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Why The BAFTAs Were (Mostly) Right To Snub The Witcher 3



(http://www.gamersftw.co.uk/author/lm_watson/)

by Doc Watson (http://www.gamersftw.co.uk/author/lm_watson/) on April 8, 2016

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It is a fact universally acknowledged when a video game awards ceremony rolls around, there is always going to be some degree of disappointment when some entrants don't win. A better game may have won the day, the bracket may have been too diverse and hard to cut down the middle, or it could be a simple case of a deserving game being snubbed in favor of something that better suits the select criteria of the judging panel. In any case, mistakes happen. Such is the subjective nature of award presentation. Sun rise, sun set. We move on with the schedule of video game releases, with the full knowledge that, at the end of the day, these awards aren't massively influential in the grand scheme of things.

However, sometimes there is a snub that is slightly too large for anyone to ignore. It happens in every field: Alfred Hitchcock was snubbed three years in a row at the Academy Awards for *Vertigo*, *North By Northwest* and *Psycho*. The Grammys did the unthinkable by giving the 1966 Rock And Roll Recording by giving it to some dude that wasn't called The Beatles, The Monkees or The Beach Boys. Now, at the 2016 BAFTA Game Awards, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, recipient of an unfathomable 800 different video game awards, including 250 GOTY nods, was nominated for six at this year's BAFTA ceremony. It received a grand total of none. Instead, flicking through the results (<http://www.gamersftw.co.uk/winners-of-bafta-games-awards-announced/>) reveals that the awards went to a handful of indie titles, including *Everybody's Gone To The Rapture* and *Her Story*. On top of that, the top prize went to *Fallout 4*, much to everyone's befuddlement. Yet, aside from the best game award, I find myself agreeing with a lot of BAFTA's choices.

(<http://www.gamersftw.co.uk/wp->

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I am not saying that *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* didn't deserve the prizes. *The Witcher 3* is a fantastic and beautifully crafted game that has earned every prize it has received thus far. That being said, for all of its efforts, it didn't do anything particularly earthshattering for the medium. It was a game that didn't do anything new or unique, but instead took all of the tools and tricks that games before it had done and polished and combined them in such a way that enhanced every component, creating a game that is greater than the sum of its parts. A game like *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* is very similar to what *Citizen Kane* did for movies, taking elements of movies that had come before him and synthesizing them into a new experience, and in doing so demonstrated how these elements could work together to create something astonishing.

With that analogy, it would appear that *The Witcher 3* deserves the BAFTA awards even more. Alas, *The Witcher 3* bringing these elements together is its only true innovation, and next to games like *Everybody's Gone To The Rapture* and *Her Story*, that are striving to push boundaries on what a game can and cannot be, *The Witcher 3*'s limitations become agonizingly obvious. There is only so much a game can achieve while maintaining to convention, which *The Witcher 3*, for all of its success, certainly does. *Everybody's Gone To The Rapture*, while criticised for being a "walking simulator", showed a different kind of story that could be presented with the video game medium. *Her Story*, on the other hand, went the exact opposite route and forced the players to painstakingly piece together the story themselves. They were two very different variations on the video game as we understand it. They might not be good or bad, per say, but they were rewarded for their defiance of convention for the sake of progress – something that *The Witcher 3* cannot say that it did.

(<http://www.gamersftw.co.uk/wp->

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Even while being forced to compete against games that went against the grain, *The Witcher 3* was in the uncomfortable position of being outclassed in every individual field that it was contesting. The game's artistic merit is solid, but the award went to *Ori And The Blind Forest*, a game that, artistically speaking, looks absolutely stunning. The game's design was solid and expansive, but its gameplay was beat out by the finely honed gameplay of *Bloodborne*. Even one of its greatest strengths, its story, was outclassed by the story of *Life Is Strange*; underneath the impacts of choice and consequence was the story of a growing girl tacking choices, consequences, and growing and living with her decisions. With these in mind, it seems that *The Witcher 3* seems like a jack-of-all-trades and master of none: competently balancing out every component of video game design but never quite excelling in any of them.

Surely, then, with all of this being said, *The Witcher 3* would at least win the Best Game Award, right? After all, *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt* was far and away the best performer of the awards; even if it was beaten in individual categories, second in everything would compute to being first over each individual game. Strangely, the award went to *Fallout 4*, which I cannot wrap my head around for the life of me. I would have personally picked *Metal Gear Solid V* for the title, if only for the simple fact that it is the swan song of a video game series based on innovation, nuance and fun. That being said, I would bow to popular opinion if *The Witcher 3* had won the award, because that, at least, makes sense. For *Fallout 4* to win – not a bad game in its own way, but certainly the weakest of the *Fallout* games by a decent margin – is utterly daft, especially considering the competition it was facing.

(<http://www.gamersftw.co.uk/wp->

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What the BAFTAs attempted to do was display the different ways that such a diverse medium like video games could aspire to create a product. From high speed rocket soccer to the precision of hand-to-hand combat, from contemplative walks through the apocalypse to the sweeping vista of Velen and beyond, and the desk of an investigator to rewinding time itself, these are all amazing ways that a game can tell a story. That is what the medium is about: creating an experience through game-play and narrative, the latter as presented or created for ourselves. Most may

disagree on that definition – after all, it is not the traditional definition. These awards, however, are testament to the traits that we see as admirable in the games that we play, and the way that games are being made in 2016. To that end, it succeeded very well, offering awards to the right people in most circumstances.

Alas, in its exclusion of *The Witcher 3: Wild Hunt*, the BAFTAs made one more statement: one innovation mastered, regardless of its quality, is better than a game created with completeness and spectacle but with no real innovation to speak of. It is a damn shame too, because having *The Witcher 3* stand as the pinnacle of the awards would have rounded off a spectacular awards ceremony. It won't hurt CD Projekt RED's reputation for the awards snub, nor will it harm anyone's opinion of the game as a masterpiece, and BAFTA did everything else right. It is interesting, though, to see a panel of judges look upon a selection of games, nod convincingly and with full knowledge of what they are doing, and then fail to see the forest through the trees.

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A twenty-something year old with a lot to say about video games and a questionable relationship with red wine.

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