

# Army of Me

## *LithiumDoll*

Honorary Award 2009: obsessive24's choice

The review below may contain spoilers for Terminator: the Sarah Connor Chronicles.

**Nicky:** The thing I loved most about Terminator (and, by extension, The Sarah Connor Chronicles) was the circles of cause and effect that the audience is forced to run around. Would young John always have become John Connor as we know him from the future? Or does he only become John Connor because he is made in the present by the shape of things to come? The complex relationship between Sarah, John and Cameron is a telling aspect of this, and Army of Me does a fantastic job of illustrating how Sarah and Cameron, in their knowledge of the future and the man John is destined to become, take on the unenviable roles of actually making him into that man, no matter how unpalatable that notion may be.

**Brad:** That concept has always been at the core of the Terminator franchise, but I don't think I've ever seen it laid out in quite this way. It's impactful in every sense. Brutally so.

**Nicky:** The vid has a striking narrative structure, first by introducing Sarah and Cameron respectively in their roles as protector, gradually bringing John's understanding of that role into clearer focus until he himself is moved to take on the role of aggressor. But whether any of them wants this is another story.

**Brad:** And that's the hook, isn't it? It's obvious that fate is forcing them down this path, yet that's not how it's presented in the wider canon. We're supposed to believe that they are forcefully carving their own fate. It looks quite the opposite here.

**Nicky:** While this vid works best as a cohesive whole, moving from segment to segment with clear narrative and character progression, the part that especially grabs me is the segment from 3:33 through to the end. This part blends breathless editing with a relentlessly driving beat as John steps up to take his part in the greater scheme of things, while both Sarah and Cameron, through the respective imagery of the baby monitor and the bird inadvertently squeezed to death, are haunted by the gravity of what they have made him into.

The cutting here is a real thing of beauty, grabbing hold of the building momentum and never for a moment letting it go. The strobing lighting and movement at 3:58 - 4:00 is spine-tingling in the placement of the characters, with John sitting between Sarah and Cameron and the look on his face conveying that he knows exactly what is going on and what they are making him into.

**Brad:** LithiumDoll's editing, particularly in this sequence, is so incredibly affecting. It feels violent and unnerving, and I love how it has an almost robotic sort of look to it.

**Nicky:** There's definitely something to be said about a kind of mechanical precision in execution when it comes to this kind of subject matter.

The ensuing long, torturous scene of John killing Sarkissian is the ultimate culmination of his growing understanding, intercut with visions of his past and future and all this weight of expectation heaped down on him. The jump cutting at 4:22, with John's jerky head tilt and self-assured smile, is the very representation of that self knowledge. Intercut with clips of crying John, and repeated imagery of text type "I'm sorry" from both Cameron and John himself, suddenly cutting to a quiet memory with Sarah kissing young John goodnight, all these visual cues add up to the blood-curdling understanding of these three characters caught in a grim cycle of creation and destruction, where there is no clear beginning and no foreseeable end.

**Brad:** The pacing here is just thrilling. Sure, in a totally gruesome way, but thrilling nonetheless. It's some of the most compelling editing I saw this year. The text spelling out "I'm sorry" is one of those images that will stick with me for a long, long time.

**Nicky:** But of course this vid is not purely about John. The first two thirds are devoted respectively to Sarah and Cameron, two very strong characters in their own right. Having covered how much I adore the ending, it's very worth noting that LithiumDoll does a fantastic job in paralleling Sarah and Cameron in a multitude of ways to create the framework in which the conclusion is allowed to arise. I particularly like the overlaying of these two figures at 3:17, their paralleled positioning at 3:19, the electric shock connection at 3:25, and the bloody wrists at 3:30. The latter two, in particular, pack a terrific gut punch on the strength of the visuals alone.

**Brad:** When watching the vid, I'm often struck by how dynamic the visuals feel, totally removed from context. It's one of those vids you can enjoy in layers, on multiple levels, whether for the aesthetic or the statement about John's fate.

**Nicky:** Caught between these two dominating figures, what other choice is allowed to John but to grow up and take charge? This sentiment is expressed most succinctly in the line "your rescue squad is too exhausted", followed immediately by Sarah's final desperate attempt to save John by running head-on into waiting police, taking a number of them down in the process. I especially love how the musicality here emphasises the rhythm guitars to brutal effect.

I've gone about analysing this vid in rather a back-to-front manner, but I do hope I have conveyed my deep love of how succinct this vid is, how much it managed to say through effective use of visuals and cutting, and how much thinking room it leaves in its wake. All this easily makes Army of Me one of my favourite vids of 2009.