

# **APOCALYPTIC CINEMA**

## **The *Supernatural* T.V. Series as an Original Neo-Humanistic Interpretation of the *Book of Revelation***

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## Abstract

This thesis aims to develop a critical analysis and interpretation of a long-running streaming television series, *Supernatural* (2005-2020), whose main story is adapted from *the Book of Revelation*. This thesis describes, analyzes, and interprets the creatively unique apocalyptic worldview presented in the series through a content/narrative analysis methodology and employing the modeling technique of Game Theory.

This study shows that *Supernatural* creates a universe in which an apocalyptic worldview is projected by a radical type of humanism, which I term ‘Neo-Humanism.’ Neo-Humanism is a kind of perspective whose worldview has roots in the deepest layers of religious belief and its lifestyle is the same as the most exclusive levels of humanism. Neo-Humanism claims that if there is a god, who created human beings with free will and the ability to distinguish between good and evil, as theism says, His creation will inevitably be above everything and able to do everything. And more importantly, even the Creator God Himself does not want, cannot, and should not interfere in humans’ affairs.

Even though the Neo-Humanism perspective seems too illogical and surreal to be believable, this thesis shows that in the universe that *Supernatural* depicts, the inner logic of Neo-Humanism works appropriately.

## General Summary

This thesis is about the apocalypse in a long-running T. V. show, *supernatural* (2005-2020). The series has adapted its main story from the *Book of Revelation*. *Supernatural* has a new approach to the apocalypse. In this series, the protagonists prevent the occurrence of the apocalypse and its catastrophes by relying on two God-given blessings, namely free will and the power to distinguish between good and evil, which arise from the human soul.

By analogizing the apocalypse to a game and comparing this game in the *Supernatural* series and the *Book of Revelation*, this research shows that *supernatural* creates a world in which humans, without any superpowers, are the most powerful beings and can even overcome God. However, this view is by no means sinful but is precisely in line with the religious teachings that emphasize free will and the role of the human soul. This worldview is called Neo-Humanism in this thesis.

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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

## 1. 1. Preface

I was fourteen when the war's cannons roared. More than twenty million men, women and children, soldiers and civilians, were killed. It was the first catastrophic chapter of my life. Fortunately, I was too young to die on the battlefield and lucky enough to survive the daily bombing of our city. But the living through the aftermath of the war was a different story. The wounds of the war were still bleeding when the plague appeared. The disease didn't care about the age or ideology of its victims. I was a young man in my early twenties and, luckily, strong enough to defeat that horrible beast who swallowed more than fifty million individuals. I didn't lose my hope and started to write my destiny. After about a decade of relative peace and calm, I had finally found my way to a decent life, but it didn't last long. I hadn't celebrated my thirtieth birthday yet when the economy collapsed. Unemployment and poverty fed hunger; famine consumed the land. The funny thing was that the famine turned out to be good times. A demonically inspired lunatic redefined the meaning of suffering. More than sixty million people were killed this time, and millions burned alive; hell appeared on earth. Fires killed hundreds of thousands in mere seconds, not just once time but twice! Demons care not about human lives. Today, I'm a forty-five-year-old survivor of the events described in the *Book of Revelation*: I was a witness to the coming of the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse.

It is not a story based on my memories, but it is conceivably the outline of a life that could have been lived. Someone born in 1900 could have experienced World War I (1914-1918), the Spanish Flu (1918-1920), the financial crisis of 1929 and the depression, the ravages of a Second World War (1939-1945), and the dropping of the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki (1945). Though historical facts and events, it would take no great leap of imagination to weave this history along the narrative arc of the *Apocalypse of St. John*. People may laugh at apocalyptic narratives--but those that do forget the reality of apocalyptic scale historical events.

Set aside recent history. Today, many feel the sense of living in the last chapters of the world's story. Climate change, the threat of nuclear war, developments in genetic engineering and artificial intelligence, conspiracy theories, unstable governments, and the current Covid-19 pandemic have only served to heighten the relevance of apocalyptic imagery and the sense of living through an *end time*. Such a pressing set of interlocking crises has led Slavoj Žižek to describe today's world in terms of "weak apocalyptic" (Žižek 2010), while Jean-Pierre Dupuy has discussed the need today for "enlightened doomsaying" (Dupuy 2012). Even if it has not been with humanity throughout history, such a feeling is undoubtedly present today.

The apocalyptic feeling, like a god from archaic religion, both terrifies and fascinates. Like an accident that compels our gaze, we seem entranced by the violent terrors of apocalyptic narratives. Given "that the world sometimes appears to be coming apart at its economic, political, and social seams and that there is 'more and more information, and less and less meaning,' our fascination with the apocalyptic myth is certainly understandable" (Rosen 2008, xi). "End time" or "the end of the world" scenarios and narratives are the subject of research in religious and mythic worldviews but also in the scientific, non-religious world. For instance, in theoretical cosmology, physicists develop theories about the ultimate fate of the cosmos through concepts such as entropy and the *heat death of the universe*.

Apocalypse is not a relic from a religious past. An apocalyptic worldview remains central to many religious people and also has currency in popular culture and secular narratives. Lorenzo DiTomasso suggests that "[n]ow, possibly more than at any other time in history, people are inclined to understand the world and their place in it through the lens of the apocalyptic worldview" (DiTomasso 2014, 474). Perhaps, film and television are the main contributors to the prevalence and salience of apocalyptic imagery and narratives.

This thesis examines the apocalyptic motif in a long-running streaming television series, *Supernatural* (2005-2020), describing, analyzing, and interpreting the creatively unique apocalyptic worldview presented in the series. *Supernatural* (SPN) is the first show in a cultural milieu made with a different approach to the

apocalyptic concepts and contents of the *Book of Revelation*. It is the representative of a new wave of post 9/11 apocalyptic T.V. series, which unlike popular earlier or simultaneously similar series, such as *The X-Files* (1993-2018), *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997-2003), or *The Fringe* (2008-2013), profoundly emphasizes religious concepts. It means that in *SPN*, supernatural beings, such as demons and angels, are not merely similar phenomena to aliens, vampires, or zombies; they are explicitly derived from mainstream religious tradition, and most of their descriptions are rooted in sacred texts.

The story of the apocalypse in this series is very similar to the story found in *the Book of Revelation* in the Bible: the Four Horsemen appear, and Archangels fight the devil and his army. In the new twist that this series offers, people who try to prevent the apocalypse rely on both their humanistic capabilities and their so-called God-given gifts, including free will and the human soul. This thesis aims to develop a critical analysis and interpretation of this T.V. series, taking it as an exemplar and innovator of the apocalyptic genre in contemporary popular culture.

Two broad questions frame this thesis: How does *Supernatural* represent the apocalypse? What solutions does the show offer in dealing with what is often seen as the limits to or problems with religious apocalyptic narratives and theologies such as violence?

Through a content/narrative analysis methodology and employing the modeling technique of Game Theory, this study describes an apocalyptic worldview projected in *Supernatural* that is informed by a radical type of humanism, which I term ‘Neo-Humanism.’

The thesis will appeal to religious individuals who hold a faith-based relationship to apocalyptic beliefs and narratives. Another audience for the thesis is those who do not believe in any literal or historical sense in the mythical, religious descriptions of the apocalypse but are nevertheless concerned about living in a culture that seems to be approaching by *end time* and find in apocalyptic narratives food for thought. Also, those interested in how popular culture, especially television, serves as a vehicle for “religious work” will want to read this thesis.

We begin with a brief discussion of definitional matters and challenges surrounding such terms as apocalypse, apocalyptic worldview and perspective, and apocalyptic motion picture.

## **1. 2. Definition Challenges**

The term ‘apocalypse’ derives from biblical-era narratives of God's plan to enact creative destruction; in some versions, the aim is to destroy the ‘ungodly’ and establish His Kingdom. However, apocalypse is not merely "a religious story that has been passed down through the ages. ... [It has become] a part of our social consciousness... a means by which to understand the world and one's place in it... an organizing principle imposed on an overwhelming, seemingly disordered universe" (Rosen 2008, xi). In other words, an apocalyptic narrative may form the core of an overarching worldview; a worldview based on an apocalypse is called apocalypticism. Even secular worldviews may contain an apocalyptic element, as seen, for example, in films such as *Deep Impact* (1998), where a comet strikes the earth.

"Apocalypticism," Lorenzo DiTommaso explains, "is a worldview, a fundamental cognitive orientation that makes axiomatic claims about time, space, and human existence ... [and] is often mistaken for what it is not," such as millennialism or utopianism or fundamentalism (DiTommaso 2014, 473-4). Often, "apocalypse" and "end of time" are conflated, but an apocalyptic worldview is not necessarily an eschatology. Following DiTommaso, I locate the core element of an apocalyptic worldview in the fundamental conception of two transcendent and antagonistic forces or powers (good and evil), locked in an imminent struggle, the outcome of which bears on matters of redemption (ibid, 474). I will return to these issues later. But, since ‘worldview’ is a key concept in this thesis, a robust conception of it is needed.

### **1. 2. 1. Worldview**

In this thesis, ‘worldview’ is not just a technical term for "the way of thinking" or a "system of beliefs" as philosophers suggest (Newton 2015, 4-5). Rather, it is what Clifford Geertz considers an essential part of a "religious perspective." For Geertz, the religious perspective is one where there is a tight fit between a culture's *ethos* and its *worldview*. The term ‘ethos’ points to moral and aesthetic dimensions, the quality

and character of a people's way of life, while a worldview "is [a people's] picture of the way things, in sheer actuality, are, their concept of nature, of self, of society" (Geertz 1957, 421). A religious perspective on experience is when where there exists a tight fit of ethos and worldview.

But not every worldview shapes a religious perspective. For a worldview to be a core for a religious perspective, it has to meet certain conditions. First, it should provide answers to human beings' basic questions (What is real? What happens when we die? How should we live?). Second, it should have a plausible structure to be understood and believed. Third, it should define a group of people, hold them, and set them apart from other groups (Newton 2015, 7). In other words, using Pierre Bourdieu's terminology, a religious perspective is a cultural narrative that brings about its habitus, field or human context, and lifestyle (Tomarken 2017, 110). An analogy between a religious perspective and a game can better explain the role of worldview in a religious perspective. As Tomarken puts it, a religious perspective is a cultural phenomenon, a closed universe, a non-playful game that shapes an individual's thoughts, attitudes, and practices through rules, roles, players, and commentaries (ibid, 15). As I will explain in detail later, the similarity of a religious perspective with the game makes the modeling methods of game theory suitable for the goal of this thesis.

## **1. 2. 2. Apocalypse and the Idea of End Time**

Ideas about "end times" or "the end of the world" fall along a spectrum of images, motifs, and narratives, mingled with utopian/dystopian futures. At one end of this spectrum, we have the end of the world in terms of the end of the cosmos as such; for example, the popular (though inaccurate) account of Shiva's final destructive function in Hinduism and the Resurrection Day doctrine (Judgment Day doctrine), *al-qiyamat*, in Islam. Somewhere, in the middle of the spectrum, we may face an "end of the world" that has been occasioned by natural threats and disasters (a meteorite) and human-caused conflagrations (nuclear war), with the potential to end life or at least the social order. The cosmos and even human life continue, but they do so in a situation of disorder and chaos. On the far end of the spectrum, "end of the world" discourse is considered as a socio-cultural event describing the role of violence not simply as a force of

destruction but as an ultimately benevolent force in the world's reordering, usually to some original state from which humanity has lapsed or fallen. In some versions, this narrative links a renewed social order and justice to a necessary *divine* violence that ushers in a new, transformed world, transforming human life and social institutions for the better.

Of course, although the concept of "apocalypse" usually associates with "end time," it isn't sensible to label all shades of this spectrum as "apocalyptic." So, what is an apocalypse, and what does the apocalyptic genre mean? Responding to these questions is vital to this thesis because "neither 'genre' nor 'apocalypse' has a precise, universally accepted connotation" (J. J. Collins 1979, 1), and we should precisely identify, define, and use these terms.

Writing in 1979, Collins developed a definition of apocalypse, "primarily based on Jewish and Christian writings from the period 250 BCE to 250 CE, but also include[ing] analysis of Gnostic, Greco-Roman, Persian, and some later Jewish writings" (J. J. Collins 2014, 2).<sup>1</sup> Collins defines an "apocalypse" as

a genre of revelatory literature with a narrative framework, in which a revelation is mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient, disclosing a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it envisages eschatological salvation, and spatial insofar as it involves another supernatural world (J. J. Collins 1979, 9).

Collins' definition has been widely accepted (J. J. Collins 2014, 2). It applies to most well-known biblical and extra-biblical apocalyptic narratives (e. g. 1 Enoch, Daniel, 4 Ezra, 2 Baruch, Apocalypse of Abraham, 3 Baruch, 2 Enoch, Testament of Levi 2-5, etc. (J. J. Collins 1998, 5)) and a vast body of other material. However, "it has also been, and continues to be, controversial in some respects" (J. J. Collins 2014, 2).

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<sup>1</sup> See also Collins, John J. 2000. "Apocalyptic Literature." In *Dictionary of New Testament Background*, by Stanley E. Porter (eds.) Craig A. Evans. P. 41.

Rosen is one of Collins' critics. For Rosen, an apocalypse is a plot, not merely prophecy. Based on this differentiation and from her postmodern perspective, Rosen argues that

[w]hat is most surprising about this definition is that the elements of "plot," which are traditionally considered to comprise apocalyptic narrative, are not mentioned in this definition at all. Indeed, this definition is arguably both too loose and too restrictive; it is too restrictive in that it suggests that without the revelatory element, a work cannot be considered apocalyptic, and it is too loose because it does not take into account some of the vital components of the traditional story of apocalypse. There is no mention of judgment, for instance, nor of the destructive aspect, which is the result of the judgment. The use of "otherworldly being" suggests a hesitance even about claiming that apocalyptic literature is a narrative whose crux is God, a problematic stance in a definition that is looking specifically at biblical, rather than secular, apocalyptic stories. And yet even secular adaptations of the apocalyptic paradigm include motifs of destruction (if they are neo-apocalyptic) and renewal (if they are more traditional) (Rosen 2008, xxii).

Collins acknowledges such criticism in a later work and notes that "one has to decide what level of abstraction is most helpful for one's purpose" (J. J. Collins 2014, 5-6). For my purposes here, a definition at least applicable to apocalyptic films is needed.

### **1. 2. 3. Apocalypse; Seeking a Modified Definition**

Collins's original definition has four aspects. In this definition, an apocalypse is (1) a genre of literature with a narrative framework that (2) is a meditated revelation by an otherworldly being to a human recipient and (3) is about eschatological salvation in the future, which (4) involves another supernatural world. Now, let's explore each aspect of this definition and see how it may be modified to reach a definition appropriate for our purpose: investigating apocalypticism in television and film.

#### **a) Genre of Literature and More**

In this definition, a "genre of literature" is, Collins says, "a group of written texts marked by distinctive recurring characteristics which constitute a recognizable and coherent type of writing" (J. J. Collins 1979,



1). Limiting the scope of apocalypse to written texts practically confines this concept to the context of the sacred texts and limits its ability to shape a worldview broadly. Apocalypse is the concept itself, not the container of the concept, as DiTommaso puts it:

Essentially, apocalypticism is the worldview of the apocalypses. But it is also the worldview of apocalyptic literature as a class, as well as apocalyptic art, apocalyptic films and novels, apocalyptic rhetoric and discourse, and of apocalyptic social movements of every size and stripe. It is what defines the adjective apocalyptic in all these expressions. It is the message, not the medium (DiTommaso 2014, 474).

To solve this problem, we can convert "literature" into "text" in its expanded hermeneutical implication, which is any "meaningful human actions and the products of such actions" (Mantzavinos 2020) or anything that carries a message and is regarded as an object of analysis or interpretation--in our case, a television series. Both film/television and written texts may take a narrative form, so it is reasonable to extend Collins' definition to film and literature.

### **b) Revelatory Characteristic of Apocalypse**

*Apocalypse* and *revelation* are connected to the idea of the *unveiling of a truth*, a reality, a complete understanding of the nature of the world. In its etymology, the word is derived from Greek *apokaluptein*, which means *uncover*, *reveal*, finding its way into ecclesiastical Latin and eventually modern European languages (*Oxford Reference* 2020). However, in Collins definition, "a revelatory literature, in which an otherworldly being mediates a revelation to a human recipient" seems to be tautological: "Revelation," as defined in the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is "the disclosure or communication of knowledge, instructions, etc., by divine or supernatural" (*Oxford English Dictionary Third Edition* 2010). The definition may aim to emphasize an "otherworldly communication," perhaps highlighting the authority often ascribed to apocalyptic texts. However, this emphasis on the otherworldliness of the source sounds unnecessary because what makes a text authoritative is its relationship to a community (Gifford 2010, 399). From a social-historical perspective, apocalyptic texts are marked as special by a community that establishes the

text as authoritative, canonical, and traditional. Though one way of legitimizing canonical status is to portray the text as *authored* or *inspired* by a divine or supernatural being.

Traditionally, being revelatory is one narrative element constitutive of apocalyptic stories. In Collin's definition, revelation is one of the three critical aspects of an apocalypse and carries the same weight as the other elements. But is this element as important as others? Is it mandatory for the narration? What happens if we eliminate the "otherworldly communication" part of an apocalyptic story? Almost nothing. But if we remove the other two elements, we won't have a complete narration.

My point here is that even if the revelatory characteristic of an apocalyptic narration is as important as other characteristics, we need not over-emphasize divine authorship. To solve this problem, I will replace "mediated by an otherworldly being to a human recipient" simply with the term 'revelation' or 'revelatory text' -- a narrative that reveals some fact or truth, but not necessarily a communication from a literal divine agent or another world.

### **c) Temporal Nature**

When do the apocalyptic events happen in relation to our normal, everyday conceptions of temporality? The answer here seems to be the future. But what is the future? And why do we assume that apocalyptic events will happen at some point in the future? Rosen discusses how

[t]he apocalyptic conception of time is inherently a complicated one, for the story of apocalypse is simultaneously about the ending of everything and yet suggests a time afterward. Moreover, on the more local level of narrative in Revelation, St. John occupies two times simultaneously since he is both in the present being shown the future and in the future experiencing it. There is a tension, therefore, between time as a principle (a continuum of successive individual moments) and time as a narrative concept (a method of juxtaposing different moments in a story). In Christian apocalypse, the overall structure of time is linear, but St. John's viewing of it is not: through his vision, he occupies more than one place on the continuum of that line simultaneously. While malleability of visionary time is a distinguishing trait of traditional apocalyptic narrative, it is distinct from the issue of the structure of time overall. Despite these

complexities, the traditional apocalypse is based on a linear notion of time and is a story about the end of history (Rosen 2008, xxiv).

Rosen develops a notion of the apocalyptic concept that supports a postmodern argument. The story about the End of Time in postmodern versions of the apocalypse, Rosen says, is a story about the end of *one* time. "This marks a return to a view of time which is cyclical rather than linear, and which is more akin to that of the end-of-cosmos stories found in ancient cultures" (ibid). While I agree with Rosen about the complex nature of the apocalyptic concept of time, I argue that apocalyptic time is not necessarily about the future.

Let's imagine a situation. You find yourself in a train station in the middle of nowhere with no communication device, and no one else is present in the station. You find a note (or a series of messages) on the wall or elsewhere in the station whose author says, "I dreamt, I saw a train would pass the station in the future." The note also includes some signs of the train's arrival and detailed descriptions of the train (including the advantages of catching it and the negative consequences of missing it). Suppose you believe the author entirely trustworthy. So what do you assume? Has the train passed yet? Is it about to arrive? Is it going to come in a couple of hours? Or is it supposed to arrive in the following days or months or years or centuries? You can never be sure because your only source of information is one note or a series of messages from the past that includes some information about the future, and the future of the past covers your past, present, future! It's an ambiguous situation, isn't it?

Now, let's expand our imaginary situation. Consider the station is located in a remote village whose inhabitants have all been waiting for the train to arrive since the time of the note's writing. These people have witnessed many of the train's arrival signs and are still waiting because they think the train has not passed the station yet and will come in the future. Are they right? The answer is no. They hope the train has not passed yet because the "timing" uncertainty in the "envisaging" note is still working. The note reports an event in the future of a past time; the time of the dream's frame is the past, and the time about which the dream talks is the future of a past time. It means the villagers' collective memory only proves that the train

hasn't passed between the time of writing the note and the present. That is, the train may have passed the station before the writer's time, and the author's dream or vision, having taken place in a time before the train's passing! The point here is that the time or timing of apocalyptic narratives is too complicated to be reduced to a simple projected future event. Why is this important?

If apocalyptic narratives were simply about the future, it wouldn't be reasonable for people to believe that they might be living in an end time: a future that is now is not the future. "For most people," DiTommaso says, "the formation of the European Union and the 9/11 terrorist attack are historical facts. For a small minority, they are signs that the end is near. For most people, the Emperor Nero is a historical figure. But for many generations of Christians after his death, Nero was the Antichrist who was expected to return to earth at the end of time" (DiTommaso 2014, 474). The complexity of time in apocalyptic narratives is, in my view, the primary source of the feeling of living in the end time, and a contributing factor informing the hermeneutic complexities of the genre. Later in the thesis, I will return to these questions of time and timing, drawing on Giorgio Agamben's distinction between apocalyptic and eschatological senses of time (Agamben 2005).

This time-focused analysis shows that apocalyptic narratives do not simply report a future event; the plot's time ambiguity supports its credibility and persistence. "Apocalypticism," Collins says, "is born of fears and hopes that are endemic to the human condition" (J. J. Collins 2014, 13). Therefore, if the duality of hope and fear is a crucial element in apocalyptic narrative persistence, it is the ambiguity of the narrative's structuring of time that keeps the audience in a state of ambivalence and anticipation, even in a state of dilemma. Later in this thesis (section 5. 1. 1), I show that *Supernatural* does not occur in an ambiguous future but in the present, unlike most other apocalyptic films and T.V. series such as *Into the Badlands* (2015-2019). For example, the adventures shown in the fifteenth season (2020) happen in the same year. This reference to the known time is probably one of the factors that make the audience feel that the story is real, it can happen at any moment, and even it may be happening somewhere right now.

Let's look back at our imaginary situations. What will you do in that situation? Will you stay to catch the train and enjoy its benefits or leave the station? The only thing that can keep you waiting for the train is the hope that comes with the time plot's ambiguity; you hope the train has not passed yet, and it will arrive soon before your time is over. Likewise, in the second imaginary situation, villagers hope the train has not passed yet, and it will come quickly before their time is over. Based on this scenario, the concept of a vague and mysterious time, in my view, is an essential feature for an apocalyptic narrative to be preserved and serve as a worldview core. Therefore, the definition's temporal aspect should be changed from "a report of the future" to "a report of an ambiguous time which could be in the past, present, and future at the same time."

#### **d) Spatial Characteristics of Apocalypse**

The spatial feature of Collin's definition of an apocalypse (its involvement in another supernatural world) is not so controversial. The only point to keep in mind here is that if we consider the supernatural elements of apocalyptic narratives to be the inviolable principle, in practice, any symbolic interpretation of these elements may exclude the subject of interpretation from the scope of the original definition. However, we can keep this part of the definition untouched because *Supernatural* literally deals with a supernatural realm, although the story takes place in our world and actual locations and situations.

Now we have a modified definition based on Collin's definition of the apocalypse. In this thesis, an apocalypse is "a narrative genre in which a revelation discloses a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it refers to eschatological salvation in an ambiguous time which could be (simultaneously) in the past, present, and future, and spatial insofar as it involves interactions with another supernatural world." Of course, the understandings and interpretations of such a narrative genre will vary across contexts, authors and audiences.

This definition helps us talk more accurately about apocalyptic television and films and avoid bringing non-apocalyptic or semi-apocalyptic items into the discussion.

## **1. 3. Apocalypse in Film and Television**

Apocalyptic narratives have rich historical, linguistic, and imaginative underpinnings. Therefore, it is not surprising that many painters, novelists, and filmmakers have taken up this theme. Among these forms of artistic expression, motion pictures have a special place in the modern era. The power of cinema in bringing imagination to life on the big screen and the growth of the film industry coincided with World War I--the first “end of the world” of the twentieth century, convincing many filmmakers to pursue the end of the world and the apocalypse as a cinematic motif. Over the past century, apocalyptic films and, more recently, television and streaming series with apocalyptic themes and narratives have come to constitute a definable genre of fiction film.

### **1. 3. 1. Apocalyptic Film and Television Genre**

Apocalyptic films are usually associated with the idea of the end of the world, but the genre forms a broad spectrum of images, motives, and narratives. DiTommaso uses Wikipedia’s “List of Apocalyptic and Post-Apocalyptic Fiction” to demonstrate this vast range (DiTommaso 2014, 476-8). He finds four points about this list relevant. First, the vast majority of the list is recent (ibid, 476), although apocalyptic films are almost as old as cinema itself. Among the first films with the theme of the end time were *The Civilization* (1916) and *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921) (Karen A. Ritzenhoff, Angela Krewani 2016, xii). Even early science-fiction films (*The Comet* (1916) and *End of the World* (1916) to *Metropolis* (1926) and *Things to Come* (1936)) have long had a close connection with films about the end of time (Thompson 2007, 11). However, DiTommaso explains, “[o]nly a few works were composed before the twentieth century. Eighty percent date from after 1970, while over half the works are post-1995, or less than twenty years old.” In contrast, audiences from the 2010s onwards “are exposed, every year, to dozens of new “apocalyptic” movies, shows, graphic novels, and so on” (DiTommaso 2014, 476).

The second point to observe, DiTommaso continues, is that the list suggests a thematic, chronological ordering of sub-genres.

The first period corresponds with the relatively few novels and short fiction that date from the years before 1945. Its defining theme is the decline of human civilization. The cultural trauma induced by the First World War was not insignificant in this regard. [...] The second period extends from the end of the Second World War to the mid-1990s. Its defining theme is nuclear holocaust, conceived in the shadow of the atomic bombings of 1945 and the Cold War doctrine of mutually assured destruction. [...] The third period extends from the mid-1990s to the present. It is marked by the foregrounding of doomsday fears—economic, ecological, pestilential, cosmological—which, while present during the second period, were overshadowed by its atomic dimension” (DiTommaso 2014, 476-7).

Thirdly, DiTommaso explains, “[m]ost works are composed in or feature the English language” (ibid, 477). It is important since Hollywood is but one of several major global producers. The apocalyptic genre seems to resonate more with English-speaking cultural contexts. And the final point is, shockingly, “the vast majority of the items referenced in Wikipedia’s ‘List of Apocalyptic Fiction’ are, strictly speaking, not apocalyptic” (ibid 478). He argues that while most of the works on the list presume or portray human civilization’s collapse, dystopia, or envision planetary catastrophes, none of them is actually apocalyptic (ibid). In other words, every film about “the end of the world” might be “semi-apocalyptic” but is not necessarily “apocalyptic.” As discussed in section 1.2, this view results from DiTommaso’s concerns about the definition of apocalypticism.

Obviously, the degree to which recognized examples fit specific definitions of apocalyptic cinema depends on definitions. Sometimes definitional strategies are overly narrow. Ritzenhoff and Krewani define apocalyptic cinema as a cinema that deals with any aspect of the “end of the time.” We observed earlier that this definition is problematic. To avoid casting the net too wide, they further reduce their definition to the films that tell the religious story of the doom of the world at God’s hand and the final judgment. In this story, “the good people [finally] are united with God; the sinners are confined to hell” (Karen A. Ritzenhoff, Angela Krewani 2016, xiv). But again, this definition is too narrow and overly

simplistic; this is merely the definition of films that, in one or another, represent motifs from the *Book of Revelation*.

The *Book of Revelation*, or *The Apocalypse of St. John*, is one of the most famous and influential religious texts, referred to and adapted in artistic and narrative forms across centuries. It has always been a primary source for much contemporary apocalyptic film and television, in part because of its compelling and visual story and in part due to its historical and cultural positioning as a critical scriptural text as the final book of the Christian Bible. The *Book of Revelation* does indeed describe a vision of a future widespread destruction leading to the end of the world and followed by God's revealing himself in the act of establishing a new heaven and earth inhabited by the faithful. However, not all apocalyptic films are based on this scriptural narrative or set of themes.

An apocalyptic film is about apocalypse, and apocalypse is, as discussed, a genre of timeless narrative with some fundamental features that can act as the core for a person's or group's worldview. In other words, an apocalyptic film is a medium by which the filmmakers describe how they see the world and their place in it through the lens of an apocalyptic worldview. Therefore, apocalyptic films are not just artistic depictions of a horrible war, the disasters of living in a post-apocalyptic dystopia, or how we can prevent a massive meteorite from hitting the earth. Instead, they take such antagonisms and threats as the framework for articulating an apocalyptic worldview, an atmosphere, a lifestyle, a set of beliefs, and values that result from and embody that worldview. In analyzing apocalyptic television and cinema, we need to move beyond identifying mere content analysis (war, destruction, dystopia) to a more nuanced discussion of the projected worldview.

In the approach taken here, an apocalyptic film could be secular, religious, extraterrestrial, scientific, or natural. It could be about events of a pre-apocalypse, during the apocalypse, post-apocalypse, or all of them. It could tell different stories about nuclear war, alien invasion, climate change, the threat of developments in genetic engineering and artificial intelligence, global pandemics, or anything else. But it couldn't be just about apocalyptic events; it must be about an apocalyptic perspective.



### 1. 3. 2. *Supernatural* T.V. Series

Now we have basic definitions of what we are dealing with in this thesis. The thesis focuses on a specific apocalyptic T.V. series, *Supernatural* (*SPN*) (2005-2020). *SPN* tells the story of two brothers, Dean and Sam Winchester, whose ‘family business’ is hunting monsters and supernatural beings. They fight these creatures for two reasons: to save human lives and to save their own family. This thesis aims to investigate how *SPN* addresses apocalyptic concerns and offers a unique apocalyptic worldview and perspective.

*SPN* offers a complex worldview and cosmology that makes it an ideal case for exploring how cinema and television interact with the apocalypse. The new millennium is grounded in a new set of interlocking social and planetary concerns that give apocalyptic film and television a very different frame than we find informing earlier decades. In the second half of the twentieth century, the devastation of WWII, the holocaust, the subsequent Cold War, and the nuclear menace often framed apocalyptic film and television. However, apocalyptic fictions of the twenty-first century are informed by a new and different range of apocalyptic or quasi-apocalyptic concerns, including the escalating threats of global war and terrorism, the eclipse of the human through genetic engineering and artificial intelligence, the mobilization of apocalyptic scenarios within religious communities (often closely connected to political interests), the existential threat of climate change, and concerns over loss of personal freedoms associated with social media, corporate power and excessive forms of governmentality.

As I write, the COVID-19 pandemic further parallels religious narrative, which often takes plagues and epidemics as apocalyptic signs. As a long-running series, *SPN* offers other significant characteristics, making it an exemplary case of the ‘new’ apocalyptic genre. The year 2005, the time of *SPN*’s pilot airing, can be taken as marking a ‘new beginning’ in the apocalyptic genre, this ‘newness’ defined by the new and broader range of identifiable crises of global scope.

*SPN* takes its apocalyptic concept mainly from the Judo-Christian scriptures. Still, it is by no means similar to Evangelical Christian cinema such as the *Left Behind* film series (2000, 2002, 2005), based on

Tim LaHaye and Jerry B. Jenkins's best-selling 1995 novel of the same name. *Left Behind*, suggests that the only possible way for being saved in the apocalypse is to be faithful to Jesus and live a true Christian life, and *SPN* has little to do with such religious promotions. *SPN* deals with a few supernatural concepts, such as possession and exorcism. But these issues are much simpler than the approach we see, for example, in the *Exorcist* (1973). In *SPN*, similar to *Constantine* (2005), a film released simultaneously with an almost identical theme, exorcism is a sub-plot. In *SPN*'s exorcisms, possessing demons are far more important than the victims. Besides, *SPN* introduces an angelic possession that has no equivalent as far as I can tell. And more interestingly, in this series, the common stereotype about angels being benevolent beings is broken; angels in this series are not sweet and light.

*SPN*, while perhaps less well-received, is so influential that since 2016, at least four popular Netflix T.V. series (*Shadowhunters* (2016-2019), *Lucifer* (2016-2020), and *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020)). have appeared; each borrow (indirectly or directly) some fundamental themes explored and developed in *SPN*. For example, *SPN* defines heaven as eternal life in the best memory of life, and *Lucifer* describes hell as being trapped in the worst memory of life. Or, for example, Cain's presence in *Lucifer* and *Shadowhunters*, especially his immortality and the story of the mark, are so similar to *SPN*'s Cain.

In this study, I concentrate on the central narrative arc to explore the religious perspective presented in *SPN* and introduce its unique apocalyptic worldview and perspective. Since this perspective's core worldview is an apocalyptic one, I call it *SPN*'s original apocalyptic perspective (SOAP). In this study, I apply the modeling methodology of Game Theory to analyze SOAP under the light of Neo-Humanism.

## **1. 4. Theoretical Framework and Methodology**

This thesis is an interdisciplinary study in Religious Studies and Film and Television Studies. My goal is to contribute to the scholarly understanding of how the apocalypse's central and traditional religious narratives are assimilated into popular culture. More specifically, this thesis's primary purpose is to develop an analysis and interpretation of the Neo-Humanistic worldview projected by *SPN*, comparing it with its

primary sources of the story, which is the *Book of Revelation (Rev)* of the Christian New Testament. For this study, I need to understand how the series's sources, like *Rev*, are adapted and assimilated into *SPN*, intending to understand the series's original implications and subtexts (religious, political, psychological). Therefore, my method's heart is a narrative/content analysis to establish recurring and prominent motifs and themes. I examine SOAP (*SPN*'s Original Apocalyptic Perspective) to see how the central themes and narrative arc are deployed within the series's narrative structure, so the thesis has a comparative design.

My interpretation of the series involves applying Game Theory's modeling techniques as a methodological means to show how *SPN* credibly develops and projects a Neo-Humanistic worldview. Neo-Humanism is a radical type of humanism, which addresses an inner paradox of traditional humanism, which is denying the existence and influence of any kind of supernatural forces and, at the same time but unintentionally, accepting their influence human lives. (I will explore this paradox in more depth in the following pages and the final chapter.)

Of course, I must emphasize that films are usually produced for a general audience with different tastes. However, they carry sets of ideas that mirror their age's cultural atmosphere (Tomarken 2017, 2). In other words, although filmmakers -generally- are not theorists, they represent ideas and/or theories of their culture. Likewise, it is worth mentioning that *SPN*'s creators do not necessarily intend what I argue as Neo-Humanism, nor were they necessarily aware of what their show represents in this regard.

#### **1. 4. 1. Traditional Humanism**

Anthony Pinn provides a comprehensive overview of humanism in his book, *Humanism: Essays on race, religion, and cultural production*. Humanism, Pinn describes, is a way of thinking and doing, a secular movement that understands life only within "the context of empirical, historical materials" and "recognizes no transcendent forces" (Pinn 2015, 3). Applying the terminology developed in section 1. 2. 1 to Pinn's notion of humanism, humanism is a perspective whose worldview is the way of guiding public life based on governmental structures, not any religious tradition, and meanwhile, guaranteeing a safe environment

for traditions in private life. And its lifestyle is an organized effort to work based on a shared motivation and goal.

Pinn argues for five basic principles to frame humanism, two of which are related to my argument. According to these two principles, humans are only a small part of life and must act in ways that recognize the web of existence. To do so, they should carry a suspicion toward or rejection of supernatural explanations and claims. In this regard, human beings must understand their humanity as “an evolving part of the natural environment as opposed to being a created being” (ibid). Based on these principles, a humanist perspective leads humans to live independently and fight to make changes without relying on any kind of transcendent being. And even if their efforts seem to be in vain, it doesn't matter; the action itself is the only thing that matters. “Struggle to make a difference in the world, for the humanist,” Pinn puts, “has no guaranteed outcomes; but instead, humanists gain some sense of living through the mere fact that they can struggle” (Pinn, 151) and free will is human's weapon in this fight; “[f]ree will [has] caught God” (ibid, 64).

Pinn admits that in this struggle, the human cannot be alone. So he permits the “collective” characteristic of religion to enter his humanistic worldview. But in this case, religion is distinguishable from theism. Pinn argues that religion is a human achievement, a structure made of “human experience meant to help humans find life's meaning” (ibid, 55). He makes use of Nimrud's story to support his idea. Pinn argues that Nimrud's radical individualism does not threaten God's controlling tendencies. Instead, Nimrud's tower's collective effect forced God to react (ibid, 65).

This worldview is exciting, but it's not flawless enough to be a perspective core. First, it cannot address issues beyond human control, such as death. And second, it removes God or any other supernatural being from the equation and, at the same time, admits their unavoidable influence on human life. Pinn, for example, praises Sisyphus and Nimrud for their disobedience and not being broken under gods' punishment. But this proves that there are more-powerful-than-us beings, gods, who control our life, and, therefore, the only thing we can do is accept the fate they wrote for us and do our best to live and struggle in the world/prison in which we are imprisoned.

Charles Tylor's transcendence humanism addresses the first flaw, and what I named Neo-Humanism deals with the second one.

## **1. 4. 2. Transcendence Humanism**

The first flaw, subjects beyond human's control, is what Charles Taylor addresses in his Transcendence Humanism (Kearney 2016, 78). In *A Secular Age* (2007), Taylor argues that modernity rejects religion because it assumes that human progress necessarily leads to liberation from religion, and this procedure has already begun (Kearney 2016, 76). Tylor believes that religion has never been left, but it has been subject to change. The main difference is in its authority. Tylor says that if we want to be faithful to a religious tradition in the modern era, we must argue for it (ibid). Tylor concentrates on a contrast between "exclusive humanism" and "religious transcendence" and argues that both have weaknesses in their principles and performance.

Schoenberg summarizes the flaws of "religious" transcendence in an inherent tension. "The inherent tension within the transcendent perspective," Schoenberg puts, "is between the affirmation of human flourishing, on the one hand, and the belief (definitive of the transcendent perspective) that the ultimate goal of life is beyond human flourishing, that the 'final end' of life is something beyond life [on the other hand]" (Phillip W. Schoenberg and Roman Majeran 2016, 175). In other words, humanism's weakness is that it cannot answer some fundamental questions of life like death. Here is where Transcendence Humanism is born. Tylor keeps positive aspects of humanism and transcendent religion and combines them to introduce Transcendence Humanism. In other words, Taylor has filled the gaps of humanism with faith-based beliefs, providing a solution to the problems for which humanism has no answers. However, Taylor's effort does not answer the central paradox of humanism: although human beings have free will, they still have to move within a framework whose rules and limitations are beyond their power and will.

Neo-Humanism is a theory that claims we can break the wheel. Neo-Humanism says if God exists, and if He has created human beings, and if He has given free will to them, inevitably, He must have left the

scene and equipped humans with what is necessary for them to live and flourish. In this way, nothing can prevent human beings from living freely, even God Himself. And if there are limitations for human beings, these limits are only for being broken and empower humans. However, the problem is that the Neo-Humanist perspective seems too illogical and surreal to be believed. This thesis aims to show how *SPN* narrates the apocalypse to create a universe in which the inner logic of Neo-Humanism works appropriately.<sup>2</sup>

### **1. 4. 3. Game Theory as a Methodological Tool**

This thesis has a comparative design. As a comparative study, this research's central question revolves around the relationship between the apocalyptic cinematic imagery and plotlines presented in two "texts": the *SPN* series and its story's original source(s). *Rev* is the central, primary resource. Through a close reading/watching of these two texts, I want to find the answer to the question of whether there is a meaningful difference in the apocalyptic imagery and narrative found in these two texts. If there is a discrepancy, what does it show, and how is it significant?

I will build my exploration around eight core motifs or themes, including human identity, family, destiny and free will, good and evil, hope, death, possession, and the role of the divine. I obtain the details of these motifs via film analysis methods, including source, mimetic, production, formal, and reception and evaluative criticism. To answer the thesis questions, we need to extract information from both texts, *Rev* and *SPN*. For this purpose, game theory can be used to model and extract the required information.

Game Theory was initially developed as an economic tool and has been widely employed in international relations theory. Don Ross provides an overview of game theory and its application. "Game

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<sup>2</sup> One future lines of research would be to compare what I am terming *neohumanism* with *Deism*. While there are similarities, Deism, historically, tends to be informed by scientific mechanism, a far less dramatic worldview than the one portrayed in *SPN*. Moreover, Deism doesn't necessarily imply humanism, though the two often go together.

Theory,” Ross defines, “ is the study of the ways in which interacting choices of economic agents produce outcomes with respect to the preferences (or utilities) of those agents, where the outcomes in question might have been intended by none of the agents” (Ross 2019 ). In this definition, an economic agent is “an entity with preferences.” The utility is an abstract concept according to which agents act to maximize their profit (ibid). However, game theory is not limited to economics.

Game Theory has a wide field of application because whenever human beings interact, they can be productively thought of as playing a game (Binmore 2007, 1). That’s why many philosophers, social scientists, and humanities scholars apply Game Theory as a tool to study human behavior. Because they need to “represent and systematically model not only what they think people normatively ought to do, but what they often actually do in interactive situations” (Ross 2019 ). However, Game Theory only works when players play rationally (Binmore, 2), and the game’s rules are logical and acceptable.

The study of a game’s logic is fundamental in Game Theory. In the Game Theory, the goal is to observe the decisions that players make (or would make) based on modeling of how players should (or be expected to) act prior to the game beginning (Binmore, 7). But, if the game is not logical and its rules are not transparent and/or fair or change in mid-course, then we cannot expect players to play rationally, nor could we generate very accurate predictive models of behavior.

## **1. 4. 4 Thesis Outline**

The thesis consists of six chapters. The first chapter is this rather lengthy introduction. In chapter two, I deal with the filmic criticism of *SPN*. It contains a brief analysis using production and formal criticism. It also briefly reviews the research that has been done on this series. In the third chapter, I delve more deeply into investigating *SPN*’s symbols, images, and motifs. Generally speaking, the third chapter introduces the main concepts around which *SPN*’s universe has been shaped. The fourth chapter details *SPN*’s general game plot. This plot contains players and their special powers, the goal of the game(s), and playing

strategies. In chapter five, I apply the obtained game model to compare *SPN*'s apocalyptic game with *Rev*'s. This chapter aims to frame *SPN*'s Original Apocalyptic Perspective (SOAP). In all of these analyses, the main focus is on the role of humans. In this way, the necessary materials are provided for the final analysis of the series in the last chapter. The sixth chapter concludes the thesis by analyzing SOAP to see how SOAP is based on a new, radical form of humanism, Neo-Humanism.



## CHAPTER 2

# SUPERNATURAL

*Supernatural* (SPN) is an American T.V. series created by Eric Kripke and aired from 2005-2020. SPN is a Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc. production and subsequently became part of The C.W. Television Network lineup. The series has 15 seasons and 328 episodes. Its pilot aired on September 13, 2005, and its finale on November 19, 2020.

## 2. 1. *SPN's* Story

*Supernatural* (SPN) has an interesting history and has evolved from a horror series project to a full-fledged apocalyptic show. In several interviews, *SPN's* creator, Eric Kripke, has announced that this series was initially meant to have only five seasons (DeLeon 2009). Its main story was supposed to end in the fifth season (Clarissa 2012). After that, the network decided to resume *SPN* for another ten seasons. In the rest of the series, Kripke is only the consultant and left the production to other showrunners, including Sera Gamble, Jeremy Carver, Robert Singer, and Andrew Dabb (Hibberd 2014). *SPN* has been the longest T.V. show in the horror genre so far.

Broadly speaking, *SPN* is about two brothers who hunt monsters. The show's central idea was filming actual urban American legends (Fernandez 2006). However, the creators realized that it could be a lot more than just a series about monsters for several reasons. It developed far beyond the original idea, turning deeply to matters of religion and faith (Kripke, S10, special episode). *SPN* takes pieces from folklore, classical mythology, ghost stories, and biblical imagery and narratives and puts these in a new context. In the series, the protagonists face several evil monsters, gods and goddesses, demons, angels, Archangels, and finally, God and His Sister.

The show's central mythos tells the story of two 'hunter' brothers, Dean [Jensen Ackles] and Sam [Jared Padalecki] Winchester<sup>3</sup>, whose family business is 'hunting' monsters and 'saving people.' The Winchesters' primary source of internal motivation is the murder of their mother, Mary [Samantha Smith], by a yellow-eyed demon named Azazel [Fredric Lehne], when the younger brother was an infant. Alongside their father, John [Jeffrey Dean Morgan], they aim to avenge their mother's death; but they soon realize that they are players of a much broader scenario: the Apocalypse.

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<sup>3</sup> See appendix 1 for a list of the main characters of the series.

The Winchester brothers find out that they are entangled in a demonic plot. Ruby [Katie Cassidy (in 6 episodes) and Genevieve Padalecki (in 13 episodes)], a female demon, tries to follow an evil plan to deceive them to break the seals of the cage in which Lucifer [Mark Pellegrino] is kept in Hell. With the cage broken, Lucifer is free, and a horrible battle awaits the human race. Angels and demons face off to fight each other on the Earth to settle an old conflict between two archangel brothers, Michael and Lucifer. Human beings (and the human world) become the necessary collateral damage of this cosmic war. The Winchesters have the task of warding off a biblical apocalypse, which they accomplish by sending Lucifer back to his cage.

The *SPN*'s fifth season's finale is the end of its direct references to the Christian Apocalypse based on the *Book of Revelation (Rev.)*, but the journey continues. In the subsequent seasons, the Winchesters repeat their earlier feat, managing to prevent or delay several types of apocalyptic and semi-apocalyptic disasters. In these adventures, in addition to humans, the brothers also unite with and receive help from non-human beings such as Castiel [Misha Collins], the angel of the Lord, Crowley [Mark A. Shepard], the king of Hell, and Rowena [Ruth Connell], the witch. In the fifteenth season, they finally decide to end their miserable cyclic life by eliminating the source of their misery: they decide to kill God!

In *SPN*, neither is God dead nor is He an ignorant, indifferent individual who doesn't care about human life. God is projected as a writer, Chuck Shurley [Rob Benedict], who plots every single moment of the Winchester's lives in what the Winchesters' friend, Castiel the angel [Misha Collins], calls Winchesters Gospel (S04, E018). *SPN*'s God enjoys His creative writing more than his marvelous creation. The Winchesters refuse to obey this writer-God's plan. So, based on their God-given abilities and their previous experiences, Sam and Dean believe that they can defeat everything and everyone, even God Himself, and they turn out to be right. Of course, they don't kill God, but not because they can't. They replace God with Jack [Alexander Calvert], Lucifer's son (a quasi-Antichrist), who is another better version of God. At the end of the day, the Winchesters are freed from God's creative imagination and can live freely.

## 2. 2. SPN's Acting and Characterization

Technically speaking, the series is of average quality. The main actors, Jared Padalecki (Sam) and Jensen Ackles (Dean), could be considered below average. Probably the biggest weakness of this series in terms of production is the main actors' poor acting skills. Of course, Ackles shows remarkable progress as the series develops, but Padalecki continues to have his artificial style and exaggerated facial expressions until the last episode of the series. However, poor acting is not true of the supporting cast. Criticism of the actors' acting skills is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is important to address how and with what characteristics the creators have created the personages and developed and elaborated them in relation to the film's development and even the audience's expectations and reception.

In this series, the main characters, the Winchesters, do not change. They are ordinary human beings with all human weaknesses with no superpowers. They are creatures who are at the lowest level in a hierarchy of power.<sup>4</sup> Of course, they go through strange adventures--for example, they die, descend to Hell, and come back to life several times or are possessed and subjugated by demons and angels. Still, they return to the human phase and remain ordinary human beings until the end. In fact, the Winchester brothers are hunters from the beginning and know themselves. That is, during their adventures, they only find new tools and methods for fighting and gaining experience. The relatively poor quality of their acting helps maintain these rather flat, two-dimensional characters throughout the series. In a fictive world filled with other than human beings, the Winchesters must retain their full, mediocre humanness.

This notion is essential because in many similar movies and series, the protagonists are or become savior figures possessing supernatural/superhuman abilities. They move through a state of identity crisis in which, usually through the mediation of 'master,' acquire or unlock latent superhuman powers, which play a central role in their ability to avert disaster or save the world. In *SPN*, in contrast, the main characters are

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<sup>4</sup> For more information about humans in *SPN*, see section 3. 2. and 3. 3.

often extraordinary, but they are by no means superhumans. And in cases where they attain superhuman powers, such as Sam's super-powers when drinking demon's blood or the immortality and great power of Dean when the mark of Cain is transferred to him, they try to deprive themselves of these forces and be only human. In short, characterization in this series invites a humanistic perspective.

## **2. 3. *SPN*'s Narrative Structure**

*SPN*'s story has a three-layer structure. Each episode has an independent story, each season develops its main story, and the whole series unfolds a master plot. Generally, there are 22 episodes in each season, about half of which focus on the main story, while the rest are standalone episodes.<sup>5</sup>

There are numerous series with such a structure. In such shows, there are usually two general categories. In the first one, each episode is a sub-story forming a piece of a master puzzle, the details of which are revealed over the life course of the series. Examples here would include *The X-Files* (1993-2018) and *Fringe* (2008-2013). In the second category, the sub-stories develop and form the depth and nuance of the characters. That is, during each episode, the characters develop or acquire new abilities to be better prepared to advance the main story. *Supernatural*, *Lucifer* (2016-), and *Chilling Adventures of Sabrina* (2018-2020) fall into this category. In the case of *SPN*, this development is so humanistic: they learn, experience, and gather new tools. Of course, there may be both approaches in a series, meaning that the characters develop themselves as they discover new pieces of the puzzle. *Shadowhunters* (2016-2019) and *Warrior Nun* (2020-) are representative examples.

In *SPN*, the standalone episodes' general storyline is that something strange happens somewhere in America. In these events, usually, one or more people are mysteriously killed or have gone missing. The Winchesters (through the media or their network of hunting fellows) become aware of the issue, which is

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<sup>5</sup> See appendix 2 for a season by season summary of the series.

likely to have been driven by supernatural beings. They go to the scene and typically investigate and, disguised as FBI agents, solve the mystery. Each of their adventures has three stages. First, they discover the truth about the creature's name and specific characteristic(s) that caused the problem. Second, they find a way to destroy the beast, which variously involves using a specialized weapon, a particular substance, a specific ritual enactment, and other broadly 'magical' means. Third, they physically fight the supernatural creature and destroy it. This structure is repeated in the main story. In fact, these subplots help make the main story more coherent. If we imagine *SPN* as a video game, each episode is the equivalent of a level defined by fixed principles and a specific winning strategy. Likewise, each season is a master level with a similar theme. Therefore, the characters repeatedly play one endgame in the whole series, with each iteration becoming more prepared for the next, more challenging level.

It is worth mentioning here that almost all supernatural creatures appear in the show at least twice, and the show depicts each creature precisely the same each time. Interestingly, when a creature seems to be different in its second appearance, there is always a retcon, and someone explains the reason for this inconsistency, even if the explanation is just in a sentence. For example, in one case, we hear about the knights of hell in season six, when Cain [Timothy Omundson] explains them and claims that he killed all of them but Abaddon [Alaina Huffman]. But in season 12, we see at least two other knights, Ramiel [Jerry Trimble] and his sister Dagon [Ali Ahl]. It sounds confusing at first, but Ramiel explains in a couple of sentences that the night Cain killed the knights, he and her sister were not there.<sup>6</sup>

One way of ensuring the continuity of these at-times complex narratives is through the reintroduction of previous characters, whose internal character remains highly consistent across episodes. In the context of a game, the demons have their respective qualities, like how chess pieces can move in but one fixed

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<sup>6</sup> The most important exception in the reappearance of supernatural creatures is when we face a human-demon hybrid boy, Jesse [Valin Shinyei], who is supposed to be the Antichrist (S05E06). He appears in the show just once. I will talk about him in detail later in the fifth chapter.

pattern. A considerable portion of each sub-story is dedicated to researching<sup>7</sup> supernatural creatures. Suppose they change in character in each of their appearances; in that case, the game-like quality of the show is replaced with randomness and, hence, with meaninglessness, a move which the audience could easily take as a lack of respect for the audience.

## 2. 4. *SPN*: Critics and Scholars

According to the *Internet Movie Database (IMDb)*, *SPN*'s average score is 8.4 out of 10, with more than 400,000 votes (*IMDb*, access date: 2/2/2021). *RottenTomatoes* scores 83% for the average audience, 93% for all critics, and 87% for top critics (*RottenTomatoes*, access date: 2/2/2021). *Metacritics* gives the show 60/100 from 26 critic reviews and 7.3/10 from 127 general viewers (*Metacritics*, access date: 2/2/2021). Accordingly, we may characterize the series as above average, a 'hit' as deemed by fans and critics alike.

Most of the reviews of *SPN* focus on the first five seasons, and especially season one. These reviews compare the show with other shows with the "the monster of the week" format. Several reviews address the last five seasons dealing primarily with family matters. For example, from 26 reviews provided by *Metacritics*, 22 cases are about the first season, and the rest for seasons 10, 11, 12, and 14. Likewise, in most discussions in *supernatural.fandom.com* (with more than 5K pages) and *Supernatural*'s official Twitter page (with 3.6M followers), the same pattern is found. This pattern raises many questions, such as: why does such a pattern exist? What does it show? Are there specific motifs that tend to invite audience response? Answering these questions, pursuing a full-blown reception criticism would be an interesting subject for research in fan studies, but it is beyond the scope of this thesis. This thesis focuses on an interpretation of the apocalypticism in *SPN*.

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<sup>7</sup> For more details about the process of research and its importance, see section 4. 3. 1

Despite its solid religious and apocalyptic themes, *SPN* has received little attention in academia, especially in interdisciplinary studies of film and religion. This show is mainly addressed in other fields of film and cultural studies. For example, Lisa Schmidt applies the theory of melodramatic identification in her argument. "Not only is *Supernatural*," Schmidt writes, "a melodramatic text, but also that text must be viewed as extending beyond the narrative world proper to the multiple narratives or texts comprised by the industrial and cultural context of the show" (Schmidt 2010). Agata Łuksza studies *SPN* from fan studies and audience studies methodological perspectives. She argues that "[e]ven though the main concept of the series indicates that *SPN* should appeal predominantly to young male viewers, in fact, the fandom is dominated by young women who are the target audience of the C.W. network" (Łuksza 2016). In this type of study, the show's apocalyptic nature is not addressed in any detailed fashion.

Diana Gonçalves considers the apocalyptic aspects of the series in her research. She analyzes the show as a part of a post-9/11 culture. She sees *SPN* deeply under the effect of the events of 2001 and the underlying sense of terror. She places *SPN* in the horror film tradition alongside various genres such as fantasy, drama, thriller, road movie, and comedy. Gonçalves argues that since *SPN* appeared only four years after 9/11, at a time when the U.S. was in the early stage of its 'war on terror,' the theme of the show arcs toward an apocalyptic scenario that was deeply religiously influenced by the governmental and mediatized narrative of good versus evil (Gonçalves 2019, 1-5). I trenchantly criticize this argument for several reasons.

First, such interpretation applies to any kind of film with horror themes produced after 9/11, no matter if it is *SPN* or any other film or series. You can replace *SPN* with anything else because the article has no reference to this specific show. It talks about all horror movies. Second, the author builds her argument on the fact that the show has appeared shortly after the events of 2001. Although the show may fit with the time, Kripke, the series creator, started his project in the mid-90s (Keveney 2005). Third, the show, strictly speaking, has no reference to anything related to 9/11. Of course, one can see, for instance, demons as a



metaphor for Al-Qaida terrorists or anything else but cannot apply such interpretation to a show that one of its most significant features is the rejection of symbolic interpretations of mythical and religious texts.<sup>8</sup>

As I said before, *SPN* has received less attention in sources that specialize in apocalyptic cinema. It is probably because at least half of this long-running show's episodes are standalone horror stories based on motifs from American urban legends. It means that analysts of apocalyptic films may have either not seen the series or judged it based on non-apocalyptic episodes. However, there are exceptional cases in this series to support the theories proposed in these works. In the following chapter, I address four theories and show how they are compatible with *SPN*.

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<sup>8</sup> As I discuss in section 4. 3, in most cases, the Winchesters read sacred texts, follow, and understand them word by word. *SPN*'s literal interpretation is a critical aspect of the series.

## CHAPTER 3

# THE UNIVERSE OF *SUPERNATURAL*

*SPN* describes a world, a universe. Several concepts shape this universe. While one might deem these concepts to be somewhat subjective, I emphasize that they were derived from the content presented across the whole series, and I reference each of them to at least one episode of the series. Since so much of the content of the series is interrelated, where necessary, I have referred to the section number in this thesis where a particular concept is most relevant.

### 3. 1. Cinematic Universe

What do moving images show and describe? Are the images that cinema presents a reconstruction of a new world or just a view of our known world through the lens of filmmakers? These are fundamental questions in the field of film theory and philosophy.

Brent Plate answers such questions by comparing film and religion. He argues we humans have long ago given up the classic cosmic separation based on which the heaven is above, and the earth is below. And the cinema has revived that look by providing a “god’s eye view” of the world (Plate 2008, 220). He believes that film and religion share the same structure, especially in the guise of myth and ritual. Film and television are different media, to be sure. But Plate’s focus is mainly on the power of ‘cinematic’ images, regardless of their being on the big or small screens, to project a ‘world.’

For Plate, films formally work as religions do; “they are structured in similar ways through their mutual re-creations of space and time” (ibid 229). That is, “they both start with the raw materials of space and time and manipulate them in ever-new ways to produce the desired result: promises of a blissful afterlife, a utopian society, the threat of a dystopian nightmare, or just a world” (ibid 220). Thus, according to Plate’s view, it can be argued that films reconstruct reality and that what we see in moving pictures is nothing but reality.

However, this reality may be different from the real world we live in. And this is where the interpretation and application of these realities become necessary. And the problem is exacerbated when, willingly or unwillingly, parallel realities are understood similarly. Under these circumstances, a scholar may equate irrelevant things with each other and make a kind of fallacy. In religiously themed films, this dilemma is more pronounced where both religion and film recreate a world on a single subject such as the apocalypse. This notion is what Lyden warns against, saying that religious studies scholars should “not seek to ‘baptize’ the filmmaker or impose a theology on the film” (Lyden 2003, 19). He suggests that to interpret a film, we must first watch the film without prior judgment and understand its universe and then evaluate

with the measurement in mind, for example, some religious contents (ibid, 34). This approach is what I take in this chapter to discover *SPN*'s universe.<sup>9</sup>

In this chapter, I detail eight concepts, eight basic centers of gravity in the series to describe *SPN*'s universe; each of these concepts/centers supports and develops my characterization of the series as a constituting Neo-Humanism. These concepts are (1) human identity; (2) family; (3) duty, destiny, and free will; (4) good and evil; (5) hope; (6) death; (7) possession; and (8) divine role.

### **3. 2. Human Identity**

Who is a human in *SPN*? A human in *SPN* is a being who has both a human body and a human soul. That is when a demon or an angel possesses a human body (see sections 3. 8, 4. 1. 2., and 4. 1. 3.), or when it turns to a vampire or a werewolf, it is not human, or no longer human. A Human body is a means or *vessel* in *SPN*. Therefore, when someone dies, especially a hunter (see section 4. 1. 1 (a)), it is better that this body be cremated to prevent it from returning to life or being abused by evil forces (see section 3. 7). Of course, sometimes even burned bodies return to life. That is, having a human body is in the second degree of importance for being a human. The most important feature of a human is his/her soul.

The human soul/spirit and its characteristics are the keys to understand the logic (or rules of the game) constituting the *SPN* universe. However, *SPN*'s creators have been unable to depict this fundamental concept consistently. That is, in some places, the soul appears as a humanoid ghost with the ability to do certain things (first time in S03E01 and many other cases), and sometimes in the form of silver plasma (first

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<sup>9</sup> From the perspectives of production and reception criticism, film and television are very distinct media, and require distinctive analyses. As this thesis focuses on the narrative and philosophical dimensions of the apocalyptic genre, Plate's and Lyden's approach to about cinema may be applied to television, while recognizing that a more comprehensive analysis of the differences in these media may reveal shortcomings in Plate's framework. For example, at the level of personal and group experience, the serialized nature of television is fundamentally different than cinema. To fully investigate these differences would require fieldwork and interviews.

time in S05E04). However, since the soul is immaterial, to understand it as bodies, we must necessarily depict and encounter it in some material way.

In *SPN*, when a person dies (or is in a near-death state), his/her soul is separated from his/her body. However, it does not mean that the person dies when the soul leaves his body (first time S06E01, S08E17, and many more cases in S11). The soul is not a thing, but a quality imbuing one's life. Jesus asks, for example, 'what does it profit someone to gain the whole world but lose their own soul?' (Mark 8: 36). One can be alive but soulless, says Jesus. But *SPN*'s story of the connection between the soul and life does not end here. That is, people may be alive without a soul! And worse than that, someone may be dead but still has a soul (S05E14)! This confusion and ambiguity have caused significant damage to the narrative logic of the series.

Perhaps, this confusion comes from the creators' attempt to recreate the concept of the soul. But, unfortunately, the wheel they have reinvented has become a triangle! Despite the extensive research the creators employed, the problem may be that they have forgotten a significant source of occidental and monotheistic mythologies: Zoroastrianism.<sup>10</sup>

Long story short, in Zoroastrian belief<sup>11</sup>, human identity has two aspects: material and non-material. The material characteristic consists of the body and *Jan*, and the non-material attribute consists of *Din* (conscience), *Rowan* (spirit), and *Frawahr* (soul). *Jan* is a feature of life, the warmth of the human body, and a force that moves the body. *Jan*'s function is to control and manage the body. When someone dies, his/her *Jan* perishes. That's why it is considered as a material characteristic. *Din* or conscience is the power

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<sup>10</sup> This is not the only case that *SPN*'s creators have had difficulty explaining a concept or event, while they would have easily been able to articulate concepts better and clearer by referring to Zoroastrian thought. Later in this chapter, I will return to this issue in notions of God's twin sister (section 3. 9).

<sup>11</sup> For more information about this subject, see: Zaehner, R.C. 1961. *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism*. London, Weidenenfeld and Nicolson; Boyce, Mary. 1975. *A History of Zoroastrianism*. Leiden, New York: E. J. Brill; "AHU" in *Encyclopædia Iranica*. (URL: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/ahu-two-homonymous-avestan-terms>); Shaki, Mansour. 1996. "DĒN" in *Encyclopædia Iranica* (URL: <https://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/den>).

of distinguishing right and wrong. It is a promise that *Ohrmazd* has placed in human beings. After death, this force does not disappear and appears as the embodiment of actions on human beings and finally joins the *Rowan* or spirit. *Rowan* is, in fact, the human self or psyche with which people are responsible for their choices. In fact, conscience (*Din*) only guides, but responsibility is with the spirit (*Rowan*). Therefore, after death, the righteous spirit will go to Heaven, and the spirit of the wicked will go to Hell. *Frawahr* or soul is the energy that *Ohrmazd* has placed in human beings. This force was created before the creation of everything and is the source of all human abilities. Souls are not responsible for humans' choices, and after death, they return to *Ohrmazd*.

Of course, *SPN* does not have such depth and complexity, but it does recognize a distinction between soul and spirit. To put it simply, the soul is the source of humanity. The spirit is the objectivity of personality, as in when we call someone 'spirited.' We can develop, sticking closely with the content of the series, a description of spirits and souls informing the series.

Spirits are like the bodies, only transparent and thin (First appearance S01E02). These creatures can affect objects and even possess other bodies (S07E20) and even communicate with live people through summoning rituals (first time in S02E01). Spirits usually carry negative emotions such as anger and a sense of revenge. They are entirely bound to the material world; therefore, when an angry spirit (also known as a ghost) is found, hunters must burn the remains of his/her owner's body to separate it from the material world and lead him to Heaven or Hell (first time, S01E02). In fact, spirits are either angry, body-less humans or desperate spirits trapped in the material world seeking freedom (S03E05). Later, in section 3. 1. 6, I return to spirits.

God has created souls in Eden, and even He Himself cannot make them again (S14E20). Souls are bright and fluid things that are the primary source of human energy. They are like nukes inside a human's body (S05E19). In fact, they are the most potent source of energy in *SPN*'s universe. Both Hell and Heaven take their energy from human souls as their power source (S06E07). The power of the soul is accessible to

humans through some dangerous rituals and turns them into one of the most powerful creatures (S12E09). "A soul can be bludgeoned, tortured, but never broken" (Death, S06E11).

An interesting thing about souls is that even dead people still have their souls until an agent takes them to their place in Hell or Heaven (S05E14). And more importantly, people can continue living without their souls. For example, some super-powerful beings such as Famine/Hunger, the Horseman (S05E14), and Amara (S11E01) feed on souls. Souls are the source of human needs; therefore, a soulless never sleeps nor eats (S05E14, S06E03, 07). A soulless person does not feel anything and doesn't care about anyone (S06E11). And since souls are the source of conscience (S11E01, 02, 05), a soulless person cannot understand the difference between right and wrong. That's why soulless beings, even angels and God, are unable to make the right choices. In other words, the soul is what turns Free Will into a blessing for humans and a curse for non-humans.

### **3. 3. Family**

Kirsten Moana Thompson is one of the scholars who explore the standpoint of family in apocalyptic films. In her book, *Apocalyptic Dread: American Film at the Turn of the Millennium*, Thompson sees apocalyptic motion pictures through a sociological lens. She begins her argument by defining the apocalyptic dread as "fear and anxiety about the future and about the anticipated end of the world," which is, in her view, a new manifestation of an American apocalyptic tradition, "[a] blend of providential, and messianic elements [found] in Puritan Calvinism" (Thompson 2007, 3). She analyzes a selected film corpus and concludes that Hollywood's disaster films of the nineties address apocalyptic dread in their anxious imaginings of the end of the world. In contrast, post 9/11 films primarily deal with anxieties about family, patriarchy, religion, and family values (ibid, 25). Alas, Thompson published her remarkable work in 2007, and at that time, *SPN* was a young series, mostly known as a copy of other 'monster of the week' shows. Otherwise, *SPN* may well have been a prominent focus because *SPN* is all about the Winchesters' attempts to protect their family and their business which is "hunting things, saving people."

In *SPN*, everything revolves around the concept of family: the Winchesters, angels who are siblings, Eve (the mother of all monsters (S06E12)), the alpha vampire's family, the King of the Hell's family, and even God and His sister. Kripke admits that the relationship between the Winchester brothers is the engine of the show: "these two guys have such a wonderful dynamic that is really much of the reasons why the show continued for so long" (Kripke, S10, special episode). But what is a family in *SPN*'s universe?

In *SPN*, family is not solely defined by blood (S05E18). It's not even related to race: the Winchesters' family consists of Dean and Sam, Mary Campbell and John Winchester (their biological parents), Bobby Singer [Jim Beaver] (their mentor), Castiel (the angel), and Jack (Lucifer's son who first appears in S12E23). But Samuel Campbell [Mitch Pileggi] (Mary's father who first appears in S04E03), Henry Winchester [Gil McKinney] (John's father who first appears in S08E12), Adam [Jake Abel] (their half-brother who first appears in S04E19), and even Sam and Dean from an alternate universe (S15E13) are not family members. However, in *SPN*'s universe, for supernatural beings and cosmic forces, the story is different. For these forces, a family is defined only in blood relation. That is why Adam can play a crucial role in the apocalypse instead of Dean (S05E18), and Henry Winchester can travel to the future with a form of blood magic to reach his grandchildren (S08E12).

In *SPN*, family is always the priority, and "responsibility is to the family" (S08E12). At the same time, family is the greatest strength and the greatest weakness (Kripke S10, Special Episode). In this show, family is comprised of individuals (whether they have a blood relation or not) who believe in each other, trust each other, never give up on each other, work in harmony with each other, and are willing to sacrifice themselves for each other. In *SPN*, family members constantly offer themselves for others' protection. In one of the best examples, Kelly Kline [Courtney Ford], who had been seduced and deceived by Lucifer (when he possessed the United States' president!) trusts in her not-born-yet son, Jack, and sacrifices herself to give him birth. This sacrifice and the maternal love in the pregnancy state are two factors that help Jack to become a perfect desirable god at the end of the day (S15E20).



### 3. 4. Duty, Destiny, Free Will, and Natural Order

**Sam:** So what do we do now?

**Dean:** We make our own future.

**Sam:** I guess we have no choice. (S04E04)

This short dialogue is all of what *SPN* tries to say about destiny, will, and duty: We've no choice but to choose our destiny in keeping with our sense of duty. Of course, we should not expect a T.V. show to give a philosophical theory to solve the fundamental problem of determinism and free will. However, in this section, I explain the series theory about the mentioned problem. And as a television product, the only thing that matters<sup>12</sup> is that this radical notion matches the story's logic and is pretty flawless in the *SPN*'s universe.

In *SPN*'s universe, destiny, will, and duty are wholly intertwined. However, they do not necessarily look the same from different perspectives. From an angelic perspective, free will is a delusion, and nothing is random or based on choices (Michael [Christian Keyes], S05E13) because there has never been a choice (Zachariah [Kurt Fuller], S05E18), and people have to play the roles that destiny has chosen for them (Gabriel S05E18). But from a human perspective, the story is totally different. There is always a choice (Dean S03E01), and no one can make anyone do anything (S05E19). That's why one must believe that s/he can choose what should be done in life, even if it is an unimportant little life and the choice is against God's will (S05E13).

*SPN* claims that God wants us to have freedom even if it means disobeying him (S06E20). The interesting fact here is that as the show develops, some of the angels, especially Castiel (S06E17, 20) and

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<sup>12</sup> Of course, when we talk about a TV series, the viewer and their reception are also important. Here, however, we may assume say that when a series is broadcast for fifteen years, it has met the criteria of acceptance by the audience.

Gabriel (S05E19), change their minds about the concept of destiny and duty; they become more human-like. In *SPN*, destiny, understood simply as a predetermined course of events, is recognized, but life's meaning is found in fighting it (S06E11). However, this issue is complicated, and it seems that the *SPN*'s creators have not been very successful in coherently developing the notion of destiny. They dedicated an episode (S06E17) to "fate." In this episode, after a series of mysterious deaths, Dean and Sam discover that Balthazar [Sebastian Roché], an angel who helps Castiel win the civil war in Heaven (the main storyline of season six), has changed history (by preventing the collision of the Titanic with an iceberg). Atropos [Katie Walder], one of the Fates in Greek and Roman mythology, is intervening, murdering the descendants of those who should not be born. Castiel informs Dean and Sam that Fate is angry with them, and they need to kill her before she kills them. Of course, they don't kill Fate!

Castiel introduces Fate sisters as high-ranked angels who are responsible for the way people die. Later in this episode, two conversations reveal some vital information about destiny; the first one is between Castiel and Atropos, and the second one is between Castiel and Dean. These two conversations have so much valuable information that it is worthwhile to express them in full here:

**Conversation 1:** Castiel talks to Atropos.

**Castiel:** Let's talk about this.

**Atropos:** Talk? About what? Maybe about how you and those two circus clowns [she points to Sam and Dean] destroyed my work. You ruined my life. ... I had a job. God gave me a job. We all had a script. I worked hard. I was really, really good at what I did until the day of the big prize fight [she means apocalypse]. And then what happens? You throw out the book!

**Castiel:** Well, I'm sorry. But freedom is more preferable.

**Atropos:** Freedom? This is chaos! How is it better? You know, I even went to Heaven just to ask what to do next, and you know what? No one would even talk to me... But I don't know what happens next. I need to know. It's what I *do*.

[Then Atropos asks Castiel to sink Titanic in the past; otherwise, she and her sisters will kill the Winchester brothers.]

**Atropos:** You can watch them every millisecond of every day. Because maybe you've heard, "fate strikes when you least expect it."

**Conversation 2:** The Titanic has sunk again, and things are back to normal. The Winchesters think they dreamed this. Castiel explains that this is not a dream:

**Castiel:** I wanted you to know who fate really is. She's cruel and capricious. ... You're the ones who taught me that you can make your own destiny. You don't have to be ruled by fate. You can choose freedom. I still believe that that's something worth fighting for. I just wanted you to understand that [such a thing may have disastrous consequences].

If we want to summarize all this discussion in one sentence, it would be a human's 'duty' is to not surrender to 'destiny' because s/he has 'free will,' and choices have consequences.

Free will, according to *SPN*, is not limited to human beings; every being has free will; "God wants us to have free will" (Castiel, S06E20); that's why He blessed us with skepticism (S11E21) and left us to grow independently (S11E20). However, there is no unconditional freedom. In *SPN*, the Natural Order sets the boundaries of freedom. Natural Order (Supernatural Order?!) is a set of laws above everything, even God's abilities.

This Natural Order works in such a way that there are laws that need to be enforced. For example, if a magic spell is performed, that spell will definitely work because "a spell is a spell," and it works unconditionally (Sam, S11E22). Or if a deal is made with the demons, this contract will be executed and cannot be circumvented because "no one can break a deal," even the demons (Crowley [Mark A. Shepard], S05E10). Another aspect of this natural order is that using these laws outside the regular order of life has dire consequences. Thus, for example, if a person wants to use the infinite power of his soul, this is possible, but at the cost of losing his sight. Anyone who wants to use this natural order must accept the consequences.

The show does not explain who made these laws, but there is a notable sequence in the series which suggests God is the one who established and maintained the Natural Order. Jack has become the most hazardous being possible because he has the power of a human soul combined with an archangel's grace. And when he loses his soul, he can't determine between right and wrong. Jack asks the Winchesters to find a way to kill him to protect the world. The problem is that he is invulnerable. The Winchesters ask God to help them either provide Jack with a new soul or kill him (S14E20). God says He is unable to make souls anymore, but He invents a gun, the Equalizer, and gives it to them. The Equalizer can kill anything, but using it has consequences. The one who pulls the trigger will suffer exactly the same damage as the target will do; you kill someone, you die; you hurt someone, you hurt yourself. It is clear that using such a weapon requires a lot of courage and sacrifice. But this is not the end of the story. This weapon is supposed to destroy anything, and that includes God Himself. For this reason, when Sam shoots God with this weapon, both he and God are harmed severely. However, God finally manages to heal Himself and destroy this dangerous weapon. This piece of the story is a key element in my argument about Neo-Humanism in the following chapters.

### **3. 5. Good and Evil**

*SPN* draws on well-known mythical and religious narratives but usually removes these from their traditional contexts. Moreover, the series works to redefine and de-familiarize these narratives to suit its unique apocalyptic purpose. Nybro Petersen analyzes this characteristic of *SPN* from an interdisciplinary approach to religious studies and media studies. *SPN*, Peterson writes, "is saturated with a wide range of religious representations. These elements often serve to instigate the storyline for one or more episodes. Still, they do so in a way that is removed from their original setting in, for example, traditional religious contexts" (Peterson 2010). Peterson shows that *SPN* applies specific narrative devices to heighten plausibility and familiarity of existing religious imaginaries and plotlines. The series provides viewers opportunities to renegotiate more traditional frameworks.

*SPN* has broken fundamental stereotypes about good and evil. For example, in popular belief, angels are considered good creatures beneficial to humans, and demons are precisely the opposite. But in the supernatural, angels have hated characters; in many episodes, viewers are invited to feel more sympathy for the demons. In fact, in *SPN*, angels and demons, usually considered in popular culture as ciphers for good and evil, do not align with this simple binary. The result of such an approach is that the audience often empathizes and cheers for the most negative mythical characters.

In one sense, this is a new idea, twisting 'traditional' conceptions; from another perspective, it is an age-old narrative. For example, the Cainites were a gnostic antinomian sect that worshipped Cain. It is also similar to Judas-- the only one strong enough to do what had to be done: betray Jesus (Pyper 2001). There are several examples of works that reimagined the figure of Judas along these lines: Morley Callaghan, in his novel, *A Time for Judas* (1983), and Nikos Kazantzakis in *The Last Temptation of Christ* (novel: 1952, film: 1988) Anyway, this kind of defamiliarization of good and evil traditional characters is by no means an *SPN*'s innovation, but this dynamic has shaped the series thoroughly. The most interesting example of it is the character 'Cain.'

Genesis 4 tells the biblical story of Cain and Abel. Cain kills his brother out of envy or jealousy, and God curses him to wander the Earth in misery; whoever hits him, that strike will hit him/her seven times harder. And God puts a mark on Cain so that people may know him and beware of him. In the Bible's story, Cain has three characteristics: first, he is a negative character; second, he cannot be harmed; and third, he has the mark to be known. *SPN*'s Cain has all of these three characteristics, but two of them are totally different. Besides, *SPN* adds another feature to its Cain: immortality.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Cain is not immortal in the Bible. In *SPN*, however, immortality is attributed to Cain. Cain's immortality can be related to his invulnerability, that is, because no one can harm and kill him, he can live forever; of course, if he does not die a natural death. However, immortality is a trait that *SPN* has added to Cain. I cannot recall other example of an immortal Cain in films produced before *SPN*, but such a character is present in at least two later series, *Lucifer* and *Shadowhunters*.

Here is Cain's story according to *SPN*. In the sixth season, the Winchesters are desperate to find a weapon powerful enough to kill Abaddon, a princess of Hell. Crowley, the new King of Hell, introduces the most potent weapon in the world that can destroy anything: a blade made of the jaw with which Cain killed his brother. Here (S06E12), Cain makes his appearance in the *SPN* universe. He is depicted as an older man with a beard, living as a beekeeper on a remote farm! Crowley takes Dean to Cain's to steal the First Blade, a weapon which is effective on Abaddon. He introduces Cain as the first human who has turned into a demon<sup>14</sup> because of fratricide. According to Crowley, Cain is the most powerful and dangerous existing demon. This narrative is more or less similar to the Biblical story.

Cain tells the story differently. He says his brother had gone astray and was talking to and worshiping Lucifer instead of God. Cain has an old friendship with Lucifer, and Lucifer is in debt (we will find out its reason soon). Cain asks Lucifer to stop deceiving Abel. Lucifer agrees to make a deal with Cain and demands two things from his brother to leave Abel alone. The first is Cain's soul, and the second is that Cain must be the one who sent Abel to Heaven. In this way, Cain willingly *chooses* to make the greatest possible sacrifice to save his brother.

Interestingly, according to *SPN*, it is not the only and even the first sacrifice Cain has made. Cain's other sacrifice was carrying the mark. As I will discuss in more detail in section 3. 1. 8, in *SPN*, God has a twin sister, Amara, who is the pure darkness. According to *SPN*, at the beginning of creation, God encaged Her sister with His archangels' help. The mark is a seal to the cage, and only a human can carry it. So, God has asked His most beloved son, Lucifer, to find the most trusted and the best human being to carry the mark. God has informed Lucifer that the one who accepts the mark must know that it results in a miserable, immortal life, and the curse of having the mark makes him the most hateful creature of the world for

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<sup>14</sup> For more information about the relationship between humans and demons, see section 4. 1. 3. In that section, we see that Lilith has been the first human being transferred to a demon and Cain is the first man.

eternity. It is not hard to guess that the only one who dares to accept the burden and *choose* to suffer the consequences is no one but Cain (S11E22).

In general, *SPN*'s Cain is among the most respectable characters, and the difference between this view and the traditional religious view is quite apparent. Cain's story is one of the best examples of shifts in the well-known concepts of good and evil in *SPN*. In this regard, *SPN* can be said to retrieve, reprise, and rehabilitate old gnostic narratives that typically invert associations of certain figures with good and evil.

The criterion of good and evil in *SPN* is not an individual who performs an act; it is the actions themselves. Any activity that is for the benefit of human beings is good, and the one who performs this action is good (of course only in the moment of doing that action) and vice versa. For this reason, the worst creatures may be the best (like the King of Hell who sacrificed himself to save humans (S12E23)), and the best beings may be the worst (like God Who destroys worlds and all of their inhabitants just to focus on the Winchesters (S15E12)).

Here is where the concept of good and evil relates to the idea of choice and free will. Good and evil are two abstract concepts measured against human interests, but "being" good or bad is not inherent or instinctive. As we see in *SPN*'s version of Cain's story, being good or evil is a choice for all beings. Since no one forces anyone to choose, the responsibility of being good or evil lies with the person who acts, and there is no acceptable excuse for being an evil person. In other words, contrary to popular belief, the devil does not make us do bad things; he gives options; we choose (S04E22).

### **3. 6. Hope**

"There is always a way, there has to be away, and we're gonna find it" (Dean, S02E01). This statement (or a similar version) is found throughout the series. In fact, the belief that there is always a way and you just have to find it, and the hope that this way can be found (supported by the Natural Order), is the engine driving the dramatic action in *SPN*.

Elizabeth Rosen has written a comprehensive study of film and apocalypticism in the postmodern era focusing on the concept of "hope." Rosen aims to examine how different media represent the apocalyptic paradigm differently and how artists apply the apocalypse story and transform a religious story into a secular one (Rosen 2008, xxv-xxvi). She differentiates between traditional apocalypticism and what she names "neo-apocalypticism." Rosen explains that traditional apocalypticism has two main advantages. First, it brings about hope because it is based on God's plan, and He compensates and rewards the suffering of the apocalypse with the happiness that comes with it. And second, it is a means of social criticism because "at least in its religious incarnation, [an apocalyptic story] is usually written by and for the discontented, and often for a minority that is profoundly alienated by its powerless position" (Rosen 2008, xii). In this sense, traditional apocalypticism is eventually optimistic. Neo-apocalypticism, on the other hand, is, to no small extent, pessimistic. In the newer version of apocalypticism, the concentration is on apocalyptic punishment.

In Rosen's theory, hope is a crucial element. "The neo-apocalyptic variant," Rosen says, "assumes that all humankind is beyond renovation, that this depravity is so complete that the Ending can only be so, too. There is nothing beyond this Ending, no hope of a new Heaven on Earth, precisely because there is nothing worth saving" (Rosen 2008, xv). Rosen argues that writers and filmmakers manipulate apparent apocalypse features to inject the hope of traditional apocalypticism to its new version, which is dark, bitter, and, to some extent, nihilistic (ibid, xx). I completely agree with this opinion. I cannot recall even one film in which the apocalypse or post-apocalypse events are not depicted in the most terrifying and bitter form. At the same time, we can see that the viewers are injected with hope in these movies. In this sense, *SPN* is one of the best examples.

*SPN* depicts as many kinds of apocalyptic and semi-apocalyptic events as possible from many religious and mythical traditions and shows different states of miserable suffering in the post-apocalyptic era. But in the end, by presenting completely different yet believable narratives of established religious concepts, it revives in the viewer the hope that human beings are more powerful than to be vulnerable to destruction in apocalypses because they are "human."



### 3. 7. Death

Death is the biggest challenge of life. Therefore, it is not surprising at all that in any discussion related to human beings, people also examine the issue from the perspective of death. Wheeler Winston Dixon is one of those who have studied apocalyptic cinema in terms of the role of death. Dixon analyzes apocalyptic motion pictures as absurdist praise of death. "When we dream of the certainty and inevitability of the apocalypse," Dixon suggests, "we are afraid of life itself" (Dixon 2003, 251). Listing many possible catastrophic scenarios that can turn the Earth and all of its inhabitants to dust, he says the only scenario that has any genuine credibility is a global nuclear war (ibid, 234). "As the Earth atomizes into cosmic dust," Dixon believes, "we will, at last, achieve the true perfection of nonexistence with nothing but some space debris to bear witness to our passing. We are all, thus, equal in death" (ibid, 17). *SPN* has nothing to do with nuclear threats, but the concept of death is a primary topic of discussion in the series.

*SPN* introduces death as two different things: death as the concept of dying, and Death as the angel of death and one of the Four Horsemen [S05E21]. *SPN* offers a specific and radical perspective in both cases. It has manipulated both of these concepts to the extent that death can be eliminated from the life equations. That is why in *SPN*, death is not the humans' soft spot in their battle against immortal supernatural beings and god(s). But how is it possible to tame death?

The angel of death, as a person, is one of the Four Horsemen. In the first appearance (S05E21), Death [Julian Richings] is an older, wise gentleman who cannot remember which one is older, he or God? It points to a philosophical, rhetorical question: have existence and life exist first or death? Nevertheless, Death claims that eventually, he will kill God. A critical aspect of Death's personality is that it is so powerful, and once, it was tempted to become a god (S15)<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>15</sup> The story of death as a god and its mythology has a long history, which is beyond the scope of this thesis. However considering death as a replacement of God is an early (but flawed) step in *SPN*'s Neo-Humanistic apocalypse. I will deal with to this subject in chapter 5.

The most important thing about Death is that it is a creature and is subject to the Natural Order like all other beings in *SPN*. That is, it can be captured and enslaved through a special ritual (S05E21 and S07E01) and even can be killed (S10E23 and S15E18)! Because "we are talking about a creature and it's corporeal, which means we can kill it" (Dean, S01E02).

The *SPN*'s creators have done an excellent job in this regard. They even explain the fate of the creatures that die. Human souls/spirits go to Heaven or Hell after death. The souls of monsters go to purgatory. And beings whose essence is of the spirit, angels, and demons (see sections 4. 1. 2. and 4. 1. 3) go to "the Empty," the place of dark nothingness, after death.

Given these characteristics, and since Death and its subordinates, the Reapers, are responsible for people's death, the concept of death itself has its specific procedure in the show.

In *SPN*, when Death touches someone, s/he dies. A reaper collects the dead person's spirit to deliver it to either Heaven or Hell. Usually, the spirit and the soul are together, but occasionally they become separated. That is, the soul may stay in the body for a short time after death, waiting for a demon or an angel to take it (S05E14). As discussed before, a human body can continue performing without a soul, but it will lack its humanity. On the other hand, the body cannot work without its spirit.

The most important thing about dying in *SPN* is when someone dies; the responsible reaper gives the spirit a choice to stay. Tessa [Lindsey McKeon], a reaper, explains this choice to Dean when we face the concept of dying for the first time in S02E01. Dean is in a coma after a car accident. He roams in the hospital, but no one can see or hear him. Then, Tessa approaches him as a beautiful girl attempting to take him. She explains:

"There is always a choice. I can't make you come with me. But you are not getting back to your body. You can stay for years disembodied, scared. After decades, it probably makes you mad. And you will turn to one of those angry ghosts whom you have been hunting all your life. And no changeing in your mind later" (Tessa S02E01).

In this way, spirits can remain in the material world, provided they accept the consequences. They have no right or choice to return to the body. And because they are separated from the soul, which is the source of positive human qualities, they will be nothing but the embodiment of anger and hatred and a sense of revenge. Ghosts are trapped in a place close to the corpse's remains or any other remnant of their body, harming those in the area. However, their ticket to Heaven or Hell has not yet been revoked. If they are cut off from the material world (that is, their remnants are burned), they are released and can go to their final destination. But this is not up to them; a hunter or anyone else who is aware of the process must burn their remains to be released.

The last thing that is worth mentioning here is undoing death. Returning from dead is possible in *SPN*, and it happens several times in the show. When the spirit has left, and the soul is still there, some dead people can return to life by taking the spirit back, but the memory of those out-of-body moments will be erased (S03E01). This type of return needs a powerful agent like a witch or a psychic (S04E15), a powerful ordinary demon (S02E01), through a deal with an ordinary demon (S03022), or an angel (S05E16). But if the soul has left too, it needs much more power for resurrection; it is only in the power of the Death (S15E10) or a team of high-ranked angels (S04E1) or the King of Hell (S06E1).

Resurrection is possible if the body has perished too, but only God and His sister are powerful enough to do it (S11E22) without any catastrophic consequence. That is, there are spells and magical acts that can bring a dead person back to life with no limitations (S14E13) too. But the Natural Order, as usual, enforces horrible consequences for such an act.

### **3. 8. Possession/Exorcism**

The subject of possession and exorcism have enough dramatic attraction to be the subject of many cinematic works. One of the first films about possession and exorcism is *The Exorcist* (1973), directed by William Friedkin, based on the 1971 novel of the same name by Peter Blatty. This film introduces possession as a rare but real phenomenon needed to be proved by religious authorities. Likewise, the

exorcism in the film is a hazardous, complicated, lengthy performance based on Catholic rituals that needed to be authorized by the highest levels of the Catholic church.

*The Exorcist* is all about saving a little girl. However, *SPN*'s narrative of possession and exorcism is different in several aspects. First, possession is a pervasive narrative element in the *SPN*'s universe. Exorcism is as simple and easy as reciting a couple of Latin sentences or using an electromagnetic pulse-generator device (S12E08), which expels the possessing demon from the victim's body in seconds. Besides, anyone can perform an exorcism, and it need not be authorized.

Second, in *SPN*, the possessing demon is more important than the victim. There is no information about the demons' past and their destination after being exorcised in *The Exorcist* and other films and shows dealing with this theme. *SPN*, on the contrary, explains who the demons are and what happens to them after being taken care of; they will either be expelled and return to Hell or be killed and go to the final destination of all celestial beings, "the Empty." In *SPN*, the Winchesters do their best to defeat the possessing demon without harming the victim (S01E22), but if there is no other choice, they do not hesitate to kill the demon even if it kills the vessel too.

The third and most crucial point about possession in *SPN* is that angels can possess human bodies too. As far as I know, as *SPN* introduces, the angelic possession has no precedent in the cinema or even in literature and mythology. Of course, there are signs of positive possession in the *Bible* but the way *SPN* introduces it is unique. For example, in the *Exodus* (35:31, 31:3, 28:3), the wise performance of God's spirit is mentioned. The characteristic of God's spirit is to compel people to piety and commit to religious acts and God's will (*Exodus*, 35:21). Other characteristics of a person filled with the Spirit of Jehovah are prophesying (*Exodus*, 11:25; *Numbers*. 11: 16–17, 11: 26-27 and 29) and interpreting dreams (*Daniel*, 4: 4-5 & 8-9, 4: 18, 5: 11, 5: 14). Likewise, based on the *New Testament*, Holy Spirit glorifies chosen ones by filling them (*John* 7: 39, 16: 13-15; *Acts* 2: 4; *Rev.* 22: 17). According to *SPN*, however, an angelic possession is almost the same as a demoniac one.

In both cases, the possessing force takes full control of the vessel, no matter if it is a corpse or a live person. When someone is possessed, his/her humanity will go away because the human soul is not in charge anymore. Likewise, the vessel's personality will be lost because his/her spirit is pushed back too. Of course, mentally strong possessed ones can retake control of their bodies [first time, S05E06]. The most crucial difference between angelic and demoniac possession is that a demon can possess anyone he wants, dead or alive, and some talisman is necessary to prevent the possession (S01E22). But an angel can never possess a human body without its permission. That is, the possessing angel asks the person if it can enter his/her body, and s/he must say yes (S04E20). It implies that angels only can possess live bodies, although there is no guarantee that the body can tolerate the angel; it may rot (Lucifer's vessel, S05) or even explode (several cases in S09)!

Although Supernatural has not explained the reason for this difference, it may be due to the difference in the earthly nature of demons and angels' heavenly nature. An analogy may better illustrate this difference. In *SPN*, the human body is like a computer that needs an operating system (O.S.). The original O.S., recommended by the manufacturer (God), is a soul/spirit. But this machine can also work with a cracked version of the original operating system, a demon. However, the non-upgraded version of this operating system, namely the angelic grace, cannot be installed on this device without the administrator's permission. However, the fact that an angel cannot possess anyone without permission is one of the most critical points of *SPN*'s neo-humanistic approach to the apocalypse.

### **3. 9. Godhood**

In *SPN*, we encounter several gods from different myths of the world. For example, just in one episode, S05E19, we see Kali and Ganesh (Indian goddess and god), Baldor and Odin (Norse gods), Zao Shen (the Chinese kitchen god), Mercury (the Roman messenger god), Baron Samedi (the Haitian god of death), and Isis (the Egyptian goddess). The important thing about these gods is that the story implicitly states that they are all God's creation, even though they do not know it (S05E19). Almost all of these beings fall into the

evil category, and naturally, the Winchesters (and in a massacre, Lucifer) destroy most of them. But it does not mean that the Winchesters believe in God at the beginning or even admit the existence of such a concept.

"If there is a God, either He is dead, or He doesn't care about us at all" (Dean, S05E02). "If there is a God, what is He waiting for? Genocide? Monsters? The fricking apocalypse?" (Dean, S04E02). Even the angels doubt the presence of God. However, they believe in the existence of God, doubt that He may have left His creation or even no longer live. For example, Raphael [Demi Moore], the Archangel, said once, "do you think God would let any of that happen if He was alive? He has gone and left us with no instruction" (S05E03). Likewise, Gabriel [Richard Speight Jr.] claims, "Daddy doesn't say anything about anything" (S05E08).

In this gap of a ruling power, several creatures claim God's throne. Eve [Julia Maxwell], the Mother of All Monsters, is the first in the self-proclaimed gods league. Eve's story shapes the sixth season. She has escaped from the purgatory, a place where monsters' spirits go when they die, trying to create a new generation of monsters and rule over the world, relying on her army's power. These monsters are a combination of all evil creatures. Finally, Dean Winchester kills Eve and puts an end to her madness. The second one is Castiel, who opens a gate to the purgatory (with Crowley's assistance) and absorbs billions of monsters' spirits to win a civil war at Heaven. He becomes the most powerful creature and kills his rival, Raphael, the archangel. This adventure is the main story of the seventh season when Castiel claims to be god but cannot hold that power and opens the gate again to return all the monsters to purgatory. Unfortunately, the wicked ones, the leviathans, refuse to return. These horrible monsters feed on both humans and other monsters and try to build a new world where all the creatures are nothing but their food. We watch the leviathans' story in the eighth season.

The ninth season is dedicated to the rise of Metatron [Curtis Armstrong], God's scribe who takes power relying on the information he has from the angels' tablet. He de-wings all the disobedient angels and exiles them to Earth. As always, the Winchesters defeat the mad angel and save the world. The last self-proclaimed god is Death. Dean has already killed the old Death! Nevertheless, since the world needs death, a reaper,

Billie [Lisa Berry], has been appointed as the new Death (S13E05). In the last season, she tries to eliminate God from the universe, but obviously, that's impossible; the world needs a god as it needs death!

These self-proclaimed gods are obsessed only with power and think that being a god is equal to being the most powerful being. But being a god needs something more. There are two more suggestions for replacing God in *SPN*: Jack, Lucifer's son, and Amara [Emily Swallow], God's twin sister. Jack is a fundamental element in my Neo-Humanism argument; therefore, I discuss him in detail in the next chapter. Amara, however, is irrelevant to my main discussion. But to know *SPN*'s God, we need to know His sister as well.

The idea of God having a twin has no place in Abrahamic religions at all. *SPN*, although based on Christian-Jewish mythology, has significantly benefited from other myths<sup>16</sup>. The idea of God's sister is one of these myths. This idea is a fundamental basis in Zurvanism, a "hypothetical religious movement in the history of Zoroastrianism" (De Jong 2014). The myth of *Zurvan* is an alternative version of the Zoroastrian myth of creation. It is about *Ohrmazd* (the representative of light) and *Ahriman* (the representative of darkness), the two spirits of good and evil. In the myth, these spirits are presented as the twin offspring of a pre-existing god, *Zurvan* (ibid).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> The show's creators usually refer to the source of the myths they have used by putting it into the characters' mouths. But although in at least two very important cases, the nature of the spirit/soul (section 3. 2) and God's twin sister, the main theme is clearly taken from Zoroastrian mythology, but for unknown reasons, this source is not mentioned.

<sup>17</sup> This is the *Zurvan*'s story: In the beginning, the great God *Zurvan* was alone. He Desired offspring that would create "heaven and hell and everything in between", so He prayed and sacrificed for a thousand years. At the end of this long time *Ohrmazd*, the beautiful shining good child, was about to be born, but unaware of his coming infant, *Zurvan* began to doubt if the sacrifice worked. As a result of this moment of doubt, *Ahriman*, the ugly dark evil child was created. When *Zurvan* realized that the twins were to be born, he swore to grant the first-born sovereignty over creation. *Ohrmazd* perceived *Zurvan*'s decision and communicated to his brother (sister?). *Ahriman* then outpaced *Ohrmazd* by ripping open the womb and emerged first. *Zurvan* compelled his oath out of compulsion and handed over the supremacy of the universe to *Ahriman*, but limited the kingship to a period of 9,000 years, after which *Ohrmazd* would rule for all eternity. The *Ahriman* ruled the world for 9,000 years and created all iniquities and evils. At the end of his time, *Ohrmazd* rose and imprisoned him unconscious in a hole. He began the good creation to remove the bad from the world. At the end of time, *Ahriman* will rise again, in a great battle, all evil will finally disappear, and good will take over the world. (Zaehner 1955, 419-428).

An entire season (S11) of the series is about the story of the Darkness. The Darkness is God's twin sister, Amara. This season refers to a kind of "end of the world" (see section 1. 2. 2) in which the whole universe is destroyed. As I mentioned in section 3. 1. 4, Amara's story began in the sixth season, when the Winchesters were looking for a powerful weapon to kill Abaddon, a princess of Hell. They find the First Blade, but Dean is trapped in its curse, and they have to find a way to get rid of the Mark of Cain. To do so, the Winchester brothers perform a kind of dangerous and complex magic to solve the problem. They destroy the mark, but as usual, the spell has a dangerous consequence: the Darkness is released. At first, they think it's just a new problem. They are unaware of the depth of the tragedy. The Winchesters never think they may face a much bigger problem than the apocalypse of Michael and Lucifer.

Since the Darkness is a severe problem, Lucifer and God, Himself, engaged with the situation. Lucifer has manipulated Sam to meet him in his cage in Hell to talk about the Darkness. By the rise of the Darkness, Lucifer says, now, "God's not the only circus in town." She is, he continues, equal to God in raw power, "but she's got none of the experience. God is a master strategist." "God needs me," claims Lucifer, "to help put the cat back in the bag. I did help dad seal up the Darkness all those years ago. She's quite a force. Determined to take over everything even back then; Prone to tantrums" (Lucifer S11E09). Likewise, God explains the reason for His emergence to His scribe: "You have to understand this about the Darkness; she's relentless, a force beyond human comprehension. It's the only reason I came off the sidelines" (Chuck/God S11E20).

This narrative is God's side story, but Amara has her story to tell. She has an internal link to Dean Winchester because he was the last carrier of the Mark of Cain. Amara shares her story with Dean. Her narration is an interesting one and has some important points.

He [God] was so threatened by me, fearful that I would make a more perfect creation than He, so He exiled me, virtually erased me, passed on stories that I was a threat. He encouraged religions as monuments to his ego, promised the fearful safety if they'd adore Him. His way, or the highway. Some people find comfort in that. The golden rule, brother's keeper. [But] what if there were no rules? No pain? No prayer? Just bliss. That



feeling that you have when you're with me [pointing to Dean]. For everyone, forever.  
God says, "jump," everybody says, "how high." Now that sis is here "(Amara S11E08).

However, darkness is a great danger, and this threat must be eliminated. And here again, the *SPN*'s Natural Order comes into play. It is possible to kill Amara, but the consequences are grave: upsetting the balance between light and darkness and destroying everything. Naturally, the Winchesters do not accept such heavy consequences and refrain from killing Amara. Fortunately, Dean manages to convince Amara to forgive her brother, the twins are reconciled, and the danger is removed.

Anyway, the Winchesters maintain the skepticism about the existence of God until they really confront God. The first time we meet God in *SPN* is in S04E18. He is a psychic and a mediocre author named Chuck Shurley, who writes a novel series entitled *Supernatural!* *Supernatural* is the Winchesters' detailed story. Everything Chuck has written matches exactly whatever had happened to the Winchesters, and everything he writes will happen. He claims that he writes what he sees in his dreams. When Chuck finds out what he writes happens literally in reality, he states that he must be a god, but the Winchesters take it as a joke. In this appearance, Castiel introduces him as a prophet of the Lord and describes prophets<sup>18</sup>. Of course, later, in the fifth season finale, we guess he may really be God based on the events. Finally, in S11E20, He reveals His true identity, first for His scribe, Metatron, and later for the Winchesters in S11E21. And it happens just because Amara, God's twin sister, has been released, and the Darkness is about to devour the whole creation.

There are two essential dialogues in *SPN* which address some of the most critical issues about God. In the first sequence, God has invited His scribe to edit His last book, *My Autobiography*. Here is a discussion about the creation between God and Metatron. God speaks about how toxic acts of humans endangered the nature He has created:

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<sup>18</sup> For more information about prophets, see section 4. 1. 1 (b).

**God:** they do like blowing stuff up. And the worst part --they do it in my name. And then they come crying to me, asking me to forgive, to fix things, never taking any responsibility.

**Metatron:** What about *your* responsibility?

**God:** I took responsibility... by leaving. At a certain point, training wheels got to come off. No one likes a helicopter parent. (S11E20)

The second sequence is when Dean and Sam figure out that Chuck is God. This scene begins with funny events: Kevin Tran [Osric Chau], a deceased teenager prophet, appears to the Winchesters, assuring them that Chuck is genuinely God and they can trust Him. Then God wants the Winchesters to keep calling him Chuck because he does not like the *G-word*. After that, Sam begins to ask scientific questions about the stars and so on. At this moment, Dean silences his brother, starting a serious argument with God.

**Dean:** Here's the thing, um...Chuck... and I mean no disrespect. I'm guessing you came back to help with the Darkness, and that's great. That's, you know -- it's fantastic. Um, but you've been gone a long, long time. And there's so much crap that has gone down on the Earth for thousands of years. I mean, plagues and wars, slaughters. And you were, I don't know, writing books, going to fan conventions. Were you even aware, o-or did you just tune it out?

**God:** I was aware, Dean.

**Dean:** But you did nothing. And, again, I-I'm not trying to piss you off. You know, I don't want to turn into a pillar of salt. ... People -- People pray to you. People build churches for you. They fight wars in your name, and you did nothing.

**God:** You're frustrated. I get it. Believe me; I was hands-on -- Real hands-on for, wow, ages. I was so sure if I kept stepping in, teaching, punishing, that these beautiful creatures that I created... would grow up. But it only stayed the same. And I saw that I needed to step away and let my baby find its way. Being overinvolved is no longer parenting. It's enabling.

**Dean:** But it didn't get better.

**God:** Well, I've been mulling it over. And from where I sit, I think it has.

**Dean:** Well, from where I sit, it feels like you left us, and you're trying to justify it. (S11E21)

In sum, *SPN's* God is not a god that the Winchesters worship because he does not do anything good for human beings. He sees and hears everything, but everything is just a game and a hobby for Him: writing a best-seller book. He is *soulless* (S11E20). Because of this, Winchesters create a new god! The one who is beneficial to humans. This god is Jack, a Nephelim who has the power of human soul and archangel grace, as well as humanity, resulted from his mother's sincere love and the Winchesters and Castiel's fatherly guidance and support [S14E03]. In the following chapters, I talk about this humanistic god in detail.

# CHAPTER 4

## THE GAME PLOT OF *SUPERNATURAL*

The *SPN* universe may be fruitfully considered as a game. To analyze this game, first, we need to describe its general plot or a "How to Play Guidebook." In this chapter, I describe this "plot." Regarding the game's concepts introduced in the previous chapter, this guide includes introducing the players, describing the events and happenings, defining the game's goals, and winning strategies and coaching. I extract the details of this game plot from the whole series. In the next chapter, I use this general game plot to frame SOAP (*Supernatural's* Original Apocalyptic Perspective).

## 4. 1. Game Players

*SPN* characters fall into six categories, each containing several sub-categories:

1. monsters (vampires, werewolves, jinni, shapeshifters, fairies, leviathans, etc.);
2. humans (ordinary people, ultra-humans);
3. transformed humans (demons<sup>19</sup>, demon-human hybrids, and angel-human hybrids or Nephilims);
4. knights of Hell (princes and princesses);
5. angels (ordinary angels and archangels); and
6. gods (God and His sister Amara and pagan gods and goddesses).

Among these categories, monsters and pagan gods and goddesses have little or nothing to do with the main apocalyptic storyline, so that I will leave them aside here. Here, I discuss players who have a role in the main story: humans, demons, angels, hybrids, and God and His sister.

### 4. 1. 1 Humans

Humans are the leading players of *SPN*'s game, and it is through their eyes that viewers watch the game unfold. There are two main categories of humans in *SPN*: ordinary people who have no special powers and ultra-humans who enjoy powers beyond ordinary people.

#### a) Ordinary People

The ordinary people are six groups. The first group is individuals who "don't fear darkness because they don't know what is out there" (S01E01). The second group consists of victims of monsters. The third group is individuals who know about supernatural beings, and their hobby is to seek them out (S01E16, S03E13, S04E17), mainly motivated by curiosity and thrill-seeking excitement. The fourth group is Greedy

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<sup>19</sup> In *SPN*'s universe, demons are actually humans. I will discuss this notion in detail later.

people, individuals who play on monsters' teams for money, even though they know how dangerous their game is and how their acts cause innocent people harm or even death (S03E03, 06, 10, 11, 15). The fifth group is hunters. They know about supernatural beings and try to kill them. And the last group is "Men of Letter." Among these groups, hunters and Men of Letter are the key protagonists/players.

Hunters usually are survivor-victims of attacks by evil creatures. Hunters are two types: some do not care about humanity and just want to kill monsters whatever it takes, while others want to save and protect people. Obviously, the Winchesters and their fellow hunters fall into this second type. For them, "hunting is not about killing; it's about doing what's right" (Sam S12E22).

The so-called Men of Letter deal with supernatural beings, but they are not field agents, as are hunters. Men of Letter refers to an ancient secret society whose members are more concerned about metaphysical knowledge. We face them for the first time in the eighth season and learn more about them in season twelve. They consider themselves preceptors and beholders superior to hunters. For Men of Letter, hunters are little more than apes, nothing but assets in a larger metaphysical game (S08E12 and S12). *SPN's* twelfth season tells their story; the season develops the notion that human beings may be the worst creatures in the universe. Men of Letter are metaphorically soulless humans who care about nothing but their knowledge. In a twist, the Winchesters, we learn, are hunters who turn out to be the legacy of the American branch of Men of Letter (S08E12).

## **b) Ultra-humans**

The ultra-humans are human beings who can perform supernatural actions. They are Prophets, witches, and ordinary humans super-charged with demon blood. Here, I deal with the two first types and discuss the latter group in the next chapter, in the notion of Antichrist.

### **Prophets**

Prophets are a distinct group of people in *SPN*, but they are not ordinary. Although Prophets are marginal characters in *SPN's* story, they are nevertheless important to my argument about Neo-Humanism.

Therefore, I need to provide a detailed explanation of them. It is in S04E18 that viewers encounter a character who clearly sounds a Prophetic note: Chuck Sherley. As mentioned earlier (in 3. 1. 8.), Chuck is not a real Prophet, but God Himself. However, since Chuck plays the role of a Prophet in this episode, Castiel seizes the opportunity and describes the Lord's Prophets for the Winchesters.

No one knows, Castiel explains, how the Prophets are chosen, but they have been Prophets from the beginning of the time. Their names are sealed in the brain of all angels and carved on all angels' eyelids. "They are very special and protected; if anything threatens a Prophet, anything at all, an archangel will appear to destroy the threat." Another important thing about the Prophets, Castiel continues, is that "what the Prophet has written can't be unwritten; as he has seen it, so it shall come to pass" (Castiel: S04E18).

The first real Prophet, a sixteen-year-old Asian-American Kevin Tran [Osric Chau], appears in S07E21. The second Prophet is an atheist chemistry professor, Donatello Redfield [Keith Szarabajka], who appears in S11E21. A real Prophets' duty is to read and translate God's words written on stone tablets (S07E22). The only ones who can read these tablets are Prophets, Metatron [Curtis Armstrong], who is God's scribe (first appearance S08E21), and God Himself. These tablets are ancient manuals telling the stories of various lines of creatures (an angels' tablet, a demons' tablet, a leviathans' tablet, etc.); the tablets also reveal how these creatures may be destroyed. A Prophet's supernatural power is the ability to read and comprehend these tablets. *SPN*'s Prophets are not necessarily authors but rather mediums for transmitting God's previously written messages.

These Prophets' story has no happy ending in *SPN*. Gadreel [Tahmoh Penikett], the angel/watcher who let Lucifer enter Eden in the first place, kills Kevin in S09E09. And Amara devours Donatello's Soul in S11E22, so he lives *literally* soullessly for the rest of the series! It may look confusing at first because archangels were supposed to protect Prophets, according to Castiel. But as I said before, *SPN*'s creators have done an excellent job paying attention to details. These Prophets get into trouble because all archangels had been either dead or locked down in a cage in Hell before, and regular angels are not powerful enough to protect the Prophets. Part of the fun and charm of the series is making sense of what at first appears to

run contrary to the inherent *logic* of the drama through reference to some earlier piece of misinformation that reconciles what at first seems a contradiction.

## **Witches**

Witches are the last group of people in *SPN*. The most important thing about the witches is that they do not have any inner power, like what we see in Harry Potter or other legends telling stories about witches who gain their inner power from Satan or other evil supernatural forces. However, we know that these people have superpowers. So how is it possible? As mentioned earlier, the answer lies in the source of power (see section 3. 1. 3).

In *SPN*, magic is an independent force, a mysterious power source, which simply exists and is available for anyone to use (S03E09). Performing magic is not a function of innate ability. To perform an act of witchcraft, you simply need just to gather the necessary ingredients and cite an incantation. The magic will always work even if someone performs it unintendedly or just for fun. And, of course, the consequences of summoning such power are on the one who performs the magic. But who teaches humans how to perform an act of witchcraft?

*SPN* suggests that demons are teachers of magic, having learned it from outcast angels and Lucifer himself (S04E02). It means that the primary source of magic, or more accurately, the primary teachers of magical knowledge, were angels, specifically an archangel. This claim has a background in an ancient text of Abrahamic religions. A large portion of an apocryphal scripture, *the Book of Enoch (TBE)*<sup>20</sup>, is dedicated

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<sup>20</sup> *The Book of Enoch* is an ancient Hebrew apocalyptic scripture but it is not in the canonical Bible. This book is traditionally attributed to Enoch, Noah's great-grandfather, and contains novel information about the origin of the demons, the reasons for the angels' fall, the great flood, and prophetic exposition of the thousand-year reign of the Messiah. For more information about the book of Enoch, see the "general introduction" in: Schodde, George h. 1882. *Book of Enoch*: Translated from the Ethiopic, with Introduction and Notes. E-book: Andover: Warren f. Draper publisher.



to the watchers (warrior angels) and how they lusted after women and girls and came to Earth. Watchers<sup>21</sup> are a group of angels who come down from Heaven to Earth and perform their duties (Daniel 4). "And they took unto themselves wives, and each chose for himself one, and they began to go into them, and mixed with them, and taught them charms and conjurations ..." (*TBE*, II, 7: 1). They taught several more arts to humans, including blacksmithing, beautifying, and astrology. "And Semjâzâ [, the chief of the watchers, ...] has made known conjurations" (*TBE*, II, 9:7) and "Amêzârâk taught all the conjurers and root-cutters" (*TBE*, II, 8:3). There is a similar and more explicit account in the Qur'an of the involvement of demons and angels in teaching magic to humans and the consequences of performing magic. It also implies that the Natural Order (the power source of magic) is ultimately from God:

"They [the disbelievers] instead followed the devils promoted during the reign of Solomon. Never did Solomon disbelieve, rather the devils disbelieved teaching to the people magic and what had been revealed to the two angels, Hârût and Mârût, in Babylon. The two angels never taught anyone without saying, "We are only a test for you, so do not abandon your faith." Yet people learned what caused a rift even between husband and wife [meaning, they learned a type of magic, which causes separation, or magic generally causes in separation, and they learned it]; although their magic could not harm anyone except by Allah's Will. They learned what harmed them and did not benefit them—although they already knew that whoever buys into magic would have no share in the Hereafter. Miserable indeed was the price for which they sold their souls, if only they knew!" (Qur'an, 2: 102).

These accounts all point to the idea that whoever taught witchcraft to humans had been a powerful outsider, whether angels or demons.

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<sup>21</sup> For more information about the watchers see *The Book of Enoch*, Sections II and III and the footnotes in:

#### 4. 1. 2. Angels

Angels are usually associated with religious beliefs. In popular understanding, angels are kind, beneficial beings who appear to believers and help them. Similarly, films depicting angels are often more religious in nature and are used as a medium for religious propaganda. This stereotype is so powerful and universal that even *SPN*'s actors have been concerned about it. "We did not want to be a mouthpiece for the writers' religious views because it wasn't the show that we signed up for," said Jensen Ackles [Dean Winchester] in an interview (Ackles 2020, 22-23). He and his co-star, Jerad Padalecki, shared this concern with Erick Kripke, the show's creator, telling Kripe: "Listen, if you're going here about religion, I don't want to be a part of it" (ibid). Of course, *SPN* never sticks to the original religious myths; it does not tell the stories that the Bible tells; it changes and reconstructs them thoroughly. Therefore, as expected, this series has profoundly destroyed the cliché of angels as being beneficent beings while retaining a religious image or aura around their character and their appearance or apparition in the drama.

Based on *SPN*'s images, angels do not have a material body. To walk on Earth, they need a vessel, a "meat suit," a human who lets them possess his/her body; this is a basic rule (S05E01). Their actual appearance, it is suggested, is closer to a winged creature with four heads and numerous eyes, one of which like is like a lion (S05E16). This description is pretty much the same as the description of the living creatures in *Revelation*.<sup>22</sup> This appearance and their voice are overwhelming for the human body (S04E02). This damaging effect is, perhaps, because of an angels' grace. Grace to an angel is similar to a soul to a human; it is their source of energy, their inner 'core' or essence (S04E10). In fact, graces were the prototypes of souls; God has invented grace first and then upgraded it to the soul<sup>23</sup>. The most crucial difference between

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<sup>22</sup> "(7) The first living creature was like a lion, the second was like an ox, the third had a face like a man, the fourth was like a flying eagle. (8) Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under its wings..." (Rev. 4: 7-8).

<sup>23</sup> This is also true of monsters. Monsters are the first prototypes of the human body that were first created (Mother of All Monsters, Eve [Julia Maxwell], S06E19 eve).

angels' grace and humans' soul is that a soul works as a moral compass, but grace does not (S08E23). That's why most of the *SPN*'s angels are hateful creatures who are unable to make the right choices.

*SPN*'s angels are the winged inhabitants of Heaven who consider themselves children of God. They are mighty and have many abilities, including time traveling (first time, S04E03), manipulating reality (S04E17), and returning the dead to life before their soul/spirit is transferred to Heaven or Hell (S05E16). Angels are in third place in the chain of power (after Gods and Leviathans<sup>24</sup>).

Angels are deprived of ordinary human pleasures such as eating and sex. Therefore, they envy human beings and are willing to work hard to obtain these pleasures (S04E10). Angels may be in a relationship with humans and even have children. *The Book of Enoch* mentions the humanistic desires of angels and human-angel hybrids. In *SPN*, in keeping with Genesis, these hybrid children are called Nephilim: human beings who have both a human soul and an angelic grace (S08E22). Nephilims are unholy creatures, abominations whose birth may cause cosmic effects (S12E08). They can be very powerful--in some cases, even more powerful than God (S15 finale).

Angels may look perfect and powerful in human eyes, but they are "like marble statues; cold, no choice, only obedience" (according to a fallen angel, Anna [Julie McNiven], S04E10). They must believe that God exists, or they are severely punished. The punishment for disbelieving is death. In general, angels have no interest in human welfare; instead, they seek to destroy humans. In this sense, they are like demons, with the critical difference that they are genuine beings who were initially created as angels, but demons are, in fact, transformed human beings.

In general, *SPN*'s angels hate humans because they believe that God has abandoned them after He created humans (S04E10) and that these "hairless apes" are God's favorites (S05E18). Angels are not humans' friends; they serve Heaven, not humans (S04E20). They don't lie, but they avoid "some certain

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<sup>24</sup> The eighth season of *SPN* tells the story of Leviathans. But since they are not related to the apocalyptic story, addressing them is out of this thesis's scope.

truth" to manipulate people (S05E18). As a result, in *SPN*, sacred texts and scriptures are not entirely trustworthy because they are angels' words, not God's (S05E17). The parallel to actual religious texts seems clear, which many people take to be entirely the product of human labor.

Angels are the warriors of God who must obey their superiors in Heaven's hierarchy (S04E10). In other words, although they usually work as a fighting team, they do not perform teamwork as humans do; they just follow the orders of the superior. The highest rank in the hierarchy of angels belongs to the archangels, the only ones who have seen God (S04E10). "Archangels are fierce; they're absolute; they're Heaven's most terrifying weapons" (Castiel, S04E18). In the lower ranks, there are other angels who have specific duties, such as the Metatron, the scribe of God. Finally, at the end of the power chain are the soldier angels, who are also in smaller groups and must obey lower-ranking commanders.

Among the many angels introduced in the supernatural, three angels are the most important: from the bottom-up, Gabriel, Lucifer, and Castiel, respectively. In the third place is a tired-of-fights-and-fratricides-in-Heaven archangel, Gabriel, who has left Heaven and immigrated to the Earth, living among the people in the form of a trickster. This immortal being gently (often with humor) manipulates reality to teach humans productive lessons (S02E15). Gabriel reveals his true identity as an archangel in S05E08. At first, he is not a supporter of either side of the apocalyptic war between humans and angels (S05E08). Still, he tries to convince the Winchesters to accept their fate (S03E11) but later chooses the side of humans (S05E19) and plays a key role in apocalyptic events that unfold. He fakes his death several times and finally sacrifices himself to save the world (S14E02).

In the second place is Lucifer. "Lucifer was strong and beautiful. He did not bow to humanity and was punished because of defending the angels. That's why angels are by his side" (S04E18). Lucifer was God's favorite son (S12E21). However, he was the first creature who disobeyed (S04E10). According to *SPN*,

Lucifer became jealous of humans, so he turned Lilith<sup>25</sup> into the first demon to screw God. Therefore, God sentenced him to imprisonment in a cage in Hell for eternity (S4E21). He is released from the cage when the last seal of a series of sixty-six seals is broken (S04E21).

Among *SPN*'s angels, Castiel is the most important. He is the one who drags out Dean from Hell (S04E01) and helps the Winchesters in all of their adventures. At first, he is like other low-ranked angels, obedient to Heaven and believer in an unseen god. But gradually, he becomes more of a human than an angel. Many adventures happen to Castiel. He is killed several times, and God returns him (S011E20). In one of his adventures (S06), he becomes the ruler of Heaven and even tries to take the place of God. Castiel eventually comes as close as possible to being human and saves the world by sacrificing himself. Castiel is the most similar creature to Lucifer in that they both disobeyed their superiors, be it God or high-ranked angels (S10E12).

#### **4. 1. 3. Demons**

*SPN* depicts demons as black smoke in its pure, bodiless form. Demons change the state of the eyes when possessing a human body. Ordinary demons are black-eyed, crossroad demons who make deals with humans are red-eyed, and the knights of Hell are yellow-eyed.

Demons, like angels, have a religious and biblical background. Demons are present throughout the *Bible*, especially in the *New Testament*, but the *Bible* does not explain --at least directly-- who the demons are, nor how they were created. However, there is an insightful explanation about them in the *Book of Enoch*. In section III, chapter 15 of *TBE*, God talks to Enoch, addressing the watchers and rebuking them:

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<sup>25</sup> *SPN* offers no explanation about Lilith's origin but she should be *the Lilith*; the first woman God created at the same time as Adam and with the same clay. Lilith was Adam's first wife who refused to become subservient to him. So she left her husband and turned to the archangel Samael (Lucifer). For more information about Lilith, see: Kvam, Kristen E.; Schearing, Linda S.; Ziegler, Valarie H.. 1999. *Eve and Adam: Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Readings on Genesis and Gender*. Indiana University Press. pp. 220–221.

... (3) Why have ye left the high, holy, and everlasting Heaven, and lain with women, and defiled yourselves with the daughters of men, and taken wives unto yourselves? ... (4) While ye were spiritual ... (7) Therefore I have not made for you any wives, for spiritual beings have their home in Heaven. (8) And now the giants, who have been begotten from body and flesh, will be called evil spirits on Earth, and their dwelling-places will be upon the Earth. (9) Evil spirits proceed from their bodies; because they are created from above, their beginning and first basis being from the holy watchers, they will be evil spirits upon the Earth and will be called evil spirits. ... (11) And the spirits of the giants, who cast themselves upon the clouds, will be destroyed and fall, and will battle and cause destruction on the Earth, and do evil; they will take no kind of food, nor will they become thirsty, and they will be invisible. ... "(TBE, III, 15: 3-12).

According to this passage, demons are Nephilim (see 3. 2. 2), children of the watchers, and female humans. The popular belief about the nature of demons is more or less the same: demons are the offspring of Lilith and Lucifer. But *SPN*'s story about demons is uniquely different from mainstream religious myths and popular beliefs.

In this show, these creatures are nothing but humans' spirit/soul tortured and transformed into black smoke, a demon. Turning a human's spirit/soul to a demon is a process that happens in Hell. As discussed in section 2. 4. 6, when someone dies, his/her soul and spirit go to Hell or Heaven. "The worst thing possible is hell; hell is like hell, even for demons. It is a prison made of bones and flesh and blood and fear" (a female demon, Meg [Nicki Aycox], S02E14). Torturers in Hell torture these newly arrived spirits. The only way to end this suffering is the torturing of others in Hell (S04E10). "Hell is forgetting what you are. There is a real fire in the pit. Hell will burn away humanity; souls turn to a demon" (Ruby, S03E09). In fact, with the continuation of torturing, the power of the soul remains, but its humanity goes away, and the result will be the black smoke, which is then known as a demon (S08E02).

That is, demons and human souls/spirits are of the same nature. This notion has two implications. First, demons are human souls lacking humanity. It means a human without humanity is no better than a demon (in seasons 9, 12, and 14, we see human beings whose actions are considerably worse than most demons).

On the contrary, demons may remember their humanity and want it back (S03E09), and such a recovery is possible. Through a specific ritual, one can return humanity to a demon through purification (S08E22). Second and most importantly, demons can possess any human body, dead or alive, without any problem. It is the main difference between demonic and angelic possession (see 3. 1. 7).

In *SPN*, Lucifer is the father of all demons (S05E01) but has nothing to do with biology, with giving birth to a baby demon, as *TBE* suggests. Lucifer has turned the human soul/spirit into demons in Hell and taught the first generation of his creation, the knights of Hell, how to continue the production. Lucifer turned Lilith into the first demon (S04E21), so she is the mother and queen of demons (S03E12 and 16).

In *SPN*, the birth of a baby is possible from a human mother and a demon father. In the sixth episode of season five, we see a little boy who is half-demon, half-human. He is so powerful that every childish myth, like the tooth fairy and so on, comes true around him. It is the only time we see such a creature in *SPN*. It is bizarre because (as discussed in 2. 1. 2), every creature in *SPN* appears at least twice. In the case of the human-demon hybrid, however, there is a very brief and, at the same time, a significant hint of his importance. In the next chapter, I discuss him in detail and offer an interpretation of why *SPN*'s creators have taken this approach.

Demons in *SPN* have two main functions. The first one is possessing people to achieve a goal. When they are exorcized, they return to Hell (first time, S01E22). Like angels, demons follow the orders of more powerful demons and cannot work as a team as humans do. Their second function is to make a deal with humans. In exchange for the people's soul, demons fulfill every wish and give the person ten years to enjoy it, but after ten years, they take the soul to Hell (first time, S02E08). There is a contract that needs to be enforced for any deal, and compliance with these contracts is one of the fundamental laws of the *SPN*'s universe. Of course, in rare cases, one can negotiate with the head of the demons and change the contract terms and even cancel it (this happens for the first time, in S03E15).

Among the numerous demons in *SPN*, three of them are the most important ones regarding apocalyptic events. The first one is Azazel. This name is mentioned in *the Book of Enoch* as one of the watchers who

came to Earth. But in *SPN*, he is the yellow-eyed demon who started everything by making a deal with Mary Winchester (S04E03), killing her several years later and providing the revenge motive (S01E01), and feeding the infant Sam with demon blood to prepare him for breaking Lucifer's cage seals and start the apocalypse (S02E14). Dean finally kills Azazel in the last episode of the second season and takes revenge for his mother's murder (S02E22).

The next demon is Ruby. She is a female demon who is a first-hand source of information about demons. She helps the Winchesters and their fellow hunters cope with demons pretending to side with humans to prevent Lucifer from being released (S03E09). But it turns out that she is a big liar who manipulates Sam Winchester teaching him how to control the power that comes from demon blood. She is an Azazel follower who accomplishes the mission by deceiving Sam to kill Lilith and break the final seal on Lucifer's cage (S04E22). The Winchesters finally killed her, but it was too late.

These two demons believe in Lucifer as their god and do their best to release him from Hell and even sacrifice themselves for their goal (S03E04). On the other hand, Crowley [Mark A. Sheppard] does his best to prevent Lucifer from coming to power. He believes that Lucifer never cares about demons and sees them only as servants and cannon powder (S05E10). As a former crossroad demon who makes deals with humans, the only thing that matters to Crowley is the return of everything to customary conditions and demoniac deals. And as the newly appointed king of Hell, all he is concerned about is Hell and its management. He is not a fan of humans, but as a genius dealer and an intelligent trader, he prefers to take the side of humans rather than Lucifer.

In general, angels and demons are on one side of the war, and humans are on the other front. In the next chapter, I explain that angels and demons are two sides of a coin trying to destroy humanity in the case of the apocalypse. And it is the Winchesters who stop them with God's assistance.



## 4. 2. The Game's Goal; Who Is the Winner?

As mentioned in section 2. 1. 2, *SPN* has a three-layer structure: stand-alone episodes, the season's main story, and the series master plot. At each level, the Winchesters play a game, and they always win. Now that we know the main characters of *SPN* and their characteristics, we can talk about the game's goal and the meaning of winning in this game.

In its totality, *SPN* projects and details a master game and several ordinary games. Each game has a goal, and there is always a winning strategy. The ordinary games are the game of life and death, in which the goal is to survive and keep others alive by killing monsters, or in other words, "saving people, hunting things." The master game, however, is not just about surviving; it is about living freely. *SPN*'s game, in general, is a zero-sum game in which the winner gains everything and the loser loses everything, be it life or freedom. At first, the story is more about trying to survive, but as the series develops, freedom becomes the essential leitmotif, with freedom being valued even more than survival.

An important thing about the game's goal is that revenge is not, in the end, an authentic or valid goal. Of course, *SPN*'s story begins with this theme: the Winchesters want to take revenge for the murder of their mother and finally kill her killer, but soon, they realize that revenge has no good result at all. In fact, the ineffectiveness of revenge emerges as one of *SPN*'s natural laws. In the continuation of the story, we see that the Winchester brothers do their best to save those who have committed the worst atrocities against them. Once they try to save Bella Talbot [Lauren Cohan], a girl who easily endangered all human beings for money and wanted to kill them several times (S03E03, 06, 10, 11, 15). And in another occasion, they save their back-from-dead grandfather, Samuel Campbell, who sold them to demons to keep himself alive (S06E16). They even stop a hunter who trains the young hunters with a sense of revenge (S08E18). The Winchesters' stance against revenge and retaliation culminates when Dean manages to stop Amara from devastating the whole cosmos by convincing her that revenge never works (S11E23).

At the level of messages and meanings, part of what *SPN* attempts is to disentangle religious motifs that link retaliatory violence with notions of necessity and sacrality. As Richard Slotkin has shown in his trilogy on American violence, the American literary and narrative imagination is rooted in the ideas of righteous violence and personal and social regeneration through violence. He shows that European settlers' social and psychological anxieties for claiming the land and defeating the indigenous people have shaped American violent culture (Slotkin 2000). These ideas reach back to religious narratives and forward to the countless movies that traffic in the idea of righteous, necessary violence of revenge.

There has been considerable discussion about the violence depicted in the *Bible*. John Dominic Crossan discussed this subject in detail in his book, *How to Read the Bible and Still Be a Christian* (2015). He attempts to answer a fundamental question: Is God violent? Exploring from Genesis to Revelation, Crossan begins his argument by putting that "something was wrong when acclamation became condemnation without any explanation" in the *Bible* (Crossan 2016, 5). Steven Schroeder has reviewed this book and summarized it in two major statements.

First, in the *Bible*, from *Genesis* to *Revelation*, two patterns are recognizable: the pattern centered on "nonviolent distributive justice" and the one revolved around "violent retributive justice" for considering this duality, Crossan reads the Bible as a struggle between "God's dream and civilization's dream" (Schroeder 2016). Second, Crossan explores the Bible in the matrix of civilization and finds it as a human book produced in a priestly tradition. And here is the problem; when a divine matter is presented in a human context, the nonviolent form of divine persuasion turns to the violence of power and justice (ibid). In this way, paraphrasing Crossan's argument, the problem of violence in the Bible is the product of a conflict between content and container. That is, the divine content is placed in a human container, and due to the requirements of civilization, the nonviolent divine message has become violent in its transformation to human law.

Suzan Hylen is another scholar who deals with the problem of violence in the *Bible*. Focusing on *Rev*, Hylen takes a literary approach to this scripture and examines the issue of violence and its incompatibility

with Jesus' message in this text. By analyzing metaphor in the form of multiple metaphors (that is, interpreting metaphors in a text using other metaphors of that text) and applying it to the interpretation of the text, Hylen suggests a way to solve the paradox of violence in *Rev.* (Hylen 2011). Her argument is based on the premise that every metaphor highlights things and hides things. Hylen suggests that for interpreting the complexities of a metaphorical text, such as the violence in *Rev.*, it is necessary to simultaneously consider different parts of the text. Hylen explains that interpreters often offer a transformation of violent to nonviolent to deal with the violent imagery (ibid, 785). She argues that this *transformation* should be understood as the interplay of multiple metaphors; that is, the multiple metaphors do not cancel each other out; each contributes to the overall meaning (ibid, 788-89). In other words, metaphors of violence cannot be easily transformed into nonviolent images because these images are all together in the form of a network of intertwined metaphors that convey the central meaning. Therefore, ignoring part of these images and bolding another part prevents the correct understanding of the content.

*SPN* has a different view of divine violence. It never tolerates violence by celestial beings. In other words, the main reason for the Winchesters' opposition to the apocalypse is that countless people are being killed. It is unacceptable for the Winchesters that the Biblical *team good* quite willingly applies violence. In fact, the main goal of humans in *SPN's* game is to stop the cycle of violence.

### **4. 3. The Winning Strategies and Tactics**

All the games in *SPN* (sub-plots and main plots) have the same pattern. Something horrible happens that puts humans in danger; the Winchesters investigate the origin of what happens; they find a particular way or tool to solve the problem; they solve the problem. It makes the game look very simple. But there are some nuanced points. If we want to play this game, we have to answer two questions. First, where can we find the information and the equipment we need? Second, how can we solve the problem itself? Here is where strategy comes into play. Let's see how Winchesters find the answer to every question posed of them.

#### **4. 3. 1. Research: Where to Find What Is Needed?**

The way to get information is, naturally, research. The Winchesters use two primary sources for their research. The first one is a journal their father has left to them, which contains his first-hand experiences. Second, the brothers rely on the writings of others. These writings are mainly the heritage of Men of Letter. In fact, both groups of resources originate from one source, and that is empirical experience. The importance of experience may seem trivial and straightforward at first, but it implies two fundamental concepts. One is the concept of time, and the other is the concept of learning.

##### **a) Time and Experience**

Experience makes sense when something is repeated. It means that when a person encounters a vampire, for example, once, if he survives, he has gained experience that he can use in subsequent encounters. This experience can also be passed on to others. It is precisely what happens in *SPN*. And as I mentioned earlier (see section 2. 3), the structure of the series and the reappearance of almost all beings<sup>26</sup> support this idea. But what does experience mean when we are confronted with a unique subject, such as the apocalypse?

The first answer that comes to mind is that there is no experience in this field, but the information is conveyed through predictions in sacred texts. This answer is not convincing in *SPN*'s universe. First of all, the information from the scriptures, which are the primary source of the prophecies, is always cryptic. On the one hand, when it comes to practical information about a weapon used to kill a specific creature, scripture means exactly what it says. On the other hand, when it comes, for example, to Michael's sword, we see that it means a human vessel, which Michael must possess. Besides, the information contained in the Prophetic texts is either incomplete or misleading. For example, in the story of the false Prophet

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<sup>26</sup> As I said before, there is an exception, a demon-human hybrid, about whom I talk in the notion of antichrist in the next chapter. For more details, see section 5. 1. 3 (b).

(S05E17), Castiel says based on the scriptures, only a faithful servant of Heaven, like a pious priest, can kill this false Prophet, but in the end, it is Dean Winchester who kills her. Whatever Dean is, he is certainly not a servant of Heaven! The viewer is led to the conclusion that a religious text may contain helpful information, but this information is not accurate enough for the players to risk their lives based on them. Religious texts cannot be taken simply at face value. Here, the series is encouraging a critical engagement with religious texts. It points to them as sources of insight, not the sources of truth and knowledge. In *SPN*, the needed answers, the required information comes from the apocalypse as both a past and recurring event. In other words, *SPN* encourages a kind of apocalyptic consciousness.

In section 1. 2. 3 c, I referred to Rosen's argument in which she sees the apocalypse as *one* end of time. The logic of *SPN*'s narration, especially in the case of research, implicitly supports Rosen's theory, but it is not the whole story. There are direct references to repetitive apocalypses as well. For example, when Dean and Sam argue with Gabriel accusing him of being a coward afraid of war, he states that he is tired of war; Gabriel does not want to see his brothers slaughtering each other *again* (S05E08). This tying apocalyptic narrative to the past rather than merely the future is a significant move made in *SPN*.

### **b) Learning from Experience**

One of the most important strengths of humans in dealing with their rivals is their ability to learn from past experiences. This difference stems from the fact that competitors, whether angels, demons, or even God Himself, have a kind of comprehensive knowledge. At first, glance, knowing everything seems an advantage; but these beings can act only according to what they know, according to their 'program,' as it were. Crucially, in the *SPN*'s universe, "there is always a choice," and the Natural Order dictates that choices occur; in many cases, then, prior knowledge is misleading or out of date, or ineffectual. Therefore, in this game, someone who can learn from past experiences and make adaptive choices will gain the upper hand. Only humans have this ability, which is clearly related to choice and freedom of the will. This capacity to learn is one reason why Winchesters ultimately win the war, although they lose several battles.

#### **4. 3. 2. Unity: How to Use the Information to Solve the Problem?**

Getting information is one thing; finding suitable materials and using them is another. Most of the materials needed can be found in nature, although they can be challenging to find. But in many cases, the basic components required, for example, to perform a particular spell, are not something you can buy from Walmart. For example, the ashes of the Phoenix, which are needed to kill Eve, the mother of all monsters (S06E19), are not found in any supermarket. It is not possible for humans to find these mythical materials. Here is where humans need supernatural powers. These forces are usually demons, angels, witches, or a combination of them.

This reference is not about the show's fantasy structure. The argument is that humans have the ability to persuade even their worst enemies to cooperate with them for the greater good. This feature is the second major strength the Winchesters possess in *SPN*'s game-world. This union, of course, is not without cost and is usually done in the form of a deal, but the important point is that it is only human beings who believe in union as a vital thing for winning. Interestingly, angels and demons usually work as a team in their race. Still, their teamwork is more like a master-slave relationship, not a win-win situation of a friendship or marriage. They can only win if they unite with other races. For example, by uniting with Sam, Ruby breaks the last seal of Lucifer's cage; similarly, Castiel, by uniting with Crowley, can open the gates of purgatory. However, as I said before, only humans are able to learn from such experiences, and they are the only ones who know the power of collective acts and acts of memory.

# CHAPTER 5

## *SUPERNATURAL*'s ORIGINAL APOCALYPTIC PERSPECTIVE

This chapter aims to formulate what I am terming *SPN*'s Original Apocalyptic Perspective (SOAP). To do this, I will develop a comparison between the *SPN*'s apocalypse and the *Book of Revelation (Rev)*, the primary source of the *SPN*'s story. I model the apocalyptic story in terms of *SPN*'s game elements, as discussed in the previous chapters. The key rubrics are players, goals, and winning strategies. To make the comparison manageable, I will focus on seasons 1-5. Moreover, in the first five seasons, the biblical apocalyptic narrative is used explicitly as a source. I will develop a comparison between the biblical elements deployed in *SPN*'s apocalyptic game with those found in the *Rev*. Based on this comparison, I will then expand the argument into detailing the projected worldview found in the series, which I term 'Neo-Humanism.' These neo-humanistic elements are most apparent in seasons 12 and 15.

## 5. 1. *SPN* vs. *Rev*: an Apocalyptic Game

*SPN*'s main story is clearly derived from *Rev*'s. However, *SPN* does not represent all the events of *Rev*, nor does it follow the chronological thread of John's apocalypse. In *Rev*, John narrates a dream. To translate this narration into game language, we have a five-round tournament (like a football tournament) whose ultimate winner will have everything forever, while the loser will lose everything, including existence. The game consists of players and spectators. It is played simultaneously in two different scenes: the playing field and the backstage. John plays no role in this game. He is only the game's reporter, covering the trophy presentation and ceremony of the winning team. But who are the audiences of his report?

John reports the game to those who have no role in the game. His audiences are supporters of the (already) winning team (or the team already known to come out on top). And since fear of being destroyed alongside the direct actors on the losing team is part of John's reporting, John's audiences hope not to be doomed based on their positioning.

*SPN* reports a game of similar structure to that of *Rev*, but its narrative is fundamentally different from John's because it attempts to wrap or contain an apocalyptic narrative within a different theoretical or theological framework. For example, *SPN*'s reporter is God Himself, and, unlike John, God is both player and reporter. And more importantly, humans in *SPN*'s version of the game are spectators and members of one of the primary teams. In *SPN*'s narrative, humans, at first glance, are the weakest team and already the loser. However, the series offers a solution that results in the ultimate victory of this seemingly insignificant group. This solution is what I am terming SOAP. To better understand the details of this solution, it is necessary to compare *SPN*'s narrative and *Rev*'s. This comparison has four aspects: time and place, narrators or game reporters, competitors, and events.



## 5. 1. 1. The Time and Place of the Games

The main difference between time and place in *Rev* and *SPN* is that in *Rev*, the game is played in an uncertain future and at a cosmic scale; in *SPN*, the story takes place in the present, right at the time of filming, and events focus on local occurrences.

As developed earlier (1. 2. 3 c), the concept of time in the apocalyptic literature genre is complicated both in terms of the structure of the narrative and the presumed timing of events (in the past, now, or in the future). This complexity introduced doubt that these stories simply refer to the future as we perceive it. There is also spatial complexity in apocalyptic narratives. That is, apocalyptic stories usually take place in mythological or typological places loaded with symbolic significances requiring interpretation. This spatial and temporal ambiguity has an exciting result: any moment and any place can be the arena of the apocalypse, and at the same time, no place and time can be considered definitive concerning the end of the world.<sup>27</sup>

*SPN*'s apocalyptic narrative does not have these features; all its apocalyptic-styled events occur at precise times and places. For example, the false prophet of apocalypse appears in a small town, Blue Earth in Minnesota, and the Winchesters kill her in early April 2010 (S05E17). The show presents these historical and geospatial accuracies, usually by referring to a newspaper headline or something similar. This feature is also important from another point of view. The uncertainty of place and time is one of the standard features of most contemporary apocalyptic, pseudo-apocalyptic and dystopian genres. That is, either these films take place in the very distant future (*Into the Badlands* (2015-2019)) or at an indefinite time between the future and the past (*Game of Thrones* (2011-2019)), or the location of events is in a completely unknown, imaginary place (*Avatar*, *The Last Air Bender* (2005-2008)), or both (*Star Wars* (film series)). If

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<sup>27</sup> Examining this literary feature of apocalyptic narratives could be an intriguing subject for an independent research.

the time and place of the films are known, features will be displayed in these cinematic works that are not similar to our real world (*The Avengers* (film series) and *Left Behind* (film series)).

This characteristic of the time and place of events in *SPN* has two different results. First, although the series is full of mythical and magical characters and events, the presence of easily recognizable times and places lends fantasy a kind of realism. Second, and more importantly, by bringing the story to our world and time, the humanistic aspects of the story become much more central and pointed: we are living at *an* end of time, and everything that happens in our ordinary lives may be considered a sign of our apocalypse.

## **5. 1. 2. The Games' Reporters and Perspectives**

The narrator of the revelations is John. He is like a person who sits in an announcer's booth or a V.I.P stand reporting the game he sees. In this regard, he is a neutral/transparent element. The only places where he announces his presence (with the narration breaking the frame of 'neutrality/transparency') is when he asks something or shows that he worries that there will be no one to open the seals of the book (Rev 5: 4), and another attendee in the V.I.P stand comforts him not to worry. The narrator's story in *SPN* is quite different.

*SPN*'s narrator is Chuck Sherley, a writer who is writing -and publishing- a novel named *Supernatural*. Naturally, therefore, he is not a neutral element in this series. Chuck is initially introduced as a prophet, but it soon becomes clear that Chuck is God Himself. And here is where *SPN*'s most important dialogue appears: "one day, these books are to be known as the Winchesters Gospel" (Castiel, S04E18).

The characteristic of the "Supernatural novel" is that it is being created in the moment of the events, so what is being written happens simultaneously. The interesting thing about this novel is that other relevant texts (other apocalyptic narratives, be they in the series or the real world) are themselves present in the novel *Supernatural*'s story. That is to say, other writings, whether they are the Bible as we know it or what is written for angels and demons, are not inherently authoritative, and whether events proceed based on those pre-existing writings is entirely dependent on the immediate will of the current author. That's how

and why God helps the Winchesters stop the apocalypse, even though it is against the Bible and angels' knowledge and even destiny. Simply put, the author of the novel *Supernatural* is a god who creates, plays, and reports *SPN*'s apocalyptic game.

Another crucial notion, in this case, is that *Rev* describes the apocalyptic game from above and the perspective of the angelic team. Therefore, his report lacks some essential details about the way the players play. Moreover, we see the competition from the perspective of a deep believer-in-God. As for John, it is clear he is no impartial reporter. In fact, he is a fan of one of the two teams and reports the game so that the audience is encouraged to support one of the two teams. Of course, nothing else can be expected from a sacred text that belongs to a particular religious system. In other words, it is quite natural for John to see himself as a supporter of the best team, the God's team, and it is natural for his report to be entirely consistent with the religion in which he believes. However, since *SPN* claims to be based on the "Winchesters Gospel," not the Bible, it discusses several different, at times conflictual, perspectives.

First, Chuck reports the game from the field and covers details about the strategies deployed by each team. *SPN* repeatedly details different views from different players in the course of its apocalyptic game. Some of these players want the apocalypse to happen, and some oppose it. The majority of angels and demons consider the apocalypse desirable. From the perspective of the low-level demons, the apocalypse is their only chance to face and defeat their archenemies, the angels (S03E04). For knights of Hell, it is Lucifer's plan to seize power and rule the universe in the right way (S04E22). For Low-level angels, it is an enforceable order from superiors (S04E16, 21). It is the only way to get rid of human beings for higher-ranked angels because they are tired of earthly affairs and want Paradise (S05E03). From Lucifer's perspective, the apocalypse is revenge on a God that made humans superior to him (S05E10). For Michael, it is Lucifer's final punishment because of his disobedience. Some humans also welcome the apocalypse. They may be believers who see the apocalypse as inevitable and, at the same time, see its fruit as salvation and attainment of Paradise (S05E17). Or they may be unbelievers who see the apocalypse as a way to

escape the oppressive earthly life (S05E06). Of course, not everyone in the show wants the apocalypse to happen; there are other groups that oppose it.

Crowley, a high-ranked, powerful demon, is a conservative person who prefers the current balance between humans and demons: a number of demons possess some humans and the hunters hunt them. Or people sell their souls to demons, and demons fulfill their desires instead. But with the advent of the apocalypse, this trend is completely reversed. He believes that the result of the apocalypse is the doom of both humans and demons, no matter whether Lucifer will come to power or Michael (S05E10). That's why Crowley wants to stop the apocalypse and helps the Winchesters. Hunters are also trying to stop the apocalypse because their job is to fight supernatural forces and save people.

But the viewpoint of God as the principal game designer and actor is much more interesting. God (Chuck Shurley, the author) does not care who wins and who loses in the apocalyptic game. The only thing that matters to God is the charm of the story he writes (S11E20, S15). God is an aesthete of sorts and uses aesthetic kinds of criteria to inform his acts and judgments. Let us compare two cases of God's intervention as a writer to make this clearer.

As I said, God is a writer whose writing actualizes as real: whatever he writes happens. But he never interferes directly in the logical and ordinary course of the story. However, during the first five seasons of the series, He intervenes directly in the story in two cases. The first time is when the last seal of Lucifer's cage is broken at the end of the fourth season. At this moment, Lucifer is released after a massive explosion. The Winchester brothers are present at the time of the event but suddenly find themselves on a plane, having survived the blast. Here God writes a very great and, at the same time, very superficial miracle. This piece of writing is too shallow and later faces criticism from Metatron, God's scribe, who criticizes God's writings by His order (S11E20).

The second time is in the episode of the fifth season when the apocalypse is about to stop. At the end of the previous episode, Lucifer has possessed Sam, and Sam has not been able to take back control of his body. So the Winchester's plan to return Lucifer to his cage in Hell has failed, and Armageddon is about to

begin. If the author/God, Chuck, wanted to write his story according to the previous formula, he could still work out a great miracle, but at this time, He writes the story differently. Unlike last time, God develops a much more attractive plot and tells it more professionally. He beautifully turns the Winchesters' black 1967 Chevrolet Impala into the main character. Chuck begins the episode's story by telling the story of the Impala model, revealing that the Winchesters' Impala is the first car built in this model. He continues the story by reviewing the childhood memories of the Winchester brothers with Impala. At this time, there is no miracle. The reflection of Sam's image on the Impala's mirror makes him remember that he is a human, and he can choose the right things. So he takes back the control of its body for a moment, pushes Lucifer back, and ends the apocalypse by jumping into Hell.

From this aesthetic perspective, it does not matter which group wins, and if the aesthetic of his story demands it, he can easily intervene and change its course (S04E22, S05E22). This rather selfish nature of the *SPN's* God -aloof from the struggle, making decisions based on aesthetic criteria, causes the Winchesters to oppose Him eventually. The Winchesters aim to stop the apocalypse not just because they are hunters and "saving people and hunting things" is their "family business;" they oppose it due to their quest for freedom. The Winchesters do not believe in fate and are not willing to be part of a predetermined plan, governed by rules set down by others. This notion is the heart of Neo-Humanism.

### **5. 1. 3. The Games' Players**

In the *Rev's* game, two teams compete with each other. According to the reporter's ideological point of view, these two teams are *good* (represented by the angels) *evil* (represented by the demons). The main field of *Rev's* game is the Earth. However, John expands his report to another field, somewhere in the skies, a kind of think tank or group of experts coaching team. In this arena, the main actor is someone sitting on the throne of God (God Himself?) who is surrounded by several assistants (including the twenty-four elders, the four living creatures, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, angels, etc.). Assistants, step by step, execute the instructions and send their players to the field, but none of the members of this coaching team are present

in person on the field. It can be assumed that team evil also has a high-level coaching group, but John does not mention it in his report.

John's report also mentions humans, but they are nothing more than insignificant victims of this violent competition. They are either crushed like the grass of a football field under the shoes of all the players on the field or are present in the stadium as spectators. Therefore, it is necessary for a human being to be among the lucky believers to survive and celebrate with the winning team at the end of the game.

In short, in John's report, the apocalyptic game occurs between the good (angels) and the evil (demons) teams; the good team's coaches are behind the scenes, but there is no mention of the evil team's coaches; humans have no active role in the game.

In *SPN*, the story is different in several ways. First, the arrangement of the teams in this series is different. On one side of the game are humans, and on the other side is the union of angels and demons. It means that although angels and demons are inherently and eternally hostile to each other, in a strategic alliance, they first confront their common enemy, humans. As has been said, from the perspective of these two supernatural groups, the apocalypse is a positive event, driven by their belief and intent that its enactment will break or undo the existing order. They believe that the winner, the one who will own everything, is determined in a cosmic-level battle. For them, the first stage of this battle is to get rid of humans. Therefore angels and demons form a temporary alliance to deal with humans, as a prologue to their final battle.

The second difference is that *SPN* represents all the 'coaching teams' or 'think tanks': angels, demons, and humans alike. A final significant difference between *Rev*'s apocalyptic report and that found in *SPN*'s is the role of God. As mentioned in the previous sub-section, *SPN*'s God, in addition to designing the game, is also present in the game and changes the situation for the benefit of humans; the one who sits on God's throne in *Rev* is never directly involved in the game.

These general differences have led *SPN* to portray characters adapted from *Rev* in a fundamentally different fashion. Among the most important of these changed characters are the Four Horsemen and the Antichrist.

#### **a) The Four Horsemen**

In *Rev*, the Four Horsemen of the apocalypse are the first players who are sent to the game field:

[1] And I saw when the Lamb opened one of the seals ... [2] ... I saw ... a white horse: and he that sat on him had a bow; and a crown was given unto him: and he went forth conquering, and to conquer. [3] And when he had opened the second seal,... [4] ... there went out another horse that was red: and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the Earth, and that they should kill one another... [5] And when he had opened the third seal ... I beheld ... a black horse; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. ... [7] And when he had opened the fourth seal, ... [8] ... I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the Earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the Earth... (Rev 6: 1-8)

This harsh and horrifying image, ushered in through divine action through Christ (John's Lamb), initiates the apocalyptic events in *Rev*. The previous chapter briefly discussed violence in the *Bible* in general and *Rev* in particular. There I explained that in *SPN*, God usually has no role in violence and that angels and demons do violence in His name. In effect, *SPN* frees God from the charge of being involved in violence. *SPN*'s version of the Four Horsemen is the best example of the way *SPN* changes the narrative in favor of God.

*SPN* tells the story of the Four Horsemen differently, making two changes in the original narrative. First, the Four Horsemen of *SPN* are not players of *team good*; they play for the bads', and it's Lucifer who releases them and orders them to invade the Earth and destroy humans (S05E10). Second, and more importantly, in *SPN*'s narrative, the culprits of the catastrophes are the humans themselves, not the Horsemen. All the Horsemen (except for Death, about whom I will talk later) have only a catalytic role.

They are not responsible for what happens to humans: the War only creates hallucinations, and humans fight and kill each other for no reason (S05E02). Famine/Hunger only reveals the greed of human beings, and it is their greed that leads them to the abyss of destruction (S05E14). And the Disease simply puts together the wrong behaviors of human beings towards themselves and nature, and it is human beings themselves who cause diseases (S05E21). These characters are personifications of forces unleashed by human actions.

Of course, overall, in *SPN*, God is still to blame because he is the principal designer of the story, but in the case of the Four Horsemen, they are not agents of God but instead unleashed on the world via human decisions and acts.

#### **b) The Antichrist**

Antichrist is perhaps the greatest supervillain in the history of literature. Countless films deal with this figure, well known to medieval European literature (Emmerson 1981). The stereotype of Antichrist is so powerful that in many cases, anti-heroes are called Antichrist, even though they have little to do with the original version of Antichrist.

Antichrist is a biblical character who has been described in numerous texts (literature, paintings, and films, as well as scholarly interpretive works). This creature is commonly known as Lucifer's son, but the Bible's descriptions of him do not necessarily support such a view, at least not directly. Ed Taylor has summarized several facts about the Antichrist, gathered from reading and interpretation of three books: *The Book of Revelation*, *Daniel*, and *Thessalonians*. According to Taylor (Taylor 2020), the Antichrist is described as a man (Daniel 8:23) with a horrifying appearance (Daniel 7:20) who hates and opposes God (Rev 13:6) and introduces himself above every god (Daniel 11:36). He will be a conqueror with global acceptance and authority (Rev 13:4, 7, 16, 17, and 17:8). The Antichrist will display miracles (Thessalonians 2:9–12) and be a part of a global false religion (Rev 13: 13-14). At the end of days, the Antichrist fights against Christ, fails, and spends eternity in the Lake of Fire. (Rev 19:19–21).



The story of Antichrist(s) is raised three times in *SPN*, each time developing a different perspective on this figure. The first time is when Sam Winchester has been accused of being Antichrist. The story's main thread in the show's first four seasons revolves around this idea, and several episodes are dedicated to this story.

According to Lucifer's plan, the general story in these four seasons is that Azazel, a prince of Hell, fed Sam Winchester with demon blood in infancy. As a result, Sam gains supernatural powers. Meanwhile, the angels tell the Winchesters that Lucifer is trapped in a cage in Hell that is guarded by 66 seals/locks. They warn the Winchesters that the seals are breaking. A female demon named Ruby tells Sam that Lilith, the first demon, is the only one who can break the last seal. She tricks Sam into drinking the demon blood to gain the extraordinary power and kill Lilith before she can break the final seal. But there is a twist: Lilith herself is the last seal and must be killed by a human to free Lucifer. Dean Winchester knows of this, but he fails to stop his brother at the last moment. Aided by conspiratorial angels, Sam sees the joint plan of the angels and the demons through to the end, and Lucifer is released. Here, the story switches focus to other hunters, and a group of them declare that Sam Winchester is the Antichrist and must be killed. After several unsuccessful attempts, they do manage to kill Sam, but the angels bring him back to life so that the unfolding of the apocalypse may continue. In this scenario, Sam is more or less consistent with the standard descriptions of the Antichrist in films with a similar biblical apocalypse theme: a man with demonic powers who provides the conditions for the forces of evil to overcome the forces of good in the world.

The second appearance of the AntiChrist in the series is when the Winchesters find a place where all legends and stories become a reality. They locate a boy in that area who seems to be responsible for this series of magical events. They find out that the boy is an adopted child whose mother is alive living elsewhere. They find the mother, and she reveals a horrible secret. A demon has possessed her, a virgin, and it has used her body to give birth to a human-demon hybrid boy. The Winchesters ask Castiel for help, and he introduces the child as the Antichrist. He explains that contrary to popular belief, the Antichrist is

the son of a demon, not Lucifer. Then Castiel, the angel, tries to kill the boy, but he is too powerful and turns the angel into a toy statue!

Meanwhile, the demon father possesses the mother and appears to the Winchesters and the boy. The boy then performs a miracle. He yells at the demon and orders him to leave, an act that exorcizes the demon. The Winchesters ask the boy to join them for good, but he refuses. The Winchesters take their leave, hoping the boy will use his soul and free will (he is part human) to choose the right path. Here is the only appearance of the boy in the series.

As mentioned earlier (2. 3; 3. 2. 3), this boy is the only significant character who appears in the show just one time. It is possible that the themes here were deemed too sensitive or transgressive, and the showrunners decided not to develop this character. The sensitivity of the theme stems from the fact that the figure of the boy is likely too close to that of Jesus: both are born of a virgin and cast out demons through verbal command (Mathew 12: 22-28; Mark 3: 20-27; Luke: 11: 14-20).

The third reference to the Antichrist involves the story of Jack, Lucifer's son. There is no sign of this character in the first five seasons; he is born in the last episode of the twelfth season. He is a human-archangel hybrid and is practically the most powerful creature in the world due to the power of his human soul and the archangel grace. I will return to this character, as Jack is the one person in the *SPN*'s Neo-Humanistic universe who can make a perfect God.

#### **5. 1. 4. The Games' Events**

The order and details of *SPN*'s apocalyptic game are different from *Rev*'s. The apocalypse, according to *Rev*, has two phases, like two halves of a football match with two extra times. The first half, chapters 5 to 12, begins with "the Lamb that was slain," opening seven seals on a sealed book and continues by angels blowing in several trumpets acts that lead to either more players entering the field or something to happen on the Earth. In this phase, team Good is in the lead: the believers survive, and the sinners are doomed.

The second half, Chapters 12 to 13, begins with a battle between Michael and Satan. The devil is defeated and falls onto the Earth, but his beasts and false prophet establish their power on the Earth and rule over it. At the second half, the sinners are in the higher position, and the believers suffer. In the middle of this phase, "a lamb" appears on Mount Sion, and angels come to the Earth and fight the beast. The battle is terrible, and there are many casualties. The legal time of the game ends with the beast and the false prophet being thrown into the lake of fire (*Rev* 19: 20), but the game is not over yet.

The first extra time entails the millennial captivity of the devil in the bottomless pit (*Rev* 20: 1-2). It is the second round of happiness for supporters of Team Good (*Rev* 20: 3-7). At the beginning of the second extra time, Satan is freed and expands evil, but he will finally lose the game and join his lead players, the beasts and the false prophet, and his followers in "the lake of fire and brimstone" (*Rev* 20: 8-15).

*SPN's* apocalypse game has two different halves. The first half, seasons 1 to 5, narrates a different version of *Rev*, and the second half, the rest of the series, is a collection of various apocalypses, which ends with the direct presence of God in the game of man's victory over Him in the show's finale.

In the first half of the game, the general stream of events is that the demons first prepare a couple of humans for a mission to free the demons from Hell, according to Lucifer's plan (S02E22). Then the liberated demons, including the seven deadly sins in the flesh (S03E01), settle on Earth. Dean Winchester dies and is sent to Hell (S03E22), but Castiel releases Dean and returns him to life. This miracle is the first seal of 66 seals on Lucifer's cage in Hell that must be broken to free Lucifer (S04E01). Then angels return to Earth after two thousand years (S04E02), strategically uniting with demons to release Lucifer and initiate the apocalypse (S04E21). Finally, Sam Winchester kills Lilith, and the last seal is broken (S04E22). Now, Lucifer is free. Then, he summons the Four Horsemen of the apocalypse, and the world prepares for the final battle between two archangels, Michael and Lucifer. This fight must take place on a particular ground to start Armageddon. The two archangels need to possess their true human vessels to be able to fight. These two vessels are the Winchester brothers (S05).

Up to this point, the Winchesters, who actually represent the humans, have failed at all stages, but from now on, their victories begin. They first realize that they are proper vessels of Michael and Lucifer, and the archangels can not start their battle until they possess their vessels. And since they are angels, they cannot possess human bodies without their permission.<sup>28</sup> So, by not saying the word "yes," the Winchesters can delay the apocalypse. And, through teamwork with Castiel and Crowley, they finally send Michael and Lucifer to a cage in Hell and stop the apocalypse altogether (S05E22). In this mission, they enjoy the guidance of another archangel, Gabriel, who tells them the secret of Lucifer's cage (S05E18); they also receive a little help from God, who reminds them that no one can control humans' life but themselves.

Clearly, *SPN* has taken the central theme from *Rev*, referring to many of its sub-events, but what has changed here is much more than localizing events and bringing the story to the present. Even changing the playing teams is not surprising given the difference in viewing angles: *SPN* tells the story through the eyes of humans and describes their struggle for survival. What is essential in this change of narrative is that human beings have found an active role and adopt methods and playing tactics that are wholly humanistic but can overcome all supernatural forces.

The Winchesters know that the biblical apocalypse has little consideration for humans as actors. They know that if they play according to their opponents' plan, they may be able to save some people, but they can not save them all (S05E18). But this is not just a matter of words; *SPN* has dedicated almost an entire season to show what happens if humans fail. In this season, the story takes place in a parallel universe. The two brothers had said "yes" to the archangels in this alternate universe, a choice that allows the biblical apocalypse to unfold. In this alternate world, Michael and his angels had have killed Lucifer and most of the demons, but their battle continues with their hunting other humans one by one (S12).

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<sup>28</sup> For more information about angelic possession, see section 3. 8.

Similarly, in another episode, Dean Winchester travels to a possible future in which he has had not said "yes" to Michael, but Sam has. Therefore, the demons had won the game instead of the angels. That world is also a ruin in which demons kill people one by one (S05E04). *SPN* represents the biblical apocalypse as a zero-sum game for humans; they will be saved if they win, they will be devastated if they lose.

To win this life and death game, the Winchesters make friend with others (even non-humans) and work as a team or community, trusting in their normal abilities (such as the distinction between right and wrong). This lifestyle opens the gates to the second half of *SPN*'s apocalyptic game, which happens after stopping the biblical apocalypse. After Michael and Lucifer are exiled to Hell, their followers, angels and demons, remain on Earth, trying to conquer the world. The Winchesters face many adventures and win them all. But in the end, they conclude that their adventurous life is not their own life but the entertainment and imagination of the God who writes. Here is the beginning of *SPN*'s Neo-Humanistic apocalypse.

## **5. 2. *SPN*'s Neo-Humanistic Apocalypse**

After too many adventures, victories, and defeats, the Winchesters conclude that no matter how hard they try, or much they think they are free, they remain captive to the story God is writing for them. So they decide to deal with the problem fundamentally and eliminate the root cause of their hard life. They have understood in the story of God's sister that the world needs balance, and everything is destroyed by destroying God. Therefore, there is no other way but to remove God and replace him with a god who maintains the balance of the world, a god who no longer plays with people as simply as toys.

Peter Paik, in his book, *From Utopia to Apocalypse: Science Fiction and the Politics of Catastrophe*, deals with this topic. From a political point of view, Paik claims that by purely human effort, utopia is not accessible. "Accordingly," Paik argues, "ideological programs seeking to establish 'universal freedom and prosperity,' whether it takes the form of Soviet communism or neoliberal capitalism, are doomed to inflict bloodshed on a massive scale in the name of peace and liberty" (Paik 2010, 6). The concept of god(s) cannot

solve this problem. "The paradise that these gods create," Paik continues, "maintains, to be sure, a horrifying and tragic reminder of the old world: a memory park that commemorates the climactic battle between the lords of light and the prince of darkness..." (ibid, 14). He concludes that the rise of superhumans is a revolutionary transformation from classic gods to some transcendent alternatives who could "fulfill the highest potential of any radical political program by founding a new order and a new epoch in human history" (ibid, 14-15). This attitude towards the concept of god and godhood can be seen in *SPN*, although Paik does not refer to the show.

Of course, *SPN* does not offer, at least directly, a political theory, and its heroes have no superpower but their humanity and in certain cases, when they acquire an unusual power, they do their best to get rid of it. In this sense, *SPN* doesn't quite fit Paik's argument. But the idea of replacing God with a better version to prevent human society from apocalyptic catastrophes is the show's heart. As discussed earlier (3. 1. 8), in *SPN*, several creatures claim to be gods, but none of them are qualified because all of them are creatures! Regarding the concept of creation, the first qualified alternative to God is His Sister, Amara, but she is not interested in godhood (S15E08). The second nominee is Death. Death is not created, is as old as God (S05E21), and powerful enough to be a god.

## **5. 2. 1. Death as a God**

Worshipping the Death as a god and its mythology has a long history. This subject is beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it is worth taking a brief look at it from a philosophical-moral point of view. In "Euthanasia and Christian vision," Gilbert Meilaender offers an important discussion about life and death as a god. Referring to Karl Barth, Meilaender states

[i]n short, life is a great good, but not the greatest (which is fidelity to God). Death, the final enemy of life, [... is the same]. The human mind can take and has quite naturally taken two equally plausible attitudes toward death. ... [T]he human being, in a majestic transcendence of the limits of earthly life, might seek to soar beyond the limits of finitude and find his good elsewhere. If death is of no consequence, we may seek it in

exchange for some important good [which may be a god]. ... Such a view, finding good only in earthly life, can find none in suffering and death. (Meilaender 1982, 471)

In this regard, Death can become a god. In *SPN*, Death itself and is willing to be one. At first, the Winchesters decide to help it kill God and His Sister; but they soon realize that Death can never be a good god for humans; Death thinks only about destruction and establishing its fundamental rule: the dead must remain dead. As might be expected, the Winchesters do not accept a god who is not humanistic, so they eliminate Death from the list of gods. Therefore, the only remaining option is Jack, Lucifer's raised-as-a-human son.

## **5. 2. 1. Human as God**

Jack was born when Lucifer possessed the president of the United States, who had an affair with his secretary, Kaley (S12). When the angels find out that a Nephilim, whose father is an archangel, is being born, they try to kill the fetus and the mother. On the other hand, Demons seek the birth of a baby to control him because he will be the most powerful creature. Castiel saves the mother and fetus, staying with them until delivery. Jack's mother also gives all her motherly love to him while she is pregnant. She knows that her body cannot bear the birth of this baby, and she will die giving him birth. So, she records her voice for his not-yet-born child and talks to him for several hours. Eventually, Jack is born and immediately becomes a young man. He is mighty, and by killing Lucifer and Michael, he puts an end to all the adventures of the angels.

Jack is the most potent being because he has both the human soul and the archangel grace. This power is what makes all supernatural beings keenly interested in him. However, the Winchesters and Castiel see him as a family member and raise him as a human being. Of course, parenting a super-powerful Nephilim is not easy, especially when he is a six-month infant with a young man's body. And it becomes more

challenging when Jack loses his human soul<sup>29</sup> and accidentally kills Marry Winchester (Sam and Dean's resurrected-by-Amara mother). The Winchester family never gives up on Jack and helps him regain his human soul during a trip to the Garden of Eden.

Finally, this mighty being, who is also a human being, absorbs all the power of God and His sister and becomes the world's most desirable god: a human-god.

This new god expresses what we can take as the manifesto of a Neo-Humanist god:

In a way... I'm already there. Everywhere. I'm me. I'm around. I'll be in every drop of falling rain, every speck of dust and in the sand, in the rocks, and the sea. And [...] answers [to people's questions] will be in each of them. Maybe not today, but someday. People don't need to pray to me or to sacrifice to me. They just need to know that I'm already a part of them and to trust in that. I won't be hands-on. Chuck put himself in the story. That was his mistake. But I learned from you and my mother and Castiel that... when people have to be their best... they can be. And that's what to believe in (Jack: S15E19).

### **5. 2. 3. SPN's Original Apocalyptic Perspective (SOAP)**

In the world of *SPN*, God, as described above, has created humans and provided them with some general, raw schemes or game plans. To play these games, God has given humans two capacities: the soul and free will. With the power of the soul, humans distinguish between good and evil, and with free will, they choose to do what is right. In other words, the plans that God has drawn for human beings are only to help them to be as human as possible, and they are free to act on these plans as they want or not to act on them at all. What is important is that man learns from this experience and knows that whatever happens to

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<sup>29</sup> Jack selflessly burns his human soul to destroy Michael (E14E12), and because he lacks a soul, he loses his good human feelings and the power to distinguish between good and evil.



him is his responsibility. Therefore, neither fate/destiny nor any supernatural power (if any, even God Himself) can force humans to carry out any of these schemes.

If these schemes are considered games, winning is simply deciding to play and try, and losing is giving up and refusing to play the game. Whoever wins will receive Paradise, which is nothing but the joy of living in the happiest moments of life, and whoever gives up will go to Hell, which is nothing but daily, fruitless, repetitive efforts in life. Humans can win these games by loving others and seeing their goodness in the goodness of others. They also need to unite with others and use the human's collective knowledge to win.

*SPN* says that the apocalypse is one of these schemes or game plots--something that happens to all human beings everywhere and at all times. In the apocalyptic drama, everyone has to experience every day and learn from these experiences at any moment. Apocalypse, as *SPN* claims, is not the end of everything until human beings want it to be the end of everything. This perspective is true about death too. Even beyond human comprehension and experience, death is just a suggested plan, and we, humans, can choose not to die.

# CHAPTER 6

## CONCLUSION

This thesis is an interdisciplinary study in religious studies and film studies, dealing with apocalyptic television. Apocalyptic film/T.V. is, of course, about an apocalypse--in this thesis, defined as "a narrative genre in which a revelation discloses a transcendent reality which is both temporal, insofar as it refers to eschatological salvation in an ambiguous time which could be (simultaneously) in the past, present, and future, and spatial insofar as it involves interactions with another supernatural world." This definition is a modified one based on that devised by John Collins (see 1. 2. 3). An apocalyptic film is a filmmaker's effort to express their views about the world through the lens of an apocalyptic worldview. Therefore, apocalyptic films develop an atmosphere, a lifestyle, a set of beliefs, and values that result from and embody that worldview. In the approach taken here, an apocalyptic film could tell different stories about different aspects of an "end time," but it could not just be about apocalyptic events; a truly apocalyptic film must develop an apocalyptic perspective. A perspective here is what shapes an individual's thoughts, attitudes, and practices. Like a game, a perspective includes rules, roles, players, and commentaries.

This thesis aims to analyze the apocalyptic narratives and themes informing a single T.V. series, *Supernatural* (SPN). This series is the longest-running show built around the theme of the apocalypse. This study seeks to answer several questions: First, what are the significant differences between the SPN's view and apocalyptic religious texts, especially the *Book of Revelation*, and how does SPN differ from other related apocalyptic motion pictures. Further, what do these differences entail or suggest? In a broad sense, I tried to determine what solutions the show offers to critiques of the limits to or problems with religious apocalyptic narratives and theologies. For example, how does one logically reconcile religious traditions and discourses of kindness and love with the presence of apocalyptic narrative violence? Or, how is it possible for human beings to be creatures with free will and self-determination but also subject to an inevitable destiny of being destroyed in the aftermath of an apocalyptic battle of supernatural forces? SPN describes a universe in which such questions are answered.

SPN offers a complex worldview and cosmology that makes it an ideal case for exploring how motion pictures interact with more traditional apocalyptic narratives. In its handling of the motif of the apocalypse,

the series has at least four unique aspects. First, unlike most of the current trend of 21st-century apocalyptic cinema, which has more political aspects and deals with the issues of the modern world (climate change, terrorism, etc.), this series entirely focuses on religious concepts and traditional matters. Second, in *Supernatural*, despite many references to religious themes and sources, the characters are by no means religious. They show no interest in religion and do not even consider themselves worthy of the salvation that religion promises its followers. The third outstanding characteristic of *SPN* is its defamiliarization of some of the most famous religious clichés. For example, most of the angels in this series are evil and hated creatures (see section 4. 1. 3). As well, the Prophets in this series have entirely different characteristics and functions from what is traditionally accepted; they may even be atheists (see section 4. 1. 1. B)! Instead of portraying familiar religious images, *SPN* introduces novel motives and characters. For example, it talks about angelic possession (see section 3. 7) or details the nature of demons (see section 4. 1. 2). And, most importantly, it fully humanizes God (see section 3. 8).

And, finally, the *SPN* sees and narrates the apocalypse from a human perspective in our ordinary space-time concepts. That is, in *SPN*, apocalyptic events occur in the present time in the world as we know it, and the focus is on humans and their role in the events, not supernatural beings. This approach is unique because, in almost all cinematic narratives of the apocalypse, either the events take place in imaginary spaces and imaginary times, or the creatures involved in the story are superhuman, or both. But *SPN*'s world is our world, its story happens in our timeline, and its main characters, the Winchester brothers, are ordinary human beings with no superpowers. This latter feature paves the way for analyzing the show's apocalyptic narrative from a humanistic point of view.

This study concentrates on the apocalyptic perspective presented in *SPN* and introduced its unique approach to the apocalypse. I called this approach '*SPN*'s original apocalyptic perspective' (SOAP). To derive SOAP, I applied Game Theory to analyze SOAP. But is Game Theory's modeling methodology applicable to *SPN*? Yes, *SPN* narrates a series of zero-sum, life and death games whose players are the Winchester brothers on one side and supernatural beings on the other. The game field in *SPN* is the

apocalypse, and the rules of the game are the apocalyptic worldview. Their strategy of playing, how they play, and the tools each party uses to win is determined by a set of 'rules' derived from their ethos, lifestyle, belief, and values systems. The result of all these games is predictable: the Winchesters always win.

The question here is not 'why' the Winchesters win. They win because *SPN* is a T.V. show, and networks don't like to kill their show stars and lose their audience/customers and profit! The question is 'how' the Winchesters always win. To be a successful T.V. series running for 15 seasons, you cannot just miraculously save your heroes; you must satisfy your audience. The audience needs a coherent and logical game whose parties play fair and rely on logical analysis and planning, not just luck and superpowers.

Throughout this thesis, I show that the *SPN*'s plot offers a multi-level logical game, and the players play each level rationally. The Winchesters win the beginner and intermediate levels. These levels are about survival. They play with supernatural beings. The winner lives and continues the game, whereas the loser is doomed. But the advanced level, the finale, is not just about survival; it's about ending "the game." The Winchesters play with the "game maker," God Himself. If the Winchesters win, the game will end, and if God wins, the game will continue. But how can humans defeat God? SOAP is the answer to this question.

SOAP describes the world as a game. This game is played in the world which we know, and at the time we experience. It consists of two teams. One team is humans, and the other team is supernatural beings, from monsters and demons to the pagan gods, the angels, and even God Himself. In this game, each team has its own powers and free will to apply its powers. Humans are the weakest physically, but they have three special powers relying on which they can always win. First, they can experiment and learn from experiences. So they can overcome their weaknesses and strengthen their strengths. This power means human beings should never despair and always look for a new way to victory/survival. Second, they can unite with each other (and even with their competitors), acting as a team/community. This power allows them to form and maintain groups. These groups are like families who both support their members and sacrifice for each other to play the games with double strength. And, third, human beings have the ability to distinguish between good and bad. This last power is actually the most important one. While other players

can benefit to some extent from the first two special powers, learning and uniting, this third power is in the hands of human beings alone, and no one else, not even God, has access to that power. This is because the source of this power is the human soul, and God has only bestowed human beings with the soul. The existence of this power accompanied by free will enables human beings, ultimately, to win all games.

Is SOAP more compatible with humanistic perspectives or religious ones? Obviously, SOAP portrays features of both perspectives. It recognizes the existence of God and other celestial beings and proves their interference in human affairs. It also acknowledges free will and the human soul as God-given gifts. However, at the same time, SOAP claims that human beings are more powerful than all other beings and can overcome everything and everyone by relying on their knowledge, experiences, and cooperative abilities. In this sense, SOAP is too humanistic to be religious and too religious to be humanistic. It is both of them and none of them; SOAP is Neo-Humanistic.

Neo-Humanism is a bridge between the deepest layers of God-centered theistic belief and the most extreme levels of humanism. Let us consider two solid poles; one is theistic/religious beliefs, and the other is a thoroughly humanistic frame. At the core of the religious pole, a god has created human beings and determined their fate. Whether one knows it or not, this God is present in all moments of their lives and leads them to a predetermined destiny. According to this belief, it is human's duty to be utterly obedient to the god and organize their life affairs accordingly. At the same time, they have no right to object and must accept God's will as absolute. At the heart of the humanistic pole, either there is no god, or if there has been a god once, this god is now dead and has no influence upon or connection to human life. According to this belief, human beings are alone in this world and must solve all their problems by uniting themselves. There is no transcendental force that can help, but, at the same time, there is no problem that cannot be solved by relying on human science, experience, and learning.

Each of these poles faces limitations. At the God-centered one, we have a god who gives human beings free will but does not allow them to use it truly. It is a paradox because God cannot perform cruelty and be considered merciful and just and at the same time. At the human-centered pole, we have human beings who

know that overcoming or putting to rest more significant religious or metaphysical questions--the origins of life, the inevitability of death, the mysteries of consciousness, and experience of free will--is beyond their ability. However, by bracketing out all of these issues, they still emphasize that they can solve all problems by relying only on their knowledge through teamwork.

What is clear is that both poles have drawbacks and attractions. But, is it possible to bring these two closer together and, to some extent, combine them? The answer seems to be yes, but not based on the above images of two solid and separate poles. In order to bring these two perspectives closer together, we should see them rather as forming a continuum, a spectrum. Incidentally, in reality, these perspectives are more in line with spectrums because neither of these two poles is 100% solid, and they show different levels of strengths and weaknesses in different cases. For example, the humanist perspective does not allow supernatural and metaphysical powers present in religious perspectives to enter its world. Still, it accepts the social characteristics of religion as a humanistic achievement.

On the other hand, most religious/theist perspectives, to some extent, affirm human freedom and, incidentally, offer a system of reward and punishment based on this freedom. In this way, each perspective shapes a spectrum from a hard, dark end to a soft, bright end. Regarding the analogy of spectrum, religious and humanist perspectives can be linked in two ways.

The first way is to bring these two spectrums closer together from their soft and bright ends. In other words, one can ignore the conflict areas and weak spots of each (as mentioned above) by emphasizing the similarities and strength of each, striking a balance in which both religious ideals and humanist achievements remain. Charles Taylor (see 1.4.2) is one of those to have linked humanism and religious beliefs in this way. He is deeply concerned for "preserving key humanist insights, an abiding commitment to moral pluralism, and the sincerity of his religious faith ...[and] insists on transcendence as the best hope for securing the continued commitment to the moral legacy of humanism in the west" (Schoenberg, 197). In this respect, Taylor presents a harmonious integration of these two perspectives in his Transcendent Humanism.

However, this first way has a significant drawback: some of the fundamental problems of both main perspectives remain and may also extend to the integrated approaches. That is, for example, in humanism, the existence and influence of supernatural beings are still denied or ignored, but their impact on human life is recognized; that is, there is still a god out there who will punish Nimrod and Sisyphus and the other disobedient, and there is no escape from such a fate. Or, in the religious/theist perspective, God still gives human beings free will but restricts its use.

The second way is to stick these two spectrums together from their hard and dark cores. At first glance, it seems impossible, but opposite poles attract each other! Neo-Humanism proposes a way forward in which each perspective covers the other's weaknesses. Neo-Humanism is a kind of perspective whose worldview has roots in the deepest layers of religious belief, and its lifestyle is the same as the most exclusive levels of humanism. Neo-Humanism postulates that if there is a god, as theism says, and that this god created human beings with free will and the ability to distinguish between good and evil, His creation will inevitably be above everything and able to do everything. And more importantly, even the Creator God Himself does not want, cannot, and should not interfere in his affairs. The role of such a god is to be out there, everywhere, and the people's duty is, as Jack says (see section 4. 2. 1), to just know that He is already a part of them and to trust in that; and when they have to be their best, they must know that they can be.

In this way, we have identified four different perspectives (religious/theist, traditional humanist, transcendence humanist, and Neo-Humanist), each with its own worldview and ethos. Each worldview shapes and describes its followers' universe, and each perspective's ethos or lifestyle tells its followers how they should live in this universe. To explain these perspectives better, I compare how they deal with a common situation. I use the apocalyptic situation to express this comparison because it is a significant, powerful, long-lasting part of our narrative imagination. We can imagine the end of the world, and it is and has always been one of the main concerns of humanity. In this comparison, we examine how each perspective might answer three questions: Why the apocalypse happens? Is it inherently a good thing or a bad thing? What is the duty of man towards it?



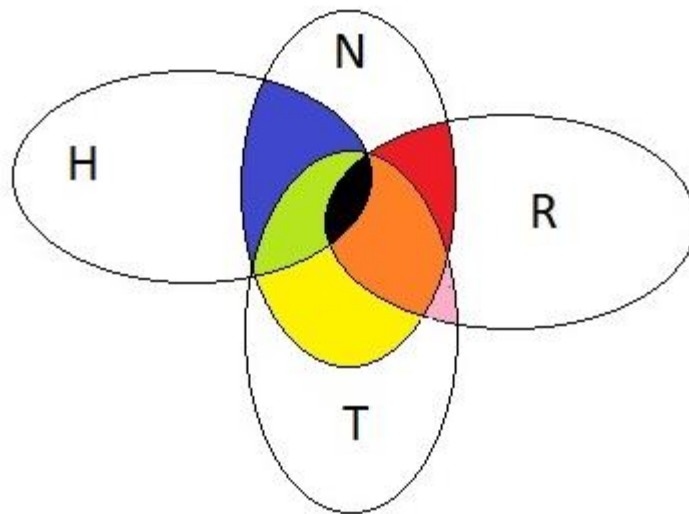
A religious/theistic perspective suggests that apocalypse happens because it is God's will and the final part of His plan for His creatures. Therefore, it is a good thing. Accordingly, people should welcome it with open arms and, relying on their faith, hope to be saved from this catastrophe. A traditional humanist perspective sees the apocalypse as the result of human wrongdoing towards nature and describes it as a bad thing. However, it is not inevitable, and people can prevent it by trusting in science and treating nature right. Transcendence humanism, like traditional humanism, holds that the apocalypse results from human wrongdoing towards nature. Still, it does not reject the possibility of supernatural beings' (including but not limited to God) interference in it. Therefore, based on a transcendence humanist perspective, the apocalypse could be simultaneously for the best and worst: functionally, an apocalyptic perspective can be good because whether it is related to superhuman realm or not, thinking about it can make human beings stronger; and, it can be bad because it necessarily brings death and destruction.<sup>30</sup> Accordingly, this perspective suggests that people should trust science, treat nature right, and hope that what is beyond their boundaries supports their efforts.

Like religious/theist perspectives, Neo-Humanism considers the apocalypse as God's or other celestial beings' plan; but like traditional humanism labels it as a bad thing. In a Neo-Humanist perspective, people must trust in their free will and relying on humans' abilities and achievements, using SPN's exaggerations, fight the plan maker(s) to change the plan entirely. One may reasonably ask and object that when a Neo-

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- <sup>30</sup> Such paradoxes are not uncommon. Marx, for example, both praises capitalism and critiques its shortcomings, which is perhaps part of the reason Dickens opens his *Tale of Two Cities* with a depiction of a world anchored in paradox: "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way – in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only."

Humanist engages in such a 'fight,' what is it that they are fighting? The short answer is God, but it needs a more profound explanation.

All generalizations can become overextended; I am attempting to articulate ideal types to understand better the similarities, differences, and overlaps of these four perspectives. A Venn diagram is helpful in this case (Figure 6.1).



*Figure 6. 2. Venn Diagram of the Four Perspectives*

In this diagram, R stands for the religious/theist perspective, H for traditional humanism, T for transcendence humanism, and N for Neo-Humanism. The diagram attempts to model shared beliefs and lifestyles of these perspectives concerning an apocalyptic scenario or situation. At the center of the diagram, the black area points to what all the perspectives accept. It could be, for instance, the occurrence of an apocalypse. The red area shows what only Neo-Humanism and religious/theist views accept, but traditional humanism and transcendence humanism reject, such as the apocalypse being a part of God's plan. The blue area is the common thoughts of Neo-Humanism and traditional humanism, such as trusting "only" in humans' abilities. The yellow area points to what only is common shared between Transcendence humanism

and Neo-Humanism. The role of other celestial beings rather than God can be placed in this area. And the pink area is what both religious/theist perspective and transcendence humanism accept, which is hoping for the help of supernatural forces. The green area is shared between all types of humanisms. It can be, for example, skepticism towards the goodness of the apocalypse or the importance of humans' abilities. (Remember that in the blue area, Humans' abilities are the only reliable and acceptable basis for lifestyle, but in the green zone, just "the importance" of these abilities are emphasized.) The orange area covers what is accepted among all the perspectives except for traditional humanism. It could be, for example, the presence of supernatural beings in the apocalyptic story. (There is also a slight difference between the blue area and the orange one. Religious/theist and Neo-Humanist perspectives emphasize the role of God or other supernatural beings in the apocalypse, but transcendence humanism only accepts the possibility of such a thing. That is, what these three perspectives have in common is that transcendence, unlike tradition, does not entirely deny the existence and effectiveness of such forces, and the other two admit their existence.)

Pushing off this attempt to articulate the Neo-Humanist perspective by comparing it with four others, the main challenge of this discussion can be tackled. The main challenge is that Neo-Humanism sounds too illogical and surreal to be actually believed. For example, as mentioned earlier, how does a Neo-Humanist engage in a fight with God? The answer to this question comes when we recall that this thesis talks about a particular universe, *SPN's* universe, a subjunctive space within our lived-in world, created by a television series. And Neo-Humanism is perfectly compatible with *SPN's* Universe. In this universe, there is a God who has created human beings and gave them the ability to overcome any beings. For example, He gives them a pistol effective on "everything" that damages the shooter as much as it hurts the beaten one. Is not this gun a metaphor for the combination of free will and the human soul, both of which are divine gifts?

Supernatural has recreated a universe whose internal logic is consistent with its events and laws. In this universe, it is quite possible to believe in Neo-Humanism and act based on it. But to see how rational

and acceptable Neo-Humanism can be in our world, we need to see how similar the *SPN*'s universe is to the world we know.

In short, this thesis shows that the *Supernatural* T.V. series depicts a universe whose *rules* I explicate through the concept of Neo-Humanism. However, its creators may not have such an intention and are not even aware of this theory. Perhaps one day, they might read this analysis.

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## **Appendix 1: List of main characters of *Supernatura* in alphabetical order**

**Amara**, played by Emily Swallow, also known as The Darkness, is God's sister who was put in a cage by God and Lucifer right after the creation. She finally gets free when Dean Winchester gets the Mark of Cain, the key to the cage, removed from his arm. She is fond of earth and finally consents to be devoured by her brother. She is later transferred into Jack, who absorbed God's power.

**Azazel**, played by Fredric Lehne, is one of the four yellow-eyed demons and princes of Hell who kills Mary and John Winchester. He is also the person who tried to release Lucifer from Hell. He finally gets killed by Dean Winchester with a colt able to kill almost all the creatures.

**Billie**, played by Lisa Berry, first a reaper, becomes the new Death after the old Death's death. She is against Winchester's coming to life after death and always tries to make them stay dead. She is finally absorbed into The Empty by Castiel, who gives in himself to The Shadow.

**Bobby Singer**, played by Jim Beaver, who first got into hunting when his wife got involved in supernatural happenings, is a father figure to Dean and Sam Winchester. While he is alive, he is the main source of information for the Winchester brothers. He finally gets killed by Dick Roman, the leader of Leviathans, and turns into a vengeful ghost. His ghost comes to peace when the Winchester's burn a flask of his that kept him attached to the earth.

**Castiel**, played by Misha Collins, is an angel of the Lord who first plays by God's rules and, after getting familiar with Winchesters, acts out of the free will. He is a loyal companion to the Winchester brothers who finally sacrifices himself for Dean Winchester by giving in to the Shadow and being absorbed into the empty. He finally helps Jack, the new God, to rebuild Heaven.

**Chuck Shurley**, played by Rob Benedict, is a writer who is first thought to be a prophet of the Lord but later reveals himself to be God Himself. He created the universe and all its creatures in the first place, betrayed His sister, put her in a cage, and then left, resulting in corruption of the whole world. He finally remains powerless as Jack, a Nephilim, takes away his powers.

**Crowley**, played by Mark Sheppard, is the king of crossroad demons who gets to be the king of Hell after Lucifer is put back into his cage. He is a mischievous character who is one of the greatest enemies of the Winchesters in the beginning and one of their biggest friends in the end. He finally dies, sacrificing himself to save Dean and Sam Winchester from Lucifer.

**Dean Winchester**, played by Jensen Ackles, is a brave and skilled hunter and the son of John and Mary Winchester. He is a kind brother to Sam Winchester, and he always strives to make up for what his mother and father couldn't accomplish as parents. He dies about 111 times on the show and gets revived 110 times. His final death happens when he impales upon a metal stake in a hunt.

**Death**, played by Julian Richings, is one of the horsemen of the apocalypse in the Bible. He is as old as God, or maybe even older. He partly helps the Winchesters put Lucifer back in his cage and get Sam Winchester his soul back from Hell. He finally gets killed by Dean Winchester with his own scythe.

**Jack**, played by Alexander Calvert, is the only Nephilim who is an offspring of a human being and an archangel. He is the son of Lucifer and Kelly Kline, the president's secretary. He is raised by the morals of his three fathers; Castiel the angel, Sam Winchester, and Dean Winchester. He finally absorbs God's powers and becomes the new God, making Heaven a better place.

**John Winchester**, played by Jeffrey Dean Morgan, is the father of Dean and Sam Winchester, who loses his wife when their second son, Sam, is six months old. He becomes a hunter and tries to get revenge on the demon who killed her wife. He finally dies when he trades his life for his older son's life.

**Lilith**, played by Katherine Boecher, Sierra McCormick, and Rachel Pattee, is the first demon Lucifer created. Throughout the series, she tries to open 66 seals to free Lucifer. Finally, the last seal is broken as Sam Winchester kills her.

**Lucifer**, played by Mark Pellegrino, is one of the four archangels who got trapped in a cage in Hell when despite God's orders, he didn't bow down to humanity. He is the first fallen angel and the original

ruler of Hell. He is one of the main enemies of the Winchesters and finally gets killed by an archangel blade used by Dean Winchester.

**Mary Winchester**, played by Samantha Smith, is a retired hunter killed by a demon named Azazel because she has sold him her soul to save her husband. She is finally revived by Amara, sister of God, 33 years after her death and gets killed again by accident in the hands of a Nephilim named Jack.

**Meg**, played by Nicki Aycox and Rachel Miner, is Azazel's daughter and a demon who changes sides several times throughout the series. She falls in love with Castiel, the angel, and finally gets killed by Crowley when she tries to go through a plan by Winchesters.

**Metatron**, played by Curtis Armstrong, is the scribe of God. One who wrote the tablets of beings, angels, demons, leviathans, and others at the beginning of creation. Metatron lives among humans and as an editor. By dominating the tablet of the angels, he seizes the kingdom of heaven and claims to be God. Of course, he loses his power and is forced to live like a human being. During this period, and at God's request, he critiqued His/Chuck's books. Finally, in the fight against Amara, Metatron sacrifices himself so that Winchester and Castiel can escape Amara.

**Rowena**, played by Ruth Connell, is a professional witch and Crowley's mother who is just like her son; an enemy in the beginning and a friend by the end. She finally sacrifices herself for the Winchesters resulting in her death. After her death, her soul goes to Hell, and she becomes the queen of Hell.

**Ruby**, played by Katie Cassidy and Genevieve Padalecki, is a demon devoted to Lucifer who has a bad influence on Sam Winchester. She tricks him into drinking blood and killing Lilith, which breaks the last seal to Lucifer's cage. She finally gets killed by the Winchester brothers after her deceit is revealed to them.

**Sam Winchester**, played by Jared Padalecki, is a warmhearted and skilled hunter who left his normal life as a college student and joined his brother and father in hunting monsters. Since he was only six months

old, he was destined to be the person who would break the seal on Lucifer's cage in Hell and set him free. He dies eight times throughout the series, but his final death is based on natural causes when he gets old.

## **Appendix 2: Season by Season Summary of *Supernatural***

### **Season 1:**

Season one begins with Dean Winchester's asking for his brother's help to find their father, John, whom they haven't heard of for several days. The younger brother, Sam, a college student, finally consents to do so after his girlfriend gets killed in the exact way their mother did; by bursting into flames on the ceiling. Throughout the first season, they get help from their father's journal and find him. Altogether, they follow the family business and try to hunt demons and monsters, finally confronting Azazel, the demon who started it all by killing the mother of the family, Mary Winchester. Eventually, the Winchester brothers can't do away with Azazel as he possesses their father. All that is achieved is for Sam to shoot his father in the leg and make Azazel flee. Finally, they have an accident with a truck whose driver is demonically possessed on the way to the hospital.

### **Season 2:**

Season two begins in the hospital where the Winchesters are kept after the car accident caused by a demon who gets orders from Azazel. While John and Sam seem to have almost recovered from the injuries, Dean is in a coma struggling with death. He is finally saved when John makes a deal with Azazel offering him his soul in return for Dean staying alive. The rest of the season follows the brothers trying to kill Azazel, now as an act of revenge for both of their parents. Along the way, Sam gets killed, and Dean, being the kind older Brother, makes a deal with a demon to make Sam alive, which costs him his soul. Eventually, a doorway to Hell opens, allowing many demons to run away from Hell. Finally, Dean manages to kill Azazel with his father's help, whose spirit has also escaped from Hell. The second season ends with many demons having gotten released from Hell and Sam promising to find a way to save Dean in the year he has left.

### **Season 3:**

Season three mostly goes around the Winchesters tracking down the hundreds of demons, including Lilith, a mighty demon who has escaped from Hell. Bobby Singer, a friend of John's and a hunter himself, helps them along the way by providing them with information about these demons and other supernatural characters. Furthermore, Bobby, as a father figure, and Sam make constant efforts to find a way to get Dean out of the deal, while Dean doesn't care about what is going to happen and just tries to enjoy his every moment. They later get accompanied by a demon named Ruby, who claims to know how to get Dean out of his pact and protect them against Lilith. Surprisingly, when the time comes, Lilith cannot do much to hurt Sam; however, as the deal suggested, the other Brother isn't saved. The last scene of the third season shows Dean hanging in Hell.

#### **Season 4:**

After some horrible months, Dean, still a human, gets miraculously saved from Hell. Bobby and Sam, surprised to see him again, try to help Dean find out who had saved him when they come across an angel of the Lord called Castiel, who tells Dean about the mission he is supposed to accomplish. The rest of the season follows the Winchesters, Bobby, Castiel, and his friend Uriel, the angel, trying to prevent Lilith and other demons from breaking 66 seals to unlock a cage in Hell, helping the fallen archangel, Lucifer, escape. With the help of Dean, who has now professionalized in torturing the Hell spirits, they try to discover who is behind this big plan when they understand that Uriel, alongside some other angels, has been trying to free Lucifer. Furthermore, Sam, who is now hanging out with Ruby, starts to get emotionally far from Dean, as he had started drinking demon blood to get stronger and destroy Lilith. Finally, when Sam succeeds in killing Lilith, he understands that Ruby had been tricking him all along, and killing Lilith was actually the last seal that had to be broken for Lucifer to get released from Hell. Dean helps Sam in killing Ruby, but it is too late, as Lucifer is now free.

#### **Season 5:**

The conflict between Michael and Lucifer that has started since Michael cast Lucifer out of Heaven will now turn into an apocalypse, which can destroy the human race. Archangel Michael is after Dean to



make him his vessel, while Lucifer is after Sam to make him his, so in season five, Dean and Sam, whose relationship is now full of mistrust, are targets of both Heaven and Hell. They do not want to take sides in this war and just get help from Bobby, Castiel, and Crowley, a powerful crossroad demon, to find a way to put Lucifer back in the cage. Along the way, Gabriel, the youngest archangel who is fond of human beings and hates to see his brothers fight, tells them that having the rings of the four horsemen is the key to opening the cage. After gaining the rings, Sam lets Lucifer possess him to take his control and put him back in the cage, but unfortunately, this does not go as planned. With the help of Chuck, a prophet of the Lord, Dean finds out about the battle's location to help Sam. However, Lucifer is more powerful and even gets to injure Bobby and explode Castiel. In the last moment, though, Sam, empowered by the Winchester's love, retakes control, opens the cage, and falls in, bringing with him Lucifer, Michael, and Adam, his half-brother and Michael's vessel. Surprisingly, Castiel, who God now resurrects, heals Bobby. Furthermore, just like he has promised Sam, Dean puts away hunting monsters and starts a new life with the love of his life and her son. The last scene of season five shows Sam standing outside the window, looking at Dean's new life.

### **Season 6:**

Season six begins about a year after the war, with Dean having a normal life for the first time after many years. Sam reveals himself to Dean after his life is involved in a supernatural act. Dean is hurt that Sam hasn't told him about his survival for a year. He finds out that he has been hunting monster alphas all this time with some other family members, including Samuel Campbell, their grandfather, who has also been resurrected. After Dean leaves his new life and joins them, he notices Sam's behavioral change. Castiel, who is mostly involved in a galactic war and tries to get as many souls as he can to win the war, tells them about Sam's lack of soul. Dean gets help from the horseman Death and gets Sam his soul back from Hell. He also finds out that Samuel has been working for Crowley, the new King of Hell, to locate purgatory, where every monster soul lies after death. Moreover, he gets to know about the fact that Castiel and Crowley have made a deal for each of them to get half of the souls in purgatory. He tries to reason with Castiel, but nothing works. As an act of opposition, Castiel removes the wall between memories of the past

year and a half in Sam's mind, resulting in him remembering all his tortures in Hell. Finally, betraying Crowley, Castiel opens the door to purgatory and devours all the souls, making him the new God.

### **Season 7:**

In season seven, Castiel, now the new God, is trying to finish his work, killing many angels in Heaven and people on earth. With the help of the horseman Death, the Winchesters convince Castiel to return the souls, which he does. However, in the process, the oldest beasts of purgatory, the Leviathans, get out, resulting in Castiel's explosion. Winchesters and Bobby, whom they lose eventually, are now faced with a completely new creature, trying to find the proper weapon to destroy these Leviathans. Moreover, Sam is now faced with the consequences of having his soul in Hell for a long time, which finally drives him insane. Dean, trying to find someone to help him, finds Castiel having amnesia. Castiel transfers Sam's hallucinations to himself. Dean and Sam, now with the help of Castiel, Crowley, Meg the demon, prophet Kevin, and the ghost of Bobby, end the Leviathans. This adventure ends up with Dean and Castiel in purgatory and Meg and Kevin in the hands of Crowley. With Bobby dead, Sam is now completely alone.

### **Season 8:**

Dean is now back from purgatory after trying to escape for a year. He finds out that after him missing, Sam has retired from hunting, which drives Dean mad. Their relationship is now a little damaged, as Dean believes that Sam did not care enough to even look for him. On the other hand, Sam is mad at Dean for helping a vampire get out of purgatory. Together, they find out that Kevin is now out of Crowley's hands, translating the demon tablet, a word of God on how to make all the demons go back to Hell and seal it forever. Along the way, the Winchesters also get to know about a knight of Hell, Abaddon. Moreover, they find a bunker that used to belong to a group of people called men of letters and is now full of lore and different weapons. Eventually, Kevin finds out about three trials that should be done to seal the Hell, all of which Sam accepts to accomplish. The trials make Sam wither little by little; however, he does not care,

and he strives to complete them. In the last trial, which is for him to cure a demon, he chooses Crowley and tries to make him a human again.

On the other hand, the three also find out about another tablet that can make all the angels go back to Heaven. Castiel, freed from purgatory by the power of an angel called Naomi, is now under her full control, spying on the Winchesters. Once again, the love between Winchesters and their friends helps Castiel retake control of himself and hide the angel tablet from both humans and angels. He later teams up with the scribe of God, Metatron, to complete the trials of the angel tablet.

In the last episode of season eight, Sam is interrupted by Abaddon while he is curing Crowley, but he pushes her away as Crowley is showing signs of humanity. Furthermore, Naomi finds out that Metatron is not trying to make angels turn back to Heaven, and he is actually trying to make all the angels fall, so she tries to stop him. Finally, Dean returns to Sam under an emotional breakdown, and they bury the hatchets for years of mistakes. Dean asks Sam not to complete the trial as he knows that he will die doing so. Sam stops, but he passes out. Metatron, on the other hand, betrays Castiel and removes his grace, making him a human. In the last scene of season eight, all the angels fall on earth.

### **Season 9:**

After the fall of angels, Sam goes into a coma. Dean gets help from the only angel he finds to be reliable; an angel named Ezekiel. Dean tricks Sam into accepting being possessed by Ezekiel so that he can heal his wounds from inside his body. Dean, Sam, Kevin, and prisoner Crowley now live in the bunker, trying to find a way to get rid of Abaddon, who wants to rule over Hell. Castiel, on the other hand, is trying to run away from all the angels who blame him for their fall. As time goes by, Sam understands that something is wrong with him. Ezekiel claims that if Dean tells Sam that he is being possessed, it would be dangerous for him. Eventually, Metatron comes to earth, and Ezekiel is revealed to be Gadreel, the former protector of Eden who let Lucifer inside. Metatron makes a deal with Gadreel about rebuilding Heaven, so

Gadreel refuses to leave Sam's body anymore, killing Kevin in addition. Dean and Castiel, with Crowley's help, warn Sam and help him cast the angel out. Sam, hurt to be tricked by Dean, tries to go on with hunting. Meanwhile, Castiel becomes the leader of angels on earth to defeat Metatron, and Dean and Crowley look for the proper weapon, the first blade and the Mark of Cain, to kill Abaddon. Eventually, Dean kills Abaddon, but the Mark starts to affect him, growing in him a desire to kill. Moreover, Gadreel, tired of Metatron's lies, joins Castiel and helps him break the angel tablet and make Metatron lose his powers. Now with more power, Dean tries to kill Metatron but gets stabbed and dies in Sam's arms. With Gadreel sacrificing himself to do a spell, Castiel can put Metatron in Heaven's dungeon. Finally, Sam summons Crowley to help him with Dean, but Crowley is there by his own choice. By putting the first blade in Dean's hand, he revives Dean as a demon.

#### **Season 10:**

At the beginning of season ten, Sam is looking for Dean, who has been missing since he got revived. He finally finds him with Crowley's help and finds out that Dean is a demon. He imprisons Dean in the bunker and tries to cure him. In the meantime, Castiel, who is getting weaker day by day, and Hannah, another angel, try to make everything alright in Heaven. Crowley can even help Castiel take a rogue angel's grace. Dean is finally a human again with Sam and Castiel's help, and they keep on hunting the monsters, but the effects of the Mark are still there. Without Dean knowing, Castiel, Sam, and a friend of theirs, Charlie, try to help him. With the help of Rowena, Crowley's mother and a powerful witch, they try to find the answer in the book of the damned that belongs to a powerful magician family. After Dean kills every member of the family to get revenge for killing Charlie, he understands more about the fatal effects of the Mark and summons the horseman Death to kill him. Death, however, reveals to him the consequences of removing the Mark without passing it on to the others. Killing Dean would unleash Darkness upon the world. Dean, instead, could kill Sam and be sent somewhere else so that Darkness stays sealed and the Mark doesn't have to be removed anymore. After Sam and Dean fight, Dean is about to kill Sam, but,

ironically, at the last second and out of his love for Sam, he kills Death. Finally, the Mark is removed, thanks to a spell Rowena finds in the book of the damned, and Darkness is released.

### **Season 11:**

Season eleven begins with Dean meeting a woman in black who thanks him for her freedom. In a hospital, where people are affected by an infection caused by the Darkness, Sam gets infected as well and asks God to help him. Eventually, he sees a reaper named Billie, who is disappointed in Death's death and promises Sam not to let him and Dean ever come back from dead. Dean finds the Mark on a baby in the hospital named Amara, and before he can take her, Crowley attacks him and takes the baby to Hell, where she feeds on demons and starts to grow. The brothers, alongside hunting monsters, look for ways to stop the Darkness. In the meantime, Sam starts to get visions, one of which shows Lucifer's cage, and he believes they come from God. Castiel finds Metatron and asks him for information about Darkness, and he understands that she is God's sister whom He betrayed and imprisoned at the beginning of the creation. Getting help from Crowley and Rowena, Sam goes to Lucifer's cage, asking him how to stop the Darkness, where he understands that the visions were from Lucifer, whose cage was now less powerful due to the rise of Darkness. He claims to be able to stop the Darkness under one condition; possessing Sam. Castiel and Dean try to help Sam fight Lucifer, which results in Lucifer possessing Castiel and ruling Hell. With the help of the Hands of God, some objects with God's power inside them, they try to destroy Amara, which does not work. Instead, she summons God, and He finally returns, causing everyone to find out Chuck was not a prophet of the Lord but God himself. Amara hurts Chuck causing Him to start dying, so Chuck tells them her weakness; the light of 10000 suns. They collect as many souls as they can and make a bomb, which Dean accepts to carry. He meets with Amara, who now regrets almost killing her Brother, and convinces her to forgive God, which she does. She summons Chuck there, and they leave, now as loving siblings. Finally, Amara leaves Dean with a thank you gift; his mother. Miles away, a British woman banishes Castiel in the bunker and shoots Sam taking him with her.

### **Season 12:**

Dean and Mary, his mother, now reunited after 33 years, find Sam in the hands of a British woman of letters. They save him, and they get to know about the British men of letters who are the new generation of the men of letters who are not fond of the hunters and want to change the hunting system. Sam and Dean, having every type of experience, know that they cannot be trusted, but Mary goes behind their back and starts working with them. After a little while, Sam also does so, which hurts Dean. Soon, they understand that these people are not trustworthy when they brainwash Mary and even kill some members of themselves. In the meantime, Lucifer changes his vessels constantly, finally landing in the president's body and impregnating his companion, Kelly, with a Nephilim. With the help of Castiel, Rowena, and Crowley, the Winchesters try to first warn and take care of Kelly and then put Lucifer back in the cage. Crowley, however, instead, imprisons him in his first vessel. By gaining the demons' trust, Lucifer can finally defeat Crowley and get out of Hell to get his child after he is born. With the Nephilim's birth coming, a rift to another universe starts to appear, where Sam and Dean are not even born to save the world from the apocalypse. There, Crowley sacrifices himself, helping Sam and Dean escape from Lucifer. Finally, when Castiel is getting out of the rift, he gets stabbed by Lucifer, and right before the rift is closed, Mary, who is trying to protect her sons, gets dragged into the rift by Lucifer. Season twelve ends with Dean grieving over Castiel's body and Sam seeing the newborn Nephilim, who has a grownup man's size.

### **Season 13:**

Season thirteen begins with the Nephilim, Jack, who runs away after getting scared of Dean and is looking for his father, whom he believes to be Castiel. Sam finally convinces him that he had better stay with him and Dean rather than wander about. They take care of Jack while trying to find a way to enter the apocalypse world and save their mother from Lucifer. Both Dean and Sam go through a phase of faith loss because of all the happenings. In the meantime, Lucifer escapes the Apocalypse World, and Castiel wakes up in The Empty, an afterlife for angels and demons, where they lay asleep forever after they die. There he drives The Shadow mad. This, along with Jack's prayers, makes him alive. Moreover, the Winchesters find a dream walker whose power can help Jack make another rift to the apocalypse world. Jack enters the

Apocalypse World, and there, he finds Mary and many other hunters trying to keep themselves safe from Michael, but he cannot go back. Finally, with Rowena's help and Gabriel's grace, the Winchesters can open a rift to the Apocalypse World and enter it, helping their mother and many other hunters to come to this world. Lucifer, on the other hand, teams up with Michael and kills Gabriel. Moreover, he steals Jack's grace and gets powerful, forcing Sam and Jack to kill one another. Once again, trying to help his brother, Dean lets Michael possess him only with half the power to control. In the end, Dean kills Lucifer using Michael's power, but his control is completely taken away by Michael, who betrays him.

#### **Season 14:**

In season fourteen, Sam is the leader of a big team of hunters who are now living with them in the bunker. He is also trying to find Dean after he has been missing with Michael. Furthermore, Jack is trying to adapt himself to human life. One day, Dean comes back to the bunker not knowing why Michael had suddenly left his body. They try to find out about Michael, while Jack starts to get sick. Rowena tells them that it is because of his angel and human sides, which are now imbalanced due to the lack of his grace. Dean, who had never trusted Jack as Sam and Castiel did, now regrets his past behaviors and tries to help Jack enjoy his last days. Jack dies, leaving the Winchesters and Castiel in mourning. They get the help of an angel expert who helps them by using Jack's soul to heal him. Castiel goes to Heaven, where Jack is happily living with his mother and trades his life for Jack's by making a deal with The Shadow, who hates him. The Shadow finally promises to take Castiel when he experiences a moment of true happiness, and Jack gets revived. Moreover, Michael once more takes over Dean's body as he has left a crack open in his mind. Using a mind link device, Sam and Castiel help Dean get out of a time loop in his mind and lock Michael in his mind. In the meantime, Jack uses part of his soul to help his friends against monsters. Secretly, Dean starts to make a box called Ma'lak Box to imprison himself and Michael for the rest of the time. Sam and Castiel try to convince him it is not the way which he first rejects, but he finally accepts to try and find another way. Finally, in a fight where Dean is not powerful anymore, and Michael leaves his body, he uses Rowena as a vessel, and Jack, using the last drops of his soul, destroys Michael, gets his

grace, and becomes powerful again. Having no soul, Jack commits a brutal act, which makes Mary disturbed. He accidentally kills Mary when he is annoyed at her and cannot bring her back, even with Rowena's help. Dean and Sam, hurt by what Jack had done, trick him into going inside the Ma'lack Box to prevent him from doing any more harm, and just before Castiel can ask them to get him out, Jack, urged on by Lucifer's hallucination, breaks free and escapes. On the other hand, Chuck, who has heard Castiel's prayers, appears and offers them an Equalizer that can kill Jack and the shooter at the same time. It makes Sam suspicious. Moreover, despite Jack's insisting on killing him, Dean still cares about Jack and cannot hurt him. Chuck, angry that his story is manipulated, kills Jack himself. Jack wakes up in the empty, where Billie wants to talk to him about a plan. In the meantime, Sam shoots the Equalizer to kill Chuck, which does not go as planned. Frustrated at their audacity, Chuck unleashes Darkness, and by the end of the season, Dean, Sam, and Castiel are surrounded by hundreds of souls of Hell.

#### **Season 15:**

In season fifteen, the true enemy of the Winchesters is God Himself. After trying to defeat every soul that has gotten out of Hell, they finally can do nothing but ask Rowena for help. Having no other choice, Rowena sacrifices herself and draws the souls inside herself, finally jumping into Hell and sealing it. Castiel, now being accused of being responsible for everything by Dean, leaves the bunker. Meanwhile, Chuck, who is now damaged by Sam's shooting, asks Amara for help, but she doesn't help Him, as she sees that He has not changed a bit. Chuck starts writing different versions of the end, in every one of which, one of the brothers gets to kill the other. Getting help from Sam's link to Chuck -because of the gunshot- and a note in the demon tablet that Donatello the prophet finds, they understand that God's weakness is His favorite, whom they find out to be Michael, who has now escaped his cage in Hell. Having a connection with Chuck, Sam understands that putting Him into a trap would end in severe consequences, so he helps Him get His full power back and wants Dean and Castiel to stop. Right when they are getting disappointed, they find Jack, who is resurrected by Billie and is trying to gain enough power to kill Chuck. As a part of Billie's plan, Jack also goes to Eden and gets a soul. Jack tells Castiel about Billie's plan, which is for him



to become a bomb to kill Chuck, Amara, and himself. In the meantime, Amara tries to convince God to stop destroying the world and traps Him in the bunker, but He manipulates time and space and absorbs Amara with her consent. Unlike Chuck's plan, Sam can talk Dean down to not kill him, resulting in Chuck's enragement and leaving. Moreover, they understand that Billie has been going through with this plan, just to remove Chuck and Amara and take over the world herself.

Dean finally gets to hurt Billie with her scythe, which makes her angry. While Sam and Jack are trying to save their friends from being destroyed by Chuck one by one, Dean and Castiel try to run away from Billie, who wants to end them. Finally, Castiel, knowing that only The Shadow can take Billie down, tells Dean about his deal and sacrifices himself to save Dean. This sacrifice results in Castiel and Billie being absorbed into empty. Michael comes to Sam, Dean, and Jack, who are the only people left in the world and claims to be in their team. They face Chuck and find Michael in Chuck's team, trying to make himself God's favorite again. Chuck, however, kills Michael. When He tries to kill Jack as well, He cannot, as Jack has absorbed all Chuck's power. Dean and Sam tell the now confused Chuck that Jack can also absorb the power of conflicts around him. They leave Chuck as a human, and Jack, as the new God, makes everything normal again and goes to Heaven to have a new start. Sam and Dean have a little happy time together until they get involved in a hunting trip, and Dean gets severely hurt by a metal spike. After having his last words with Sam, he asks Sam if it is okay for him to leave, and with Sam's agreement, he does. He goes to Heaven and reunites with Bobby, who tells him that Jack and Castiel have helped make Heaven a better place. Finally, he drives along a road in Heaven, waiting for Sam to arrive. Sam, who eventually dies of natural causes, joins Dean on a bridge in Heaven.