

EGSM – Anime

Content warnings

- Innuendo & brief sexual references
- Explicit language
- Discussions of: cultural appropriation, exercise, physical violence & war, trauma, workaholism, gender identity
- Mentions of: sexism, prosthetics & disability

NEMO

I don't know if there's a plot anymore – it is just (singing) “how far can we go until we're sued the next time?!”

[laughter]

[Show Theme - Intro]

HELEN

Rusty Quill presents Enthusigasm.

Hello friends and fans and welcome to Enthusigasm, the show where we talk about a few of our favourite things. I am your host, Helen Gould, one of the best Rusty Quillers and today we're talking about Anime. And, I am making the biggest heart-eyes at my guests today, who are Alex and Nemo, the dream

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

team. So, as always, we shall introduce ourselves alphabetically and, just very serendipitously, Alex starts with an 'A', so, Alex, what are your pronouns and what do you do?

ALEX

I am Alexander J Newell, he/him, I am the founder and CEO of Rusty Quill. You might be one of the best RQ-ers, but I like to think of myself as RQ-Alpha...

[Helen laughs]

... maybe, like... maybe, like, RQ-Prime. I'm not sure which one, though.

HELEN [laughing]

The 'Er-Q'!

ALEX

The Er-Q... aaahhhh, aaahhhh, I'm stealing that! Er-Q, there you go!

HELEN

Ach, I'm so talented and clever!

ALEX

You are underpaid, Helen!

[laughter]

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

HELEN

Nemo, what are your pronouns and what do you do?

NEMO

Hi, I'm Nemo Martin. I use they/them pronouns and I am the writer and creator of Trice Forgotten, a new Rusty Quill podcast, and I know that Alex doesn't really know much about fan-fiction stuff, so calling himself the Alpha was a mistake on an anime episode – just going to hedge that there and not say anything else about it!

HELEN

Yeah, I didn't... I just wanted to let him, like that's gonna, we're gonna keep that in...

ALEX

Also, factually inaccurate! I'm told that most of my characters end up pregnant in fanworks.

[laughter]

HELEN

Oh god! Oh, no... oh we're moving, we're moving on! Huaaaaggghhhhh...
Lowri has turned her camera on just to shake her head in dismay!

ALEX [laughing]

I haven't been allowed out in company for a while...

[laughter]

ALEX [laughing]

... and it's showing!!

HELEN

That's alright. That's alright. So, okay, anime is a subject that, actually, I don't know that much about, but I am interested in it as, like, a subject which is why we're doing the episode. I do know that it covers a whole range of shows so how do we actually, like, what is actually the definition of anime? Like, is it just any Japanese animation or does it have to have certain characteristics?

NEMO

I mean, my answer was going to be, yeah, Japanese animation is full stop for me, but if you have something more loquacious than that...!

ALEX

It kind of depends on your time period, actually.

NEMO

Mmm...

HELEN

Oh!

ALEX

Historically, anime has a few interesting and fairly disparate roots, like, some of them are driven economically, some of them are driven culturally, although I would broadly agree with Nemo's definition at the moment, which is anime has expanded beyond just, sort of, the Japanese style of animation to, just, its own style of animation that's, sort of, transcending, and you get stuff like...

HELEN

Mmm...

ALEX

... Ruby from, sort of, western origins and things like that, and it's still anime, even though it's not, sort of, a Japanese bent, but there was a lot of stuff in the history of it to do with, like, Japanese representations of the west in animation, hence the big anime eyes and things like that...

HELEN

Ohhh...

ALEX

... these were deliberate caricatures and exaggerations for animation, like, depictions of western society which is... and again, that's not all it is, but that's lent itself into the style so that's why in some of the older ones you'll get a lot of stuff that's, sort of, based, say, in the US, even though it has a very Japanese cultural identity and it gets a bit weird...

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

HELEN

Mmm...

ALEX

... a lot of that San Fran-Tokyo kind of vibes, if you know what I'm referencing.

NEMO

Mmm. There was definitely a style choice of the, like, European picture books and stuff like that, like...

HELEN

Ohhh...

NEMO

... they really enjoy the, kind of, 80s hair and stuff like...

ALEX

Yeah. Yeah, yeah...

NEMO

... when that... in the 80s when anime started developing and, yeah, there was such a style crossover that has, like, slowly become what we see as Japanese when you can see, like, the inspirations from, like, yeah, cartoons or TV shows or picture books, slightly older, and artwork from the West, so it's a very, like, yeah... it comes from one, it comes from the other...

ALEX

And bear in mind a lot of it as well – not anymore, but once upon a time – it was anime, basically, if it was derived from manga...

HELEN and NEMO

Mmm...

ALEX

... so there was the, like, 80s manga explosion and stuff like that where you had a *HUGE* amount of stories and then you'd go to a comparatively nascent film industry and go, 'Hi, I want to tell this story. It spans 2,000 years, has a cast of 600 people...' and then you would get told, 'no', but anime can cater to that quite well, hence why it's sort of got this representation for... well, RQ hits a lot of the same notes like that genre, kind of, scale thing...

HELEN and NEMO

Mmm...

ALEX

... it's because it's leaning into the medium and, for anime, again this is back in the day, it was a good way of telling the story that really wasn't tellable elsewhere, although, obviously, now it's broad in a way, you know, like, you get a lot of romance anime and stuff like that that could be IRL and you see a lot adaptations, the recent *Bebop*, or whatever, but then you get into, like, is it anime derived if it's IRL, like, where's the line? It's all getting very mushy...

HELEN and NEMO

Mmm...

HELEN

So, you said some of it's quite inspired by, like, 80s style. Is that why there's so much spiky hair going on?

ALEX

Yes.

NEMO

Mmmm, yeah.

HELEN

Oh! That's so cool! That makes so much sense.

ALEX

But that means that's why spiky hair comes back in as a style thing now is via anime; it's, sort of, 80s hair goes into anime, gets chopped up a bit and comes back out the other side to western audiences. It's fascinating.

HELEN

We're all just in an endless loop, slightly shifting.

NEMO

And because Japanese culture... I think in the West, like, a lot of individualism is kind of how we are right now. We're very... a society where, actually, rebellion in the West, especially in the UK and America, is very much about becoming a socialist and living in the community, whereas in Japan it is the... kind of, conservatism is about, like, not being individual and so in the 80s a lot of rebellion and, like, a lot of sub-cultures, came from looking at American trends and being, like, oh, if I look more western then I can be more individual and I can assert my individual rights. So, there was a lot of the, like, big hair-dos and very, like, perm... perming was, like, a huge thing and spiky hair and all that kind of stuff.

ALEX

I think it's arguably one of the ones that's had the most cross pollination over the years where it just keeps grabbing from whatever it likes and, kind of, it just slots in nicely. It's very mutable as a medium, I guess.

HELEN

Then... this is a slight tangent, right?

ALEX

Right.

NEMO

Mmm.

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

HELEN

My best friend is really into *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*...

ALEX

Understood.

NEMO

Mmm.

HELEN

... loads and loads of things in that are, like, the names are just stolen from popular bands and songs, and stuff, and I'm wondering how does that fit in, or is the writer just... just, like, aaahhhh, just do it. Heck it!

ALEX

You're kind of hitting into, like, where's the line between anime as a medium adopting things and a specific thing choosing to adapt thing.

HELEN

Mmm.

ALEX

I have to admit, I haven't seen *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*. I know of it and I know around it, but I've never just sat and watched the whole thing or anything. So, I can't really speak to that. I'm hoping, Nemo, you might be able to rescue me

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

because at the moment, I'm kind of, it's like, is that an anime thing or is a 'just-this-show' thing?

NEMO

I mean, in line with what we've just said, like, Japan also really likes black culture and black music and so...

HELEN

Mmm...

NEMO

... Cowboy Bebop is also, you know, one...

ALEX

Yeah, yeah.

NEMO

... and so taking from cool things, which, in the same way that white America did with a lot of black culture, Japan also does the same thing and puts it into anime so I think, yeah, taking from bands because it is cool and it is, like, I mean, for Japan it's western, but it's, kind of, like, white America takes from black America and then...

HELEN

Yeah.

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

NEMO

... Japan, like, cool Japanese people take it from white America who have taken it from black America. So it that, kind of, like, progression. And then white British people take it from anime, who have taken it from, blah, blah, blah...

[laughter]

HELEN

So, Nemo, have you seen *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*?

NEMO

I've seen the first season of *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*.

HELEN

What did you think?

NEMO

I think it's in line with how a lot of anime is quite self-referential and self-referential does mean, like, taking from other, like, pop references and stuff like that...

HELEN

Mmm.

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

NEMO

... even though it... all of the names are the kind of names in it that **[they laugh]**, if someone was basing a TV show in a country they had never been to, didn't speak that language and just, kind of, read a menu from, like, a restaurant...

[Helen laughs]

... like, that's what *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure* does with names!

HELEN

Yeah!

[laughter]

ALEX

And why not?!

HELEN

It's very funny. So, for those of you who don't know it, in *JoJo's Bizarre Adventure*, I think the first one follows Joseph...

NEMO

Mmm.

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

HELEN

... oh, I dunno! There's like Joseph and Joey and Josuki and...

ALEX

Aaauugggghhh...

[Helen laughs]

... Sorry I give that as note to writers so often – you can't give every character the same name!

[laughter]

You're making it so hard unnecessarily!

HELEN

No, no, no, this is the thing. The protagonist of each season has the Jo...

ALEX

Sure.

HELEN

... subgenre of a name. there are lots of people who have superpowers that are called Stands, and it's the Stands that often have the weird names, like, I'm pretty sure someone's got a Stand called Talking Heads, and stuff like that.

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

NEMO

Yep.

HELEN

In fact, I might do a quick little Google...

ALEX

So, again, I've only ever caught gleams of this, like, it hits meme culture *super-hard* as an anime, so I've got a lot by osmosis, but, like I said, I couldn't actually tell you for the life of me what the main story is even about.

HELEN

I... I couldn't either!

[laughter]

Because, so the story changes from season to season and is always really, really, like, complicated...

ALEX

Good, good.

HELEN

... So, a Stand is basically, like... they're often, like, people, they're like physical manifestations of, like, a superpower...

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

ALEX

Okay.

HELEN

... I'm looking at a Wiki...

ALEX

Good.

HELEN

... So, some of them have been named after tarot cards, some of them are named after Egyptian deities...

ALEX

It does sound very anime!

NEMO

Yeah.

HELEN

It's extremely anime!

ALEX

Good!

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

NEMO

It's quite similar to... the only think I know about *Persona*, the video game, because there is a character who has... is also called a Stand in that, or something, but his one is Jean Valjean...

[Helen laughs]

ALEX

Oh, right, yeah!

NEMO

... which makes me very excited as someone doing a PhD on *Les Mis*, but I'm just, like, the... and it's really in depth and he has, like, loads of portcullises and locks and chains, and stuff like that...

ALEX

It is power level 24601?

[laughter]

NEMO

Yes! 24601 written over his chest! It's really interesting because, in Japan, 24601 isn't his number because that doesn't rhyme in Japanese so...

HELEN

Oooooohhhh!

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

NEMO

... anyway, that's my...

ALEX

Of *course*! Oh, god, I've got to ask now – I know this is completely tangential – what is the number?

NEMO

It's [0:11:35 nee yon boku gor sun] 24653 because sun rhymes with Jean Valjean, kind of...

ALEX

Ohh, I don't know why but that's grating on my brain!

[laughter]

Ugh! Okay!

HELEN

That's really good. I found some Stand names. You've got Killer Queen...

ALEX

Good.

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

HELEN

... Spice Girl...

[laughter]

... just, Whitesnake, is there!

ALEX

Right!

NEMO

I love Spice Girl! Spice Girl is the best.

HELEN

Foo Fighters, Jumping Jack Flash, and it just goes... there's so many of them.

One of them is called Notorious B.I.G.!!

[Helen laughs]

ALEX

Okay, this is definitely a writer who just went, stop me...

[Helen laughs]

... and just kept going, and I'm perfectly on board with that.

NEMO

Yeah, yeah. I mean, have you ever watched *Gintama* the anime?

HELEN

No! Tell me about it.

NEMO

It's an anime and it's, like, the height of, like, self-referential in that they've been cancelled maybe three or four times because they keep getting lawsuits, like, against them...

[Helen laughs]

... and every single time in the first episode of the new season where they, like, have been brought back because of audience demand, they'll do something, like, even worse, like, one time the characters – this is, like, a historical fiction anime, right? So, it's, like, you know, there are samurai and there are... you know it's set in that, kind of period of Japan – and they all come dressed as *One Piece* characters in the first episode...

[Helen laughs]

... and for me, like, just use the names of the *One Piece* characters and get copyrights struck? Stricken? Striked...

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

ALEX

Yeah, yeah.

NEMO

... in, like, the first episode after being cancelled for doing the exact same thing in their last series, so, they very much like the, kind of, like, referencing each other and...

ALEX

Yeah, but at that point they kind of have to, right?

[laughter]

If your brand, like, don't get me wrong, it's not an avenue I'd take, but if your brand is being sued unfortunately...

[Helen laughs]

NEMO

Yeah.

[laughing]

ALEX

... you've got a very specific line of attack now, right?!

NEMO

Yeah. I think, like, it only started as an anime that was just, you know, it had a normal storyline and sometimes it would, kind of, like, offhandedly reference things for a, kind of, like, in-joke, and now it's just, like, I don't know if there's a plot anymore – it is just **[singing]** “how far can we go until we're sued the next time!”

[laughter]

HELEN

That is a great concept for a show. I might actually look into that. Okay, so we've talked a bit about anime in general. I mentioned that I know that there are lots of different subgenres, like, there are some shows that are a slice of life, like, they're set in a school or something, and there are some that are massive epics, and there are some that are horrendous, upsetting, political sci-fi and then there are some that are just straight up horror. So, do either of you, like, focus on a particular subgenre or do you just, like, consume it all?

ALEX

I'm quite eclectic. I don't mean well-read in the genre, I just mean, like, I kind of spread it comparatively wide, as it were, but in terms of... I keep returning to hard sci-fi in anime, actually, the reason being I find the space opera stuff, the scope gets so huge at some point, like, six seasons in where the planet Earth is a punching bag that is used to beat someone up with and stuff like that – you kind of start losing track.

HELEN

Mmmm...

ALEX

I tend to prefer the harder sci-fi one, although there's an interesting negative on the hard sci-fi which is a lot of the best hard sci-fi stuff is older and, as a result, it is starting to date itself in terms of cultural identity...

HELEN and NEMO

Mmmm...

ALEX

... so it's an odd one where it's, like... I mean, the obvious one which everyone picks is, like, *Akira*, sure whatever, where, you know, the Tokyo Olympics and blah, blah, blah, like, it's starting to... the cracks are starting to show culturally speaking and so...

NEMO

Mmm...

ALEX

... I do like my hard sci-fi, but I think generally speaking the age of that was closer to late 80s and 90s. I think that that's a little bit out of vogue recently. There seems to be a lean towards more, kinda, bombastic storytelling or, like, super, super intimate and that hard sci-fi falls between the two so it's not getting served quite as well, but, yeah, I kind of... I'll do it on a whim. Mostly

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasgasm – [Anime]

my criteria are, is it considered well-written, because I really, I really struggle if it's just not...

[Nemo laughs]

... and, at the risk of talking negatively for a moment, I try to avoid anything that, like, pushes what's called, like, fan-service as a thing. So I try to steer around those particular things.

HELEN

Sure. What about you, Nemo.

NEMO

I'm similar in that I will watch, actually, I will watch pretty much anything apart from the hentai and...

[Helen laughs]

... most, like, of the stuff that's coming out now which is very fan-service-y. There's like...

ALEX

Mmm hmm.

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

NEMO

... I think the genre in vogue right now is isekai which is like a character from this world gets transported to another world...

ALEX

Yeah, yeah.

HELEN

Ohhhh.

NEMO

... and then causes, like, high jinks, and it was, like, a really cool genre for a while and now it's, like, oh, everyone wants that? Okay, everything is going to be that!

ALEX

And everyone wants to make *No Game No Life*, and stuff like that.

NEMO

Yes.

ALEX

Yeah.

NEMO

Yeah, and it's like... it's basically, like, all kind of harem where this dude... he's a loser from the real world, goes to a foreign world and now all of the babes love him and he's also a king and...

[Helen laughs]

... yeah, it's very, you know, wish-fulfilment, fantasy for young men which is, kind of, grim, but I will watch pretty much anything else, especially if it is well-written. I do... my favourite genre is sad young person who is disillusioned with the world but accidentally adopts a young child and learns childish joy again, [they laugh], and there is surprisingly quite a few of those.

HELEN

Ohh, that's...

ALEX

Weirdly enough, I'm immediately going, oh, I can think of a couple that hit that bill straight away! [he laughs]

HELEN

Yeah, that's really lovely.

ALEX

I think, when I was younger I really liked anime for... like, a lot of western narratives that were big and flashy and magic were always, like, you were the

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

chosen one, and a lot of anime in the same period was, like, you're now the best in the world, how? Because you worked... *REALLY* hard. Like, you've just trained your ass off...

HELEN

Mmm.

ALEX

... like, there is still the chosen, like, person angle, but there's a lot more in anime of just, like, I am Bob and I will train for 60 years and now I'm just kick-ass!

[Helen laughs]

And, like, anime serves that very well. There was a whole swathe of those, late 90s, of just, like, people working their ass off to be the best at something and that... that spoke to me quite a lot, I have to admit.

HELEN

Ahhh.

NEMO

It's kind of the running joke in *One-Punch Man* – I don't know if you've seen that?

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

ALEX

Oh yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah!

HELEN

That's one I *have* seen!

ALEX

Oh, *One-Punch Man's* so very good.

NEMO

It's so good, and, yeah, it's the running joke of even though he seems like the chosen one in that he is, like, so over-powered, it's like, well I trained... here's my training montage of me running and yeah, like, clearly you can't become this powerful just by doing a jog around the block, but... yeah, again, referencing other anime that you probably have watched in order to make the joke even funnier.

HELEN

Yeah, for those who haven't seen it, *One-Punch Man* is about a guy who can defeat any enemy with just one punch, and that literal scene happens, I think, that you were just talking about, Nemo, someone's, like, oh, I'm such a big fan, how do you do it? And he just takes them through a completely average gym routine!

[laughter]

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

ALEX

Yeah, he does something like, so, you're going to struggle, you're going to sweat, your bones are going to creak, but you cannot stop until you've done one hundred push ups!

[laughter]

HELEN

It's a very funny show. I really did like that.

ALEX

It's a really difficult one, though, to sell people on at first...

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... because if they really like their anime they're, like, oh, it's just taking the mick out of my anime, and if they don't like anime they're, like, well, I don't really... what's this riffing off? I find it really... of all the anime, I find it one of the hardest ones to actually get people to watch.

NEMO

Mmm. Yeah, I was going to say, maybe it's a good starter one, but I don't think it is. I think you do have to have some level of, like, having watched all of the Shounen anime that it's parodying in order to, like...

ALEX

Yeah, it just falls between the cracks.

NEMO

Mmmm.

HELEN

I really didn't, though, and I still enjoyed it.

NEMO

Okay!

HELEN

A lot of the stuff he was doing was probably very fresh and new to me. Well, while we're on that topic then, how did you two get into anime? What was your starter show?

NEMO

Well, so, I'm British Japanese so my mum is Japanese and so I've been watching anime since I was a kid because my mum loved anime and manga, so even though I grew up in London, we did have a lot of manga and... I don't know how she was able to... I mean, I think she was pirating anime to show us when we were kids, so, yeah...

[Helen giggles]

Rusty Quill - Enthusingasm – [Anime]

We watched a lot of, like, random pirated anime, and then *Naruto* and *Bleach* and *One Piece* started being shown on Jetix, maybe, Toonami – one of those.

ALEX

Oh god, yeah, yeah, Toonami.

NEMO

Mmm. So, a lot of the first anime that I watched was, like, Japanese kids' anime un-subbed, but then the first one that I fully watched as a, like, TV show instead of, like, something that was on I think was probably *Naruto*, the original show.

HELEN

So, Alex, what's the first one you saw?

ALEX

So my, I came at it... I got a bit blindsided by anime, so I...

[Nemo laughs]

... as a kid... well, I didn't know it was... I didn't know it was a thing! So, unfortunately, I'm going to demonstrate my age by pre-dating you, Nemo, and go, oh, *Toonami*, the golden age! No, no, no... gosh no – far earlier than that! *Cartoon Network* did a limited run of *DBZ*!

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

NEMO

Mmm.

HELEN

Yes! Yes, yes.

ALEX

Dragon Ball Z. Now, as a young, fresh-faced fool, I was very inexperienced in, basically, everything, and just came home, put it on and went... what? What?! What is happening?! What is this?!

[laughter]

It's... it's cool! As a child I am certain that this is cool, but I don't know what's happening, why? Why, why it's cool, what's... *Whaaaaaat* is this?! So then I started doing a thing where I would run to the bus stop to catch the earlier bus home to catch the timings because it was on at, like, 5pm and because of the journey times, blah, blah, blah, I was always catching it five minutes in.

HELEN

Mmm.

ALEX

So, anyway, I just discovered this thing. It finished its run – it didn't do the whole thing – and then it disappeared, and I just chalked it up – this is very 90s

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

kid – I chalked it up as that was a cool series that I'll never see again and the internet isn't a thing so it's just gone now. That was fun!

HELEN and NEMO

Mmmm.

ALEX

And then I started secondary school and then midway through secondary school I just stumbled into a group of lads who knew anime and they just happened to mention *DBZ* in passing and, at my time, I thought it was a one-off. I didn't know it was a whole school of animation. I really thought just one person had a cool, kooky vision and that's what it was. So, I was just, like, oh, I thought that I was the only one who'd seen this niche little thing that no one's really heard of...

[laughter]

... oh, that's cool! At which point, they sat me down and went, 'you have a lot of required reading – what's this? Okay, so this is the *Vegeta Saga*, this is the *Cell Saga*, this is the *Buu Saga*, okay, right while we're getting through this... okay, *Buu's* still running, okay... now you also have to watch *Bebop*, because *Bebop's* here. Now, after *Bebop*, we recommend *Trigun*, but you might not like *Trigun*... and they just worked their way through and gave me, like, required reading!

[Helen laughs]

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

So, I went in thinking this was just, like, a niche auteur's little thing on Cartoon Network, and instead discovered it was, like, *[whoomph]*, gateway to just this *enormous* culture I knew nothing about, and then I fell in quite hard for a period of just... like, it was telling the stories I wasn't seeing elsewhere...

HELEN

Mmm.

ALEX

... stories that were interesting, stories that were pitched right to my age at the time of, like, 14, 15, which is...

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... as much as it's, like, as a kid you're, like, oh, I wanna see grown up stuff, a lot of the grown-up stuff was quite boring, and a lot of the kiddie stuff was quite kiddie, and this was the only thing that was really hitting that itch of mature themes, but in a way that's actually, like, interesting and they put a lot of... like... I got a bit of a luxury tour in that they just went, you wanna watch this, don't watch this; watch this, watch all of this, only watch the first season of

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

this... and they were right, they knew what they were talking about! So, I kind of got a bit of a, a grace period where I only experienced good anime with nothing bad!

NEMO

Mmm...

ALEX

... and that kind of sells you quite hard when everything you've seen you're, like, oh my *god*, it seems like every single thing from this animation school is *phenomenal!* There's no duds!

[laughter]

And then, obviously, later on you start trying to explore things for yourself...

NEMO

Finding the duds really badly...

ALEX

... and finding, oh yeah, this was a cash grab, or this wasn't handled very tastefully, or whatever, but I think they made their impression early enough that it, kind of, cemented in for me.

NEMO

Mmm.

HELEN

Lovely. Well, you know what? On that, I think we're going to take a little break and we'll be right back.

[BREAK]

HELEN

And welcome back. Okay. Right, we've talked about anime in general. We've talked about a couple of shows. Now I'm going to do the very big question, which is what's your favourite anime show?

[ALEX sighs heavily]

And I... Alex, rubbing the bridge of his nose...

[Helen laughs]

... I know, it's a big, big question, but it's not one that I can answer because I haven't seen many.

ALEX

Obviously, *Bebop's* up there.

HELEN

Okay.

ALEX

Like, I really... I really like *Bebop*. I think it's very, very, very well executed, and there's a reason that it always gets a hard time anytime someone tries to riff off it, is if you make something tight enough and well, like, well-crafted enough, pretty much it's always going to get torn apart whenever someone tries to iterate on it. If we include anime films...

HELEN

Okay, yeah!

ALEX

... *Ghost in the Shell*, scratch a certain itch, I actually really liked – which is a bit controversial because a lot of people liked it less – *Ghost in the Shell Standalone Complex*, which was the first *Ghost in the Shell* TV series because it effectively took the *Ghost*... like, the *Ghost in the Shell* film is, like, **[tchoo]**, and then the series, like, takes all of the same themes and stuff, and it just expands and iterates. First couple of episodes are kind of fine, but the soundtrack's good, the animation is really good, and it's... it hits later a lot of really... at the time, it taught me a lot about, the world and the direction it could go – example being a, I'm trying to remember the episode, it's been too long – one that resonated with me was either a guy had modelled his child's neural pathways or had, like, it was his actual kid's neural pathways – I can't

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

remember. Long story short, had designed a tank for, like, the military, and it needed an AI to run it and it ended up being his kid, and this whole episode they're trying to stop this runaway tank because, they're like they're the best of the best police and they're all fully augmented and they're all just trying to stop this runaway tank, and this tank was just trying to make its way home to a dad to say the equivalent of, like, why did you leave or why did you do this to me, or whatever...

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... and it's just... I think it's just an AI that thinks it's his son or something because he used the engrams as, like, a starting point or something, but, like, that, as just a self-contained one, I was, like, *oh*, that's... and there's a lot.. and that whole... it effectively takes, you know, what was it we used to say... the Trigger's broom, Theseus' ship, model is pretty much the baseline.

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

How much of a person can you replace till they're not a person anymore? And then it just looks at every single angle of it, and it was really interesting, and it was just... it was done in a very gentle way. A lot of anime is, kind of, just *go*, *GO, all the time – GO, GO!*

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

[laughter]

Bottle episode... *then go some more!*

[laughter]

Whereas anime is a bit more, like, sorry, *Standalone Complex* is a bit of a slower burn – a lot of things, sort of, iterate over time. I'll always have a soft spot for those, sort of, slower turning stories. So, I'd probably say for TV it is either... it's probably *Bebop*, but closely followed by, just, *Ghost in the Shell* in general dealt with stuff in a very interesting way.

NEMO

Mmm.

HELEN

Gosh.

ALEX

Heavy, though.

HELEN

That does sound really interesting. I love, yeah, I love explorations of personhood.

ALEX

That's all *Ghost in the Shell* ever has been and ever will be. It's just explorations of personhood in a future where cyborg robot people, everything in between, like, where is the line...? And it also, taking aside, like, female representations in fiction for instance, let's just put that on a shelf for a second and just deal with, like, the other elements of it, there's a lot there to do with handling the trauma of augmentation and replacement and prosthetics, and, you know...

HELEN and NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... the main character has a full-body prosthetic. It is a prosthetic. It is always described as a prosthetic not, '*you're a cyborg killing machine*'. They are a person, they are the first successful case of a full-body prosthetic and it's, like, for the TV series more than the film, what does that feel like? You know, what are the consequences of that? How do you deal with that? And I know that that's buried in a lot of pew, pew, pew which, again, of course that tickles me as a, sort of, like, 14-year-old **[raaaagggghhh]** shoot things...!

[Helen laughs]

But, it's not often that I was seeing at the time in TV that measured examination of a topic. I think that we're a little bit spoiled now in, sort of, modern TV in that you see more of that kind of thing where that can be the

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

topic for a TV show. Bear in mind, the time that I was watching this was, you know, late 90s, stuff like that where you weren't seeing that. You weren't seeing that anywhere so that will always hold a certain reverence, I guess, for me.

HELEN [sighing]

What about you, Nemo?

NEMO

I mean, I think my favourite, erm I also... just the same thing of, yeah, thinking about, yeah, the nature of humanity. My most recent favourite, the one I keep coming back to is called *Barakamon*. It's a 12-episode series and it is that young man, very disillusioned with the world, is basically forced to go on holiday and...

[Helen laugh-squeals]

... erm...

HELEN

Oh wow!

NEMO [laughing]

... that really spoke to me!

HELEN

[with feeling] Yeah!

[laughter]

... he, like, ends up on this island and it's, like, all very countryside and he's trying to force himself to work and he's trying to force himself to, like, be the best and, you know, he's a young protégé, but he's like, you know, not in grace right now and, basically, these local kids adopt him and just, kind of, show him that he is a human being and allow him to have feelings and to think about the world and to, like, actually exist as a human being and it's such a... yeah, it's one of those anime you can re-watch quite easily and just feel like, wow, it's nice being a human, I guess!

ALEX

Nope, not allowed to watch that one! Nope!

[laughter]

HELEN

Ach, yeah!

ALEX

Way too close to bone!

[laughter]

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

NEMO

There is another one very recently called *Sangatsu no Raion*, I think...

ALEX

Oh yes.

NEMO

... in English it's *March Comes In Like A Lion* and it's very similar, like, a young kid who's had quite a lot of trauma, but deals with it by being a workaholic and is adopted by nice people who are nice to him and I'm just, like, ooh, it's nice when, when your found family treats you nicely, and I think some of my more, I guess, classic... I was born in '95 so I can't really say that any of the classic ones are the first ones that I watched. So, the first ones that I really enjoyed were *One Piece* – clearly, I'm wearing a *One Piece* t-shirt!

HELEN [laughing]

So you are!

NEMO

... and *Ouran High School Host Club* – I think that was the first time... **[laughing]** I always talk about *Ouran* and *One Piece* because they're both ones that I look back on watching and I'm, like, hmmm, one of these is about someone who dresses up as a boy and prefers not being the gender that they were assigned at birth, and gets to go and have cool fun times and gets to, like, explore their gender identity and have new friends... hmm! Don't know why I could have been attracted to that as a teenager...

[Helen laughs]

ALEX

One of the big strengths of anime!

NEMO

Yeah.

ALEX

A lot of that kind of thing, it's definitely one of the strengths.

NEMO

Yeah, and, you know, *One Piece*, it's a pirate anime, but Luffy, the main character, he doesn't have, like, a romantic arc at all, which is very, very rare for a shonen anime, like, he's the main character, he's the main boy, he's, like, supposed to be the teenage boy ideal, but even when characters are, like, outright... there's one character whose ability in the anime is to make people who are sexually attracted to her turn to stone. It doesn't work on Luffy at all, and, I mean, it's not like they say oh, he's an asexual aromantic person, but it is, I mean, so rare for that to be a thing – especially a masculine person in an anime – so aside from the seafaring adventures which clearly is something that I love. I still hold *Ouran* and *One Piece* as being two very instrumental to my development as a person and understanding.

HELEN

Yeah

NEMO

I think, like, you can also find what you want in anime, like, quite often now the genres are getting quite, like, specific and more specific and more specific so you can very much, like, you know, go on my anime list and find exactly what you want, but I think you can find what you want in anime because they did explore a lot of things – the first time I, like, knew what an intersex person was, was through anime. Again, not done amazingly, but, like it wasn't shown on TV in the UK...

HELEN

Mmm.

NEMO

... and queerness, I mean, I definitely watched a lot of BL anime before I know that I was queer in any way, and finding things that are in-world acceptable, even if in, you know, Japanese society, not acceptable, and there were loads of narratives of, like, ooh, bad and evil and all that kind of stuff, but you can find storylines that you don't get to see a lot elsewhere. Well, you didn't get to see – thankfully, teens these days don't know how good they have it!

[laughter]

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

ALEX

They don't know! They don't know!

[laughter]

Do you have any idea how happy you would be when you went to a *Blockbuster* and then someone had mixed up the video with an anime?

[laughter]

A secret anime in the VHS box! That was a joy that you'll never know!

[laughter]

HELEN [laughing]

The experience of going to your friend's house to go on the computer and just be on the computer together.

ALEX

Ohhh, oh!! I had a friend with a basement that had their own computer – ohhhh! Oh, the stuff we'd watch! It was very low-quality flash mostly because the tech wasn't there, but that's not the point!

[laughter]

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

But, like, speaking to that, though – I have a pet theory which is, okay, pre-internet this only really applied to people who were really into media...

HELEN and NEMO

Mmm...

ALEX

... and post-internet, I think it's becoming – if not, has become by now – the norm which is take a moment and think how much you consume stories in your daily life. Let's even put, like, pandemic aside, like, the crafted human experience versus authentic human experience which, you know, has boring bits. Due to the internet, this has exacerbated it – I was a media-kid, like, I was pouring myself into media before internet so, as a result, ahead of the curve on certain elements, behind on others – but my point is that we all spend so much time now consuming media that our baseline for what we consider normal is now being derived from the media, not your real life. If you're spending more time in fictional worlds than you are in real life, that's your new norm, and I think what anime caters to better than most is it's real life, let's call it, with... their baseline still has a dash of spice. It's, like... the most mundane anime is still, like, it's real life, but, you know, everyone can fly – and that's just not a thing! And it hits that note of anything that's truly, like, real life, real life, grounded, grounded, real life these days starts to feel a bit drab and a bit heavy, a bit leaden...

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... because we're all spending time in these fictional worlds, whereas anime just sort of leads into it going, like, it's a baselevel assumption that, like, telepathy is a thing in a lot of anime, like, a lot of anime just has telepathy, and it's not, like, this is telepathy and we have to explain what it is – it's just taken as read! Everyone can fall through a building and land and they'll be injured, but not dead, and, again, it's just, well, yeah, it's kinda like the baseline for anime is just life plus, and I think...

[Helen laughs]

... that it speaks to something quite universal at the moment which is because we're all spending so much time in these fictional worlds that...

HELEN

Yes.

ALEX

... unless it has that little extra level of plus, that's what gets you to baseline of normal? And anime has the edge there where it has enough of that going on that a normal IRL anime, it's still saturated colours, it's still really, really, like – a lot of them are very comforting. I have an incredible soft spot for anime depictions of suburban life because I think the renditions are a) astonishingly accurate, visually speaking, at least, and b) they have a certain, like, quiet quality to them that people hanker for and you urge to, and I think that anime

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

speaks to it better than most mediums of, like, hey, I'm going to give you what you're craving as opposed to what you really think you should be watching, or what you say you want to watch...

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... and that's why anime has such a huge comfort-viewing set of genres – whole swathes of anime that are just, what's the goal of this? You watch, and you feel better.

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

And it's not the same as a sitcom – that's different. You can have a feel-good sitcom, but this is a comfort anime and it's very different, and I think it speaks to something... okay, basically, I think that anime's only going to go from strength to strength to strength moving forward because it has a very unique edge at the moment that people just aren't catching up to in other mediums, so it's just going to... it's just going to keep growing, I think.

HELEN

That's an unusually optimistic read from you!

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

[laughter]

ALEX

I mean, I could take it to a darker place and say maybe we should all be a bit worried that we're deriving our sense of normality from fiction...

NEMO

Yeah!

ALEX

... but let's not do that!

HELEN

Yeah, let's move on!

[laughter]

So, we're starting to come towards the end of the episode. So, as I have done with many similar episodes, I would like to ask where would you recommend someone to start with anime, like, for example, Alex, you started with *Dragon Ball Z* – is that a good starting show?

ALEX

Noooooo!

[laughter]

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

No, it's not!

HELEN

Okay!

[laughter]

ALEX

Um, I think, and I've considered this before because I've tried to get other people into it – sometimes I succeed, sometimes I've failed – if you have a guide, like, someone who already knows anime, I tend to tell people to just say, what's your favourite type of show? *Oh, this, but it's probably not an anime.* I guarantee you there's a thousand animes about that thing. Go more specific. *Oh, I guess I like hard sci-fi about lunar culture.* Come on! There's 60! Be more specific!

[Helen laughs]

If you have a guide who can just dig in and go, find this, I just ask people what's your ideal show, like, what's your ideal, like, oh I like this, this, this, this, this. I guarantee you in the cooking pot that is anime, it exists – you can go watch it right now, and that's a good way to, sort of, hook people in, going, *wow, I can't believe this exists!* But, in terms of, like, a big broad, like, entrance-level one, that's trickier.

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

HELEN

Yeah.

ALEX

Um...

NEMO

I have found that, like, you know, *Ghibli* films are on Netflix...

ALEX

Fair... good point.

NEMO

... and are translated...

ALEX

... yeah, good point.

NEMO

... into most languages and there are... I mean, even amongst *Ghibli* films you, kind of, have to be specific with them because you do have, like, ones aimed at, like, younger kids and ones aimed at older people, like, I wouldn't immediately go and say, go and watch *Grave Of The Fireflies*, but I would say, like...

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

HELEN

I was about to ask...

NEMO

Yeah...

HELEN

... because that's what I, kind of, want to see because everyone has said is really sad and I'm, like...

NEMO

It is really good...

HELEN

... that wasn't sad!

NEMO

... but it wouldn't be my recommendation for first anime that you watch!

ALEX

It occurs to me, for listeners, Studio Ghibli is a specific sort of animation house in anime – they're like *THE* animation house... they're think – not anymore – but think, like, early Disney in western animation, like, they were the name...

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... similar kind of situation on the anime side. It's a good suggestion, a Studio Ghibli, although hot take, they're not... they don't speak to me that much. I think they're beautifully crafted, but I don't... they don't hit the same... like, *Catbus* just doesn't do it for me the way it does for everyone else. I don't know why.

NEMO

Mmm.

[Helen laughs]

ALEX

I dunno!

HELEN

Is, is *Catbus* what it sounds like?

NEMO

Yes.

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

ALEX

Well yeah, it's a cat that's a bus!

HELEN

YAAAAAYYYY!

ALEX

It's both a cat and a bus, don't think about it!

NEMO

So when *Grave Of The Fireflies* came out, they used to do this quite a lot – more often than they do now – Ghibli would release a pure kids film that you take your toddlers to and be spellbound, like, *Totoro*, and then they would release a gut-wrenchingly horrible picture...

[laughter]

... of how war fucks up humanity...

ALEX

Yeah.

NEMO

... and, like, *Grave Of The Fireflies*... so *Totoro* and *Grave Of The Fireflies* came out in the same year so that you could basically go from one to the other – so if

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

you haven't seen *Totoro* Helen, you should watch *Grave of the Fireflies* and then probably watch *Totoro* straight after...

[Helen laughs]

... so that you can go to bed and...

[Alex explodes with laughter]

... not feel like humanity is, like, crumbling around you!

HELEN

I mean, I don't have that much more to do today, so I might directly after this go and watch *Grave Of The Fireflies*.

NEMO

Great!

HELEN

I will let you know. I'll DM you to let you know what I think!

[she laughs]

NEMO

Yeah!

ALEX

Controversially, I am going to suggest – hot take, why not – I think you should watch *Bebop* first. I think someone should just shove you into it. Why?

[Helen laughs]

It's well regarded, it has enough of a length for you to get used to it. It hits a lot of what are now considered the, like, broad touchstones of anime, and even, like, what have become stereotypes, but I think if my goal is to get you exposed to as much anime as quickly as possible, without completely alienating you, I'd pick, probably, one of the big hitters, which says to me, again, you're looking at – I'm kind of speaking from my own experience there – you're talking about *Bebop*, you're talking about *Ghosts In The Shell*, but the film not the series, you're talking about... I wouldn't recommend *Pokémon*...

[laughter]

... because I think it has too much of a cultural caché on itself...

NEMO

It has a billion episodes as well.

ALEX

... at the end of it, you're an expert in *Pokémon*, you're not an expert in anime!

[Helen laughs]

NEMO

Yeah!

ALEX

There is one I always recommend people who haven't seen anime actually, if they like their sci-fi, which is called *Planetes* – anyone heard of that?

NEMO

Nope.

ALEX

So *Planetes* is a comparatively obscure one that came out in about 2000, but it still used hand-drawn animation, which is unusual for the period, and its story was, basically, after an avoidable disaster in commercial space-flight, like, a low orbital thing – it just hit a loose screw – they hire, obviously they have to, they hire garbage pick-up for space...

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... people to go round and just pick up, you know, derelict satellites and stuff like that, and so, naturally, it immediately gets defunded and it's a dangerous job that no one should be doing, but it's not an action adventure, it's a... it hits

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

a lot of standard Japanese anime tropes of, like – not in a creepy way – like, new girl in the office...

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... it's a lot of office politics and office dynamics in a group of people picking up space debris.

NEMO

Mmmm, mmm.

ALEX

... so the stakes are high, but it hits that office politics of, like, well don't alienate this person. *Why?* They're in charge of your breathing! You do you, but I'd get him those flowers!

[Helen laughs]

ALEX

And it's a fun one to introduce people to if they'd never seen anime because it's a little gentler and they just go, oh, it's like a sci-fi cartoon...

HELEN and NEMO

Mmm...

ALEX

... sure, but it, sort of, sneaks in a lot of the broader touchstones for anime, I guess.

HELEN

Any last thoughts, Nemo?

NEMO

Yeah, I was gonna say, like, if sci-fi genre isn't something that you would want to start with and you wanted something that was more down to earth, erm...

ALEX

Hey!

NEMO

... I would recommend, like, maybe *Natsume Yuujinchou*, *Natsume's Book Of Friends*, I think, in English. It's a really beautiful anime. It's very Japanese – it's about this boy who can see these spirits, and him not having a lot of friends and being, kind of, stuck between two cultures of, like, the real human world who can't see these spirits, these *Youkai*, and the *Youkai* world who, a lot of them are in trouble, and how he prioritises, like, whether he helps them, but then that makes him look weird to other people or whether he ignores them, but he can see how, like, much they're going through and stuff like that, and it's a really gentle, quite emotional story, I think, and it's a nice, like, kind of equal ground of storytelling and emotions.

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

ALEX

I've got it. I've got, a) I'm all over that, by the way, as a angle of anime – very... all over that. I think I have the objectively correct answer, and I'm just going to... I think I'm just going to immediately alienate myself from Nemo forever here...

NEMO

Uh huh...

ALEX

... this is a person who's never seen anime before...

NEMO

Mmm hmm...

ALEX

... they're aware cartoons exist, but they need an easy mode in...

NEMO

Mmm hmm...

ALEX

... *Avatar!*

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

NEMO

Yeah! I mean...

ALEX

I realise it doesn't count as...

[Helen laughs]

... like, true, hardcore, proper anime, blah, blah, blah...

NEMO

Mmm.

ALEX

... but it really is a very good anime-lite...

NEMO

Yeah.

ALEX

... like, it's a very easy in, you know, you finish *Avatar* and you're like, oh, that was really good. I guess I'll watch *Legend of Korra*. That was really good. I guess I could watch more things like this... and then they're in!

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

NEMO

Yep!

ALEX

And you've got them!

[Helen laughs]

NEMO

Yeah, I think you're correct, actually. I have my reservations about other western animations being called anime, but I do think that *Avatar* is what, yeah, if you haven't watched any animated shows before...

ALEX

... like, none at all, you've literally never encountered the medium...

NEMO

Yeah, yeah...

ALEX

... and you need someone to, like, get you there slowly...

NEMO

Yep, yep...

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

ALEX

... that, that... final answer, regardless of reservations...

[laughter]

... my final answer is *Avatar*...

NEMO

Yep.

ALEX

... *Avatar, The Last Airbender*.

[Nemo laughs]

HELEN

Amazing!

ALEX [laughing]

I didn't ever think I'd say it!

[laughter]

It's not a sentence I thought I'd be saying in a recorded medium, but yeah, weirdly enough...

Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

HELEN [giggling]

Well, on that I think... well, we're out of time. There's nothing I can do about that, like...

[she laughs]

ALEX

Oh, oh, Nemo – there's a trick I've learnt for Enthusigasm, by the way, right? Which is the episode can't end if we don't stop talking!

[laughter]

HELEN

No, absolutely not!!

ALEX

So, we can just keep going...

HELEN

No, we're not doing this...

[both talking over Helen]

NEMO

Ok so do you want to hear my Manga recommendations, cause I can go on for...?

ALEX

I've done this before!

HELEN

No, No! Absolutely... no, look, look... Lowri... Lowri is wagging her finger! Thank you.

ALEX

We haven't even covered, like, what if you're an *Edgelord*, *Death Note's* right there – we haven't even touched on all of that side!

NEMO

Yeah! we haven't talked about any of the *Trifectas*, *Bleach*, *One Piece*...

ALEX

Absolutely!

[Helen laughs]

Absolutely! I think we should knuckle down. We've got another three hours in here!

HELEN [hurriedly, shouting over them]

Editor just fade us out, just fade us out...

Rusty Quill - Enthusiasm – [Anime]

[laughter]

... thanks for listening, I'll see you all in the next episode! Bye!!

[laughter]

[Show Theme - Outro]

HELEN

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[Show Theme – Outro Ends]

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Rusty Quill - Enthusigasm – [Anime]

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