

Episode 65: CLAMPdown Interview w/ Ian Wolf

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Ian

Italics indicate content that may not have made it into the episode

Intro

When the world falls apart, you might as well read some really good comics about, well, the world falling apart. And then write a book about it!

We're Lucy and Robin, your guides through CLAMP's Wonderland! We're taking a detour today to highlight a listener and fellow CLAMP-fan who has a new book on the way! Welcome Ian Wolf!

(Greet the listeners!)

Check-In

- We have a transatlantic episode for you today! With an 8-hour time difference, Robin and I are at the beginning of our day and you're in the evening.
- (Ian response if it feels natural)
- As with most of our special episodes, Stargazing penalties have been suspended. So just be aware that we *may* drop some spoilers here and there, as we talk about the wonderful worlds of CLAMP.

Background

- Tell us a little about yourself!

I describe myself as an autistic comedic data specialist, awards judge, anime and manga critic, TV quiz show question writer, and one of the few people to have come last on the high-brow quiz *Mastermind* twice.

Still impressive! Maybe 3 times will be the charm? But you said 'comedic data specialist'--would you elaborate on that very interesting conjunction of words?

The title is something of a fudge. Regarding the comedy, I work for the British Comedy Guide (comedy.co.uk), mainly behind-the-scenes. It's mostly admin work. My work involves updating TV and radio schedules, as well as writing up guides to shows. The first guide I did, which got me the job in the first and one I still do, is *QI*, a quiz where the questions are so hard you get points just for being interesting; and *Taskmaster*, a game where comedians are forced to carry out strange challenges like getting someone to dry land as elegantly as possible in a boat with

no ores, or conducting the best rescue of a (toy) cat (not to be confused with finding someone's pet peacock).

I've watched a couple seasons of Taskmaster! Very fun show, highly recommend.

Glad to know that you can see it in the USA.

I also collect press clippings – a lot of press clippings. During the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, the biggest comedy festival in the world, I tend to collection around 5,000 reviews (not including other pieces of press) in just one month, or as I like to think of it, my job involves collecting the opinions of arseholes (critics) regarding another bunch of arseholes (comics) for the consumption of more arseholes (the public). Indeed, it is during this work that I find myself turning into Seishiro and contemplating the idea of reducing my workload using assassination. I'm sure psychiatrists would find me fascinating.

Considering how much I've read from psychologists with regards to the mental health effects of, say, being a moderator for facebook and sites like that, I think you'd probably find yourself viewed in a very sympathetic light. Also you'd at least have a clear and understandable motivation, ha!

Nevertheless, in comedy that's what I'm famous for. In 2019, my work resulted in me becoming a judge of (as we describe ourselves) the "increasingly prestigious" Malcolm Hardee Awards, which cover alternative comedy acts, giving out prizes for "Comic Originality", "Cunning Stunt" and "Act Most Likely To Make A Million Quid". Past winners have included Trevor Noah, Bo Burnham and Reggie Watts, who coincidentally hosted a short-lived US version of *Taskmaster*. To give an idea of what Hardee was like, before he became a comic he was in-and-out of prison for various petty crimes in the 1970s, and during one of his spells inside he and his fellow inmates would list to BBC Radio 4's cryptic quiz show *Round Britain Quiz*, where Malcolm would know every answer exactly to these incredibly complicated questions. What Malcolm didn't tell them was, they were listening to repeats that he had already heard, and had remembered all the answers from before.

What a legend.

Regarding anime and manga, *Pokemon* was the first series I came across when I was a teenager, but I did not properly get into it until I started university. I had made a shift in degrees from software engineering (I couldn't code) to media studies (which turns out is as pointless as everyone jokes it is) and was encouraged to examine forms of media that were new to me. I went into manga and anime then, the first manga I bought being *Hyper Police* and the first anime *Evangelion*.

I joined the website Anime UK News (AUKN) in 2011, and eventually began reviewing both anime and manga releases. In 2012, a new magazine, *MyM*, launched and was devoted to among other things anime and manga. I send some submissions and got a job as their manga critic, mainly because everyone else just sent in anime reviews. I was the only one to apply with

manga as well as anime, and thus I became their manga critic for all 71 issues until the magazine stopped in 2018. I still work for AUKN. Is this enough detail?

I really love that last detail—that you sent in manga reviews not JUST anime reviews. (Clarification: I sent both anime and manga reviews, but I was the only one that sent in manga, which is why I got the job) Because I personally think that it's really important to be clear about the distinction—different people make these media with different parameters, just like books versus TV shows versus movies. So, kudos!

Yeah, I think that really is an important distinction! We've talked about it a little as we discuss CLAMP anime versus manga. There are just different strengths and weaknesses, different kinds of comedy that work or don't work, different sensitivities...it's important to remember that they really are two different mediums!

- This was a 2020 phase-of-the-Pandemic project, right?

Yes, but the origins date back a bit further. Back when I was *MyM*'s manga critic, I used to get free copies of manga to review, with Viz Media sending me a large FedEx package to me every month. Even after the magazine shut down in 2018, Viz kept sending me stuff, some of which I reviewed for AUKN, but often it would just pile up.

The best worst problem—too many books!

Thus, I decided for my 2019 New Year's Resolution to get through my entire backlog of manga. My rules were I had to read one print volume of manga per day until the backlog cleared. The book had to be manga, it had to originate from Japan, it had to be translated into English and it had to be in print. If I was given a new volume of a series I was already reading, but it skipped previous volumes, I had to buy the missing volumes to continue. If it was a new volume of a series I had not been reading (unless it was Vol. 1 of something brand new), I could get rid of it (I've never read "Case Closed", but I still got volumes of it in the 50s, and I don't have the money to buy all those other volumes).

Fair—that's a HUGE series, like, life-eating not to mention wallet-emptying.

Across 365 days I read 366 print manga, because due to one surprise late shipment from Viz I ended up reading two volumes on Christmas day (My Hero Academia Vol. 22 and the BL title *Liquor & Cigarettes*).

Which was the better read?

Hard to recall which is better as it was some time ago.

Among the print manga I had during that time were some CLAMP stuff I never got around to, including *Suki: A Like Story*, *Chobits*, *Drug and Drop* and *Tsubasa: World Chronicle*. However, I from the CLAMP manga I had read before that CLAMP had all these interconnected characters, and I am the kind of person who wants to read everything in order, so before I could these, I

went back and read digital copies of the series I was missing like *Cardcaptor Sakura* and *Wish*. I finally read *World Chronicle* on 20th-21st December 2019. I enjoyed doing this year-long project.

Yeah like I've said before in our early episodes, the genesis of our podcast was that I re-read most of CLAMP (including buying up most of what I didn't have) so I love that we have a similar experience we're drawing from—I think my binge was 2017? Still. Congrats on a fun year.

In January 2020, I got a new, short-term job at the TV production company Remarkable as a question writer for two quiz shows: the UK version of *The Wall*, and the more comic *Richard Osman's House of Games*. My contract ended in March 2020, just as the Covid pandemic was really starting to hit and the first of the UK's lockdowns were about to start.

As everything in Britain started closing down as the virus struck – and it struck the UK badly – I decided that I needed another project, like my Resolution one, to keep me going during this difficult time. I've always wanted to be more respected as a manga critic, so I decided writing a book would be a good thing to do, so I decided to write about CLAMP. My first challenge was to get *Gate 7*, which is out-of-print and not available digitally, so I had to buy second-hand copies on eBay which took a month to arrive because the seller forgot to ship them out. Once I read them, I went back to *RG Veda*, and started the whole thing from the start.

- So tell us more about why you decided on CLAMP?

A few reasons: one was that I was surprised that there wasn't any books in English about the group and their work itself. I later learned there had been an attempt to do so, with Shaenon K. Garrity trying to write the book *CLAMP in America* in the early 2010s.

Yeah! It was going to be published by Del Rey Manga, an imprint of Del Rey, which is an imprint of Ballantine (itself a part of Random House because publishing is...like that.) They were a joint venture with Kodansha so they were the publishers for Tsubasa and XXXHolic in English, but by 2010 they decided to fold Del Rey Manga and instead just have Kodansha publish manga in the US as Kodansha USA. That book was probably killed by the collapse and lost in the shuffle. Which is too bad, really, that was an era where the English-speaking public would have been really hungry for such a book.

So many other manga creators have been the subject of books, like Osamu Tezuka and Leiji Matsumoto, but little has been written about female authors in English (I know there is a book about Rumiko Takahashi in French), and CLAMP are my favourites. I thus decided that I should try and write one, but as someone who works in comedy, writing a straight history was not something I felt was right for me, so my book takes on a more humorous, personal tone.

I think the fact that CLAMP are your fave female mangaka is worth highlighting—it comes through, I think? Why are they your favorites—does it connect with your love of comedy or is it

something you don't get from that avenue?

I think it is partly, as you say, CLAMP are women and not only that they are the one big manga group that anyone has really heard of, what with everyone else working on their own or in pairs, but backed by assistants. Then you have the interconnectedness of all of their stories which creates this CLAMP universe or "CLAMPverse" as I refer to it in the book. Plus there is the range of genres they cover and the quality of the artwork.

Regarding a comedy connection, the one that sticks out is a comment made by Sandi Toksvig, a Danish comedian based in Britain, former host of *The Great British Bake Off* and the current host of *QI*. She was a guest on *QI*'s radio spin-off series *The Museum of Curiosity*, where guests from various fields from entertainment to the academic donate something to a virtual museum. Past exhibits include the Big Bang when it was the size of a grapefruit, the Holy Grail, 10,000 tigers, a wing of the museum which is entirely deep fried, and most recently in tribute to all NHS staff who worked during COVID-19, the sunrise after a night shift.

When Toksvig appeared on the show, her donation was the alphabet, but not for the reasons you might think. Toksvig is a big feminist campaigner and co-founder of the Women's Equality Party in the UK, and she donated the alphabet on the grounds that arguably it has hindered women. Before literacy, most societies were goddess cultures with women at their center, but when writing comes along, men normally always end up in charge and society becomes more sexist. I think this where not just CLAMP, but all female-identifying comic creators can come into their own, because with manga, comics and graphic novels, you are combining the visual with the written, creating someone more accessible to all.

You know, in my personal experience as a kid lit comic artist, I always feel that comics are an incredibly accessible artform—but to be honest, they are NOT equally accessible to all! Either to make, or to read. To make comics is time-consuming and requires many different skillsets all used at once—and is generally underpaid, which affects accessibility. But also many folks I've met over the years find that they cannot follow visual narratives at all, and that the artwork is distracting rather than directing for them. On the other hand, there are people who will get stories out of comics that they might never manage to glean from prose, and visual literacy is also teachable and important and comics are maybe a place where that can become more prominent in education!

Anyway your book does have a very personal approach and I think that helps it feel like a casual, accessible read rather than a lecture.

Yes, accessibility is one of the big things at the heart of the book. This probably is due to me being disabled, where accessibility has long been an issue, whether it is physical and you have difficulty entering a place because you are in a wheelchair and you are confronted by steps, or in my case a mental/learning disability where you have difficulty understanding certain situations and social queues. This is part of the reason I put translation notes in the book, like many

manga do to explain aspects of Japanese life to western readers, but in my case it is explaining bits of British life and culture.

Very thoughtful! I know as Americans we appreciated those translation notes.

The comedy in the book is also part of the accessible nature of it. Probably my favourite style of comedy is where you learn something from it. To take *QI* for example, there are bits of Japanese culture which I have learned from it which are interesting, because I then see them in anime. For example, in Japan most adoptions are of adult men, namely the owners of big corporations adopting bright young men to be the heir of the business and marrying them to the owner's daughter, but you still keep it as a family business. There is a saying: "You can't choose your son, but you can choose your son-in-law." Such a figure appears as one of the antagonists in the first series of *Sword Art Online*, Oberon / Nobuyuki Sugo in the Alfheim arc, who plots to marry Asuna to take over a business.

Yeah, that is fascinating, and not something I was aware of!

The fact that most of CLAMP's work is in English is one of the other reasons I picked them. I speak virtually no Japanese, never really studied the language, and at school I was hopeless at learning foreign languages. Also, my book is aimed at people who are new to anime and manga, so I thought it would be good to use a group of people who have had nearly all their work released in English, the only major exception being *Murikuri*.

The situation with *Murikuri* is so frustrating! But you handle that in a fun way in the book.

Yes I know, especially given the fact that Kodansha have released chapters of *Clear Card* which are shorter than *Murikuri*.

I'm under the impression that they're more like, one-shot gag comics that were fill-ins for a magazine, not really a series or anything. So they are just not any kind of priority/would be more trouble to translate and pay royalties for than they're worth to a publisher. The completionist in me writhes.

Also, one advantage of writing about CLAMP is that you can cover lots of different kinds of manga because of their range. You can cover detective stories with *CLAMP School Detectives*, both isekai and mecha with *Magic Knight Rayearth*, magical girls with *Cardcaptor Sakura* and sci-fi with *Clover*. The chances are that someone new to manga will get a better chance of finding something they like as they cover so much.

Yeah, I know that their range was something that just really meant a lot to me as a kid when I was getting into them—for someone new to comics you get to sample such a wide variety of genre and tones, and they have a unique take on each!

Yes, as well as genres, there are various different art styles too, whether it is the hand-painting in *Shirahime-Syo*, the white space in *Clover*, or the various character designs they have done not just in their own manga, but for other people's anime series too.

Yeah, I find their versatility really inspiring!

- So we like to ask our interview-ees what their favorite CLAMP work is. I know your book of course contains this and more, but do you have a favorite you can talk about?

It depends on if we are talking anime or manga, because it is different. For the manga, it is a toss-up between *Tokyo Babylon* or *X*, mainly because my favourite characters in the CLAMP canon are Subaru and Seishiro. I flit around which of the two guys I like the most, from being in a positive Subaru mood to the more moody and grim Seishiro mood – and as I live in an area of Britain so grim it boasts about inspiring two of the world's most famous dystopias, *Blade Runner* and *Brave New World*, combined with my comedy work which sees me on the front lines of the “culture wars” and seeing arseholes who claim to be “canceled” getting full media exposure when I never get much of say myself, it's usually Seishiro.

Regarding the anime, my favourite is *Angelic Layer*. It's not perfect – how come their white school uniforms never get dirty – but I like the excitement of it all and I'm interested in the depiction of disability in it, as someone who is disabled themselves.

Yes, we cannot wait to get to *Angelic Layer* in our podcast! It's also one of my favorite CLAMP animes, and one of the few times where I actually like the anime better than the manga. Or at least, I did about a decade ago. We'll see if my feelings change when we finally get to it!

- Which CLAMP series were you already familiar with when you started?

*I was already familiar with several of their works. As I said, I read all their works in order, and by the time I started my New Year's project I think I had got as far as *Angelic Layer*, reading *Suki: A Like Story* between 4th-6th March, and I read most of CLAMP either in print (counting towards my goal) or digitally (as something extra separate from the goal) over that period.*

- Were there any series you weren't that interested in that you ended up liking more than you expected?

*Arguably *Miyuki-chan in Wonderland*, because it is the CLAMP series that appears to be the most critically panned. I disagree with this: personally I think *The One I Love* is my least favourite CLAMP series, and for me it is a slog to read partly due to the mixture of essays and*

short manga, so I recommend reading it in small chunks. Miyuki-chan however is interesting, as is evidenced that it was used at British Museum's manga exhibition in 2019.

Miyuki-chan is such a riot, we had a ton of fun covering it.

The One I Love—I actually like the fluffy essays more than the comics! Maybe because we're so focused on researching CLAMP and the essays are information-adjacent enough for me, I guess? I think I'm right there with you, it isn't as substantial and lacks and hooks other than what a wedding magazine would expect I guess.

You did also provide me with some useful information regarding the origins of the skateboarding bunny girl in Miyuki-chan, referencing the animation for Daicon IV. I later read in Kimi Rito's The History of Hentai Manga that for a long time, that was considered the anime that first depicted the movement of breasts, but there are now considered to be earlier examples of it.

It was the origin for so much, it can't take credit for everything I guess!

- Any other surprises while you were doing this research, for better or worse?

The surprises were usually worse. I originally contacted you to talk about the use of the word "spaz" in CLAMP School Detectives, a word which is considered discriminatory towards the disabled in Britain. You still see it pop up in translations of both anime and manga from time to time, because all the translations are done by Americans who are unaware of what the word means over here.

As far as CLAMP themselves, the biggest shock was the scene in Rayearth with the girls being cooked in a pot why Presea dresses as a stereotypical whooping Native American, even though she is from an entirely different world which presumably had no contact with Native Americans. Very definitely dodgy to say the least.

Yeah, language is honestly slippery. We critique the translations for so many reasons and sometimes—like in this case—it's something that should probably be addressed in style guides, and sometimes we're just being pedantic.

- I bet that awful Native American stereotype nonsense was inspired by scenes from mid-century Disney comics or old American films. Ugh.
- The Nazi Clamp School Detectives was what made me need to go get my heart rate to come down to a safe level.

Yes, not helped by that fact that Nokoru has blonde hair and blue eyes. You could not look more Ayran unless he was actually German.

- Your book is quite the undertaking. You had to do a lot of research, a lot of reading, importing—what was the biggest challenge you faced?

As I said earlier, part of the problem is the language barrier. There are so many resources that I can't access because they are only in Japanese. Thank goodness for Chibi Yuuto for translating so much stuff.

Seriously, what a champion, what a prince. And all of his network of folks he works with to provide translations, everyone who shares resources...we're so grateful! Chibi Yuuto has a redbubble shop and ways to take donations from his site, too, which I recommend to folks to give a little back!

The biggest load of research I did was right at the beginning, as I decided to familiarise myself with the original *Rig Veda* before writing about CLAMP's *RG Veda*. Luckily an unabridged audiobook came out, so I listened to it while doing the brief periods of outdoors exercise I was allowed to take during the lockdown. This was also a shock, especially one sentence which began: "Destroy in us the counsel of the niggard" – N-I-G-G-A-R-D – a word which is completely unrelated to THAT N-word, meaning miserly, but it was still a shock.

Ah, the power and nuance of language strike again.

- Since you tackle every single CLAMP series published in English, your book is really comprehensive. That means you're not just sticking to the biggest, most known series, or just skipping around to your favorites.
- I appreciate the attention you gave to series like Suki and Angelic Layer. Your writings about Suki have me very excited to read it for the first time (it's one of the ones I missed!)—and we happen to be big champions of Angelic Layer, too!

Yes, *Suki*, starring Hina Asahi, the most naive person in the entire world. The only person I am aware of who you can go up to, ask for their school uniform in public, and she will give it to you without a moment's thought – although that actually comes up in *Legal Drug* when Kazahaya needs one for a mission he has been sent out to do, in one of CLAMP's many examples of series crossing each other. It's no wonder she has been kidnapped so many times.

To be fair, that happened when she was a guest star in a book with characters who are as no-brain-cells as she is haaa! CLAMP will just go ahead and write stuff that requires the main character to be a uniquely naive or sheltered or just plain brainless monster, won't they? Like, the whole plot (which will be interesting and twisty and full of insight) will not work if the main character ever thinks for five minutes about their situation and asks basic questions. I could never get away with that! Maybe that connects them to sketch comedy ha ha ha

As for *Angelic Layer*, one of things that got me interested was a not entirely flattering review of the series, criticising it as a series about a game you can't play. At the time the series was going out, we had a TV show called *Robot Wars* which was about people building their own robots

and fighting with them. *Angelic Layer* involves people creating dolls and fighting with them. As far as I'm concerned, it was actually on-moment.

Yeah, I also read that review. And I'm with you, both in sentiment and your comparison. Like...I think that its a sci fi show that both explores the way humans connect with dolls AND speculates about the evolution of games, not an advertisement for a game—and I think a lot of other 'card game anime' play with that line, too. Like, it is a very post-pokemon show in what it explores and what it says.

It is interesting you mention card game anime, because during my time reviewing manga, one of the worst titles I reviewed was the first volume of *Cardfight Vanguard*, partly because it is only about plugging the game rather than any story. And then CLAMP ended up doing character design for the *OverDress* anime

I have card game anime on the brain since I'm going to discuss one for our Magical-Girl-forward-year, and the one I'm excited about is almost a PSA warning you not to play the (actual, extant) game! I do not come from Yu Gi Oh so card game anime has been a whole world I've happily ignored until a friend was playing 'crunchyroll roulette' and accidentally fell in love with this one...well, we'll get to it. She tried watching *OverDress* and said she couldn't force herself to watch more than one episode, if I recall.

I should say I'm not a TCG player, but I have read the *Yu Gi Oh!* manga and reviewed the anime for AUKN, as well as some of the later sequels. I certainly prefer it to *Vanguard* on the ground that it was originally just a typical shonen series, and then the card game spun-off it, became massive, and understandably that's what the manga became about. *Vanguard* has always just been plugging a game.

- One thing that struck us when we were reading your book is that you talk a lot at the beginning about anime's reputation in the UK. Do you think that has changed with kids having more access now?

Among young people yes. Today's generation have so much access to streaming services, as well as DVDs, Blu-Rays, and in my case VHS. As a critic I keep an eye out for the more obscure titles that have not made it to DVD in this country, but have been out on video. There are also all the conventions and in 2019 the British Museum held a large manga exhibit, with one of the first things you spotted when entering it was a blow-up of the cover of *Miyuki-chan in Wonderland*. How many people knew it was a lesbian sex comedy before they made that blow-up I don't know.

When you shared that with me, all I could think of was 'I guess the Alice connection seemed important to someone who didn't know much about manga.' Or maybe it was just cheap to get a hold of? There are probably people we could ask about that someday...

My guess is that they wanted to find something manga related which has an obvious British connection, and *Alice in Wonderland* is a series that has the subject of many manga adaptations. As it is a one-off volume maybe it is cheaper.

However, these are still only from specialist services. While last year the BBC did start streaming old episodes of *Pokemon* on their iPlayer service including two more seasons and two films this week, this was still the first anime the BBC had ever shown (ignoring the odd clip here and there) since the 2000s *Astro Boy* when it originally aired. Channel 4 have a few more titles, sometimes show Studio Ghibli films, and even had the first series of *Cardcaptor Sakura* for a while.

I seemed to remember you mentioning that CCS was something that you folks had access to despite having very little anime on TV.

Yes ITV, Britain's main commercial TV channel, did broadcast the *Cardcaptors* dub back in the day. They also broadcast some of *Yu-Gi-Oh!*, *Pokemon* and *Digimon Adventure* too. This was back when ITV's children's strand, CITV, was a small segment on the main ITV channel. Today, CITV is a separate channel. They did broadcast *Yokai Watch* a year or two ago, but there is no anime on the network currently.

The UK has a different situation with broadcasting than the US does though, right? The BBC puts more emphasis on home-grown material partially to keep from just being out-competed with American TV garbage?

I would say the thing the BBC is mainly keen on right now is survival. It's gone through several scandals over the years, the Conservative government have frozen the licence fee which is how the BBC has funded, the fee covering the cost of TV, radio and internet services which everyone owning a colour TV in the UK must pay. The government is considering alternative ways of funding the BBC, like making it a Netflix-like subscription service, but those championing the Beeb see it as a threat to the entire corporation. It is thinking of privatising Channel 4 too. Politicians are telling broadcasters to make more "distinctly British" programmes - i.e. not show foreign stuff, but are not giving public broadcasters more money to make shows, while putting or trying to put more Conservative-supporting people in strong media positions. If the Conservatives could sell the BBC and Channel 4 to the Murdoch News Corp. empire, they would.

The horror x...x

Well, last year a new very FOX-like news channel called GB News was launched in Britain. If you want to get an idea of what it is like, 1) a right-wing BBC News presenter called Andrew Neil left the BBC to join GB News, but left GB News after a few months because it was too right-wing even for him; and 2), when the channel launched people kept pranking the channel by sending in questions from some people whose names you can imagine Moe from *The Simpsons* saying, including 'Mike Hunt', 'Hugh Janus', 'Mike Oxlong', 'Tess Tegal', 'Cleo Torez' and 'Jenny Taylier'.

Yet you still get the feeling that among the general public, especially older people, that the first things that come to mind with when it comes to anime and manga is graphic sex and violence, not helped by distributors in the 1980s and 1990s wanting to be seen as edgy and wanting to generate such an image. There is still a mindset that in Britain cartoons are just for kids, and any adult cartoon is to be treated with suspicion. While more mature American series like *South Park* and *Rick and Morty* are accepted, anime, especially more grown-up series, is still generally shunned and not broadcast on mainstream TV. While Britain does make some great animation, especially Aardman, with a new *Wallace & Gromit* recently commissioned, we hardly make any adult stuff.

Yeah I'm glad I get to watch Aardman animations for sure. And Ireland's Cartoon Saloon is incredible—maybe not 'for adults' in terms of sex and violence but in terms of quality. I really love animation and comics and want to have access to things made around the world—and I want folks around the world to have the means to use these media as creative expression! But to ignore just HOW MUCH art has come out of the Japanese anime and manga industries feels...really ridiculous.

There is very little media coverage in the press. I have not seen any coverage of *Requiem of the Rose King* for example, even though it is based on the works of Shakespeare, is about one of our most famous kings, who is being portrayed as intersex, and is voiced by a non-binary British voice actor. If this was live-action, the British press would be all over it, for better or worse (most likely worse, the British media has a big transphobia problem)

Admittedly I've given up on mainstream news as anything worth worrying about, so I don't know how much anime is ever discussed on the news here outside of 'save the children' nonsense when we were younger. And I guess they probably reported on the incredible amount of money *Demon Slayer* has made, since that makes it important by American standards. Sigh.

No. The only coverage of *Demon Slayer* in the UK mainstream press I can think of was some reviews of the recent film rather than how much money it made. Other than that I don't recall seeing anything about it. The last time I remember anime getting really major coverage was the Kyoto Animation arson attack, the BBC interviewing me about it.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-49026944>

Yeah, I'm not sure how much it comes up in the news here, but overall anime feels pretty mainstream. Most people will admit to watching a least a few shows here or there, and even people who "don't get" anime still more or less understand what it is. At least among younger people, anyway.

- Were there any jokes you had to cut from the book that you wish there'd been room for?

While the publisher may want to tinker with a few things if I get the funds for the book, the only thing I can think of was cutting something out because the gag worked better visually rather than written down. I learned that Seishiro has a Scorpio star sign. I don't know much about astrology so someone sent me a link to the website Cafe Astrology, and it mentioned the key anatomical body parts as being the genitals, bladder and bowels. I know that age gap between Seishiro and Subaru is problematic for some, but in my head things just got WAY kinkier between the two, and I just imagined some kind of male *2 Girls 1 Cup* scenario. The gag I cut involved me writing as if Seishiro was breaking the fourth wall, poking his head out of a toilet cubicle, and saying directly: "Hang on, you mean you **didn't** want us to actually do it?", then a solitary, dirty gloved hand appears and is followed by the strained words: "You bastard!"

See folks, this is the danger of getting into Astrology. Slippery slope to scat porn.

- So just for my own edification, I want to know about what kinds of comics you have access to in the UK! Tell me about your fave comic shops, or bookstores that sell comics!
 - Do you have access to a lot of French, Spanish, other European comics? Or do people who are interested tend to buy them when they travel abroad?

Obviously we get a lot of your superhero comics, and aside from manga there are some comics that come from Europe: France has *Asterix the Gaul*, Belgium has *Tintin*, and Scandinavia has *The Moomins*. As far as Britain is concerned, probably the most famous comics are the sci-fi comic 2000 AD, which created *Judge Dredd*. There is also *Commando*, which is war comics, namely the two world wars; plus the children's comics *Dandy* and *Beano*, the latter of which is home to the British version of *Dennis the Menace*, which debuted in the same week as the American *Dennis the Menace* entirely independently.

Those are the same tiny sampling of Euro comics we get! I'm shocked, I'd assume you'd have more access just because of proximity! ACTually we get way more than that, but still very specialized and hard to access outside of those classics, basically.

I should say I really only know about manga. We probably get just as many stuff from Europe, but manga is really the only thing form of comics I care about.

I'm shocked! I wish we had better access to Euro comics! I'm a lifelong Moomin fan and it's sad we didn't have collections of the comics till recently. My comic is getting a French release and I'm over the moon—France and Italy have so much manga influence because they were importing more manga and anime than the US or UK did and it's a fascinating world of media to get into!

There is also Britain's most famous adult comic book, which confusingly for manga fans is called *Viz*. The comic is home to character such as Johnny Fartpants, Buster Gonad (the boy with the biggest bollocks in the world), Sid the Sexist, Billy the Fish (a soccer goalkeeper who is an actual fish), the Fat Slags, and the foul-mouthed Roger Mellie: The Man From The Telly. Among

the other things *Viz* have done were buying the rights to the comedian Johnny Vegas's wedding for five pounds, and giving away a free balloon to their readers, which was attached to the back page via a staple.

In terms of manga, the only British publisher I can think of is Breakdown Press, which from time-to-time releases the odd underground 1960s-1970s manga. Other than that, no-one else in the UK prints manga. All our releases are American.

Yeah I know we've talked before about how maddening it is to English speakers outside the US to see Celsius inelegantly converted to Fahrenheit for non-metric-users' comprehension. Since I'm pretty focused on manga as a portal for understanding culture, it feels weird to me, too, and I'm supposedly the target audience for changes like that!

- You're from an interesting town with a lot of nerdy connections, though, right?

My hometown of Stockton-on-Tees has a surprising amount of geeky shops. My personal favourite is Geek Corner, which as well as being a second-hand comic shop sells figures, games, are also prop makers. They create loads of things for cosplayers, make fursuits for furies, and are also working on my own cosplay ideas. There are other comic books shops in the town such as Something For The Geekend, a games shop called Beanie Games which has a board game cafe; Hunter Toys which specialises in *Star Wars*; and *Who-Ray* which specialises in *Doctor Who*. Stockton is also home to the world's first passenger railways, so I also jokingly argue that we invented the geeky hobby of trainspotting too.

As for outside of my hometown, there are the Forbidden Planet chain of comic book shops across the country, there is Traveling Man which has several branches across the north of England, and there are also the big bookshop chains like Waterstones.

That sounds wonderful! I'm delighted at the idea of an entire *Doctor Who* store. About the closest we've got here is a fish'n chips restaurant with *Doctor Who* themed drinks and a bathroom door that kind of looks like the Tardis.

That sounds incredibly tacky.

- On our podcast we've made it to *Cardcaptor Sakura*! Of course you wrote extensively about CCS in your book. Let's talk about it a little bit! This'll be interesting with us suspending Stargazing, Lucy and I might tip-toe a little around so as to not spoil too much of our future discussions but you don't necessarily have to worry about such compunctions. You said earlier that it was a comic series you'd missed and went back to read, right?

It wasn't one I really missed. When I did my year-long reading, CCS was one of the titles I read digitally and which didn't count towards my overall total, but it was one that I felt I had to read because one of the print titles I had was *Tsubasa: World Chronicle*, so I read it to make sense of

everything that was in it. I am currently reading the Kodansha Collector's Editions as you make your way through the series, and one of things I've noted is the way the individual volumes are spread across these books is uneven. For example, Volume 3 of the original is told mostly in Volume 2 of the Collector's Edition, except for the final chapter which goes into the third edition.

Woah, I didn't realize that! We're gonna have to be careful as we go, I guess...

Over here in the UK, the CCS anime is about to be released as a Blu-Ray Collector's Edition by Anime Limited. It was meant to come out on Valentine's Day but got pushed back to the end of March. Anime Ltd., or All The Anime have been releasing a lot of CLAMP shows over the years, having all releases the UK Blu-Ray releases of *Rayearth* and *Angelic Layer*, as well as series they have provided character designs for such as *Code Geass* and soon a very special "Ultimate Edition" of the two *Blood-C* films. Anime Ltd. are very good with boxsets, and were the people who brought out the recent *Evangelion* set in the UK.

I did watch all of the CCS anime, on a Region 1 DVD, and it is interesting because the anime did provide me with what is my favourite part of the entire book, and you have already past this bit in the manga so I feel safe talking about it now. I know you have commented on some problematic relationships in CLAMP's work: Subaru and Seishiro, Rika and Terada, etc. However, I feel that there is one person out there who needs to be stopped: Tomoyo.

Hear me out. I know most people see her as Sakura's friendly if eccentric sidekick, the Lois Lane to Sakura's Superman, but as Sakura says, she is a little weird. I say she's a pervert, and I have proof. Tenuous, jokey "proof" but I'm going with it. In the manga, Sakura manages to capture the "Thunder" card with ease and it is only briefly dealt with. In the anime, capturing this card becomes a full-length episode. In the episode, Sakura has trouble catching the card as it is so dangerous, so to help her capture the card that night Tomoyo helps her by making her a special costume, out of rubber, but also looking like a catgirl maid, and when Sakura asks why the cat ears are part of the outfit, Tomoyo says: "It looks cute."

Now, to illustrate my point, imagine a Venn diagram of three crossing circles. In one is "A 10-year-old girl", the second says: "Dressed as a catgirl", and the third "Wearing rubber". I would argue that two of those statements combining is fine. A 10-year-old girl dressed as a catgirl is perfectly charming and cute. A 10-year-old girl wearing rubber makes sense in the context of the scene because Sakura is being protected from the thunder. You might make your child wear a rubber mackintosh and wellington boots to protect them from rain and mud, which again makes sense. Dressed as a catgirl wearing rubber may be considered kinky, but it's fine among consenting adults. But all three? A 10-year-old girl dressed as a catgirl wearing rubber? That is just creepy. If you spotted a girl in real-life dressed like that, I think you would be on the phone to the authorities. This is just Tomoyo trying to get Sakura into some weird fetish, and given that she always carries that camcorder, as well as dresses her up and watching her own footage back all the time, I say she needs to be stopped!

You can compare Tomoyo to Lois Lane, but I think she is more akin to a British comedy character. There was a sketch show in the 1990s called *The Fast Show*, so-called because all the sketches were quick: if *Monty Python* were the people who got rid of punchlines, *The Fast Show* were the people who only had punchlines. The character from it which I think matches Tomoyo is Paul Whitehouse's lascivious 13th Duke of Wybourne, who dressed in a blue velvet jacket, unfastened bow tie, cigar in one hand and open bottle of champagne in the other would speak to camera saying things like: "Me? The 13th Duke of Wybourne, here, in a French maid's finishing school, at three o'clock in the morning, with my reputation? ... Bingo!"

As a result, everytime Tomoyo comes up in the book, and as CLAMP cross-reference a lot she does appear several times, I feel compelled to make a 13th Duke of Wybourne-style gag. I have her saying things like: "Me? Tomoyo Daidouji, here, in Tomoeda's Penguin Park, dressing a 10-year-old girl in a rubber catgirl costume, while armed with a camcorder, at three o'clock in the morning, with my reputation? ... Poor little thing's never even heard of upskirting!"

You know we disagree with your interpretation, but I do think that is funny as hell <3

I know you do. I don't think there is anyone out there who would agree with me, and let's be honest the explanation is something of a joke, but my thoughts are that if somebody reads that and thinks: "What?! I'm going to have to read this for myself", and they end up reading CLAMP's stuff because of it, I'm happy because at least they are interacting with the work. I want a reaction in the hope that people will want to write more about CLAMP, and let's be honest if it gets my book more attention, it's another sale.

Like I say, this book is meant to be humorous and not a serious study. I suspect that if a student of manga quotes my book for their studies, they would probably fail their degree.

I think you definitely succeed on that front! And I really, really want to hear from the kid who one day tries to do that...good luck future anime scholar!

- So outside of CLAMP, I know in the book that you mentioned being a big fan of Gurren Lagann, which I also think is pretty excellent.

I first came across it when I joined my university's comic club. They showed the series on a big screen back in 2006-2007. I'm not sure how legal the copies of the show were, but when I watched it was like nothing I had even seen before or since. Nothing has been as big in terms of scale as it I suspect nothing will. How can you get bigger than a mecha the size of the universe, or even larger than it? I think that if *CLAMPdown* is a success, a book about *Gurren Lagann* will be my follow-up.

Yeah, Gurren Lagann is pretty unique. I'd be remiss if I didn't mention that it's one of my boyfriend's favorite animes as well. He also loves xxxHolic, so he's definitely got good taste!

- All right, tell the world how they can help make this book a reality!

OK, I'm happy to say that soon you'll be able to show your CLAMP love in a whole new way. Exciting announcement! It's not NFTs... I'm launching the book on Kickstarter.

I am working with a local publisher, Sixth Element (6e.net). With this publisher, I pay for copyediting, cover design, publishing print copies etc., but I retain all of the rights to the book itself. I have set my target low, not knowing how many people are interested, so the project will cover 100 print copies of the book, but obviously if lots more people fund the book we can print more copies, and there will be digital copies too.

My funding target is £2,800 (roughly \$3,800, or ¥440,000), and there are various different reward tiers people can choose from. The lowest, just for £1, is a thank you credit in the book. Next up is £5, where you will get the eBook version as well as the credits. £15 will get you a thank you credit and a signed copy of the print book, with the added bonus that each signature will be unique – my handwriting's terrible. For £20 you get the credit, the eBook and the signed print book. For £25 you get all of that, and a bookmark to match the book – the bookmark is also an £2 add-on award for all the other tiers. You can add-on extra print copies for £15 each. Finally, the top tier, at £50, you get everything in the £22 tier: credit, eBook, signed print book, bookmark, and added onto this, I will give an online preview reading of any chapter you choose.

If I reach £2,800, there is an extra stretch goal: I have been in touch with a local recording studio, Green Dragon Studios, about recording an audiobook version of CLAMPdown. Once I pass £2,800 I will create a new reward tier/add-on of £6 for the audiobook, and the target to release it will be £3,400.

I am going to launch the Kickstarter campaign on 1st March at midday UK time, and it will end on 31st March at 4pm, which is midnight 1st April in Japan, so the entire thing finishes as CLAMP Day begins. I would finish it on 1st April in the UK, but being a comedy project there is the risk of people thinking it is all an April Fool.

You can visit the project page now and arrange to be notified of the launch by visiting www.kickstarter.com/projects/clampdown/clampdown - that's "/clampdown" twice, as the first is my Kickstarter profile name. I hope to get the book out by July, because as I say August is always very busy for me due to my work at the Edinburgh Fringe.

Now, my original intention with the book was to release one chapter every year at 4pm on 31st March until I had secured a book deal. If you go to the book's Twitter page, @clampdownbook, you will see a pinned Tweet linking to an early draft version of the first chapter, covering RG Veda, as well as the book's preface and introduction. In the event I do not reach my target, I will post up chapter two, which covers the three CLAMP School series: Man of Many Faces, Duklyon and CLAMP School Detectives, and I will continue to post up chapters like this – all 18

of them, as it currently stands, but there is every chance that CLAMP might announce a brand new manga and thus I'll have to crowbar in a 19th chapter.

We, too, live in a state of anticipation for a new series tacking on years more podcasting...

Thank you so much, Ian, for joining us. And thank you for giving us early access to your book, we wish you so much luck—it is a huge endeavor and you had a very interesting take.

Outro

In our next episode, we'll be discussing Cardcaptor Sakura volume 4. Yep, back to our regular episodes...at least for now!

Until then, you can follow us on twitter, Tumblr, and Instagram @Clampcastpod, on Facebook as Clampcast in Wonderland, and on our website clampcastinwonderland.com.

You can support us on Patreon, by making purchases through our Bookshop.org store, or just by writing a review or sharing this podcast with your friends.

You can support the CLAMPdown book by visiting Kickstarter at <https://www.kickstarter.com/projects/clampdown/clampdown> or the Twitter account @clampdownbook

There will be links to all of that in the show notes!

Thanks for coming with us on our journey through CLAMP's Wonderland!

Until next time, remember that everything will be alright—

—and try not to lose an eye!