

Exploring the Beginnings of “SUPERNATURAL”

Written by Tony Timpone
Wednesday, 11 May 2011 10:51



SUPERNATURAL fans are in for a treat with the spring publication of SUPERNATURAL: JOHN WINCHESTER’S JOURNAL (It Books), a trade paperback companion book to the hit CW TV series. Written by Alex Irvine (author of a previous SUPERNATURAL tie-in), JOHN WINCHESTER’S JOURNAL takes us through Sam and Dean’s rocky childhoods, ending with their father’s disappearance—the starting point of SUPERNATURAL’s pilot episode. The illustrated paperback reveals such tidbits as: John’s single-minded pursuit of a growing and deadly evil; John’s notes on everything from shapeshifters to Samuel Colt’s demon-halting pistol; the exorcism Sam and Dean used in “Phantom Traveler”; Dean’s first hunt; Sam’s peewee soccer team (!) and much more. Fango spoke with Irvine about JOHN WINCHESTER’S JOURNAL and his love of the show. The author of seven novels, Irvine has also written two collections of short stories and a Marvel Comics series, HELLSTORM: SON OF SATAN.

FANGORIA: How did this book come together?

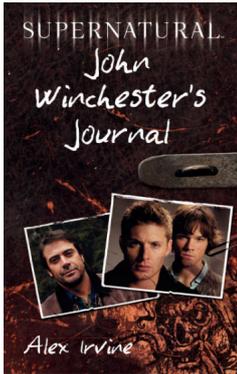
ALEX IRVINE: I had written the SUPERNATURAL BOOK OF MONSTERS, DEMONS, SPIRITS, AND GHOULS a year or so before. While I was working on that, there was talk of maybe doing John’s journal some day. (I think I said to [comics writer/author] Chris Cerasi one time, “Man, it sure would be fun to write John’s journal.”) Then when the monster book did well, they came back to me and asked if I wanted to do John’s journal. And I said something along the lines of, “Hell, yes, that sounds great.”

FANG: What was your pitch to the show’s creators and potential publishers?

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IRVINE: Well, it wasn't really a pitch. Since they came to me, all I had to do was start putting something together that made sense in the context of the show. And promise that I would try to iron out some of the continuity ripples between the journal as originally posted online, the journal as seen on the show and the journal as quoted in the comics. I did try to do that, but where there were conflicts, I usually went with what had been on the show.



FANG: What kind of input did the show's creative team and creator Eric Kripke have on the JOURNAL?

IRVINE: Eric and I talked two or three times before I really dove in and started writing, and then he saw a draft of the book along with Cat Humphris and Rebecca Dessertine and a couple of other people. They didn't have big edits, which was nice, but they did give the manuscript a careful read and ask me a bunch of questions—which was also nice. Writers like having attentive readers.

FANG: Was it a challenge to fill in all that backstory?

IRVINE: No, it was a blast. We meet John in the show as a guy who has already been through this long crucible of discovering evil, fighting it, and making a conscious decision to force his boys to follow in his footsteps—at the cost of a normal life for all of them. The reason I wanted to do this book was to get at what that might have been like early on. What's it like to but a gun in a 9-year-old's hand and tell him he might have to use it? What's it like to not be there on Christmas because you're hunting monsters and hoping for a lead on the demon that killed your boys' mother? I have three kids (two when I was writing the book), and that complex of dilemmas fascinates me. When do you put your kids through hardship because you think it's good for them? How much is it OK to ask a kid to sacrifice?

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And then, of course, there was all the great monster stuff and John’s esoteric research. I had a great time reading through grimoires and folkloric accounts of various beasties throughout American history. That’s been an interest of mine all along—check out my novels *THE NARROWS* or *A SCATTERING OF JADES*, for example—and this was a way to indulge it again!

FANG: This is not your first SUPERNATURAL book. What appeals to you about the show?

IRVINE: I think that American folklore gets short shrift in this culture. Until recently, writers spent all their time looting British and Irish folklore. That’s a generalization, but by and large fantasy and horror fiction in the U.S. has been a colonial literature. Only more recently has American folklore gotten its literary due. SUPERNATURAL has been part of that phenomenon. The show did a good job from the beginning of trying to integrate various immigrant folklores into a broader American narrative.

FANG: What do you think of the SUPERNATURAL’s evolution over the years, from season one’s “Monster of the Week” to the rich mythos and epic arcs of later seasons?

IRVINE: I loved the monster of the week shows, just like I loved the same storytelling devices on the X-FILES (and [producer/director] Kim Manners, of course, had a lot to do with both). But, yeah, the show kept reaching and reaching for grander and grander stakes, which was the only way it could go. Once you invoke demons, eventually you have to face down the questions of hell and damnation, etc. To do otherwise would be to quit on the fundamental mythology of the series, literally from its first shots. It would have been easy to hand-wave around that problem, but it wouldn’t have been honest, and I give Eric, Sera [Gamble] and the rest of the gang an A-plus for not bailing out on the narrative consequences demanded by the show’s origin.



FANG: Considering that the series’ leads no longer use their dad’s journal, is your book still relevant?

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IRVINE: Is the Old Testament relevant to Christians? (Was that lightning outside?) Yeah, I think it still is. The boys aren't still hunting the same way, but the show is drawing new fans in all the time, and they've got those first five seasons to go through to catch up. So they're all going to need JOHN WINCHESTER'S JOURNAL to keep up, of course!

FANG: Some fans think SUPERNATURAL should have ended last year, with the departure of Kripke and big Apocalypse arc?

IRVINE: The fans who think the show should have ended don't need to watch it, right? They can change the channel and for them it will have been over last year. But if you're going to watch season six, just watch it and enjoy it! Don't spend all your time second-guessing whether it should exist. Where does that get you?

FANG: The latest season has had a lot of trouble finding its footing this year (well, how could you top the Apocalypse?) Do you agree, and if so, how can it get back on track?

IRVINE: I don't think they're trying to top the Apocalypse, because as you said, how can you? The interesting question is, well, once the Apocalypse is over, what then? Life goes on, right? But how can you go on with regular normal life when you've lived through the Apocalypse!? The question of Castiel and Crowley and free will has made for some good stuff.

FANG: What's next for you, SUPERNATURAL or otherwise?

IRVINE: There is occasionally talk of an updated monster book. We'll see about that. On the non-SUPERNATURAL front, I just finished the second of what look to be three TRANSFORMERS novels; I'm diving into revisions on a STAR WARS novel; I just finished a novelization of an upcoming film that I can't talk about, but wish I could; and I'm writing a Facebook game that everyone in the world is going to want to play. Really. Plus working on a couple of original novels and some comics. I'm on Twitter @alexirvine if you want to hear more.

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