

Coin Operated Boy

counteragent

Achievement in Innovation - Winner 2011
Achievement in Vidding - Winner 2011

The review below may contain spoilers for *Supernatural* through the end of season 6.

Nicky: I follow *Supernatural*, but I am in the very outskirts of SPN fandom - if at all - so I'm sure there's a lot in *Coin Operated Boy* that I'm not fully understanding and appreciating. That said, I think we can all appreciate the amount of thought and work that went into this vid. The thing I love most is that there is so much fannish self-expression in it. You can really feel that the vidder was looking inward and analysing her relationship to the character, the pairing, the show and the fandom. It's certainly not a viewpoint that everyone will share, either within or without the fandom, but it's so undeniably the vidder's viewpoint and her honest emotional reaction to a source that she feels very strongly about. I can't think of a better reason to make a vid. Especially one that lets you shoot your own footage!

HWG: As soon as I wrapped my head around the concept, it sunk in just how monumental an undertaking this project would be since this is so much bigger than your everyday typical vid. Because the one thing you don't want to do is fail on the production end so it comes out looking like a home movie. However the amount of thought, energy and *bank* the vidder put forth in order to see her concept come to life is not only inspiring but ultimately well worth it. She bought a camera, rented lights, composed shots and directed actors! That sort of dedication is pure fannish love and I have nothing but respect for counteragent for achieving something so exceptionally creative.

Nicky: The narrative structure in three parts is clear signposting for those of us who aren't familiar enough with the fannish context to know where it's all going. But both the structure and clip choices make the vid easy to parse, even where we don't necessarily identify with the narrator.

HWG: I felt the structure was a brilliant way to slowly ease the viewer out of the familiar and into new territory where we're basically watching original material.

Nicky: I like how the narrative started in-story in Part 1, drawing the viewer in emotionally with Dean as the observing participator of a relationship, but also as a viewer proxy. It sets up the ongoing cymbal monkey motif as well as lays the groundwork for why exactly Sam is loveable, and why Dean loves him. But wait, is it only Dean who's doing the talking?

HWG: There's definitely Dean and the viewer there, and now that you've brought my attention to it I do think there's a third voice talking. It's the voice of the showrunner, a.k.a. the puppet master, (the monkey with the cymbals?) the one responsible for causing every single bit of torment we fangirls go through as witnessed in Parts 2 and 3.

Nicky: That's a neat interpretation. I didn't think of that when I asked the question, but I can see it now that you mention it. The cymbal monkey certainly embodies the "puppet" idea.

The emotional intensity is piled on in Part 2, where the viewer starts becoming conflated with Dean. I love the various ways you can read this part, the way it blurs the lines between passive viewer and active participator. Is the Sam fangirl self-identifying as Dean, or is this still primarily a comment on

the fictional relationship? Why can't it be both at the same time? Fannish life online is clearly blending with "story life" onscreen, and that is indeed how a lot of us feel when we're up to our eyeballs in fannish love.

What really struck me was how emotionally affecting this part is, the way significant emotional source visuals are used against the music. Young Sam against exploding fireworks! Toy soldiers! Again with the "reading on multiple levels" theme, it can be seen as an emotional journey as you interact with the fiction, expressing exactly how the show/relationship/characters make the fannish viewer feel. It utilizes a lot of the same tools for emotional and narrative expression as many other Supernatural vids. But at the same time, the lyrics make it clear that there's an element of knowing cynicism in this. "This bridge was written to make you feel smitten" indeed. Again, these two layers are by no means mutually exclusive, and we are certainly capable of feeling both at the same time.

HWG: The layers are certainly piling up and they work well together. Since I don't know the source too well what struck me most is the main plight in this part. The zoom out at 1:38 seamlessly moves us out of the source and into the fangirl's POV. We see her take up the fight online and lash out the show and the story that she's seeing, meanwhile moments like the toy soldier remind the viewer that the showrunner is still present, still here tormenting this girl by showing her that Sam = writer's pawn. "Girl getting bitter" would work well as a subtitle for this part because we've all been there. Maybe all those emotional source visuals that you mentioned can serve as examples of key moments from the show's history. It's moments like these that we cling to, that we love. Possibly that's the kind of storytelling we want the show to get back to and if it's not happening then the bitterness piles up and up and the monkey beats those cymbals!

Nicky: So what happens when what's onscreen isn't quite what you wanted, or expected, or thought was true to where the show/characters/relationship was going? Not being a Supernatural fangirl, I'm purely observing from the fringes here, but it's testament to the vidder's skill that the intensity of fannish reaction is captured so vividly in this part. Even if I don't feel that emotional reaction in my gut, the vid at least makes me able to understand it on an intellectual level. Enough that I can comprehend why what's happening onscreen leads to the prison bars closing in on the real monkey while the fake monkey incessantly bashes his cymbal, and meanwhile Dean is beating the crap out of Sam. It's an extreme reaction - both in the fiction as presented and in its real-life metaphor interpretation - and, again, not necessarily something that everyone can identify or agree with emotionally. But that's not really the point, is it? For me, it was first and foremost about the vidder saying her own piece in her own space. And from where I was standing, it was very well said instead.

HWG: You've seriously never experienced fannish disappointment?! Wow, I envy you so hard.

Nicky: Part 3 strips away the fiction altogether and cuts straight to the fangirl in her real-life space. I suspect it can read as either honest self-expression or deep, mocking cynicism, depending on where you the viewer is standing and where you think the vidder is standing. But again, who's to say it can't work both ways? Just as a fictional space overlaps a fannish space overlaps a real-life space, there are many layers of self-awareness in this vid. And just as all these personal and community and creative spaces may fit uncomfortably together at times, so do the various interpretations of this vid. But that doesn't mean they can't all exist in one place. I don't want to get you over-excited, but I'm starting to have Fringe-y thoughts. Parallel and tangent universes sitting on top of each other? All right here, man.

HWG: Oh, well since you mentioned it, I'm currently lighting candles around the giant poster of Olivia Dunham in my room while simultaneously crying and breaking things...

Nicky: And by the end of it all, what I love most about this vid is that the narrator/vidder/audience-proxy/Dean/whoever-else does manage to reconcile everything to her/his/their/zer satisfaction. Far be it to mean that all the issues raised have been solved, but there is a peaceful resolution of sorts on an internal, personal level. And when we consider where this vid started - as a deeply personal comment on something that generated much love and hate and lots of other emotions besides - it really seems fitting and proper to end on this note.

HWG: It really does. And I guess for me what mattered most is that the fangirl got her wish. It seems that Sam got his soul back and she could rest easy feeling like she played an active part in this development. And Dean, representing the showrunner, can also lay down his burdens because the story arc is now complete. Phew!



THE FOURTH WALL
