

Rough transcript of Anime World Order's interview with Nobuteru Yuuki at Otakon 2006

Note: any lines attributed to Nobuteru Yuuki are actually what was said by his English language interpreter. Also, this transcript is not completely accurate; to hear the audio of this, please visit the AWO website.

Daryl Surat: Well, here we are with Nobuteru Yuuki. I'm Daryl Surat from Anime World Order.

Gerald Rathkolb: And I'm Gerald Rathkolb.

Daryl Surat: Now if we may begin at the beginning: how did you get started in the anime industry?

Nobuteru Yuuki: [laughs] Well, I've been asked this question many times. [Daryl laughs] I actually started out as a fan, a very big fan just like everybody else at this convention. The funny thing is I actually first started out working at a regular job, a government business job, and was just attending conventions as a fan where I met an animator and he had suggested that if I was really interested that much perhaps I should become one. After that conversation I made the decision to actually become an animator and I quit my job. And that's actually how I first started.

Gerald Rathkolb: It also mentioned [referring to the Otakon con guide] that you worked in the doujinshi field before this. Do you still do doujinshis now, and...but...how did you...oh shucks...

Daryl Surat: Are you trying to ask "how did you progress from being a doujinshi artist to..."

Gerald Rathkolb: ...to a professional as well?

Nobuteru Yuuki: Actually, the doujinshi that I produced as a fan initially, back when I was still working at a government job. Obviously, when I became a professional, I did retire that amateur portion of it. But about ten years ago, I started to produce doujinshi again, but this time as a professional. Since everything that's being produced these days is done on film, everything's finished in film, a lot of the artwork that is made along the way gets thrown out. And so what I've gone ahead and done is I collected them and put them into a book of sketches and artwork and produced them as a doujinshi now.

Daryl Surat: You mentioned being a fan before becoming a professional. As a personal question, could you tell us maybe some of the titles that you were a fan of and whether or not any of those might have had any influence in your art style?

Nobuteru Yuuki: [laughs] There's too many titles to mention. Just like all the fans out there, I love animation and manga, and so essentially whatever I saw I do love.

Gerald Rathkolb: One of the works that you worked on was Megazone 23. What did you do in the show and what capacity did you have in the production?

Nobuteru Yuuki: I was the key animator for characters on Part I. For Part II I actually did the mechanical animations. I was the key animator on that.

Daryl Surat: I've noticed that a lot of the works you've worked on have been adaptations of prior manga by other individuals such as Five Star Stories, Gunnm [aka Battle Angel], and X/1999. What challenges do you have when having to adapt another artist's designs to animation?

Nobuteru Yuuki: The largest problem with regards to working with original comics or adapting original comics is that there's already a fanbase established for those works. And what you need to do, what you TRY to do, is not change the image...what these fans have of the original comic. You don't want to change it too much to upset them, but the only problem with it is that there's a lot of strong characteristics in the original comics such as characters drawn with a tall nose or eyes that are wide apart. I don't like that, and so when adapting them I usually try to take only the good characteristics that I like and carry them over to the animation. In doing so, I understand that it's not going to be possible to please 100% of the fans; each person has a different impression of the character and the work. But I do hope that the majority of the people actually like it and will continue to support the work even if it's a little bit away from the original.

Gerald Rathkolb: You seem to have a distinctive style in your character designs, especially with newer works such as Escaflowne and such [Daryl: It should be noted that Escaflowne is actually from ten years ago, so this is in relative terms], but when you look back at some of your older work that you did like Sukeban Deka and Record of Lodoss War the style was distinctly different. Do you feel that you've now been able to create works that are now closer to your personal style of character designs or back then were you more or less following the designs of the previously created work?

Nobuteru Yuuki: Like I've just previously mentioned with regards to the adaptation of original works, I believe that it is actually a good thing to have a little personalization, stepping a little bit away from the actual original work. And the reason being is that I'm not the original artist, and so there is no way that I can match the original work. It's a little bit to compensate for that that I bring in my own characteristics into it. So I do keep the majority of the original character design intact but I do have a tendency to add my own flair to it. Does that answer your question?

Gerald Rathkolb: What do you believe are your own personal characteristics that you add to each character design to make them your own?

Nobuteru Yuuki: There's really nothing that you can pinpoint, but as a professional what you end up doing is you read the comic and you look at it and you internalize the image and you come up with your own style of what you think they look like or how they should act, and then you start drawing and that's what becomes your style character. As

an amateur you might go ahead and read the comic and essentially almost trace and try to draw the same thing, but as a pro that's not what you do. It's something that's internally thought of and then brought out into your design. So it's not a particular characteristic but it's just an internal image that comes out.

Daryl Surat: You've done work for videogames as well as animation, such as Chrono Cross and I guess in Japan they would call it Seiken Densetsu [Secret of Mana]. What differences, if any, go into doing videogame design work as opposed to animation?

Nobuteru Yuuki: The number one difference between the animation and the gaming industry is that in the animation world—I mean, that's my field, that's my world—I usually end up directing the key animators. I have a say in colors and backgrounds and pretty much all aspects of it. But when it comes to the videogames, I'm essentially working for a videogaming company and it could differ from illustrating my own designs to...there might be a separate team within the company and I might be asked to illustrate their designs, or sometimes just end up collaborating with a different team there. Whereas the animation it's usually my team that I'm working with and directing. So that's the key difference.

Gerald Rathkolb: You touched on this already, but what sort of influence on a show as a whole do you have as a character designer as opposed to say, the animation director such as you are now?

Nobuteru Yuuki: Well, as director obviously I get to have a say in all aspects of a work. And like I mentioned, it might be just coloring or choosing the background of a particular scene all the way to being part of HR and picking and choosing people I want to work with. So I might bring in someone, a colorist, that I have previously worked with, had experience with, and I know and I trust their sense of style. So I get to just pick and choose people that I work with. But when it comes to the character design, it's basically whatever company that comes to me and asks me to draw something and I can only essentially draw the character and fulfill my obligation to the 100%, but beyond that what they do with it really is up to them. It's very limiting in that respect.

Daryl Surat: This is kind of a silly question [and by this I meant the primary goal of doing this interview was to ask this question], but a lot of fans in America often know that the definitive trait of a Nobuteru Yuuki character design is the very prominent noses on your characters. [Nobuteru Yuuki starts laughing before the question has been translated] If you'd give some comments on that, as to why it seems that the Nobuteru Yuuki character design would have prominent noses and most other anime characters do not seem to feature that quite so much. Is that a personal trait of yours? Something you seem to enjoy?

Nobuteru Yuuki: So probably, the American fans started noticing it with Escaflowne. It's probably when they first thought about that. And as I said in my panel yesterday, the concept of that came originally from the shojo manga, the concept between the shojo

manga and the robots. Back then, big noses, large noses, was kind of like, the fad, the in thing. But it's actually a little bit different in the fact that people who like animation...the type of shojo manga that they read is actually quite different from what normal Japanese young girls read. The type of shojo manga that they read is actually quite different. And so, what I was trying to accomplish was drawing for the normal Japanese girls who are reading these shojo manga. Maybe it might be a habit, looking back. Yeah, I think the large noses might be a habit of mine. Come to think of it, I think someone else pointed that out to me before. "Yeah, your noses are actually quite large, aren't they?" and "why do you do that?" Yeah, at the end of it, maybe it is my habit, my trait.

Daryl Surat: And finally, since we're running slightly late: do you have a message for your fans here in America that you'd like to communicate?

Nobuteru Yuuki: Last year in Japan my latest work Paradise Kiss was televised. They're actually going to be starting DVD sales of that here in the United States very soon. It is directed by a very eccentric, different director by the name of Osamu Kobayashi [he directed Kimagure Orange Road as well as Beck – Daryl]. It was a very hard job on my part, and actually produced a different style of Nobuteru Yuuki, but I'd like to have the fans take a look at that and support my work.

Daryl Surat: Nobuteru Yuuki, thank you very much for your time. If you'd like to see some more recent works by Nobuteru Yuuki, we recommend Noein and Mushishi. Thank you very much.