

Bandersnatch by Brooker: Art Imitating Art

Bandersnatch is a special piece of art. Something unique, though not exactly original. In my life I have read (and played, think sandbox games, think role playing games) hundreds, perhaps thousands, of choose your own adventure stories, and Bandersnatch is definitely special and clever.

It's an interactive visual story whereby you select and make choices at potentially crucial points in the plot, driving the narrative in unforeseen directions. No spoilers here.

However, I feel that, brilliant as this remarkable work of fiction is, it has largely missed the point of the 'choose your own adventure' story from which it is descended. What I mean is: there is supposed to be a discernible 'correct' ending.

Twice, after moving through the various pathways, I found what I considered to be 'correct' endings: one vicious and grinning, one tragic and weeping; the stuff from which Black Mirror is formed. However, disappointingly, each time I was redirected to yet another path choice. A few times I was redirected to paths that I had already completely explored, thereby negating the necessary suspension of disbelief such art depends upon. All I wanted was for the credits to roll; such an event would definitely not have prevented me from going through the film again. To have the credits roll following two or three differing optional 'correct' endings would have been satisfying, even. And while a small optional credits icon does appear in the corner of the screen, this does not necessarily meet viewer expectations, and is potentially overlooked. There is something important about the credits appearing before the viewer, a sense of finality and closure, and in the case of Black Mirror, of escape and return.

It is important to be aware that a good 'choose your own adventure' story — and that is most definitely what Bandersnatch is, underneath it all — consists of facets such as multiple possible endings, necessary re-playability, and reader-centric story telling. Bandersnatch provides all of this for the viewer, and more, and it does it very well. The multiple worlds theory, breaking of the fourth

wall, and the moral/immoral optionality are all either developments or improvements, but to miss the essence, in this case the finality, of the art form you are emulating is an aesthetic faux pas.

Nevertheless, Bandersnatch is a crafted work of art; intelligent, engrossing, very well acted and written, and definitely worth writing about. For me, the rabbit hole was deep, but despite exploring it quite thoroughly, I am still there, in that grim echoic place Mr Brooker has crafted for us, I am incomplete and I am dissatisfied.