= GISHWHES =

The Greatest International Scavenger Hunt the World Has Ever Seen (GISHWHES , pronounced gish @-@ wes) is an annual week @-@ long competitive media scavenger hunt originally held each October or November , but more recently each August . Teams of 15 competitors earn points for submitting photos and videos of themselves completing prompts from a list they receive at the beginning of the week . Actor Misha Collins officially founded GISHWHES in 2011 after a publicity stunt to help the television series Supernatural (on which Collins appears) win a People 's Choice Award . The competition holds a world record for being the largest media scavenger hunt ever to take place , and several additional world records .

= = History = =

Actor Misha Collins , known for playing the angel Castiel on the American television series Supernatural , is the founder of GISHWHES . The competition began informally in 2010 when Holly Ollis , a publicist for Warner Bros. , asked Collins to engage his audience to help Supernatural move from second place to first in the People 's Choice Awards voting . Collins posted a message on Twitter , declaring that if the show won , Ollis had promised him a rhinoceros which he would share with everyone who helped by voting for the show . When Supernatural won the competition , Collins , partially inspired by his time at the University of Chicago as an undergraduate during which he participated in the school 's annual scavenger hunt , asked his followers to send him self @-@ addressed stamped envelopes into which he put scavenger hunt prompts written on the backs of jigsaw puzzle pieces from a puzzle depicting a rhino . Soon , participants began to respond to Collins 's " absurd " requests . One successful prompt , for example , challenged fans to photograph a group of firemen wearing nothing but kale .
Collins enjoyed this exercise so much that he decided to create an official scavenger hunt in 2011 . He established the event 's website and gave it its name , the Greatest International Scavenger Hunt the World Has Ever Seen , calling its acronym , GISHWHES , " the ugliest acronym the world has ever seen " . According to Collins , the primary reason for developing the competition was that he " loved the idea of thousands of people from all over the world connecting to create incredible things " . He hoped to use GISHWHES to encourage participants " to do good in the world " . The inaugural event , categorized by Guinness World Records as a " media scavenger hunt " , broke the record for the largest scavenger hunt of its kind . In 2012 , it broke its own record with 14 @,@ 580 participants , representing 69 different countries . The contest broke two additional world records in 2013 : the longest safety pin chain , measuring 1 @,@ 901 @.@ 8 metres (6 @,@ 239 @.@ 5 ft) , and the largest online photo album of hugs , totaling 108 @,@ 121 images .

= = Contest = =

On the first day of the week @-@ long competition , a list is posted on the GISHWHES website with over 150 different tasks for competitors to complete during the hunt , which Collins and his friends , including co @-@ coordinator Jean Louise Alexander , have devised prior to the beginning of the competition . Teams then submit photos or videos of themselves completing the prompts at the contest 's website , receiving points for each item completed . While literal interpretations of prompts are preferred , judges will sometimes award points for especially creative responses . Prizes for the team with the most points at the end of GISHWHES have included a trip to Scotland for a slumber party with Collins and a trip to Vancouver for a " Viking surprise " .
Teams consist of 15 members who may come from different countries . Individuals may prearrange teams or sign up individually , in which case they are randomly grouped into appropriately sized teams . As of the 2013 contest , signup costs ran $ 19 per person with participation fees going towards Random Acts , a non @-@ profit run by Collins that aims to encourage random acts of kindness .

= = = Challenges = = =

 GISHWHES challenges vary widely in focus and sometimes attract media attention . The Los Angeles @-@ focused OC Weekly reported on a local ice cream shop 's response to a GISHWHES team that asked them to create a custom ice cream flavor for the 2013 challenge " Get your team 's new ice cream flavor on sale in an ice cream parlor " . Another challenge involved participants using and spreading the word abnosome , Collins 's portmanteau of abnormal and awesome . During the 2013 hunt , competitors were asked to dress up as the DC Comics character Flash and have their pictures taken next to a functioning particle accelerator . As a result , the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator Facility and Fermilab received numerous emails from GISHWHES participants and set up special tours for the visitors . Dean Golembeski reported in Symmetry , the official magazine of Fermilab and the SLAC National Accelerator Laboratory , that the visits were welcomed and seen as an opportunity to educate a wider audience on the goals of and research done at national laboratories .
 Most GISHWHES challenges are completed successfully by at least one team , according to Collins . During the 2012 contest , for example , only one item saw no successes : coating a commercial blimp with fall leaves . Collins speculated it failed because of physical limitations . A 2013 challenge noted by Écrans , a French website run by Libération , challenged competitors to convince astronauts on the International Space Station to take a photo holding a sign with their team 's name . Efforts by participants were headed off by NASA , which posted that the astronauts were unable to participate on its official Twitter account .

 = = = = Gallery = = = =

 = = Reception = =

 Aspects of the contests have been well received by some media outlets . A writer for Nerdist.com called it an " avalanche of awesomeness " and compared the hunt 's acronym to " an apocryphal GWAR album or a lesser deity in H.P. Lovecraft 's consonant @-@ laden pantheon " . Reviewing the experience of participating in GISHWHES , a writer for Detroit 's WKBD @-@ TV described the contest as " a lot of fun " and recommended that others participate in the future . Shanghai Daily deemed several of GISHWHES 's challenges " outrageous " and " visually stunning " . Laura Prudom of The Huffington Post commended Collins 's " herculean " efforts in organizing the event .
 Not all reception has been positive . Todd VanDerWerff wrote for Vox that , " Quite a few of the items basically invite participants to pester ? or even harass ? the famous and semi @-@ famous on Twitter , Tumblr , and Facebook . " A 2014 challenge asked hunters to convince published science fiction authors to write a 140 @-@ character story for them and some , such as John Scalzi and Lauren DeStefano , complained that the task encouraged participants to harass them on social networks .
 In an article analyzing Collins 's relationship with his fanbase , Middlebury College Assistant Professor Louisa Ellen Stein argued that GISHWHES was a " co @-@ authored transmedia experience " that " play [ed] with [the] power , erotics , and emotional excess present in Collins ' fandom . " Citing participants ' independent efforts to coordinate teams using a variety of online platforms , Stein suggested that " GISHWHES may lack the overt language of industrial reconfiguration found in the Divine Kickstarter Project [a webseries that Collins engaged his fans to help fund] . But through its satire and dadaist play , it more fully models the potential for a congregation of authors , both official and unofficial , to direct fannish and creative investment into digital participation . " Stein further argued that " decentralized projects like Gishwhes , with creators who fully immerse themselves in the surrounding digital cultures , show us the potential for future transmedia creative authorship in millennial culture . "

 = = World Records = =

GISHWHES has broken several Guinness World Records .
? Largest Photo Scavenger Hunt (2011)
? Largest Media Scavenger Hunt (2012)
? Most Pledges for Campaign (2012)
? Largest Online Photo Album of " Hugs " (2013)
? Largest Chain of Safety Pins (2013)
? Largest gathering of people dressed as French maids (2014)
? Most people in a decorated hat competition (2014)
? Longest human chain to pass through a hula hoop (2014)

= = = Cited = = =

 Stein , Louisa Ellen (2013) . " # Bowdown to Your New God : Misha Collins and Decentered Authorship in the Digital Age " . In Gray , Jonathan ; Johnson , Derek . A Companion to Media Authorship . Hoboken , NJ : Wiley @-@ Blackwell . ISBN 978 @-@ 0 @-@ 470 @-@ 67096 @-@ 5 .
 Stein , Louisa Ellen (2015) . Millennial Fandom : Television Audiences in the Transmedia Age . Iowa City , IA : University of Iowa Press . ISBN 978 @-@ 1 @-@ 60938 @-@ 356 @-@ 5 .