

Sarah Witkowski [recorded in the car]

I'm going to be getting to the convention center. It looks like at 10:30 I don't know why I am a ball of anxiety right now. It's not even my first convention. It's not my first con

This was me, talking to myself as I drove to the Rosemont convention center. Located just outside Chicago, I was driving from my home to attend the first day of a three day supernatural convention, hosted by Creation Entertainment.

Sarah Witkowski

I'm not even doing anything that stressful! I'm just going to be hanging out trying to get some tape with Chris Schmelke and a few others. I'm not even like my meet and greets are tomorrow. But last night, I had a stress-dream that Misha just walked over to me and was like, Hey, I heard you wanted to interview and I had none of my interview questions. And I was so stressed out. I am a 31 year old adult human who has dove over 100 feet underwater and finished a PhD and I have anxiety about seeing some marginally famous people at a convention. So it doesn't make sense. Like, I know that...but it doesn't. It doesn't.

It feels appropriate that this season ends where it began: at a convention.

[start music here]

We've heard a bit about the conventions over the course of the season, but I want to wrap up by diving deep into this unique experience. And it really is unique, compared to other cons I've attended!

As a lucky nerd with a background in science communication, I was asked to be a guest on a panel at San Diego Comic-Con last year. I've also attended a handful of anime and general science fiction conventions back when I lived in Texas, but SPN conventions have a totally different vibe.

For one, they're much smaller than your standard sci-fi con since they have a much narrower focus. That small size makes the whole thing feel more like an intentional community.

At a larger con, there would be overlapping panels where you have to decide between who you want to see the most. But for Supernatural, from about 9am until 5pm-ish, all panels are held in the same ballroom, with occasional breaks. Running concurrently with the panels are photo ops, where fans can take staged photos with their favorite actors. More on this later.

Towards the end of each day, people start queuing — when their group number is called, like boarding an airplane — for autographs from their actor of choice. Or often, actors. There are super exclusive meet & greets that they sell by blind auction to the dozen-or-so highest bidders, there's a fan-creator vendor's room, a Friday night karaoke party, and a Saturday night special concert. And that's it: you have yourself a Supernatural convention!

When Supernatural was still on the air, these cons only had Supernatural actors and those associated with the show. But now that the core actors of Jared, Jensen, and Misha have taken new roles in new series, the conventions have started to integrate these shows into the con too.

In Chicago, that meant featuring a panel of actors from Jared's Walker Texas Ranger reboot as well as a panel featuring most of the core cast from Jensen's parallel universe prequel series, The Winchesters.

Steph

It's about the actors and the projects that they're working on and the love and support that we have for them. So while Supernatural is the base, it can grow exponentially.

Stephanie, or Stephas she prefers to be called, has a unique insight when it comes to SPN cons.

Steph

My official title is Senior Vice President. I started as the talent booker. But because I had extensive background in producing events, I kind of naturally went, Hey, can I can I tweak this a little bit?

Steph works for Creation Entertainment, the events company that runs all the U.S. conventions specific to Supernatural. She's constantly busy, organizing not just Supernatural conventions, but also cons for Vampire Diaries, Stranger Things, and even Star Trek! It's like being a wedding planner, but for a 3-day blow-out bash every weekend.

Steph

there's a lot of moving parts, you know, there's so much entailed into each and everything. So, but then I come here and I see these faces and it's pre reg night and the hugs and the people are so happy to be here. Then all of a sudden I'm feeling better.

You might think that such a position would feel glamorous. After all, Steph has the personal phone numbers for William Shatner, Jensen Ackles, and many other stars.

Steph

I have I you know, type because I have celebrity numbers in my phone. So I purposely give them different names, but names that all remember, right, you know, because I'd be like, Who's that? Oh, right.

But her job isn't just calling celebrities to talk dates. It's a non-stop job with many less glamorous aspects: managing schedules, finding venues that meet their space and tech requirements, and fielding questions or complaints from attendees.

But all that feels worth it to Steph.

Steph

And we are providing fans an opportunity to be with like-minded people and be with people who understand them. And even if you don't know each other, you still understand each other on that level. And the fun that we're that we bring to them. And it's just so like, it's it's the most the best compliment I ever hear on these weekends that I get to hear on these weekends, or I had so much fun. This was the best weekend of my life. This was... Oh god, I had such a great time! That if I, when I hear that, I'm like, Okay, we did our job.

Of course, it doesn't always go smoothly. Whether it's a last minute cancellation by an actor, a freak weather incident, or maybe even something caused by one of their own guest stars....

Sadie Witkowski

Okay, so I have to ask, what is the like the craziest fire you've had to put out at a supernatural convention? Not a literal fire. I hope

Steph

Oh, because I have that.

Sadie Witkowski

Oh, well cause now I need to know that too [laughs]

Steph

we're in Jersey. And Misha took his adventure to the forest in the back. And and the next thing I know, I hear on the radio, can someone bring a fire extinguisher to the forest behind the parking lot? What!?

Sadie Witkowski

You're like, what? Why? No one give Misha matches anymore, apparently. [laughter]

I wasn't able to find anyone to confirm this, but apparently Misha tried to start a bonfire as part of his "adventure" meet & greet that didn't go as smoothly as intended.

Having been in his Chicago panel where halfway through, he brought out pierogies for all us attendees, I can't say I'm surprised. Misha seems to run on chaotic good energy from what I can tell.

But putting this incident aside...

Steph

All of the actors that we work with bring their A game and they they know how important their appearance is to these, to fans. And and they put their best foot forward and they get it and they, they have a good time. Because if they didn't have a good time, believe me, it would it would be obvious, especially in this environment.

And this is a refrain I heard from fans, folks who work at the convention, and even through interviews of these actors talking about their time working together. The Supernatural cast legitimately seem to be having a blast at conventions and are genuinely nice people who like to be around each other and the fans.

[music starts]

As Lynn and Laurena (who we met in the second episode) told me:

Lynn Zubernis

I do still think they have a different feeling about fandom than some actors do, because they've just had so much interaction with fans. You know, it's like, if the literature on stereotypes says that if you have direct interaction with someone, you can't really maintain a stereotype of them that's not accurate. Well, these guys do conventions every two weeks, and they have for 15 years. They, they know fans are, you know, interesting, smart, thoughtful, not pathologizing. Humans, they relate to them human to human. So I think, any fear of fans or any prejudices about fans that they might have come in with, kind of got quashed by all that face to face interaction.

Laurena

the supernatural fandom SPN family has branched into being the walker family has into as you said, radio company, the music fans. There's, I think part of it is because... a large part of it is because the stars have, in real life, connected with fans through the conventions and through concerts, the music concerts, Loudon Swain. They've connected in social media, they've connected in charity events. So they have opened themselves up to the fans in real life. So fans can connect with them in real life and pull them into their own love of music or going to conventions or reading books or you know, whatever it might be. There isn't necessarily a boundary between the show as there is it's with so many other shows that you just watch.

Even Jules, from Supernatural Wiki, agreed with this assessment.

SPN Wiki (Jules)

Not only for the fans, but for the cast. You know, they've made friends they've made, they've had collaborations. They've had a space for creativity, as much as we have. And that's been amazing to see as well. You know, with Jason Mann's producing albums from Brianna, and a whole lot of stuff going on that again, is part of fandom because none of that would have happened without the show and fans and convention bringing us together and and them getting to know each other in a way that most of them weren't even episodes together.

I knew what to expect from conventions from the fan side, but always wondered what it was like from the celebrity's point of view. I've had work fly me out to conferences to give a talk, but I've never been a headliner for an event where everyone knew my name. It seemed like that would be a trippy experience, to say the least.

Luckily, I had Rachel Miner, aka Meg, to lead me through her experiences.

Rachel Miner

And then when I got invited to my first conventions, I was really, really hesitant because I also am an introvert. I'm an extrovert introvert, but I'm an introvert. I didn't like the idea of love attention being on me. And I also question whether it was healthy. Because I don't like that pedestal kind of dynamic or that dynamic of like, I am so amazing. And I'm supposed to prop up that that lie that I am just that incredible. And I also, I felt this constant guilt of like, people would show up expecting and wanting me to be this thing that I was never going to live up to. Oh, and I was like, somebody's supposed to keep that lie going. And I went, you know what, what got me through so I went, No, I'm that I can't do any of that. So from the get go, I'm like, I'm going to be honestly myself. And so one of the first things I do, you know, at a panel or a thing is that oh, that's not me. I play really cool characters. She's awesome. I'm a fan of her too. That's not who I am. I am this flawed, nerdy, whatever human being who geeks out about and then just I don't try to sell anything else. Any other image. I don't try to live up to that. I just go like no, I'm human, and you're human. And we can talk like humans. And and that has kind of changed the whole dynamic for me.

Rachel's approach to her panels and meet & greets helped her build connections with the fans she spoke to, whether that lasted for 30 seconds or 30 minutes.

Rachel Miner

So there have been so many profound interactions. I love this fandom so much. I love all of the people, individuals within it. I'm very, very, very, I consider myself extremely lucky, which is that like, so my meet and greets my one-on-one meetings, whatever the people who tend to come up to me, I think, for multiple reasons tend to be the most, I consider the most like, good hearted, kind hearted, fascinating people with like, important conversations that they want to have.

Whether those conversations were about her character on the show or her work with Random Acts or her diagnosis of multiple sclerosis, Rachel focused on her ability to connect with others.

Rachel Miner

Cause I think our natural state, what we want to do is connect as human beings, and connect with our similarities and feel a part of things. I think that's where our happiness is.

It was really important to me, when I was going to conventions, physically, that I would try with every single person to have a moment where like, we looked each other in the eye and like, acknowledge each other. I was big, like on tactile, like just like taking people's hands and touching on my heart and like doing kind of grounding things to like, Hey, we're here. And we're enjoying this together. And this is awesome.

Unfortunately, due to her MS, Rachel hasn't been able to attend SPN conventions in person. Covid 19 might just mean the sniffles or a low grade fever in some of us, but for Rachel it would be a HUGE tax on her already compromised immune system.

Not that she's let the pandemic completely cut her off from the fandom. With some technological assistance from Creation, she's been able to virtually attend several panels this year and get back to spending time with the SPN Family.

Rachel Miner

I'm lucky enough to get to spend a lot of time with this fandom. And sometimes people will put themselves in this other category of like, well, you're an actor on the show, but I'm just someone who watched that. And it's not a just. Because you're absolutely as much of a factor in creating and contributing every time that any of us takes in a piece of art. We then have to, like, create it, in order for it to be real in our universe in our head, you know, like, and so I'm fascinated. I'm always like, No, you're so creative. That's your ability. That's not me. I maybe gave me something to bounce that off of. But, but that's all you and I want to know what else you're gonna put in the world.

Rachel was a lovely interview subject and I'm so glad she felt comfortable sharing her fandom experiences with me, especially when we originally scheduled the interview to focus on Random Acts.

[music starts]

OK: Full disclosure. I did send multiple interview inquiries to Jared, Jensen, and Misha. All were too busy for a chat, but my offer stands! I would love to hear from more Supernatural cast about what it's been like to be a part of the SPN Family, a guest at conventions, and how that's affected their professional or personal lives!

Just... throwing that out into the universe. [laughs]

[music continues/fades]

Funny enough, it's not just the actors that are the 'stars' at SPN conventions. Some people have become so integral to the con experience that they're celebrities in their own right — like Steph, who doesn't just plan, but also emcees the events.

Then there's Chris Schmelke. At my first con, I kept overhearing fellow fans talking about how they still needed a 'Schmelke selfie' and I was completely confused.

Chris Schmelke

We've done over 160, you know, and I've taken over half a million photos that supernatural, just supernatural. So it's an enormous history.

Chris Schmelke is *the* photographer of creation's Supernatural cons. And, from what I can tell, has been the photo ops photographer since the beginning.

Chris Schmelke

But the fans that I've known and whether it met your fan once or 15 times, it's, it's important that I, if they're coming through what I do, that I am trying to deliver as best I can on my reputation, which...

they were integral to me doing all the Supernaturals because they, they wrote in, I think early on, I was marked to go to a different convention and, and a fan asked me, she said, I'll see you in Vancouver. And I said, No, that I'm gonna be in Jersey. And they said, no, no, we'll see. And then creation, said...

get a lot of like messages, like they want you at the show,

When I got the chance to interview Chris at the Chicago con, I wasn't totally sure what to expect. I'd smiled into his camera more than once at previous cons, but hadn't had a real interaction. So I thought I was starting with a softball question when I asked how he first started working for creation.

Chris Schmelke

Creation had a comic store by my elementary school. And back in the 1900s. When I would go to the store. I would sneak out of elementary school during lunch, every time I would go in and I noticed that there was a help wanted sign.

Yeah, Chris is the OG apparently.

He was too young to start working at the comic book shop, but his mom ended up taking the position - unknowingly catapulting Chris into his path to nerd royalty, as he started attending conventions and meeting some of the biggest names in sci fi.

Chris Schmelke

I met George Lucas and Gene Roddenberry from who had come. George Lucas had a birthday that weekend and Gene Roddenberry came to give him a big card on stage. So that was my initial exposure to conventions.

I promise I'll stay focused on SPN, but C'MON! Star Trek & Star Wars brushes, while he was only 13?! How can I NOT be jealous of that?! [escalating volume as speaking]

A-hem, ok. Be cool, Sadie. Be cool.

At that young of an age, Chris obviously wasn't working the photo op room. But he does remember what it was like in the early days.

Chris Schmelke

It was Polaroids was a lot of these early shows that were pictures my mom had taken. I had my mom taken a Polaroid it was just so random. It was with Isaac Asimov. And with the Ramones with me, that were at the horror convention.

Resisting. Urge. To geek out. [said straining through teeth]

[exaggerated deep breath]

Chris Schmelke

this is like the Stone Age of photo ops, it just was all the heads of all the actors that were at the show with the actor sitting and you sitting next to them, and these very large throne chairs. But again, that's just what it was, you know, at that time,

Although Chris managed another one of the Creation comic book shops and did some work for them throughout his youth, he ended up losing touch with the company for a while as he pursued other career options in New York City. Eventually, he made his way back to photography through shooting at live music shows.

And that led him back to creation and shooting photos for their various fan conventions.

Chris Schmelke

they had asked me to, to, to photograph, do photo ops in Stargate, New Jersey. And I believe that was the first show that I ever did photos, and that was probably 2005.

And he's basically been hooked ever since!

Chris Schmelke

creation entrusted me to, you know, to make an atmosphere that I wanted it to be that I knew as a fan, how I would want it to be done, to not be judged on who I am and what I'm about as a person. But to just be there and to have something capture that's allowed to be unhinged, in a way

Chris strives not just to take technically proficient photos. Like, sure he's always there to catch if you blinked or if there's a glare on your glasses and you need a re-shoot.

But what he really does is build an atmosphere that's comfortable for guests and fans alike. There's not queuing for an hour, with people screaming "NEXT!" to just hurry you along the process. Chris tries to make it feel special. Even though these photos do go by incredibly fast — fans are typically in and out in the amount of time it takes to strike a pose and snap the photo.

Chris Schmelke

But if you remember the song that was playing, you remember, he twirled you, because it's a song I know, he likes. So all of these, you know, it's my relationship with the actors, which is, you know, obviously, they trust me incredibly highly. And I love being around them.

Talk about vibes. Chris builds a space that, even if it goes by at light speed, feels fun and special for the moment that you're there.

Chris Schmelke

sometimes, you know, when I'm taking the photos, you know, those surreal moments, where you feel like you're kind of watching from above, you know, because it's surreal. If you think about it, you know, that, you know, it's hundreds and hundreds of people doing, you know, coming to do photos, and they have their own, you know, poses or whatever. And their own anticipation.

I will NOT disclose how much I've personally spent on photos. But I'll tell you it's somehow both too much yet not even that much compared to other fans.

But I will say that I have firsthand experience that Chris is good at his job.

Chris Schmelke

So much negativity in the world, you know, that if you could have a couple moments in that time to not be worried about anything else. And like that's, that's such a incredible thing to provide someone

Because it's so rare to just be focused on one thing that makes you happy and nothing else and that time that moment.

So yeah, I guess I'll be the veteran fan at my next con, talking about how I need to make sure to get my Schmelke selfie before leaving.

[music break]

Chris got back into photography from shooting live bands, and though that's not his main duty, it's still something he gets to indulge in from time to time. Chris was front and center for the Radio Company concert in Nashville. And he usually snags some photos during the Saturday Night Special with Loudon Swain.

Speaking of which,

Steven Norton

I don't think we've ever set out to specifically write a song, or I don't think he's ever specifically set out to write a song about interactions with fans, but I think certain things creep in and certainly, like, in guilty one on the new record. I mean, that's literally the story of, of all these different places that we've been together as a band.

Steve Norton, is drummer for Loudon Swain. He's referring to the song Guilty One, which appears on their newest album, Feelings & Such. The song lists some of the cities they've toured as part of the SPN conventions.

Steven Norton

So all these experiences that we've had, certainly make their way into his lyrics from time to time.

We talked about Loudon Swain's Saturday night rock shows in episode 4. And it was gratifying to hear from both Steve and guitarist Billy Moran that these convention shows impact them nearly as much as they affect the crowd.

Billy Moran

just having the audience singing those songs with us was so amazing. It was you realize you're, you're part of something special when you're being sung your song back to you, you know, and it's really, it's really a pretty wild experience,

Steven Norton

hearing feedback from fans definitely influences. Influences choices that we make along the way in terms of like, you know, oh let's do this you know, this song gets a positive reaction. Let's make sure we include that like this song. Everybody sings along to the certain lines. Let's make sure we include that in the setlist. So there's definitely those things that get noticed and and things get added or or removed based on on fan reactions.

Billy Moran

amazing is one of those songs, Mama's jam is one of those songs.

I've been to other conventions and I can say without a doubt, I have yet to have a con experience like a Loudon Swain concert.

Billy Moran

We've really enjoyed this kind of bond that we all have as band members from these, you're able to take away from these conventions. And we want to carry this over to more shows.

[music break, Loudon Swain's Guilty One]

Waaaaay back in March when I started this project, I had a vague plan of the areas I wanted to cover, about 7 completed interviews, and one wonderful friend I'd roped in to be my editor.

Looking back, I've been at this for about half of a year and some things have changed. I've conducted about 40 interviews which created something like 35 hours of tape.

I've certainly learned a ton about how to make a podcast with integrating this many voices.

But most of what I've learned has been about the SPN family and how this community creates that family dynamic. And nowhere is it more obvious than at the conventions themselves.

Shontill

My first convention, I saw a girl just like come out from a photo op and just went down. And I was like, Oh, my God. And she was just like, I just she was so she was happy. But I was like, I was concerned.

Shontill told me the fan basically had an adrenaline crash after her photo op, from just being *that* excited. I promise, this wasn't a medical emergency. In fact, part of the job of volunteers like Shontill is to help con attendees who are feeling overwhelmed by an experience.

And let me tell you, being at a con solo can be very over stimulating! Maybe that's part of why attendees seem to be particularly good at making friends when at a con. It helps to have someone with you who is as excited as you are to get Rob's signature or get a photo op with Kim & Bri.

I mean, think about it. To no one's surprise, it's hard to make friends as an adult! We don't have classes and extracurriculars to meet new people. And responsibilities getting in the way: children, pets, house work... it's hard to make time to find avenues to make friends. But I think that's what helps make fandom special - it's an avenue for building new friendships.

Alana

now having gone to quite a few like, I feel like whenever I go to one, I'm going to see my friends like, because I have so many friends now who go to these and they live all over the United States. And so like for the most part, sometimes we'll see each other outside of conventions, like we'll make a point to make trips to go see each other but like the supernatural conventions are what bring us all to the same place.

N. Sparrow

one thing that is really wonderful about this fandom for me is it's generated real life friendships, friendships, that translated into real life into like, visiting the people in their home country. And these are like international friends. For me. They're from other countries. And I, I've, I've had friendships for years and years and years that are very much real world real life friendships now. So that's wonderful. And that has not happened for me with other fandoms.

Valerie

You just get the same joy and community and, you know, this, the thrill of travel and seeing new places, and like I mentioned, like just showing up someplace and meeting somebody for the first time that you've never met in person, but we know them super Well, because you have this wealth to draw upon that we have in common. So it's wonderful that it's not awkward.

Supernatural is also one of the few places I've seen cross-generational fandom, with parents and their kids, or friendships forming between generations that usually wouldn't form such close relationships.

Even the artists among my interviewees all speak of how important convention experiences have been for them.

Jackie

I got a lot of support from the fandom to offer it so that they could buy it for things. So it ultimately did happen, where I got to monetize some of my fan art. I didn't go into wanting to do that. And actually took a lot of time. Like, I got, people had to talk me into doing it, because I didn't want to do it.

Robin Lynn

I have built this like, friend base that goes to conventions. And one thing that happens at conventions is they have vendor rooms. And I have friends who make, you know, graphic art, and jewelry and stickers and things like that, and they're wanting to sell.

Scout

Yeah, the conventions completely changed my life. Like 5,000% I like I probably I would not be sitting here without those. Like, that's the part of fandom especially, like, that's where the like the hashtag supernatural family thing. That's where I'm like, okay, that's where it is, is that those cons. And those gave me the opportunity to sort of actually, like, be there in person and poke fun with people in person and it's just, it's more fun. I like being an interactive artist, I guess. So I like doing art as a response to something so it's like someone would come out wearing a t shirt with like a joke that they just said yesterday. And I think that like snappy stuff like that is so fun and so funny. So that's, that's usually that's usually how I ended up getting to know people is they will be like, how did you how did you make fun of us this fast? So it's like, well, I can do all sorts of art very quickly. But that just happens to be the one you guys are victim to the most.

And surprisingly, I think this fandom is growing! The show might have ended 3 years ago, but there's a new audience discovering Supernatural through binging it on streaming sites like Netflix.

There's a whole new crop of fans, who like me, might think that they're late to the party but actually we're just getting going.

I used to joke that SPN conventions felt like Star Trek cons from the 70s. The Original Series had ended, but fans were still there and still interested in enjoying time in their community. Knowing that creation entertainment runs both trekkie conventions and the SPN cons, I don't think that's a joke anymore. I think it's just the truth.

[music plays]

So I've come back to where I started. Only this time instead of being in a hotel in downtown Kansas City, I'm on my home turf of Chicago.

Jensen Ackles

Chicago and wherever we are right now. It's always, it's always a favorite of these that we get to do and so it was kind of certainly one of the original stops and we're happy to be here. So Thanks for Thanks for showing up and give us a reason to be here.

THANK YOU JENSEN! Because while this was technically my “home con” as fans call it, we definitely weren’t in Chicago. Instead we were out in Rosemont, a suburb right next to the O’Hare airport.

Anyways, Chicago, emphasis on the air/finger quotes, was the perfect convention to invite my editor, Anna Funk, to share her thoughts as a newly minted fan.

Anna Funk

This is Anna funk. I'm the editor of this podcast. And I have just left the con in Chicago with Sadie. I will confess I am only on Season Seven of Supernatural, which is very unusual for a con goer to not have seen the entire season. Don't recommend going to a convention, by the way, if you haven't seen everything because boy, are there a lot of spoilers. Everyone loves talking about when their character died, and how and what that was like.

Poor Anna! I actually bought her a Saturday ticket for the Kansas City con last year, but immediately had to send her out of the main hall when Rob Benedict came on. She had only seen season 1 at that time and wanted to avoid spoilers.... You just know the first question was about Chuck turning out to be God! [laughs]

Anna Funk

SPOILERS, SADIE!

Anyways, back to what Anna was saying at the Chicago convention, Sunday evening.

Anna Funk

I have this weird, joyful, peaceful feeling that I wasn't quite expecting to leave with the first couple of days of the convention. I mean, they were really fun. And it's fun to hear from these actors and see all these fans having the time of their lives. And I would count myself among them. But something about the the main panel, the main panel with the two actors, Jared and Jensen, the two main characters of the show was really special and more, more than I expected. And I think I'm trying to figure out why.

Turns out, I'm not the only one getting hit with a big wallop of dopamine from this experience. I found my own little recording that I made of myself, between the end of panels and before the Saturday Night Special concert.

Sadie Witkowski

I have had the best goddamn time today. Incredible. It's Saturday, it's end of the day but before Loudon Swain's concert, just what a magical time. Truly.

But while we both had our brains bathed in the feel good neurotransmitter, we were both still plenty aware of some aspects of the convention that can feel... off.

Anna Funk

There's something about the convention that felt very commercialized. I mean, and it is like stuff is expensive, you pay extra to get every individual autograph every photograph you want to take. If you want to do a meet and greet or have special special events that get you like closer access to the actors that all costs literally hundreds of dollars. Like people are paying hundreds and 1000s of dollars in a weekend. And I heard maybe one too many jokes about like, Haha, I'm glad my spouse... I'm glad my spouse and I don't share a bank account. Haha. I'm like, That's not funny. You'll need to work that out with your partner.

Anna is right. It's a bit too much of a constant joke from attendees about how they splurged and bought another photo op or autograph that was going to send them into debt. Like, my friends in grad school would make those jokes when we'd go out for drinks but we weren't spending \$200 for a single beer.

And the photo ops can certainly range well above that sticker price.

Anna Funk

Something else I noticed was that the merch was so it felt very like fandom focused rather than supernatural focus. Does that make sense? Like there were like, like a table would have stickers for sale or something like that. But all the stickers would be like inside jokes. And like inside fandom jokes and fanfic shipping references more so than like references to the show directly.

Just jumping in here to provide an example. Fan art has lots of jokes about things that the actors have said at conventions or in social media posts that become an inside joke among the fandom. Like references to Misha and Kale or calling Jared's longer hair "pada-flippies" or the iced coffee jokes in reference to Jensen's character Soldier Boy from Amazon's The Boys.

It's at least 2 steps removed from the actual text of the original show, but seems well recognized by fans nonetheless.

Anna Funk

some of the fans are and maybe this is just a subset of the fan community. It's like they're more interested in like the actors and the SPN family happenings and stuff like that than they were the actual show. It's like they've strayed from the source and maybe that's a good thing maybe that's like a beautiful thing that like supernatural will live on in this way.

And arguably, that's what this podcast has been about. That the fandom has grown into a new space that isn't constrained by the cannon of the original Supernatural series. Fanfiction and fanart and the like are all taking that original source text and expanding on it in new ways. With time, I suppose we should expect there to be this drift from the source.

Although, Anna is still a new enough fan (and one not getting brain rot from the twitter, tumblr, and discord fan communities) that maybe it feels jarring for her. It feels like a much more natural evolution to me.

[laughs] Then again, we all know I fell into this rabbit hole way too deep.

Regardless, I was really pleased to hear that Anna enjoyed her time at SPN Chicago.

Anna Funk

I feel right now kind of how I feel like leaving a really quality visit with like, a best friend who I haven't seen in a long time. And I'm surprised I'm surprised that I feel like this

[music starts]

I'm not. I still remember my flight home from Kansas City last summer, still buzzing from the high of my photo op with Misha dressed as Castiel and my interaction with Jared during his autograph.

As someone with a neuroscience background, I know this sounds like some classic addictive behavior. But, well, it's not necessarily as financially ruinous as a gambling addiction and certainly better for my health than an alcohol addiction.

As Lynn Zubernis told me during our interview, it can sometimes feel like, socially, you're allowed to be passionate about high culture or something that's respected, but for some reason you're not allowed to be equally passionate about a genre show from the CW.

Well screw that. Let me have my weird passions. We all need something that brings us joy, especially when times are tough. Supernatural was that for me during the depths of the covid lockdown.

And I do think the... intensity of my interest will fade with time. But I don't think it was time ill-spent, meeting so many lovely fans and diving into this particular corner of fandom. For me, it's been quite the ride.

[music ends]

And like all endings, it's hard to say goodbye.... Anyways, see ya! [Laughs]

So that's it! That's all I have to say about Supernatural and the SPN Family. Won't my husband be so relieved..... Bahahaha, psych! Y'all know this isn't a fandom that releases you easily.

Robin Lynn

It seems like the fandom is a very quick quicksands. You put one foot in, and then all of a sudden you're in over your head.

Jackie

The supernatural fandom fire burns hot, it will take you out quickly if you are not careful.

So you aren't getting rid of me THAT easily! This episode is the wrap up I originally envisioned when I pitched the idea to my editor, Anna. A pitch, I might add, that I made by calling her out of the blue after a run and saying "hey, will you be my editor for a podcast on Supernatural fandom?"

Anna Funk

Wait wait. Back up. First was you called me to ask if I had ever seen the show Supernatural. And would I go with you to the convention in Kansas City — where I live — if you flew in from Chicago and bought me my day pass.

Ohhh yeah, that. And look where we are now!

Truly, this is where I always saw this season ending — with a convention.

[music plays]

I hope you'll stay with us for more In Defense of Fandom!

Keep an eye out for season one bonus episodes, on topics like: How & why fans first connected with Supernatural, what it's like to work at a brewery co-owned by a TV star, and a few other treats.

Ko-fi donors will get access to behind-the-scenes material, like my full interviews with Rachel Miner, Billy Moran & Steve Norton, and Chris Schmelke. You can join too with a donation of any amount.

And of course: Season two! There's so much that didn't fit into season one that I still want to cover. Will we talk about how series end and what that does to the fandom? A deeper dive into fanfiction? Representation of different identities? We'll find out!

So thanks for joining me on this road trip. I hope you've learned something new about fandom and the Supernatural family! Thanks for joining me.

[music continues]

Here are the credits, one last (official) time.

Editorial support was provided by Dr. Anna Funk.

Music was composed and performed by Chris Scott.

Cover art was designed by Liz Hand.

Thanks to One Crafty Chicakadee, DitchLilyTiger, Wayward Photographer, Meg, Rupert Gayes, Dani, and Marissa for supporting the show through ko-fi.

In Defense of Fandom was made possible through an unhealthy obsession, and your support via ko-fi. If you're not already supporting the show and you'd like to, you can find a link in the show notes to our ko-fi. Your support is deeply appreciated.

joke whisper as credit music plays Is this the part where I'm supposed to make a bad joke about carrying on wayward sons? I feel like that's a requirement for anything Supernatural-related and I've avoided it so far.

[J2 panel: clip of the cars-for-kids jingle audio]