

[\[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvofVvXyUKM\]](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dvofVvXyUKM)

[audio from SPN KC 2022, Rob Benedict announcing]

The boys are about to come out! [cheering]

But first we're gonna let them know how much energy this Kansas City audience has had all weekend. And we're gonna rock, we're gonna rock the house.

[narrator]

So you might be wondering how we got here. How I got here. The screaming voices in a hotel convention center in downtown Kansas City, Missouri.

There are literally hundreds of people, mostly women or femme presenting, packed into this room, screaming their lungs out to see two middle aged guys from a network television show that has been off the air for nearly 3 years now.

So you wouldn't be wrong to ask me: Sadie, how the HELL did you get there?

[cut back to a Louden Swain & audience reaction, then fades]

[sigh]

Look, the covid19 pandemic has been hard on us all. And has led to all sorts of new coping mechanisms. Some people got into sourdough baking. Some started knitting or sewing. Hell, my husband took the time to start really focusing on starting a worker owned cooperative rum distillery.

But me? I... fell into a new fandom. Or, the rabbit hole of tv that is CW's Supernatural.

[stinger of the intro sound for the show]

Supernatural, as it's described on Netflix where I started binging the show, is the story of siblings Dean and Sam Winchester who crisscross the country, investigating paranormal activity and picking fights with demons, ghosts, and monsters.

Not to sound like Stefon from Saturday Night Live, but this show has EVERYTHING!

It's the epic story of a pair of brothers road tripping across the continental US, fighting monsters and demons, dealing with their family baggage, and trying to save the world. And they do it riding in a seriously gorgeous classic muscle car while listening to classic 70s rock playing in the background. What's not to love?

The basic monster-fighting premise, directed in the early seasons by X Files veteran Kim Manners, played on urban legends and ghost stories in a monster-of-the-week format, while intertwining with a strong Americana sensibility.

But I'm a bit of a horror wienie, so why did I keep binging this show with a pretty terrifying first three seasons?

Well I loved the set design. As a Texan who has somehow ended up in the Midwest, I loved seeing representation of the "fly over states." The lonely, rundown motels in the middle of nowhere feel like road trips I've taken through parts of the US. In fact, just last month while on the road outside Milwaukee, I saw a motel that looks like it could've been dreamed up by set designer Jerry Wanek.

I also loved the car- a black 1967 Chevy Impala. I prefer relying on my bicycle and public transportation in real life, but the sounds that that old car made really spoke to me. In high school, I inherited a 1993 Buick roadmaster with bench leather seats that creaked EXACTLY like the Impala, affectionately called Baby in the show. The experience of driving across the flat expanses of the Great Plains in a similarly heavy-framed car for hours on end. Hearing the creak of the doors and metallic catch of the mechanical door handles. It's like the soundtrack of my childhood.

And of course I loved the sibling dynamics. I have a younger brother myself and saw a lot of myself in Dean Winchester, the older brother. Hell, my brother and my share initials with the Winchester brothers: SW & DW, just like the characters in the show!

And beyond the typical reasons you might hear for liking a show - characters, plot, setting, hot actors, all of which the show had - this show held some extra appeal to me.

For those who don't know me, I'm obnoxiously Texan. And the two main actors, Jared Padalecki and Jensen Ackles, are both from Texas (and now live right next to my hometown I should add!). Only after falling into this rabbit hole did I realize I'd been to the Family Business Brewery, which is owned by Jensen. But I'm getting off track.

The point is, I started watching in October of 2021 and was immediately sucked into the longest running American sci-fi fantasy tv show in history. I watched all 327 episodes — that's about 229 hours — waaaay too quickly.

But I like to think I'm not the only one this happened to. According to a January Variety news story, Supernatural is still the 7th most viewed series on Netflix. And according to

the website Flix patrol, Supernatural was the 18th most streamed show on HBO for 2022 — with more views than hits like Pretty Little Liars or WestWorld.

And that's two years after the show ended! So clearly, I'm not alone in fangirling out over a show that began back in 2005 and somehow managed to stay on the air for over a decade.

But. This podcast isn't actually about Supernatural. At least not directly.

Despite what my husband might have thought when he first heard I was starting this project.

[Daniel's audio]

Sadie

I'm sorry, what did you just discover?

Daniel

I already know...

Sadie

You know what? What's my podcast about?

Daniel

Supernatural

Sadie

Yeah

Daniel

Nooooooo... noooo... What is wrong with you?

[audio ends]

I'm not here trying to speak to the actors or writers or set designers or anyone else involved on the show. This podcast is for the voices you heard at the beginning of this episode. You know, the screaming ones. The women, and men (though it's mostly women), who fan really hard for this show.

Ok, so if this project isn't just the obvious next step in my personal Supernatural obsession, why are we here?

I want to amplify the voices of the crowd we heard at the beginning, of which I am a part.

Because people can be dismissive of fans.

One way is that they tend to imagine anti-social homebodies who spend too much on t-shirts and tote bags and other merch from their IP, their preferred intellectual property.

And yes, those people do exist.

Fandom can be about consumption. In fact, youtuber Sarah Z has a fantastic video essay on the commodification of fan and geek culture. [stage whisper] See the link in the show notes.

But fandom isn't just the capitalistic exercise of buying all things with a '67 Chevy Impala on them. Just like a Star Trek fan isn't defined by the number of crew action figures they own from The Next Generation. Fandom isn't limited to purchasing power and collecting funkopops. Nor has it ever been.

The second kind of dismissal that you tend to hear is that it's all surface level and somehow childish.

I also have friends who tease that I only watched Supernatural for "Benson Hedges," their joke name for the actor who plays Dean, Jensen Ackles. Or that I'm only there for the 'k-mart hot guys.'

[audio tape starts]

Francisco:

What's that guys name? Benson Hedges?"

[tape ends]

And look, I'm not going to lie. It's nice to watch a show with pretty people in it - ok? But that's not a good reason to dismiss the fans.

That's another reason I wanted to create this podcast — because I think there is often this dismissive attitude taken towards not only fandom in general, but especially fandoms that are NOT primarily driven by white men.

I'm looking at you Star Wars.

[Kaitlyn Tiffany Excerpt - read by Anna]

When listing off pivotal subcultural moments, hardly anyone would think of fangirls. The mid-century sociologists who invented subcultural studies even literally considered rebellion the province of middle- and working-class young men, spending their postwar discretionary income on weird outfits and aggressive haircuts; girls - who at the time were screaming over the Beatles or sitting at home watching soap operas with their mothers - didn't jump out as a compelling subject for study. Or, these activities did not seem subcultural. They looked generic.

Yet a fangirl still exists in contradiction to the dominant culture. She's not considered normal or sane; her refusal to accept things the way they are is one of her defining characteristics.

That was an excerpt from Kaitlyn Tiffany's book, Everything I need I get from you: How fangirls created the internet as we know it. Tiffany's focus was on music fandom, focusing on her lived experience as a One Direction fan.

I found Tiffany's book to be one of the best popular science books on the history and direction of this online culture. And much of what she describes, closely maps to other fandoms like Supernatural.

In the book, she goes on to explain a certain shade of fandoms that celebrate the canon -- the source material that is the show itself -- exactly as it is. This means these fans are into things like collecting DVD box sets or props from the show, rather than expanding on those works in new ways, such as fan fiction or fan art, that can create new, and often personalized meanings for those fans.

And she explains why this sort of fandom is a transformational experience.

[Kaitlyn Tiffany Excerpt - read by Anna]

Transformational fandom separates itself from "affirmation" or "mimetic" fandom that celebrates the "canon" exactly as it is, copying it with exact replicas or precise cosplaying.

This is what I want to take the time to look at: This transformational experience, using Supernatural as the lens.

I want to look at bringing fandom into the 'meat space' - aka to see the ways it leaves online and comes into the real world. And the real good it can do, not just within the group, but beyond it.

**Shawn Taylor**

Like, how do you take something that's kind of like localized in a group of people no matter how big it is, and then take it outside of the group, so it can have another impact on a different level?

And that voice you just heard is Shawn Taylor. Shawn earned his graduate degree in digital humanities, is a founding author of the geek culture site Nerds of Color. He was also a Senior Fellow with the pop culture collaborative, where he focused on the transformative social and political power of fandoms.

He's thought deeply about what he describes as "tactical fandom."

### **Shawn Taylor**

Tactical fandom is really a concentrated effort from a particular IP, you know, or object of affection, or however you want to call it that is mobilized to address a particular thing, a particular social issue. For example, say you are looking at Jason Momoa's tattoos and Aquaman. But those are all oceanic countries' tattoos. And you had to, but then you now you're going to go and realize that this particular thing now that we have it in the public space, and not to mention, you know, the Rock really claiming his Samoan heritage. Now let's put it let's use the fandom for that, you know, Fast and Furious franchise and Aquaman to launch a project to preserve oceanic languages for future generations. I mean, something like that.

Shawn has plenty of other examples of how fandom can and does extend outside itself to the quote-unquote real world. And this is something we will absolutely be hearing about in more detail in a future episode.

But even when a fandom doesn't expand much beyond its borders - it can still be a very positive experience.

Just hear how Jules Wilkinson, the managing editor of supernatural wiki, also known online generally as Super Wiki, describes fandom.

### **Jules Wilkinson**

Every fandom thinks that's unique and every fandom is unique in its own way, but all fandoms have that magic of community, collaboration, and creativity.

In my interview, I went on to ask Jules why she thinks the fandom community, and the supernatural fandom in particular, is so powerful.

### **Jules Wilkinson**

I think it's a place where you can find like minded people, you can make connections, you know, I've just been on the other side of the world for the umpteenth time, visiting friends I've made from around the world into space for collaboration, whether that's on you know, a project like the super wiki, or fanfic, or even just organizing to go on a road trip with together. And a real space for creativity. And I... still largely creativity in fandom is... manages, generally, to exist outside capitalism, which is a rare thing in this day. That you can still make things, fannish things that are appreciated and loved by other people, for the sheer joy of creating things. And I think that's really special.

This was a major refrain I heard from the fifteen-plus people I've talked to for this podcast.

Fandoms are a major source of support for people's creative pursuits. Whether it's a means for extending creative projects they're already tackling, or inspiring all new projects.

And that's something else I really want to explore here. Again, using Supernatural as a lens, I want to display the incredible variety of creativity shown by the 'SPN Family', as the Supernatural fandom refer to themselves.

Ourselves.

So, each episode in this short series will cover a specific aspect of the SPN family, using the principles Jules mentioned of community, collaboration, and creativity.

And I hope, by the end of this, I can even show you how that community, collaboration, and creativity can end up feeding back into the show itself.

This is not a podcast about Supernatural. It's about the SPN Family. As worried as my partner and friends are that this will just become a gush-fest over the actors, I promise it won't.

It's a look into this particularly unique, cool example of fandom in action.

When I spoke with Jules, she mentioned that the fan-run website SPN Wiki became a tool that was used as a resource for the creators of the later seasons of Supernatural.

### **Jules**

I mean it dates back to the...I think one of the the amazing things that happened with the wiki as a fan project was it became a resource used by the show. And so, you know,

10 years or more, I found out that both the writers and people in production were using the wiki as a reference. So for example, the VFX team might go might be thinking, Well, what did that particular monsters blood look like, last time we did it? let's just look on the wiki, we can find the episode, and go and look it up. And obviously, for writers... even had actors say that, you know, if they were cast to play a Reaper or something, they'd go to the wiki to look up the lore on that monster, or perhaps ref, find a couple of episodes that that monster was in, and they could go and watch them before their audition. So I think that was a wonderful, you know, achievement of the of the wiki to become a resource for the show.

That alone might seem like a big deal. But through Jules' work on the wiki, she got to know writers for Supernatural, like Robbie Thompson.

Fans of the show will also recognize the name as one of the executive producers for the Supernatural prequel series, The Winchesters, which started coming out in Fall of last year.

**Jules:**

when he was got the job to show run over the Winchesters, he contacted me and said, Well, we just we just want to make sure that we're, you know, covering off on all the canon of supernatural. And so my job was basically to sign a whole lot of NDA saying I wouldn't talk about anything... was to get all the scripts I would get every version of the script for every episode and and review it in terms of if it referenced an event in supernatural or lore in supernatural, and then just give them feedback.

So SPN fans' ability to obsessively catalog information about monsters and locations and timelines became a resource that fed back into the show and helped keep the prequel true to its roots.

Jules said seeing that happen and getting to be a part of it was an experience like no other.

**Jules**

So look, it's been a lovely, a great honor and a great chance to get a bit of more of a peek behind the curtain about how TV shows are made. And all I can say is it involves... it must involve magic, because there are so many people, so many moving parts.



Not to sound glib, but I think that it's pretty cool that one of the integral moving parts for The Winchesters was the SPN Family and their knowledge — and obsessive documentation of it — of the world of Supernatural.

[music starts]

How many fandoms can claim something like that?

So that's what In Defense of Fandom is all about. Not just the fans, not just Supernatural and the SPN Family, but what happens when a fandom sparks so much creativity, so much community, that it enriches both individual fans' lives and the lives of people who haven't even watched the show.

Supernatural started as a road tripping television series, back when you still needed a paper atlas of the American highway system to navigate. In that spirit, I'd like to provide us with a basic road map.

I haven't finished putting together all the episodes yet, but I expect In Defense of Fandom to run approximately 8 episodes.

The first few episodes will focus on art.

We'll cover visual arts, looking at photography, oils, digital art and the like that fans have made.

In another early episode, we'll also hear from fans who are writers. So yes, that does mean we'll be covering the world of fanfiction.

And of course, we'll have an entire episode dedicated to creative pursuits in the audio world. Podcasters, podficcers, and even a few musicians.

The second half of the podcast will zoom out beyond artistic fans to explore stories of community support offered within the SPN Family.

We'll also set aside an episode to look at the quote-unquote darkside of fandom and see which critiques don't hold water and which might be justified.

We'll also have an entire episode about the various charitable pursuits that have been started by fans as well as actors from the show itself, digging more into some of the 'tactical fandom' that Shawn mentioned.

Now, although I'll be using the Supernatural fandom experience as my study system here, I hope I have some listeners that aren't fans of the show. I hope people listen and hear how experiences in this fandom mirror fan experiences they've had with Star Trek or Harry Potter or various other fandoms.

Yes, this pursuit does feel a bit silly to me. Taking a serious, semi-academic view of fandom feels like a subconscious excuse to spend too much time on twitter or reading fanfiction. But more and more people are acknowledging that fandom has real power to make change in our world and we should take it seriously.

As Kaitlyn Tiffany wrote:

[Kaitlyn Tiffany's book - read by Anna]

Fandom is an interruption; it's as simple as enjoying something for no reason, and it's as complicated as growing up. It should be celebrated for what it can provide in individual lives, but it should also taken seriously for what it can do at scale - not because I like it or because being a girl is cool now, but because fans are connecting based on affinity and instinct and participating in hyper connected networks that they built for one purpose but can use for many others.

[music break]

Oh, and this is your spoiler warning. It's not my intention to talk about the storylines in the show or specific plot points, but my sources occasionally bring up moments that stuck with them and inspired them. Consider this a blanket spoiler warning for a show that ended nearly 3 years ago. [laughs]

You've been warned.

[outro music]

Huge thank you to all people who have chatted with me, and shout out to the gazillion other people who probably deserve to be interviewed here but I just couldn't get to. The SPN Family just has way too many all-stars as far as I'm concerned.

Editorial support was provided by Dr. Anna Funk (and yes, that's her real name) Anna was also the voice of the excerpts from Tiffany's book, [Everything I Need I Get from You: How Fangirls Created the Internet as We Know It.](#)

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