

Hey SPN Family! Just a quick note before we get into the show. As you are probably aware, both the WGA: the writers guild of america and SAG: the screen actors guild, are currently on strike.

They are fighting for fair compensation, improved workplace safety, and other basic necessities that will protect EVERYONE in the profession - regardless if they're a big name movie star, a new writer trying to break into the profession, or even a costume designer.

If you can, please support their efforts. I'll link to the Entertainment Community Fund where you can donate directly to their efforts.

Now, onto the bonus content!

[music break]

Welcome back to In Defense of Fandom! Well, sort of.

Although season one wrapped, I know I'm nowhere close to being finished with exploring fandom in all its iterations. While I continue working on the next season, I wanted to give y'all a few bonus episodes to help tide you over.

So, by popular request, via a twitter poll, our first bonus will focus on origin stories!

Namely, how fans got into Supernatural and joined the SPN family. Because this is a bonus episode, I'll be drawing from the original interviews I conducted for the season.

In almost every single one of my interviews with fellow fans, I tried to start by asking them what drew them to Supernatural as a show, and then as a fan community.

Their answers varied widely: from the OG fans when the first season or two was airing to the latecomers who discovered it on netflix like me. And their stories of why the show spoke to them differed just as much. Some were drawn in by the Americana tone set by the music and set design. Others immediately latched onto characters and saw mirrored experiences there. And some. Some fell hard into the fandom without even really getting into the show at all.

For this bonus episode, I'm going to try and let the SPN Family really speak for themselves with minimal interjection by me. I've grouped them by themes and I'll introduce each person, but I think it's best to let each speak to their experiences.

Let's start with *when* people found Supernatural. If you've listened to the season, you'll know that I definitely fall into the latecomer category. I didn't start watching until late 2021, when I discovered a youtube video essay that made me curious enough to start binging the show.

I like to joke that "covid broke everyone's brains in unique ways - this is how it broke mine."

But thanks to streaming, I'm not the only latecomer. Just listen to Shontill!

Shontill

Didn't know anything about it. I was randomly scrolling on Netflix and looking for something to watch. And I was like, Oh, this looks cool. And my, my younger son was like, Oh, I watched that, you know, it's okay. I think you'll like it, you know, that type of thing. Put on the first episode, and I was hooked. Like, from press play. I was hooked. And I never looked back.

Even after I started watching, I was still so just like oblivious to fandom, that it even existed. You know, I, I don't even if I if I think back I can't even really tell you how I just I think I may have been on Twitter and saw somebody say something about supernatural. And I was like, Okay, I watch that show, you know, and I kind of started following people that I thought, you know, have similar interests. I don't think I discovered like AO3 till maybe two or three years later, honestly,

And when I asked her about attending cons...

Shontill

Didn't get to my first one though, until 2019. Because I'm, I'm a paralegal. And so I had planned to go to the one in Houston. And then I had a trial that weekend. So I couldn't go and then they weren't coming back to Dallas or Houston for years.

Others, like Lynn Zubernis, were in the fandom from nearly the very beginning!

Lynn Zubernis

it's so striking how this happened. I was sitting there watching a new episode of Supernatural. I was also grading papers, I was multitasking, old school grading with like a pen like a red pen and printed papers. And I suddenly realized I had stopped grading the pen had literally fallen out of my hand. And I was just staring at the TV screen. But it wasn't until like it really started to get into the emotional lives of the brothers and sort of trauma and the grief and the loss. And what that had done to them that I think it

woke up my psychologist brain. And I was like, Oh my God, this isn't just a frothy show with some good looking guys like this show is going deep and going dark. What the hell?

Lynn, along with her friend and fellow researcher Kathy Larsen, were so interested in both the show and the fandom that it led them down a whole new research track.

Lynn Zubernis

And we sort of plunged down the rabbit hole of fandom together because, you know, as like moms and partners, and professors and grownups, we were like, oh my god, what is happening to us? Like, we don't want to talk about anything except supernatural, and Sam and Dean. And where are all the photos of Jared and Jensen? Let's collect 8 million of them and oh my god, there's fanfiction. And we just we literally just went down the rabbit hole. And that was how I discovered, like, the community of fandom.

I think of everyone I spoke to, only one mentioned that they were watching Supernatural from the premiere at the very start. And in fact, she's the lovely artist who did the cover art for this very show - Liz Hand!

Liz Hand

So I started watching the day the pilot premiered in 2005. Yeah, I was missing Buffy in my life. And I was a fan of Jensen Ackles since he was in Days of Our Lives.

And Smallville and Dark Angel, I watched all that stuff. And I love spooky things. So yeah, I started watching it and I never stopped.

I did not join fandom though. Until the pandemic.

Well, I stopped working. Because I needed to become a stay at home mom. So I had a lot of time to be on the internet. Too much time.

Probably the most proto-typical description I heard about how fans ended up in the SPN family came from Alana. She wasn't there from the very beginning, but did get into the show while it was still airing and quickly fell down the fandom rabbit hole once a friend told her that she should start watching.

Alana

And I was like, Okay, fine. So I watched the pilot. And then I was like, oh, no, I really like this. And then I watched all 10 seasons in less than a month, because I was on summer break. And I had almost nothing else to do. So I just watched the entirety of supernatural. And then I was hooked on it. And I watched seasons 11 through 15 Every night as they aired.

After my senior year of high school when I graduated, my parents, like for my graduation and my birthday present. They got me tickets to my first supernatural convention in Pittsburgh. And we just went Saturday and Sunday. But I was so excited because I had gone to other conventions before like, my dad is really big into Marvel. And so he started taking me to conventions just like general, like Wizard World when that was still around. We would go to those just like in Ohio, we would drive to them. Like there was one in Columbus he would take me to and I loved them. So when I found out that they were conventions for supernatural, I was like, I have to go to one of these. I hadn't really like gotten into the online fandom before I went to the convention that I saw, like, the community vibe there and how, like, I don't know, it was just, it's kind of like one of those things where like, I want to be a part of this, like, you look at it, and you're like, this is this. I feel like this is for me like it clicked.

[music break]

Another major theme that fans spoke to was the deep emotional resonance they felt with the show. Often the relationships between characters spoke to lived experiences. Con photographer and fan Ditch Lily Tiger certainly felt a kinship with the character of Dean Winchester.

DitchLilyTiger

I realized that Dean Winchester and I share the same baggage cars on the same train wreck. I mean, it was like, like, the baggage was the same. It was like absent mother. Our fathers were kind of like, almost, like disappointed in us. We were the oldest kid we had younger siblings. When they killed Sam, that I was a mess, because that was my brother. That was like, I'm gonna cry thinking about it. That was me just going right through it. Like everything, like everything Dean had felt, I was like, this is my little brother. This is this is Bran. And, and it was just it. It was like, I mean, like I said, it's like Dean Winchester, is probably the closest character I have found, written, that I relate to, identify with, like, he was he was living my life in different ways. I guess. Like his brother had left, my younger brother had left, not the little one that had... is deceased, but the one between us had left he... for the same reasons like I... it was, it was kind of like the same scenario. Like I was stuck in this small town with a parent who was angry about his, the, the departure of the wife, you know, it's like, my mom was absent. My, my dad was a mess over it. And he was like, blaming everybody, you know, I was a problem. And I needed to be like, I needed to be a better person. And if I was a better person, then he would, he wouldn't feel this way. Like, like, you know how Dean thinks that he could fix his dad by being a perfect soldier. That was me.

I can connect dots between Dean Winchester and I, and I'm not, you know, a six foot something. Gorgeous, man. I'm a five foot one little petite redheaded woman.

Sometimes it wasn't the connection with characters in the show itself, but the ability to mentally leave your own struggles and problems behind and fully inhabit a fictional world where the monsters can be fought and bested.

At least, that's how I understood fanfic author Northern Sparrow's origin story.

Northern Sparrow

at the time I was in Boston, and I thought, you know, it'd be great if I get to know some Boston people. And I had this bright idea of volunteering at the finish line of the Boston Marathon for the first time. So I got went and do that. But 2013 was not the year to do that. So this was the year that there was the bombing at the finish line. So I was right there. And that was a pretty formative day and week and time.

Sparrow went from volunteering at the Boston Marathon and witnessing the terrorist bombing attack, to a long field expedition in the Alaskan tundra for her academic research. Without much of a reprieve between the two, plus Alaska's midnight sun that never seems to set, it's no surprise she was looking for a way to get out of her own head.

Northern Sparrow

And I'm one of these supernatural fans who the second they found it just did like a full on nonstop marathon. But it was because I had this insomnia about about the the bombing. So that was just a it's funny to look back on that now. And I feel like in a way I kind of liked I gravitated to the show because they were it's about these, these guys who were faced with all this blood and gore but managed to make a difference.

And then I sprained my ankle, running around on the tundra after birds and I ended up laid up for about a week in this tent on the tundra. But the field station I was working at has Wi Fi they just gotten Wi Fi they just finally ran a fiber optic cable over the Brooks Range and they just had Wi Fi for the first time. So I found supernatural when I was on the Arctic tundra dealing with all this weird insomnia. And it was I have this vivid memory of watching seasons one through seven absolutely non stop while I'm in a tent on the Arctic tundra hearing like these Arctic birds around me and the sun was never quite setting and it could never get to sleep but I would just watch episode after episode.

Another fan, Robin, also discovered the show as she was awaiting surgery after a workplace accident.

Robin

So I used to be a full time paramedic and an RN. And I got hurt. And I was disabled. And I was like, there was a period of time where I was waiting for surgery. And I couldn't really do much of anything. So like a lot of people I was scrolling Netflix and I stumbled upon and I had known about supernatural and I had watched it like very, very casually, like I had been complete what we call now like the the the GA or the general audience. And then when I was disabled, when I started to become disabled, I binged the entire thing in like, I wouldn't even say but an embarrassingly short period of time had to have been 2015 it was before my surgery, so 2015 I'm googling this. The fandom is well established by this point. I'm completely unaware of it. I'm like, What is Tumblr? Let's have a look.

[music break]

So far, we've covered the themes of OG vs latecomers to the fandom, how the pandemic influenced how fans joined the SPN family, and the deep emotional resonance that hooked some fans right from the start.

But one aspect we haven't covered as much is how watching Supernatural and joining the SPN fandom coincided with personal revelations about the fans themselves. That Supernatural was a mirror that helped these fans realize something about themselves. An aspect that, maybe, they had been ignoring, as Lizlee puts it.

Lizlee

And I'm gonna, I'm gonna admit that at first I was really I was really put off by it, but this is because largely because I myself was still heavily closeted. So that was a huge impediment to my absorbing of it at first in terms of the shipping part, but because because for me, the fandom goes hand in hand with with the shipping in Supernatural's case, like, I love the show, but I never would have gotten so obsessed with it if it wasn't for, you know, the Dean/Cas kind of implied love story part of it. So I guess it's more of a complicated story.

And I was very like, and I think it made me uncomfortable because it made me face a part of myself that I hadn't. I hadn't conquered yet. And, you know, as an extension of that, like supernatural and you know, like the destiel fan fandom actually helped me come out of the closet. That discomfort, it really meant something and it was very attractive and like that, ooh, forbidden fruit. We're like, this is raising some flags. And I should probably look into why

It was through SPN fandom that helped Lizlee recognize that she didn't actually identify as straight after all.

Lizlee

I think that fandom often offers people like an escape for what's going on in their lives. And they can like find their true sort of desires or how, you know, they're, they can find themselves in it,

Marie, of the Carrying Wayward podcast, also spoke to the effect of the queer-coded character as she saw Dean Winchester. Even though it took her a while to get into the show, because of some of the early season misogyny that was so prevalent in the aughts.

Marie

Controversially didn't love the first season or so it was a lot scarier than I thought it was going to be. And it was full of, of more misogyny than I was expected, I think.

Despite the casual sexism and homophobic jokes in the early seasons, Marie kept watching.

Marie

looking back. I kind of wonder why I kept watching because I was very much like, in the middle of recognizing, like the misogyny that I had been confronted with in my own personal life. And I think that's why I was like hypersensitive to what I was watching on screen. But I kept watching. I'm not entirely sure why I did. But I did. I'm glad I did. But I don't really understand why I did.

For her, she had been into the show before, but really "entered" the fandom right as the show was coming to a close with the last few episodes in November of 2020.

Marie

For me, I discovered the fandom on the evening of November 5 2020. For those who may not know what I'm referring to that is the night that the episode despair aired, which is in season 15, episode 18.

Keep in mind, I was not in touch with the fandom at all. And so like, my experience as what I would now call a casual viewer, was that like, this is never where the narrative would go, not because it's where it should go. But because the network would never allow it kind of thing,

It's just, it was an unparalleled experience. Like I have never experienced something like that before. And I will never experience something like that, again, like it was just absolutely euphoric in a way to kind of see this happen in real time.

And like, what it meant for queer people to potentially see like, this love between two people who are like, middle aged, right, and like, who hadn't had on screen relationships with somebody of the same sex before. And just to kind of see that that was a possibility. Oh, my goodness. And then the letdown, but that's another story.

And she's right. That's a whole other story. I'm currently drafting with a potential future episode or series looking at queer representation in media and how that gets reflected or amplified, or even initially created by the fans. And how that interacts between the media and fans.

But as I said, that's a whole other story.

The next category of fan experience I want to share is... well really weird to me to be honest. There were fans that I met who were attending cons, writing fanfic, creating fanart... and they hadn't even seen the whole series! In fact, they seemed more like fans of the fandom or fans of the cast - rather than Supernatural itself!

Just look at Jen, aka Wayward Girl Photographer, who has attended conventions for years, but has barely watched any of the show!

Jen (Wayward Girl Photog)

So mine is so weird, because I'm really not a fan of the show. I mean, I am to the extent that it brought me those characters, but you know, I never really watched it.

June of 2018, I decided to go to my first convention, which would be Jacksonville, later in the year. And so I'm like, you know, I should probably watch the show a little bit. And so I started watching it. And I'm actually only made it up to mid season six. And that's where I kind of stopped. And then I've watched a few from the last maybe four seasons, some episodes here and there.

And whatnot. but really, I don't watch the show.

Jenn, aka Rupert Gayes on twitter, has a similar experience.

Rupert Gayes

So I started. I want to say, in like the early 2010, and if you are a supernatural fan, you probably know that was like the heyday of supernatural, you know.

And I was also in Tumblr at the time. So also the supernatural website, as some people like to kind of call it the the gif sets were everywhere. People I knew were constantly talking about it.

So I start to watch it, and that was, I believe in between season 7 and 8, so i'm like Well, let me see how far I can get.

Spoiler - she's never finished the show.

Rupert Gayes

I would say I'm online probably more than I am consuming those original pieces of media. So I'm usually getting more interested in what people are saying about the source material versus say, getting ads for the source material itself, and then choosing to watch that way.

[music break]

And finally, for the last category of fan stories. When I was sorting through all the tape, I just labeled these fans as "in it for the vibes." Maybe that's an unfairly vague or broad category, but I think this is also probably where a majority of the SPN family are located.

First up: JackieDee, also known as Winchester Reload.

JackieDee

So back in the day, I was very, I was a huge X Files nerd. And a lot of the people a lot of the crew from The X Files kind of went over and they started working on Supernatural. And I didn't get into it when it started. I actually didn't start watching until I think it was like 2011 or 2012 or something like that. And I got hooked because the beginning couple of seasons are very, like X Files-esque. And so I was like, kind of getting that, that rush again, because the X Files had been gone for such a long time. And I was like, okay, yeah, I can dig it. And then I just kind of got sucked in by the characters. And I don't think that there's a door out once you get into the fandom, like just as like a, you know, twisty little tunnel that never never ends,

Jules from the Supernatural Wiki also had the X-files connection.

Jules

I started watching the show in early 2006, when it started broadcasting in Australia, which is where I'm from, as you may have guessed, by my accent, I started watching because it was mis advertised if you like. It was promoted in Australia as from the

producers of The X Files, which Okay, Kim Manners, who was one of the executive producers had been an EP on The X Files, but there was a bit of a stretch. We're about five months behind in Australia, the broadcast, but I was already a Live Journal and involved in fandom. So it took me you know, all of 90 seconds to discover the supernatural fandom and a rabbit hole I've yet to climb out of 20 years later. It had some of the things that get me. So it was it had horror, in a sense of humor I liked and had pop culture references. So it tapped into the, they're all things that will get me into into any show. It looked good. And it felt different than anything that was on at the time. So I'm pretty pretty quickly thought I'll go and see what the fandoms up to. And the fandom was already exploding with creativity and things for me to get totally hooked on. So it was a combination of both the show and the fandom that sucked me in pretty quickly.

Meanwhile, Scout first was drawn in by the gothic horror stories and monsters.

Scout

I think so it was like 12 years ago that I started, like actually watching and then I started doing, like, fan art and things like that.

I really liked that Gothic Americana sort of vibe with monsters. Like that's totally my, my thing vibe.

Jeremy, from Monster of the Week podcast, also liked the dark fantasy elements.

MOTW

Oh, here's a cool show. It's got rock music. It's got hunky dudes. It's got like monsters. And you know, we're big, you know, fantasy, dark fantasy, you know, sci fi kind of nerds. And we just had to watch it. And I was hooked.

Speaking of music, that's how Winchester Family Business editor NightSky first discovered the show herself!

Laurena

And I was doing chores, and I needed something to distract me and running through the channels. And up comes this show that had absolutely fantastic music. From my era rock era of just I really was attracted to the music.

I bought tickets to the convention. And that kind of snowballed into me wanting to meet people at the convention.

The convention was the trigger point. For everything that pulled me into this being a full time gig for me.

[music starts]

I guess as the narrator of this series, I should be sharing my own personal story of how I joined the SPN family. But well, I sorta feel like I already did a whole series about it!
[laughs]

Seriously, the promo and first episode of season one pretty clearly lay it out. I went from watching a youtube video essay about the show in October, to deciding to watch a few episodes in the spirit of Halloween, to fully falling down this rabbit hole.

When I was about 7 or 8 seasons in, I began to worry that the pop culture fandom around the show had left me behind. Sure, I saw fanfic on AO3 and art on twitter. But I kind of assumed that a show no longer on the air would see its fandom evaporate too.

Being a trekkie, I should've known better.

Just because there's no new episodes of Supernatural for fans to dissect or big panels at major comic conventions to generate buzz, doesn't mean that the fandom is dead. Or even dormant!

SPN Family is still plenty active, both online and at conventions! And I do hope it stays that way so that new fans can discover the show for years to come.

[music starts]

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.

Oh, and don't forget! If you donate any amount on the ko-fi, you'll get access to some of the full, raw interviews conducted during this season. The conversation with Rachel

Miner is already out, and next up will be the full interview with Billy Moran and Steven Norton of Loudon Swain!