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# Netflix Review: Bandersnatch

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**Abstract**

"Whatever an 'interactive film' really is, it deserves to be developed. This is a great opportunity for artists."

Posting about the film *Bandersnatch* from *In All Things* - an online journal for critical reflection on faith, culture, art, and every ordinary-yet-graced square inch of God's creation.

https://inallthings.org/netflix-review-bandersnatch/

**Keywords**

In All Things, movie review, Black Mirror, Bandersnatch, David Slade

**Disciplines**

American Film Studies

**Comments**

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# Netflix Review: "Bandersnatch"

**Josh Matthews**

> **Title**: **Black Mirror: Bandersnatch**
> **Directed by**: David Slade
> **Starring**: Fionn Whitehead, Craig Parkinson, Alice Lowe
> **Written by:** Charlie Brooker
> **Music by: Brian Reitzell**

This is an interactive review of the new interactive film *Bandersnatch*, which is part of the science-fiction series *Black Mirror* on Netflix. When you watch this movie, you will make over a dozen choices about what happens in it. There are many possible storylines.

To read the *Bandersnatch* review you would like, choose the option you prefer:

a) To feel great about your life, art, and all of the possibilities therein, go to #3.
b) To learn about the plot of *Bandersnatch*, go to #1.

1.  Set in the ominous year of 1984, *Bandersnatch* tells the story of a young English computer programmer who is trying to create his first major videogame called "Bandersnatch." Stefan Baxter (Fionn Whitehead) has all the problems that young programmers in the movies face. He is a loner.  He's struggling in a relationship with his father. He isn't sure if he wants to be part of the "system," in this case a big gaming corporation named Tuckersoft.

Stefan's videogame is based on a massive "choose-your-own-adventure" book that he loves, also called *Bandersnatch*. The book was written by a genius science-fiction writer who went crazy and killed his wife. Working on his game, the threat to Baxter is that he might become like this writer: obsessive, delusional, and then insane.

In the course of the film, no matter which branches of the story you choose, Baxter needs to figure out how closely he will work with the Tuckersoft corporation. He also needs to decide what he will and will not tell his therapist. Finally, he needs to choose what to do about his father. It's up to you to decide what will happen. (However, if you want to see all the possibilities for what happens, the film will allow you to go back to key choices and choose different options.)

a) If you would like to feel great about *Bandersnatch*, go to #3.
b) To save yourself two hours of your life, go to #2.

*2. Bandersnatch* is filled with so many undeveloped clichés that it is not just lesser *Black Mirror*—it is among the worst of the series. Baxter would have been a stereotype in a 1980s movie, yet here we are in 2019 with the same old Male Programming Geek character. The film gives us the individual computer guy versus the system, the genius who struggles with insanity, and the teenage rebel who struggles with authority, all packaged in simple nostalgia for the 1980s.

Immediately after watching the best *Black Mirror* episodes (e.g., "White Christmas," "Be Right Back," "The National Anthem"), I feel a strong punch to the head that, once I recover, offers great insight into the social ramifications of new technology.

However, *Bandersnatch* does not punch. It does not even lightly tap.

The movie meditates on itself, a lot. *Bandersnatch* is constantly making statements about its own interactivity, and by extension, the vast choices that all technology offers to users, including streaming services like Netflix. The more you have seen this kind of thing in art, the less interesting *Bandersnatch*'s approach to it will be for you.

One of *Bandersnatch*'s most basic points is that consumer choice is an illusion, including the interactive choices you think you make during the movie itself. Yes, you have plenty of choices while you participate in this movie, but the given array of choices in *Bandersnatch* are, no duh, already made for you by the moviemakers. This is akin to the array of choices on an iPhone, which are controlled by Apple, or the choices on a website created by a web designer.

You are not as free to choose as you think you are. You actually choose within a set of choices offered to you by (*cue ominous music*) "The System." That means that the System, and not you, is in control. Thereby, according to *Black Mirror*, you ought to feel paranoid or something.

If you hadn't thought about this point ever in your life, you might be head-punched by *Bandersnatch*. However, it is an idea so far from new that it rotted away in the sun a long time ago. Metacommentary on the free-will-versus-determinism debate and the relationship between an artistic medium and its effects on readers, presented within that medium, has been a staple of written literature *forever*. Just read *Don Quixote*, written in the early 1600s, which beat *Bandersnatch* to all ideas by 400 years, *and* it deals with them far more complexly.

Or, just play any videogame ever made. You choose, you interact within it, and the given set of choices were programmed into the game by a designer. *Bandersnatch* has nothing at all profound to say about something that has long been part of our world.

a) If you thought this section was harsh and pretentious, go to #3.
b) To truly make your own choices, please close your browser or turn off your phone. Thank you.

*3. Bandersnatch* might signal the beginning of a new film genre. It might even be, if it has any influence, a brand new visual medium. Although it calls itself an "interactive film," it is really an artwork containing branching story pathways. You could experience just one pathway, or you could go through all the pathways, trying to conceive of the entire set of story possibilities as a whole. It is somewhere between a movie and a videogame!

Wow!

There is so much creative potential here that a genius on the level of Kurosawa or Hitchcock could do wonders with it. Whatever an "interactive film" really is, it deserves to be developed. This is a great opportunity for artists.

I also admit, grudgingly, that choosing what a character could do in a movie was kind of fun. If you like 1980s synth music to dominate your movie soundtracks, you will be happy to participate in *Bandersnatch*.

a) To maintain your happy feeling, please continue reading inAllthings.
b) If you prefer to face up to reality, go to #2.