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The Unlikely Rebellion

Rebels; a force that will work together to achieve a goal. They are seemingly unstoppable and will work hard to achieve something bigger than themselves. “Fifteen Million Merits,” an episode of *Black Mirror*, focuses on a dystopian society whose day to day lives revolve not only around technology, but the difficult path to fame. Every day, characters ride bikes to gain merits, a form of currency used to purchase anything from toothpaste to an audition slot on the televised talent show, “Hot Shot.” After viewing the different paths the characters take to rebel against the system to still achieve fame, author Emily Yoshida responds in her article “Black Mirror Episode 2, ‘Fifteen Million Merits’: The Rebellion Show.” Through her comedic tone and extensive analysis of the episode, Yoshida argues that no matter how hard one may try, when standards and norms are deeply established, a personal rebellion is nearly impossible.

Bing, the main character, attempts to overcome the technology and reward driven environment in which he is entrapped. As Yoshida describes it, Bing is “as much of a hippie as one can be in this particular dystopia.” He tries to hack the system and get people to join in on his rebellion; however, on his path of dissent, Bing gets sucked into the system. Complete rebellion, in Yoshida’s eyes, is unattainable. The main focus of the article is this idea that no matter how hard one may try, they can not obtain a rebellion on an extreme extent; it is merely a phase that will come and go until the rebel gives up or falls back into the system.

Many young readers may connect to the idea of rebellion; people ranging from their late teens to early thirties all can feel a connection to Bing and his journey of defiance. Whether it be wanting to break the habit of going to a boring job or attempting to defy a parent's wish, a rebel may feel as if they have the power to overcome an unrealistic task. The target audience can realize that their goals to rebel may seem important, but might not last; as Yoshida says "we're all going to die anyway and there is no afterlife where we are rewarded for how valiantly we resisted and spoke out against consumerism/the patriarchy/animal byproducts." Essentially, Yoshida is arguing that there is no greater gain by rebelling and the only impact created would be for oneself. The items Yoshida lists such as "consumerism/the patriarchy" are large parts of the current power-driven society. On the other hand, "animal byproducts" (Yoshida) is not on the same scale. By using extremes, the reader feels a sense of helplessness. Additionally, it is essential that readers are familiar with not only this episode, but *Black Mirror* as a whole. The dark, dystopian worlds created in the series are unlike any other television series on streaming services. If the audience was not familiar with the story of Bing's somewhat rebellion, the article would not make sense.

With the overwhelming amount of young viewers of this show, it makes sense that Yoshida's article is targeted towards them. She uses a comedic and relaxed tone as she reacts to the show; she is genuine and sincere. This resonates with target audiences because they want an honest analysis after an episode of insincerity. Specifically, Yoshida uses words and phrases such as "shitty," "I guess," and "No, seriously." This casual tone makes the reading seem conversational. By creating a casual and comedic piece, the darker and deeper meaning takes a back seat. The truth displayed in "Fifteen Million Merits" is not hidden, however; it is not in the

spotlight. This impactful decision to write in a laid back tone allows the reader to understand Yoshida's message without feeling upset and defeated after reading. If Yoshida's tone were as dark and depressing as the contents of the article, the reader would feel completely powerless. The playful tone is essential.

An interesting facet of Yoshida's writing is how she begins her article; she starts off discussing the end of "Fifteen Million Merits." By ending the introductory paragraph by saying the episode "comes full circle," Yoshida brings the reader back to the episode. Bing starts off his day alone and has extremely minimal human interaction. By the end, he is in an isolated apartment where seemingly, his only companions are the video camera for which he communicates to the public and his blade of glass which has become superficial, just like he has. The loneliness is inescapable for Bing. He severely fails at human connections and he could not escape that failure when he made it big. The structure used in the article is extremely effective in having the reader recall specific aspects of the show, like its beginning and end.

For an article written five years ago, its relevance still reigns true more than one would initially expect. Neither the article nor the episode would be relevant if there was not a problem with technology. A millennial or a Generation Z not having a phone, streaming media services like Netflix, and a television in their home is almost unheard of. Yoshida acknowledges this as she jokes about Charlie Brooker, the writer of *Black Mirror*, by saying "he makes those of us who claim to have clarity about how our culture sausage is made but still indulge in some *Real Housewives* now and then look crazy by comparison." Cultural references from 2013, the year the article was published, such as *The Real Housewives* are easily implied; had that reference been made a long time ago, the show would not have its household popularity that it had when

the article was written and now, five years later. One Yoshida's strengths is making her article up-to-date and timeless at the same time, while still having interesting analysis of "Fifteen Million Merits."

With the mixture of a trendy, controversial topic and a lighthearted tone, Yoshida persuades readers on her subject matter. She makes her audience feel as if they can not rebel from technological norms that are established in a consumerist society, but that they do not have to. Through effective tone and dark subject matters written in a comical manner, Yoshida explains the ineffectiveness of rebellion on masses of people with deeply rooted views and norms. The article and episode make clear connections and warnings between Bing's technologically driven world and the current less technological, inescapable consumerist culture. Bing tried to be a rebel and he ended up where he started; alone. Isolation may be something that is hard to cope with but Yoshida's lighthearted tone made this large pill a bit easier to swallow.

Works Cited

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