



Unnatural Selection

Ann Somerville

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Four years ago, Nick Guthrie nearly died from a brain tumour until he received an experimental treatment that saved his life, even though the treatment brought bizarre and permanent side effects. Now he drinks fake blood to live, and has had to have his new long canines capped, but it's a small price to pay to keep doing the job he loves. He's a cop, part of a London Met Police Murder Investigation team.

His current case involves trying to find the person ritualistically killing gay 'vees'. With no witnesses and no clues, the police are stymied, but Nick won't give up until their killer is found.

Complicating his life is Dr Anton Marber, an attractive, gay minor celebrity Nick saves from being kicked to death one night. Nick doesn't expect to see Anton again, but Anton is amazingly stubborn when it comes to things that are important to him, like Nick's case, Nick's diet and Nick's determination never to fall in love again.

Unnatural Selection Details

Date : Published September 9th 2011 by Ann Somerville

ISBN :

Author : Ann Somerville

Format : ebook 95 pages

Genre : Romance, M M Romance, Mystery, Fantasy, Paranormal, Vampires, Contemporary, Science Fiction, Lgbt, Crime

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From Reader Review Unnatural Selection for online ebook

Denise says

Quick and entertaining mystery & M/M romance read with a unique twist on vampires. Would have enjoyed it more had I not found both Nick and Anton extremely irritating at times.

Adrienne -kocham czyta?- says

Read it right after the start of the new year. I liked it; there was a good balance of mystery, death, the internal issues stopping the MC from opening himself up, and the romance. The treatment that turns terminally ill people into vampire-esque beings was inventive, too.

I bought the bundle of all three parts of the series and am looking forward to continuing it.

willaful says

Police Constable Nick Guthrie is a vampire -- or as he prefers, a "vee" -- in a world in which that doesn't mean a whole lot. No superhuman strength or supernatural powers-- just embarrassing fangs that most vees have capped, the need for a liquid diet, and immunity from disease. For Nick, it's just one more reason to throw himself into work and give up on having a social life. Even the delightful and persistent biologist Dr. Anton Marber finds it hard to tempt him into anything more than one nighters.

But of course the outside world reacts unpredictably to real life vampires in their midst, even though their condition is a medical one, induced in hospitals to save people who would otherwise die. Some bizarrely worship vees, some fear them. And when the vees happen to be gay, as Nick is, that fear and hatred can be exponential.

This compact novella combines mystery, science fiction and romance in one tightly written package. I liked how the world building came organically, without info dumping; the mystery is not as developed as it might be in a longer story, but strongly intersects with the other themes of the book.

Of course for me the romance was the most important aspect, and I loved seeing the formation of Nick and Anton's relationship, from comfortable banter to tenderness. This was my favorite scene, after a harrowing experience for Nick:

"'I'm sorry.'

'No. It was him. All him.'

'I'm not apologising. I'm sorry you're hurting.' He kissed my forehead. 'What can I do? Or not do?'

'Hold me. And don't be evil.'"

I felt like I'd lived that scene with my own love, with those very words, when the ugliness of the world was too much for me to bear.

Dumbledore11214 says

I know you guys pretty much expect me to say that about this writer's works, but I cant help myself I just do love most of her works. There are only two of her books I did not much care for (did not hate but did not care as much as about others) and this one is not one of them. I thought Nick and Anton were awesome, i thought they had some real flaws (and no, those flaws would not be not knowing how awesome they are) and still likeable. I mean, I wished Anton's analyzing brain just knew where to stop when he started analysing his lover and just freaking shut up. I wished that Nick would not have been so damn rude to Anton even if I understood the reasons why he closed himself off.

I thought mystery was solid, however, I think due to page count, or maybe because it is getting so hard to surprise me in the mystery, it was not that hard to choose between the only two real suspects available. However I also think that making the reader work hard in figuring out the clues was not the point of this work, I thought mystery served as a perfect vehicle for Nick to figure out who he is and to figure out how he wants to live from now on to and of course for him and Anton to build something together. Of course with that lovely treatment from so many diseases one cant help but think again about possible references to our society as I so often do when i read this writer's work. I think actually that overall I do like this variety of the future. Oh it was quite refreshing to read about non homophobic for the most part police. There were few words I could not understand (book is written in british english) and I loved it, I figured it out from context pretty easily (literally VERY few, maybe five or six words throughout the book) and I enjoyed that writer did not treat me as imbecile :).

But of course the guys shined. Nick grew and change so much throughout the short work, figuring out how he is going to use his second chance and Anton, awwwww, for all his obsessive analysing, him bringing food to Nick was such a sweet scene.

Lynxie says

Nick Guthrie is a likeable, unlikable character. I adored the fact that the main character is a gay 'vee' copper with issues, but he certainly did his best to push people away, the reader included!

The premise is strong, the murder mystery is twisted and complicated, but the overshadowing of appropriate footwork by the police and clear information helped the story along well. I was initially a little lost with all of the acronyms, there were a lot! This could be confusing for readers.

Pacing was good, you got some slower, softer scenes mixed in with the plodding police work and the speedy mystery and murder. All in all a good mix. I suspected the killer about half way through, but wasn't 100% sure until it just about jumped out and bit me.

Easy to understand mostly plain English, this story will be easily digested by vampire fans, murder mystery fans and M/M fans. While the M/M relationship aspect is a focal point of the story, with a strong chaser of homophobic violence, but the sex isn't graphic, in fact I think most readers would probably just find it like a M/F relationship with all its complications and emotional responses. If you are worried about the M/M side of the story, don't be. It helped to develop the story, but doesn't define it.

Note: the author provided an electronic copy of the book in return for an honest review

Vfields Don't touch my happy! says

Wow do I love Ann Somerville's writing style. I can't understand why she's not on everybody's to-read list. This is a mystery, with a reality twist and a sweet love story thrown in. Nick & Anton are an honest couple. Sex is not the star connecting is. Double Yum!

Sho says

First I was somewhat confused about what Nick was. Since I read a lot of urban fantasy, I just assumed at the beginning he was a vampire cop. It is a fascinating concept this "virus" as a cure to cancer and deadly diseases. Just that part is different but everything else is the same in this world.

The crimes and the reasons Nick and Anton meet are just a side story. And the identity of the serial killer is somewhat predictable. It doesn't matter! The best part of the story is the gradual emotional wall-crumbling of Nick and the care/stubbornness of Anton.

I just fell in love with the characters! They feel more human than a lot of the MM romances out there. A GeeVee cop and celebrity professor sounds like an exciting typical romance bit, but their conflicts and emotions come through more than just the glamour of their occupation. If you are looking for really "sexy" MM stories, you won't find it here. Instead you will find a nice romance of a heart-tired cop and a stubborn prof!

Mandapanda says

4.5 stars rounded up. Intriguing and intelligent romantic police drama with a paranormal twist. There is a series of murders of gay 'vees' in London and the detectives of the London Police Murder Investigation Team are hot on the case.

The only thing Nick Guthrie loves is his job with the Murder Investigation Team. He nearly died several years earlier from a brain tumor but was cured by a controversial viral treatment that left him with strange 'vampire-like' side effects. Nick is having trouble coming to terms with his new life and his experiences with family and past relationships have made him withdraw from everyone around him.

Dr Anton Marber is a scientist who Nick saved from a gay bashing one night. He is a bit of a celebrity, kind of the David Attenborough of gay animal behaviour. He is very taken by the handsome and capable detective who saves his life and is determined to get past Nick's walls and into his affections.

There is so much I liked about this novel. Firstly it's very well written. The romance and mystery are subtle yet fascinating. It reminded me a little of Josh Lanyon's work. There is time spent on what the investigating team do to try and capture the killer. Anton is gorgeous in his stubborn persistence to gain Nick's affections and Nick's vulnerable self-isolation and dogged pursuit of the killer are admirable. I was really attracted to both these characters.

When I wrote 'paranormal twist' that is misleading. There are no supernatural 'abilities' involved in being a

'vee'. There is just the inability to eat/drink anything except blood and the emergence of enlarged canines which 'vees' usually have capped. The concept is approached more as a chronic illness that 'vees' have to learn to live with.

The only problem I had with the book was the ending. It was too rushed and anti-climactic, both in terms of the mystery and the romance. I wasn't overly keen on the identity of the bad guy (not for the same reasons as fellow reviewer Bookwatcher) and there was no big confrontation at the end. Don't worry romance fans there is a HEA. But for the first time in a romance novel I would have preferred a HFN ending. There are still TOO MANY unresolved issues with Nick and Anton's relationship for the usual 'I Love You's' at the end. And not just unresolved issues but huge opportunities for a series of books with these two characters.

Anton's job and frequent absences, Nick's family and his reporter ex (Harry), the implied preference for 'vees' to drink fresh blood, and of course Nick's detective work could give rise to lots more interesting stories. I guess I'm just a bit cheesed off that this book seems to be a standalone. I loved it and **I. Want. More!** Recommended for fans of M/M mystery romance and of course fans of Ann Somerville.

Clodia Metelli says

I enjoyed this book. The premise, that a cure has been discovered for serious illnesses that leaves the patient with vampiric characteristics as a side effect was intriguing.

I also liked the main character, prickly Nick Guthrie a gay police officer and 'Vee' who has some issues around forming personal relationships. The intricate dance that is the development of his relationship with Dr Anton Marber was, for me, the main pleasure of the story.

The main reason for the comparatively low rating is that the actual crime story never seemed very real or plausible to me. We didn't get to know the victims, so the murders had little emotional impact, and I was only semi-convinced when the identity of the perpetrator was revealed. I might have found it more plausible if more information and background detail had been leaked throughout the narrative, but it felt rather as though the reader was being asked to take quite a bit on trust, just as we were told who the killer was.

Part of the problem, I suspect, is that this novella was more strongly focused on the detective's personal relationship, so that the crime element took a back seat. There wasn't enough space for a convincing romance and crime drama combined.

Lady*M says

3.5 stars

It was really difficult for me to rate this story. I like Somerville's writing a lot and I was additionally tickled by the Britishness of the book. I also liked her original take on "vampirism". But, unlike in the author's other books (and I didn't read only one or two), I couldn't connect with the protagonists and the resolution of the mystery and their relationship left me rather cold. I think it was partially due to Nick's narrative voice - very disconnected, dispassionate, even when he, supposedly, experiences strong emotions.

In the very, very near future (judging by pop and political references), the virus was engineered to cure almost all terrible diseases, including AIDS, hepatitis and cancer. It has side-effects though - like inability to process solid food. Those who received the treatment, survive on blood (fake or real), have unnaturally good health, they are lean and have long canines. The similarities with vampires bring them some bad publicity as well as the "followers". This is the aspect of the book that I liked - it really was ingenious and well-developed for such a short piece. All the consequences of miraculous cure were multi-layered and realistic and, of course, not all positive.

What didn't work for me, aside from some very funny banter, were Nick and Anton. I wanted to smack sultry Nick and his bemoaning through most of the story. I truly felt that it was *he* who did not appreciate the amazing gift he was given and I couldn't help but see him as very childish. The "oh, poor me" attitude was tiring, especially since, no matter how they opposed to his choices, the people in his life were rather supportive. I do not condone cheating at all, but I could *almost* understand his ex. Anton, on the other hand, pushed, pushed, pushed the other man, who he literally saw only two or three times, beyond all reason. He did have the most awesome among awesome jobs I've ever read about in M/M fiction and I would love to see one of his shows. XD Additionally, the resolution of the mystery was rather bland, perhaps because there were no real clues to lead us to the murderer. I wanted to at least see some confrontation between Nick and the murderer. No such luck.

Overall, it may be that the page count didn't allow the character and mystery development that I've come to expect from Ann Somerville. Or, it could be that the author has spoiled me. *Unnatural Selection* is not a bad book, but this author certainly can do better. And this rating is a reflection of that fact - compared to her other books, this one was average.

Meggie says

This story was well plotted and written. I liked the mystery around the killer and how Anton slowly but steadily got under Nicks skin. I liked it a lot.

Lori says

Ann Somerville never disappoints when it comes to solid writing, snappy dialogue and interesting characters. While this book had all of those elements, I had a hard time warming up to the main character. When Nick's brain tumor fails to respond to conventional protocols he's given a highly controversial treatment that effectively makes him bullet proof to ever getting sick again. The downside is that he grows fangs and has to live on synthetic blood. He becomes bitter and withdraws from life, instead focusing on his job as a cop. His only indulgence is a nightly trip to the pub for a beer where he sits and reads. Yes, reads. No social interaction for our poor Nick. Walking home one night, he interrupts a gay bashing which introduces us to his eventual love interest. My issue with Nick is that he was given a second chance at life and instead of embracing that, he totally focuses on the negative aspects. Enter Anton, the man he saved from the gay bashing. Anton is the polar opposite of Nick. He's full of enthusiasm for life and determined to make Nick see that his life isn't over, he just needs to be willing to make a few adjustments. I did end up liking Nick better once Anton worked his magic on him and I anticipate that I will like him even more in the next book.

Ann's books usually contain a subtle...or sometimes not so subtle...commentary on life. This one is no exception with a dig at the Catholic church for it's celibacy laws and the right wing religious zealots who find issue with the new "cure" and those treated with it.

The identity of the serial killer isn't hard to figure out, which always disappoints me but happens more often than not. I'm always shocked when the identity of the bad guy is a complete surprise. That very rarely happens these days.

Overall, this was an enjoyable read and like all of Ann's books, dumps you into a world that is just close enough to our own to make them less of a fantasy and more of a future world. Sometimes that's damn scary.

Bookwatcher says

There is a cure to every terrible disease in the world... it's available, and only in 5% of the cases the person will not be completely cured... it's called Immuno-Stimuland Haemovirus and it's very close to a miracle. The only problem? The side effect: it's very close to a myth coming true. Who is treated by it will become a "vampire".

No, forget about sun burning, holy water or coffin. It's a different view of vampirism, and well it's a very good original plot.

Nick, the main character and the only narrator, didn't have a choice. He was dying, with an incurable brain tumor. He is not happy with his new life in liquid diet, and his craving for blood. **Can I say I ADORE HIM??** I REEEEEEEEEEEALLY love tormented heroes, so Nick was perfect in my view!

The plot, mystery and secondary characters are also very well constructed, and I never get bored or tired. I read without stop!

So, if I like it so much, and enjoy everything why I told you I can't give more than 3 stars?

One thing: the religious aspect. And probably because I'm Catholic I really was disappointed with some aspects of the book.

No, I'm not a bigot (he he he.... I would not read and enjoy so much gay novels if I was, would I?), and no, I'm not brainless and I know the pope did a lot of absurd statements (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7947460.stm>) so it's not about someone saying something about him (I'm the first one, always saying I'm a catholic, but I follow the religion directives, not the pope, a man).

What really bothers me very much was something I can't explain without spoiling who is the killer, so ignore from now on, if you don't want to know it

(view spoiler)

It's one of the last phrases of the book, and unfortunately it's Nick's thoughts that made me cringe.

I think it's wrong, and it can be used in not so good "excuses" as well. It's just Nick's idea, but it can be used also to explain why priests are pedophiles, no? They are not only crazy, but also the religion, aka Vatican-imposed celibacy, did it to them? No, sorry, I can't agree with it. If someone is crazy, as a killer in this story, nothing can be said or thought to justify it. Not the Vatican-imposition of anything, because no one put a gun on Donald's head screaming "do it! Be a priest" but it was his choice, to become one, and stay as one.

I think it's a dangerous comment (as Nick thought or not it's in this book), and I really dislike it with all my heart. There are a lot of choices we must do in our lives, and we must deal with the consequences of our

choices. If someone want to be a Catholic Priest he know about celibacy. I'm sorry if I'm not one of those saying priests should get married, for example. I think if they want it, why still be a priest? (hide spoiler)]

But it's just my personal view, and I don't want to impose my ideas about it. **It's just to justify my personal motives, why I gave 3 stars, to a book that probably deserve 5 stars.** It's a standalone, but the end left the possibility of a sequel. If there is I'll certainly read it! The virus explanation to give origin to "vampires" in modern days was VERY good, and I loved all the characters... so I must admit I would certainly read more, and I'll if there will be more.

MyzanM says

This was a bit different.

I liked Nick and Anton and the secondary characters.

The plot was interesting enough to keep my attention most of the time.

There were instances though where I got bored off my head and it was just the interest of knowing "who done it" that kept me pushing through.

It was different enough that I might even continue the series. (God knows I've continued worse series in the past.)

Alysa H. says

This is basically a police novel, a serial murder mystery in which a young London copper tries to solve a case that he feels close to because, like the victims, he is gay. Oh, and almost incidentally, they are all "vees" -- not vampires in any supernatural sense, but simply regular people who require a diet of blood as the result of a having undergone a cutting edge, life-saving medical treatment.

So, this is a police procedural with a sci-fi edge, and also a M/M romance, as our gay vee copper hero, Nick, finds himself being romanced by the charismatic Anton after a few years of self-imposed singledom. There's a small bit of explicit sex, but nothing major.

I very much appreciated the world that Somerville created here, and its critique of reality by way of mirroring and amplifying the social treatment of people with HIV. I would have liked to see some of the side characters fleshed out a bit more, and perhaps for Nick's reluctance to get involved with Anton to have relied less upon predictable character tropes. There was also a somewhat rushed ending that wrapped up the serial killer case a little too neatly, and without adding much more substance to the social commentary.
