming to laugh at them, but someone who genuinely had an affection for their products.

My most recent association with the BBC has been on the [Strontium Dog](#) audio dramas starring Simon Pegg. I wrote both of them for the *Big Finish Company*, who later sold them on to the BBC.

PJ: Back in the early 90's, anime & manga was very niche, what was the thinking behind trailblazing this new genre with "Anime UK" and "Manga Mania" publications? How did it start and what went wrong at the end?

JC: Well, you're asking me to comment on the aims of two other people, Helen McCarthy with *Anime UK*, and Cefn Ridout with *Manga Mania*. Helen wanted to tell people about this wonderful anime thing she'd discovered; she was a fan who wanted to make more fans. Cefn Ridout was working at Dark Horse UK, and saw a niche to exploit the company's ownership of the Akira manga in a magazine form.

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“At the end” of course, Cefn went back to Australia, *Anime UK* was betrayed by its backer, who simply stopped paying people, and Helen ended up as the editor of *Manga Mania*. When she left, the magazine was renamed *Manga Max*. That’s where I came in. This is a long story, and I can sense your eyes are already glazing over...

The publishers, Titan offered me the editorship, but weren’t prepared to pay for manga in the magazine. I told them that they could have an anime magazine without a manga in it, but we would have to take it up market to compensate. I wanted to create a magazine that the industry read, that was literally ahead of its time. Which it was; there are seven-year-old articles from *Manga Max* that you could print tomorrow and would still be fresh and interesting. We had the kind of magazine that could print a rant column from Hayao Miyazaki, that had Toren Smith on the letters page, and that had Pioneer demanding to know how we knew their Japanese release plans ahead of their English office. We had Frederik Schodt interviewing Masamune Shirow!

But the magazine needed American distribution to survive, and Titan insisted on shipping it by ship. By ship! We would scoop *Animerica* by two months, and then the magazine would have to sail across the Atlantic before anyone could read it. My conscience is clear. I made good every penny of my budget (my managing editor complained that I kept detailed accounts, since “If the boss finds out, we’ll all have to do it!”), and I found a team of writers who could do things they were asked to write about. We had animators, novelists, scriptwriters and games designers writing our reviews. They knew what they were talking about.

The explanation that I was given by Titan for the cancellation of *Manga Max* was that their staff at the time were not adequately equipped to market or distribute an international anime magazine. They claimed they would put the magazine on “hiatus” until they had “sorted these problems out.” There’s a lot more that happened, but basically, I think they found out the hard way that while they thought the magazine could be run by a trained monkey, it wasn’t as easy as it looked.

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PJ: You co-authored the “Anime Encyclopaedia”. How did you go about organising such a daunting task?

JC: The [Anime Encyclopedia](#) (I’m obliged to use the American spelling as it is an American book) was a very enjoyable nightmare. When it was published, it was bigger than every other English-language anime book combined. The index alone is larger than some other books on anime. But there is something quite addictively exciting about discovering new stuff, working out which title fits which Japanese show, and so on. I had to write a massive spreadsheet of alternate titles in Japanese and English, annotating source material until Helen and I were able to divide up the work and write the book. I worked as hard on the *Anime Encyclopedia* as I had on *Manga Max*, maybe even harder. But the *Anime Encyclopedia* is a much more enduring monument, and of course, I get royalties from it, which I never got as a magazine editor.

We had some good people on the book as well. When covering Japan, it makes a big difference having a Japanese-speaking editor like Peter Goodman at Stone Bridge. And we hired Fred Patten to check the manuscript, who worked way beyond the call of duty. He’s say things like. “I thought your *Giant Gorg* entry wasn’t up to scratch, so I’ve taken the liberty of writing my own.” Mere money wouldn’t thank him enough, so I dedicated my [Confucius](#) book to him.

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After the AE, I wrote the [Dorama Encyclopedia](#) with Motoko Tamamuro. I'm actually even prouder of that. The *Anime Encyclopedia* broke new ground, introduced several hundred titles that had never been discussed before, and consolidated our knowledge of the industry, but the *Dorama Encyclopedia* opened up a whole new field in Asian Studies. It's the book I'm proudest of, along with *Pirate King*.

PJ: You are one of only a handful of people to be honoured by the Japanese (Japan Festival Award) for “outstanding achievements in furthering the understanding of Japanese culture”, how did you feel about receiving this honour?

JC: Pretty damn good! The award was specifically for editing *Manga Max*. Titan had fired me two days before the awards ceremony, so I got a peculiar kick out of it.

PJ: A hobby (nay pleasure) that you make a living from: Are you still able to just kick back and enjoy something without having your critical eye engaged? Has this blunted your enjoyment at all?

JC: I'm not easy to impress, if that's what you mean. Many anime producers work on a 24-month product cycle. They figure that they can sell the same stuff every two years, and nobody will be around long enough to notice. Sadly for them, I do notice, and I call them out on it. But if you're a thinking anime fan, that's what you want. You want someone who knows where this stuff has come from. If you want some breathless idiot enthusing about how “kewl” it all is, well, there are plenty of places you can find that.

PJ: How has the medium changed over the past ~20 years? Have the Japanese made any discernable concessions to Western tastes?

JC: I think the Japanese like to think they have. It doesn't always work out. Look at *Golgo 13*. That was an attempt by the Japanese to give us what we wanted. They reverse-engineered a few action movies, and decided that Western viewers were all obsessed with sex and death. So I guess they got our number.

PJ: During your work you have travelled extensively, this and your language skills has given you an edge over other people's interpretations of Japanese entertainment. In your view are there elements that get lost in translation?

JC: Oh, don't get me started. I gave a whole seminar about this for the Master's in Translation students at the University of East Anglia. The thing that most people miss is that it takes a lot to be a translator. You need to speak Japanese, yes. You also need to be able to write English. And if you're good enough to sell your own work in English, why on Earth would you take McJob money to translate *Magical Princess Fluffy Tossopot*?

The thing that is missed more than anything else in the translation world is how many times translators get things right. The most heroic translators in the business are the ones that you never see people talking about. People like Jack Wiedrick and his staff at *Newtype USA*, who anonymously translate hundreds of pages, all so that fans in a chat room can pretend they read it all in Japanese.

If there's anything that gets on my nerves at the moment, it's the plethora of translations that simply don't translate things, apparently with the consent and approval of large sectors within fandom. Don't people feel ripped off when they buy

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Haibane Renmei in 'English' and it's still called Haibane Renmei? What kind of translation is that?

Part 2: What does it all mean?

In part 1 we looked back through Jonathan's career, and got a feel for his origins, and the origins of anime and manga in the UK. In this section, we examine society and get an insight into the cruel world of commercial anime and manga production- it's not all "beer and skittles"!

PJ: If TV is the microscope under which to examine societies' values, what have you noticed between the East and the West? Any similarities or differences?

JC: The crucial difference between Japanese TV and Anglophone TV is the extra five years head start that the British and Americans had. It meant that Japanese TV was swamped with foreign imports from an early stage, and took years to purge them. One of the reasons for anime's popularity in the early days was simply that it was a home-grown product, and not another inscrutable cowboy saga.

Japanese TV is not unique in this. You see similar effects all over the world. I am fascinated by the way in which the cowboy genre (American TV uses American locations set 100 years in the past because the props are easy to find....) is essentially transformed into the samurai drama. It's amazing to see the effects of shows like the Mary Tyler Moore show and Colombo, years after they first aired. Less so with comedy; comedy is very difficult to transfer across cultures. Anime comedy is easier to move because so much of it is slapstick.

PJ: Is there a big cultural difference in Japanese and Western entertainment values? Do we all hold the same traits (heroes & villains) to be true? i.e. Western villain is always very black, Japanese villains tend to have a sympathetic element to them.

JC: And Darth Vader doesn't? You're happy to make a gross generalisation about western villains, but are prepared to put a mitigating "tend" into the Japanese part of your question. I'm sorry, I do that a lot, with everyone, including myself. We ask questions about anime, it's our job. I also ask if they are the questions we should be asking.

Your "values" question is a book in itself. But the bottom line is that television is an advertising delivery system, obliged to put programmes in between the commercials. This doesn't change between cultures. Too much anime criticism has a cultural angle, but industrial, commercial concerns come at the front of any medium. Japanese animators don't sit around trying to think how to imitate kabuki pauses in the middle of fights. They realise that they can get away with still-frame animation if they pretend to imitate kabuki pauses. It's cheaper. It becomes a cliché, a trope in itself. Then *The Matrix* spends millions of dollars on bullet time in an attempt to imitate it.

Follow the money. Late night anime broadcast? It's the low, low budget replacement for OAV. Essentially "bring your own tape". Team shows? The chance to sell five toys instead of one. Long pauses in manga? Is there a cultural explanation? Well, you could dig one up, or you could remember that manga authors are paid by the page. The longer a scene, the more money they get, and the longer they have to think of what comes next.

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I'm not denigrating cultural studies, but I think it's an easy grade. I'd like to see more writing on the business of anime. Box office figures and ratings tell you a lot more about anime's place in Japanese society than how many cherry blossoms you can see.



PJ: The western approach to story telling has traditionally been to write the story with a start – middle – ending. Some have said that the Japanese approach is almost all middle with a quick ending, thus leaving audiences confused. What's your perspective on this observation?

JC: Follow the money. TV anime writers are used to getting fired or cancelled partway, so they often start without much idea of what the end will be. When they get to the last episode, they can be as shocked as everyone else that they are now obliged to tie everything up in, and yet still leave it open. This is nothing unusual in Western TV, either. Think of *Babylon 5*, or *The Prisoner*, or the *X Files*.

PJ: Is everything coming out of Japan good? And what are the dangers of too much?

JC: 95% of everything is crap. Anime is no exception. But I don't see a danger in "too much". The size of the current anime business makes it possible to support

magazines like *Newtype USA*, and books like the *Anime Encyclopedia*. It made it possible to sell Miyazaki to America. The amount of anime and manga available in English is truly overwhelming, but that's great! It's that much more difficult to argue that "all anime is porn" when there is so much other stuff to provide a frame of reference. But one problem with the amount of available material is that marketers are forced to say that everything is wonderful, and not everything is. When everything is hyped, you need something like the *Anime Encyclopedia* to separate the wheat from the chaff.

PJ: What are your views on the movement to have Japanese style anime and manga produced by other countries? Can it still be thought of anime & manga if it's produced in, say, Korea or China?

JC: If it's not Japanese, it's not anime or manga! There's no point in creating a distinction if we then refuse to apply it. It makes us no better than those people who used to insist that we should call it all "manga videos". Those people who sell Korean or Chinese cartoons as "anime" are treating anime as a brand, and hoping that consumers are dumb enough to buy anything with that word on it. I like to think that anime fans are smarter than that. Chinese animation has its own history, its own classics and scandals; it doesn't need to leech off Japanese animation. I like to think that people know this for themselves; certainly, the [Chinese animation](#) page on my website gets a disproportionately high amount of hits.

PJ: Anime in UK is still banished to the fringes, why hasn't TV grasped the nettle beyond the banal DBz and the merchandise motivated Pokemon offerings?

JC: Remember that TV doesn't really grasp that nettle in Japan either. Beyond the "banal and the merchandise-motivated", a large proportion of TV anime are in the graveyard slot when nobody is watching them. Even those that are shown in waking hours have very low ratings in comparison to live-action TV. Sure, you had *Neon Genesis Evangelion* on at prime time, but you get the *Simpsons* and *Futurama* on at prime time here. Actually, when *Saiko Exciting* was running, *NGE* was on at prime time here in the UK as well! In the sense of anime made for the otaku audience, it's "banished to the fringes" in Japan, too.

PJ: How are the "West aware" outputs of Studio Ghibli effecting the business practices of Western production houses such as Disney? Is there serious competition?

JC: Disney neutralised the competition by buying it. Just like they did with the *Thief and the Cobbler* and with Pixar. Miyazaki for Disney is like *The Larry Sanders Show* for HBO. It's not the numbers that count, it's the prestige. It's the awards and the *New Yorker* features. While we like to tell each other that cartoons are not kid's stuff, it's the kid's stuff that matters on the balance sheet. The real battle in animation is still for the attention of children. Bandai, and Disney and the newly independent Pixar are all vying for that sense of wonder in a seven-year old boy. Because if he decides he wants *Pokemon* curtains, duvet, lunchbox and satchel, and you own *Pokemon*, you've just tripled your investment in the animation.

I did some story-lining work at a production company last year that follows the modern practise. Design the toys and the show side-by-side. These people are not kidding around. They have think-tanks of Child Psychology Phds working on what

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enhances children's play experience. Every one of my ideas had to get an approval from Marketing, from Production, from the lady who designs the boxes. They spend a lot of money on ideas they may never use, because if they hit it big, they make billions. I don't think Ghibli presents a concrete threat to Disney. If I were running Disney, my main worry would be Bandai.

PJ: Is the work of Pixar (or any Western production company) having an effect on Productions in Japan?

JC: Pixar proved to everyone that CG animation didn't have to look like a long cut scene. Cel animation was dying anyway, but it was Pixar that pulled the switch.



PJ: The cross-pollination of styles and ideas (East & West) on Animatrix produced some very exciting outputs onto the screen, yet no other collaborations have been done, any reason you can point to?

JC: There are collaborations all the time. The Japanese aren't choosy. Wave a million dollars at Madhouse and watch them come running. If you haven't noticed any recently it's because the Japanese have the American market pretty sewn up at the moment. Most of what they make gets picked up by the Americans, all they have to do is sign it over to ADV or CPM and wait for the royalties. And if you look at ADV's output at the moment you'll see that a surprising number of their anime are actually co-productions. They're investing in the Japanese end of production so that they don't have to fight over the American rights with all the other US companies further down the line.

The Japanese are already looking at the next market, which for them is China. There are import restrictions that make it economically sensible to make half an anime in China, thereby qualifying it as a local product under Chinese law. If you look at stuff

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like *Legend of the Condor Hero*, it's the Japanese animation industry trying to tap into a market of one billion consumers, ahead of the 2008 Beijing Olympics.



PJ: Can you define the quintessential elements that make up anime and manga?

JC: Anime is animation from Japan. Manga are comics from Japan. Everything else is subject to massive variation over the last 90 years. The popular perception in the UK of anime was porn (1995), then *Pokemon* (2000), and now it's the *Animatrix* and *Kill Bill*, and maybe, if you're lucky, it's Miyazaki. None of those claims are strictly true, of course; even Miyazaki is a misrepresentation of anime as a whole.

PJ: Why do you think this is so appealing to Western audiences?

JC: Many old-school anime fans were created in reaction to Western culture. They tired of the Disney machine or its imitators and they demand something else. Often this meant buying into the products of the Bandai machine instead, but it was different for them. But I think the new generation of anime fans are radically different. They buy into anime because of its familiarity to them. Like anime fans in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Korea, they are buying anime because they grow up with those

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images and those styles, in computer games and on TV. It's not a break from the norm for them, it is the norm.

Part 3: I spy, with my little eye ...

In part 2 we examined some of the motivations and misconceptions. In this section we get to some current insight into the meaning behind all that we love from Japan, and indulge in some Marketing navel gazing.

PJ: The trend through 2003-4 anime series, was to set the stories in non Japanese locations e.g. Gunslinger Girl in Italy, Hellsing England, NOIR in France, not too mention the Hip-Hop influences on such releases as Samurai Champloo and Gantz. Shrewd marketing or a genuine interest in an amalgam of Japanese and Western influences?

JC: Neither. Anime are often set outside Japan, and have been for decades. What you see as a current trend is based on the same reasons as always, that exotic local colour is better than yet another Tokyo setting, and that a foreign location requires a foreign location scouting, which makes your vacation tax-deductible.

PJ: How do the Japanese view the West's interest in their culture and entertainment?

JC: With faintly embarrassed bafflement, or cringe-worthy triumphalism. Ten years ago, non-Japanese sales were worth barely 10% of the anime business. So anime remained resolutely Japan-oriented. If foreigners wanted to turn up and buy some, then the Japanese wouldn't turn them away, but it wasn't important to them. These days there is a lot of foreign money in anime. I'm pleased to say a lot of foreign investors are silent partners, letting the Japanese get on with doing their thing. Ultimately, anime will dissolve into the mainstream, and stop becoming an ethnically Japanese product. But I am not a fan of "animation" for animation's sake. I don't really care about an American producer's idea of what anime should be. I would rather have something made by the Japanese.



PJ: Is there anything, beside Western music and fashion, that the Japanese enjoy in Western entertainment?

JC: Er... everything else? Western TV is now largely a cable phenomenon in Japan, but movies still play a large part, particularly on video. And American porn. The Japanese love it! They think occidentals¹ are all inscrutable perverts... How's that for irony?

PJ: I've heard anime being reviewed on BBC Radio 4 (Parkinson show)- a show aimed at 50+ something. Does this mean that the efforts of Jonathan Ross, Mark Kermode and yourself are starting to have an effect on the establishment?

JC: It's interesting that you pick those two critics, as both of them excel at evaluating something in terms of the film-maker's intentions. If a film does what it sets out to do, without conning its audience, then they support it. If a film has pretensions of grandeur, they have no patience. So what makes Ross and Kermode so good at what they do is that if you want to sell them a kung-fu dolphin movie, they will love it as long as it's a good kung-fu dolphin movie.

Anime gets covered on Radio Four because someone is spending thousands of pounds sending copies to every journalist, instead of meekly waiting for otaku word-of-mouth. If critics have an effect, it is only indirectly, by giving people the tools to talk about anime. When I started writing about anime, magazines didn't even bother

¹ western, opposite of "oriental", aka you and me

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to credit anime directors in reviews. Nowadays, it's possible to see writers on anime discussing the works of specific directors, or writers. Anime hasn't necessarily changed all that much; it's the critics that have grown up and become more sophisticated. With the *Anime Encyclopedia*, we wanted to pay anime the respect of treating it like another part of the film business. We weren't going to give it a special protected status like a rare orchid. Tough love, that's the policy.

PJ: Wishful thinking I know, but if for 2005 you could get one anime released onto the big Multiplex\ TV screen, and one manga into Waterstones book store, what would they be?

JC: My favourite anime ever is the original *Gunbuster*, and it broke my heart to see the shoddy way it was treated in the UK. With the infinite budget you have given me, I would buy the rights, tart it up, do a dub (which is difficult because the Music & Effects track has been lost and would need to be reconstructed from the ground up), and then do the commentary track that Kiseki refused to pay me for in the UK. Either that or the wartime anime *Momotaro's Divine Sea Warriors*, which I would try to release in a double disc with the Chinese movie *Princess Iron Fan*. I didn't choose those titles for their commercial potential, but simply for my own sick amusement.

As for manga, I would want to release *Shooting Stars in the Twilight*, by Kenshi Hirokane. It's a series of love stories for the over-sixties, and if I am ever a rich producer, I shall buy all the rights and make a dozen movies of it.

PJ: What would you say is the biggest block to a wider acceptance of manga and anime in the UK?

JC: The fact that so much of it is crap! Sacrilege, I know, to suggest that, but I'm bored with having to patronise everything. It's embarrassing having to say to non-fans, "Ah, the reason you don't understand Show X is you have to watch Show Y first, and then appreciate that there's a manga you can't read that fills in the blanks, and so on." For every *Cowboy Bebop* there are a dozen *Psychic Wars*.

Actually, the real answer is that anime is accepted. 200,000 people bought the *Animatrix* in the UK. You can buy anime in the high street, with subtitles! Miyazaki is in the cinemas. You can read *Newtype* in English. Really, truly, what more do you people want!? Anime on the National Health? Compulsory sailor suits? Anime fans are only truly happy when they are complaining. They like it that way. If they ever thought anime were truly accepted by the mainstream, most of them would lose all interest because suddenly it wasn't alternative enough for them, and all the kids they don't like at school were wearing *Haibane Renmei* T-shirts.

PJ: As translation is an area of your expertise, for whom have you worked in the past? How much translation are you doing these days?

JC: Who have I worked for... let me see, Pioneer, Kiseki, Manga Entertainment, Western Connection, East 2 West, Manga Publishing, Equinox, Bloomsbury, Ehapa, and Bandai. I don't do much translation these days; the money is laughable. When I started translating anime and manga, a travel card on the London Underground cost £3.50. Now it's £5.20. Prices go up in the real world, but the going rate for manga translation today is actually less than it was ten years ago when I was just starting out. In the last year I've edited poetry translations for Motoko Tamamuro, and I

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translated classical Chinese in my Confucius biography. But I've steered clear of anime and manga.

I remember a very large, well-known American publisher approaching me and asking me to do a four-month project translating a work by one of the best-known manga authors in Japan. They were prepared to pay me roughly half the amount I would have earned working in Burger King. You know, when Neil Gaiman earns big money on *Princess Mononoke*, he's getting a perfectly normal rate in the real film business. But some anime and manga companies think they're doing you a favour by letting you near a manga. The reason you haven't seen a recession yet is that the damage has been passed on, not to consumers, but to company employees like translators.

When I was editing *Manga Max*, one of the contributors was Paul Corrigan, who was completing a Phd in Economics. He came up with all kinds of interesting numbers to do with the anime world; he was working on a theoretical model of the effect of fan-subbing, for example, and another on the variables that affected a new anime release getting picked up by foreign distributors. One of our most heated debates was on the economics of translation in the anime business. He demonstrated very clearly to me that with the brutal, commercial logic for which I am justly known, it made sound economic sense to split up the translation and the English adaptation roles. There might be a qualitative loss, but it was outweighed but the reduction in costs, and the amount of translation that could be produced. I didn't like hearing it then, and I don't like hearing it now.

I'm from the Studio Proteus school of translation, that says "Hey, let's do right by these Japanese creators. Let's find someone who is a skilled writer in English, who also speaks Japanese, because they will do the text justice." It's natural for me as a translator to believe in finding the best possible person for the job, and to try to use a single person, since that gives less chance of semantic drift. It's over-engineering, because 99.9% of the audience will never notice. But Studio Proteus translations have stayed in print for a decade. Let's see how some of today's operations are doing in ten years time.

Interview with Jonathan Clements



PJ: What are you currently working on?

JC: I'm writing a biography of the first emperor of China, the man who built the Great Wall and was buried with the terracotta army. His father commissioned an "Ultimate Encyclopaedia" designed to hold all the knowledge of the world. I'm reading that right now, and musing on how encyclopaedia compilers had it easy in the third century BC. Confucius didn't bring out a new TV series every week. There's a new anime on average every 3 days. There's 35 hours of new anime every week. Just monitoring that is like sucking on a fire hose. Of course, I won't be executed if I make a mistake, so maybe things aren't so bad now.

PJ: What are your plans for 2005?

JC: [Pirate King](#) is being published in paperback this summer as *Coxinga: Pirate King of the Ming Dynasty*. Noise Monster are releasing my [Space 1889: Red Devils](#), starring Anthony Daniels. There's a TV company who want me story-lining for them on something that is supposedly "very anime". And at some point, I have to start wading through the materials for the second edition of the *Anime Encyclopedia*. If I disappear for a year and a half, you'll find me under a pile of Newtypes.

PJ: Thank you.

JC: Thank you.

A full bibliography of Jonathan Clements work can be found at his company website, [Muramasa Industries](#) (the giant pseudo-Japanese-pharma-chem-heavy-industries-hi-tech-conglomerate).