Interview with “Dark Flame Master”

LA: Layna Auchard

DFM: Dark Flame Master

START

LA: Oh, okay-

DFM: Ready?

LA: Yeah. Alright, so, thank you Dark Flame Master for doing this interview with me. And, you are a fan of Japanese anime, correct?

DFM: Oh yes, I *love* the works of fiction.

LA: Yes, okay. So your first question is: What does being a fan of anime mean, and how might you define anime, the anime fandom?

DFM: Well, being a fan of anime, to me at least, has um, well for one, growing up as an anime fan, you know, I never really acknowledged myself as a fan of anime. ‘Cause the thing is you gotta, you gotta realize that anime, there’s so much out there it literally takes up 60% of all media. Um, it’s *huge*. So, growing up I would always watch anime and I never really realized it was *anime* until I was, you know, at least middle school. Um, but to me, you know, the reason why the world of anime, and there are so many shows that are so intriguing to me, and why there is so much potential, is um, unlike a lot of, you know, American cartoons, anime is actually, animation and cartoons focused and targeted towards adult audiences as well. While there are kids shows there are many shows that are really deep and reach new levels that honestly, cannot currently beat in American adult movies.

LA: Mhm.

DFM: Uh, the reason why, is because due to the fact that it is animation, you can, you know, make a fantasy setting for example. Um take, take uh, Avatar for example, that was such a big budget movie.

LA: Mhm.

DFM: But all that was depicted and shown—hundreds of millions of dollars—and the story, honestly, you know, was rather simplistic; they had to keep it that way in order to budget everything. But with anime, you know, you can have such vast, huge, spectacular, worlds shown with, you know, budgets that are actually, you know, feasible. So, that’s why I think anime is amazing and, you know, I find myself as someone who really engrosses in that culture, not just someone who watches the shows, but someone who, you know, understands the sources, understands what work came into producing it, all the different, you know, voice acting that took place, every little part of that, you know, makes up anime culture. And uh, the community here has been growing so much uh, over the past years and uh, it, it manifests itself in so many different ways, whether it is anime conventions, with is especially very lively here in America—going to anime conventions—um, cosplaying, uh, you know, reading up on manga, as well as like, novels. Um, all of these things go hand and hand together, and to me, that is what I think, you know, being a part of all that and understanding all that, is what it takes to be, you know, a real anime fan.

LA: And, you mentioned that, like conventions, and cosplay. So like, what behaviors and activities do you partake. So, obviously though so—

DFM: Yeah, obviously though, so you know, I cosplay for conventions all the time. Um, you know, I’ve gone to them for the last five or six years. Um, when I realized that I didn’t need to be secretive about the fact that I liked anime, you know, there were a lot of people around me. I was so worried about it, at first. Um—

LA: Yeah, can, just, really fast, can you like, maybe elaborate a little bit on like, why you were secretive, and why you’re not now?

DFM: Well, you know, growing up I always, you know, when I was really young, you know, back as I mentioned before, I didn’t realize that anime was anime, you know. I’d just like, go and watch all these movies as a kid without realizing what it was. But uh, as I grew older I realized everything everyone watched, everything I watched, was completely different. Most people couldn’t pronounce what I was watching. In fact, *I* couldn’t pronounce what I was watching. Um—\*laughs\*—but uh, you know, uh, at first I was very shy about it ‘cause um, a lot of my friends that I grew up, that I originally watched anime with, they moved away, uh, they weren’t around anymore. So, when I first lost that friend group, I was like, “Oh, no one watches this stuff. I’m weird. I should, you know, keep it to myself. You know, no one’s gonna wanna be friends with me.” So I was very secretive about it. Um, but when I reached college, you know, everyone was so, you know, upbeat, no one really cared too much. And no one could really judge very much and um, there was a lot—\*loud car noise\*—Nice truck—\*laughs\*.

LA: \*Laughs\*.

DFM: Uh, there was a lot less social pressure. And um, just, you know, just by pure chance, uh, I was always like a passive, passive helper, you know. I was always wanting to help. I always wanted to help my friends out. I wasn’t like, one of the outgoing kids. Um, but I met like, two really good, close friends to me, Yoni and Giussepe, and when we got really close they were, you know, they noticed the small keychain I had, you know. And I got it, it was a very small, subtle anime reference to Mirai Nikki. It was very small. It was just like a little symbol.

LA: Mhm.

DFM: Um, and they noticed it right away. And it just started from conversation, that blew up, you know it was so much, um, you know. Uh, I had so many feelings that—

LA: Yeah \*laughing\*.

DFM: —that I wanted to talk about every show, just pent up inside me. And uh, it just blew up, and after we, you know, had a great time, we became like, the closest of friends and we decided to like, you know, make an Anime Club together, you know. We made that club so that all the people that felt the same way as us could come out and, you know, be honest about their interests. So um, you know, that’s what, you know, first got me, you know, really, to be open with anime.

LA: It really opened you up.

DFM: And now, and now I don’t care; I tell everyone. Yeah!

LA: Yeah \*laughs\*.

DFM: I love it! I don’t care. Um, and now, you know, I still even, even when I’m not like attending the school, I’m still helping out with the club, you know. I still have friends that go to that club and they, they’re keeping the legacy going so, it’s great!

LA: Mhm.

DFM: \*Phone rings\*

LA: \*Laughs\*

DFM: \*Hangs up phone\*

LA: Okay… um, so just, what are some issues or problems you see or experienced in like, the anime community.

DFM: \*Sighs\*

LA: I feel like there’s *a lot* \*laughs\*.

DFM: Yeah, yeah, there can be a lot. I mean, any community, any fan base has a lot of, you know, it can have a really toxic, you know, vibe to it. Especially when people argue about, you know, what’s, what they like is, what they like is more superior, you know. What’s better, what’s good.

LA: Mhm.

DFM: Um, and of course, uh, another real problem that comes along with a lot of the anime community is um, often a lot of, you know, the term “weeaboo” is in point.

LA: Yeah.

DFM: And um, that is key to, to you know, ah, lowkey it actually can be, you know, it can mean fetishizing of Japanese culture. Um, you know, and um, which is never really good. You never want to fetishize anything. No one wants to be fetishized, because that’s creepy \*laughs\*.

LA: \*Laughs\*.

DFM: Um, but uh, honestly a lot of that goes hand in hand with anime culture, you know, a lot of people, you know, they watch anime, they get so hyped and pulled into the interest that, they um, overlook a lot of things about the culture. There’s a big difference between, you know, what anime is and what Japan is. Um, and uh, you know, I guess a lot of the real problem with anime comes with, you know, the sexualization in, in general.

LA: Mhm. With like, women?

DFM: Yeah, um, there’s, because the thing is uh, currently Japan has like, a *big* declining population rate. Uh, 1% of uh, only 1% of Japan was born before World War II, so it’s a very young population. Um, but there are not many kids, so currently, anime has to change its demographics. It’s no longer catering itself towards um, a wide varied audience ‘cause there’s not many people. What’s left is, you know, what’s left is a high purchasing, small concentrated groups of adult males really.

LA: Mhm.

DFM: And so adult females, there is catering to that as well, but uh, because of this very specific demographic, um, you know, it’s causing anime that’s released to be a lot more sexualized, it’s more targeted towards a specific type of catering because that’s the only way they will make money. They’re goal is to like, to sell high selling DVDs, you know. Um, when you see an anime get completed, you know, DVDs aren’t cheap. They cost, you know, a hundred something dollars; it’s a lot of money. And, that’s just because that’s the only way, you know, these uh, animes can stay alive. So, often there’s a lot of *really* good, creative content out there, and the problem is uh, the way the Japanese economy works with um, anime. Uh, their currently aren’t many ways for a lot of the younger audiences, which are international, to really contribute to the original source. Um, you know, if there was an anime we really loved here and had a great series, but didn’t do well in Japan, it’s not, it’s not gonna have a second season.

LA: Yeah, it won’t continue.

DFM: And it’s not gonna continue.

LA: Yeah.

DFM: So, that’s honestly one of the biggest problems in the media right now. And uh, currently companies don’t care to sell a lot, they don’t care to. Because what American companies do, is you know, is they like to share their rights. Like if they have an anime, and they want— and Europe wants to see it, right, or they have a show that they really want to show to Europe, they can be like, “Alright here you go Europe you can have this show. We’ll take like, a cut from everything you guys made.” That’s what it normally does, but with anime, all they do is they sell the rights. So um, they sell the rights and they don’t care what happens, you know, afterwards.

LA: Mhm.

DFM: So that’s currently a big problem in anime, is, you know, internationally we don’t have a voice. Um, and now there’s a lot of things that are making it better like Crunchyroll and all that.

LA: Yeah.

DFM: There’s slowly starting to be ways for us to contribute to the original course.

LA: Yeah, like, Crunchyroll. Funimation does it too, right?

DFM: Yeah. Those are the two big ones.

LA: They brought Kimi no Na wa here.

DFM: And uh, hopefully that’ll be the way that we’ll be able to, you know, slowly change what comes out ‘cause they’ll know notice there’s so many, you know, different viewers out there internationally. We really wanna see more of, you know, uh, the things that we can’t get otherwise. Um, so. Yeah.

LA: Yeah. And they like, they tend to make like, pretty, like they always have to include some kind of like, ecchi content—

DFM: Mhm.

LA: —into it. Like, just in some simple anime.

DFM: Yeah.

LA: Right?

DFM: Always.

LA: Like you see that a lot now.

DFM: And it, it—

LA: Like, just to appeal to the—

DFM: Just to appeal to the audience, you know, and—

LA: —the male population.

DFM: And even like with the fujoushi. You know, there’s a lot of really like, rapey, you know.

LA: Yeah.

DFM: There’s always like, it’s really—the sexualization is just a huge problem. But the thing is, that’s what sells. Sex sells in every culture.

LA: Yeah.

DFM: So, um, if we wanna change that, you know, that’s why I’m like, trying to support what Crunchyroll is doing. Even though it still has a long way to go, you know, it’s the first step and hopefully, you know, we’ll all be able to eventually reach out and uh, get more content that’s suited for everyone.

LA: Mhm. I think they’ll do it. Um, okay. The last question: So how do you think being a part of this fandom has affected you personally?

DFM: Honestly, uh, being a part of, just being open about, you know, my interest in anime has changed my life, uh, a *huge* amount. You know, growing up, I was a religious person uh, my family was Muslim so, I fast every year of *Ramadan*. I, you know, pray five times a day. No of course I don’t always pray five times a day. I, I don’t always have the time to pray, but, you know.

LA: Yeah.

DFM: My family is very conservative religiously. Um, but, you know, the media I was so, you know, used to in anime, even though, it’s so interesting because Japanese culture is quite the opposite, quite less open about these things and very judgmental. Um, but anime culture was *so*, open about so many huge topics, you know. Transgender, uh you know, homosexuality, even harder topics like incest, pedophilia.

LA: Mhm.

DFM: But there’s so open about, you know, these, these really heavy topics and um, you know, by being exposed to all that, you know, it made me a lot more of an open, understanding person. Uh, rather than I wouldn’t just, you know, shut my eyes and ignore things even though I was so conservative, like even though I was raised so conservatively. So, being around that has, you know, for one thing made me a very tolerant to others. Um, and you know, of course uh, being a part of the anime fandom has made, you know, introduced me to so many different friends, so many different people. And um, honestly I have a lot more conversations than I could ever, you know, have the heart to have when, you know, before when I was all closed about it. Like I used to be very shy. But because of anime I’m not, you know, I’m now like a *really* social nerd. Which is hilarious.

LA: \*Laughs\*

DFM: I didn’t expect like, some guy who loved staying in his room all day, playing games, watching anime. I’m now, you know, really popular. When I go to school and walk around people are saying hi to me. I don’t even know who they are half the time. And I never would have imagined that. I honestly, *never* would have imagined that. And it’s honestly all just because of you know, my interests. It’s because of what I love and me sharing and telling people it’s okay to love, you know, to love anime. It’s okay, even though there are all these faults and all these problems, you know. Whenever we get that really good show, that really hyped up show moment, or that psychological breakdown where everything comes together, it’s okay to enjoy it, you know. And you don’t need to be shy about it, you know. Um, we all understand and, you know, we can change this. We can make it ours. We can be a part of it, um, even though we aren’t from Japan. So, that’s what anime has done for me, and I honestly wouldn’t have it any other way.

LA: Awesome! Thank you so much!