

Unnatural Selection

Charmax

Honorary Award 2009: Bradcpu's choice

The review below may contain spoilers for new *Battlestar Galactica*, *Terminator: the Sarah Connor Chronicles* and the *Terminator* films.

Brad: My favorite vids - the ones I remember for years and rewatch over and over, absorbing new layers of brilliance each time - have something in common: They work on every level. The emotional, the visual, the intellectual.

That's the case with *Unnatural Selection*. The premise is audacious: That robots are the natural evolution of humanity. They're the ultimate example of Darwin's theory in action. It's brilliant, and brilliantly executed by stitching together multiple fandoms in an elegant and even beautiful way. But then it's all presented in a way that's so incredibly visual and musical that it's thrilling to watch purely on an aesthetic level.

Nicky: The blend of multiple sources - including additional text and graphics - appears so effortless to Charmax. The colours, the motion, the concept... it all blends together slickly with an almost mechanical precision. (Sorry for the pun. Just couldn't help it!)

Brad: Even as someone who's not entirely familiar with all of the sources involved, the complex multi-fandom narrative comes across in an astoundingly clear way, which says so much about the vidder's skill.

Nicky: I think having the Darwin text especially helps on that front because it provides a unifying context for most - if not all - viewers. Even if you don't know some or all of the source, the core concept of the vid is still apparent from what you see onscreen.

Brad: That's a good point. Darwin's theory is a starting point from which we can almost all identify, and that serves to make the vid's themes more accessible right from the first image.

The vid opens with the human race being destroyed, apocalypse-style by their creations. Love the overlay of the evolving skeletons at 0:32 and how the nuclear wave wipes it away.

Nicky: Everybody loves a robot apocalypse! I really love that slow downward gradient wipe at the part you mentioned. It shows such amazing attention to detail regarding the composition of overlays. I also liked how the Darwin text was introduced upfront at 0:25, foreshadowing the integration of text and visuals to come.

Brad: The step-down on the skull at 0:48 to "this monkey's gone to heaven" is probably the most memorable moment of any vid I saw this year.

What's cool is that, at this stage of the vid, these images of humanity's fall seem tragic and sad. But by the end it feels... almost natural. (Unnatural?)

Nicky: I don't know about anyone else, but I was rooting for the robots throughout the vid. Er... not sure if that was the vidder's ultimate intention, but as an argument vid toward that end, it has certainly convinced me.

Brad: One of my favorite connections is the bird scooping up the worm at 1:04 and, as is often the case throughout the vid, how her text adds impact to the image. A great example is the bridge starting at 1:50, when the Cylon's eye bathes the whole screen in red light, which flares into a reveal of subservient/caged humans with overlays from *The Origin of Species*. I also absolutely adore the musicality of this segment, which expresses the layers of instruments with everything from the desperate, tossing hair at 1:56; to the laser on the bar code scan on the guitar at 1:59; to subtle external motion like at 2:02. Such amazing attention to musical detail.

Nicky: Layered music is fulfilling to listen to but hard to get right in a vid-musicality sense, so it is really amazing when you come across a segment like this where these elements can get addressed all at once. There's so much going on visually, but the segment doesn't look cluttered. It just looks professional and beautifully done.

Brad: The text also works so well with the shifting coloring and source lighting to create such a distinctive visual identity for the vid. The vid feels like a visual universe of its own, which I think really helps in terms of linking the different sources - which in turn aids it properly getting across the narrative.

Of course the section beginning at 2:09 ("If man is five") contains some of the most inspired lyric ties I've ever seen. It's here where I really begin to get the full impact of "robots are closer to god than we are."

Nicky: Which is certainly a point that has been canonically made in these various sources, but in my opinion none of them did it quite as succinctly as this vid has managed. In source, it comes across as expressions of opinion, or as individual small moments of clarity; in *Unnatural Selection*, you feel like you've been bashed over the head with experimental proof for three and a half minutes... in a good way.

Brad: One thing that I found extremely interesting about the vid: If you watch it without the sound, the narrative and images are just as powerful and affecting. That blows my mind, especially when you consider that the with-sound version is some of the most compelling musicality I've ever seen.

It's just an extraordinary, multifaceted vid that engages the viewer on every level.