

Snow on the Sahara

Absrip

Achievement in Innovation: Shortlist 2008

The review below may contain spoilers for Supernatural up to mid-season 4.

Nicky: We've had quite a few AU narrative entries in The Fourth Wall this year, and the emphasis of qualifying in the Achievement in Innovation category is generally focused on the ambitiousness of the narrative as well as how clearly that narrative is carried out. Snow on the Sahara excelled in both respects.

Brad: I think it's one of the most ambitious AUs I've seen attempted, and certainly the most ambitious that I've seen carried out in such a visually striking and impressive way.

Nicky: I love the audacity and coherence of the vid's premise - that Sam has already turned toward the dark side and has come back again, and the vid deals not with the fact of his turning dark, but the psychological aftermath.

Brad: The way in which the vidder paints this premise just grabs you from the opening image and never lets up. It's so consistent and unrelenting with its visual elements and how it uses repeated clips to weave it all together.

Nicky: From the very start, this vid utilises some stunning external source: a bird in flight, gorgeous aerial shots of landscapes, motifs of fire and cloudburst. All of this serve to be a beautiful representation of Sam's descent into darkness, cued dramatically by a specific layer of vocals.

Brad: That's the thing - it attaches to different layers in the music as each becomes more prominent and yet maintains a consistent flow in the pace and narrative, which is extremely difficult. The distinct musical elements and vocal layers in the song lend themselves really well to repeated elements and the way we're introduced to flashbacks, and the vidder uses that in a smart and creative way.

Nicky: I love the amount of effects in here to add mood: colour shifts, white fades, cutting in and the use of ghosting effects. All of this comes together to create a dreamlike atmosphere, and Absrip's colour work comes into particular focus, contrasting the vibrant red-golds with Sam's personal hell with the blues of Dean's melancholy, calming presence.

Brad: On top of that, I think the way source lighting and motion is used plays extremely well into what the vidder has added in terms of effects and mood. For instance, the eye flash at 0:16 and the car lights turning off at 0:25 - aside from mirroring each other really well - play perfectly into the vidder's secondary source and themes.

Nicky: I loved many of the visual motifs used to add thematic and emotional significance: the gorgeous open landscape and clouds at 0:35; the lone figure wandering on a beach with Sam's face layered over the shot; footprints on the sand at 1:26; the moonrise behind Dean at 1:32, the gorgeous blood shots at 2:32 and 2:37.

Brad: Exactly. The shots like the one at 0:35 get across such a lonely, painful feeling. Plus we get those wonderful glimpses of Evil Sam like at 0:37 that add to the texture of it all. I think that mood - woven together from several sources - is really what carries the AU here, more so than a linear story.

Nicky: The use of video compositing is another key component of carrying out the narrative in this vid. Having seen a number of Sam/Dean video composites in vid form, I was particularly fascinated with the ones in Snow on the Sahara because many of them appeared fresh and new, sourced from a collection of scenes hitherto unseen - at least by me!

Brad: I think the way the vidder matches lighting, coloring, and positioning in the sources so well is what makes it so convincing. Most composites I run across take you out of the vid for a moment, or at least force you to suspend some disbelief and play along. This doesn't ask anything of the viewer. It's just silky smooth and totally believable.

Nicky: I particularly liked the clip at 2:05, the variations on it around 2:19, then again in a gorgeous build-up toward the end of the vid. On the non-Wincest front, I also loved the shots of Sam walking through a burning city beginning around the 2:12 mark and again reinforced throughout the remainder of the vid.

Brad: Which, again, is a powerful way of getting across the overall feeling and mood of what has happened and where they are now without having to spell it out in a linear sense. It's carried out so well that it's almost like watching new source instead of an AU vid. When you think back on the vid afterward, you have to remind yourself that it didn't actually happen on the show.

Nicky: While the vid is built on an AU premise, the thing that comes across most clearly is the emotional journey. Sam's path to redemption is not an easy one, and the only reason that he manages to do it at all is because of Dean. This vid shows this premise clearly and beautifully, and takes us on a vibrant and emotional ride at the same time.
