

Charlie Brooker's Black Mirror: *White Christmas*: Conversation Starter

Synopsis



Photo: len4ita on Flickr

Matt and Joe are together in an isolated house in a snowy wilderness. They appear to have been working together for a number of years, but Joe is uncommunicative. Matt is cooking Christmas dinner and offers Joe some wine. Matt confesses that he has been sent there because he misused a technology called Z-eyes. This technology enables you to see through another person's eyes and also to block another person from your sight, turning them into a silhouette that you also cannot hear.

Matt offered 'romantic services' to a shy young man called Harry in order to help him meet women. With Matt's help over an earpiece and using the Z-eyes, Harry crashed an office party. What Harry did not know was that a group of other men were also watching Harry's progress, offering advice and comments, but basically just there to watch if he got lucky. They seem to be in for a treat; since Harry identifies a woman he likes and manages to talk to her. They seem to be kindred spirits and she invites Harry back to her place and tells him to go into the bedroom. The watching group are jubilant but Harry is nervous. The girl has observed Harry talking to Matt and assumes that, like her, he hears tormenting voices. In the bedroom, she offers him a drink, but it turns out to be poison. She has decided that they are both suffering souls who need to die to be free of the voices. Harry tries to explain, but she thinks that he is just talking about the experience of mental illness. Instead of doing something, Matt panics and just destroys the evidence. Harry and the girl die.

Then Matt goes on to talk about the technology of making 'cookies'. This involves cloning a person's mind and re-creating them as a piece of code that lives inside an egg-shaped object. Such cloned slaves can be made to do anything since they will go mad with boredom otherwise. We see an ambitious and selfish young woman creating the cookie and it is Matt's job to convince the cloned slave that she is not real and will have to spend eternity in a white featureless hell unless she agrees to do what the 'real' her wants. In this case it is act as alarm clock, breakfast provider and diary secretary. The cookie refuses at first, but after time is speeded up inside the cookie to make a 'real' minute seem like days, weeks and months, the desperate slave agrees, just to have something to occupy her time.

Joe then tells his story: he was in love with a girl who got pregnant. In the story she tells him she doesn't want the baby. He's had a few drinks and gets angry, saying it's his too so he should have some say in it. After the row, his girlfriend blocks him via her Z-eyes and disappears. He is unable to call her or contact her, but later he sees her silhouette is clearly still pregnant. Every Christmas he drives up to her dad's place in a snowy wilderness and watches her silhouette and her child's silhouette visiting. He leaves little toys for the child to find. He realises after a few years that the child is female.

One day Joe finds out that his ex-girlfriend had been killed in a rail crash. This means that the block on the child is gone and he will be able to see her. So he goes back to the dad's house at Christmas with a snow globe as a present. But when he approaches her he sees that she has Asian features and realises that his ex-girlfriend had been sleeping with one of his close friends. Joe is devastated and goes into the house to confront his ex's dad, who tells him the child is not his and to get out. In rage and despair, Joe hits him with the snow globe and kills him. Then he leaves. He also tells Matt that the child waited a long time and then went out into the cold to try and find help and froze to death.

It now turns out that the house that Matt and Joe are in is a cookie and Joe's personality has been cloned and put there so that Matt can get a confession out of him. Out of the window, the girl's body is visible. In 'reality' Joe is in a police cell and refusing to talk. Matt has done this to try and get a deal for his freedom having been arrested for his part in the death of Harry. The deal is honoured, but Matt, although set free, finds himself permanently blocked by everyone and his silhouette is red, so people avoid him. He is totally alone.

Meanwhile, Joe's clone realises that he is trapped in his own personal hell, alone in the place of the murder with the body of the child always beyond the window. Furthermore the police crank up the torture by putting Wizzard's *I wish it could be Christmas every Day* on permanent repeat. No matter how often Joe smashes the radio, he is forced to hear it over and over. He screams with despair.

Some ideas for a discussion

How useful would it be to see through someone else's eyes?

What would it be like to be blocked by the people around you?

What do you think about the idea of 'confession' in the drama?

Whose 'hell' is worse, Matt's, Joe's or the house slave?

Is technology helping us or enslaving us? How can we tell?