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# Transmedia Franchises and the Digital Humanities

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ANTI-ANXIETY DH:

# TRANSMEDIA FRANCHISES AND THE DIGITAL HUMANITIES

# What would Hollywood be without superhero movies?
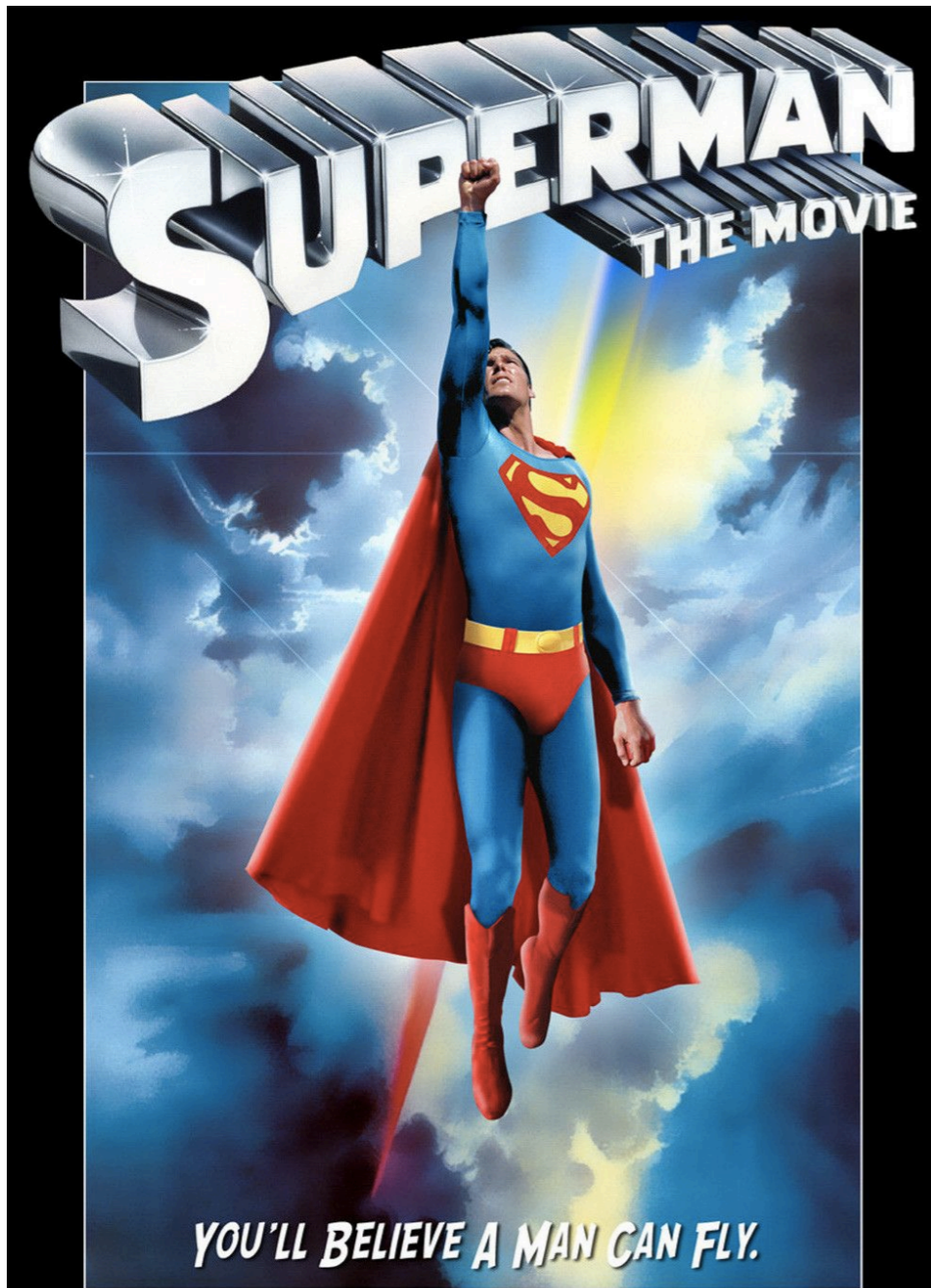
By Marielle Segarra

- Superhero movies account for 25% of domestic box office revenue

- In 2018, 6 of the 10 top grossing films in North America featured superheroes

# Superheroes Then and Now



*Superman*
(Dir. Richard Donner, 1978)

# Superheroes Then and Now

Transmedia Storytelling: A narrative that unfolds across multiple platforms (ex. film, tv, video games, special events). Their emergence is facilitated by conglomeration.

**WARNER MEDIA**

# Superheroes Then and Now

Transmedia Storytelling: A narrative that unfolds across multiple platforms (ex. film, tv, video games, special events). Their emergence is facilitated by conglomeration.

# Anxiety as Research Problem

- Obstacles to Transmedia Studies

  - Instructors: Tough to evaluate; expense

  - Students: Production anxiety; expense

- One Approach Forward: Using low-tech DH tools (**geocaching**, **storyboarding**), reduces "new-technology anxiety."

- DH also helps students understand a key debate in transmedia franchise studies: storytelling as a mode of content v. storytelling as a mode of marketing.

# Key Transmedia Debate: Content v. Marketing

- In what ways is transmedia storytelling a mode of content? In what ways is transmedia storytelling a mode of marketing?

  - Marketing: Merchandising and synergy made possible by conglomeration

  - Content: Rather than film as self-contained, a story unfolds across multiple platforms. Fans often participate as "authors," changing how the story unfolds

# *Star Wars* as Game-changer

A LONG TIME AGO IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY....
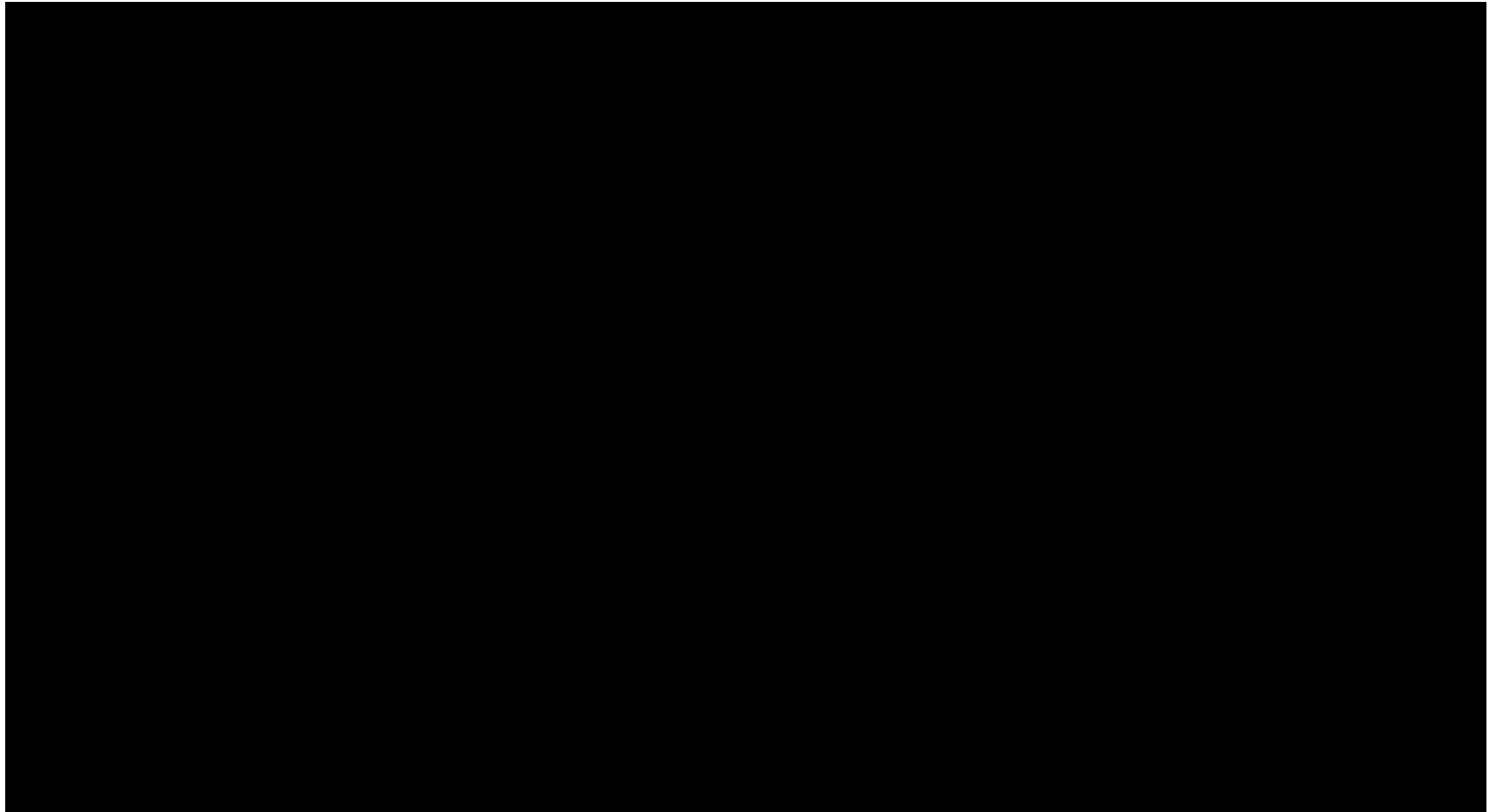
- Transmedia Marketing

  - Merchandising

  - Cross-promotion

- Transmedia Content

  - Novels, video games, TV shows, etc.

  - Encyclopedic enough for individual fantasy

# Key Transmedia Debate:
## Content v. <u>Marketing</u>

How should we think about transmedia's "participatory" ethos?
What's the appeal of transmedia efforts like this?

# DH & Transmedia <u>Marketing</u>

## Possible Low-Stakes Assignment

- Task:
- Students design a scavenger hunt/geocaching experience in small groups for a given media property



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WIN PRIZES & CHANGE THE WORLD

# DH & Transmedia <u>Marketing</u>
## Possible Low-Stakes Assignment

- Task:
- Students design a scavenger hunt/ geocaching experience in small groups for a given media property

- Goal:
- Analysis over scavenger hunt design
- Students understand the creation of participatory, "top-down" marketing efforts.
- They also learn how participation affects viewers' sense of ownership/fantasy investment in the franchise
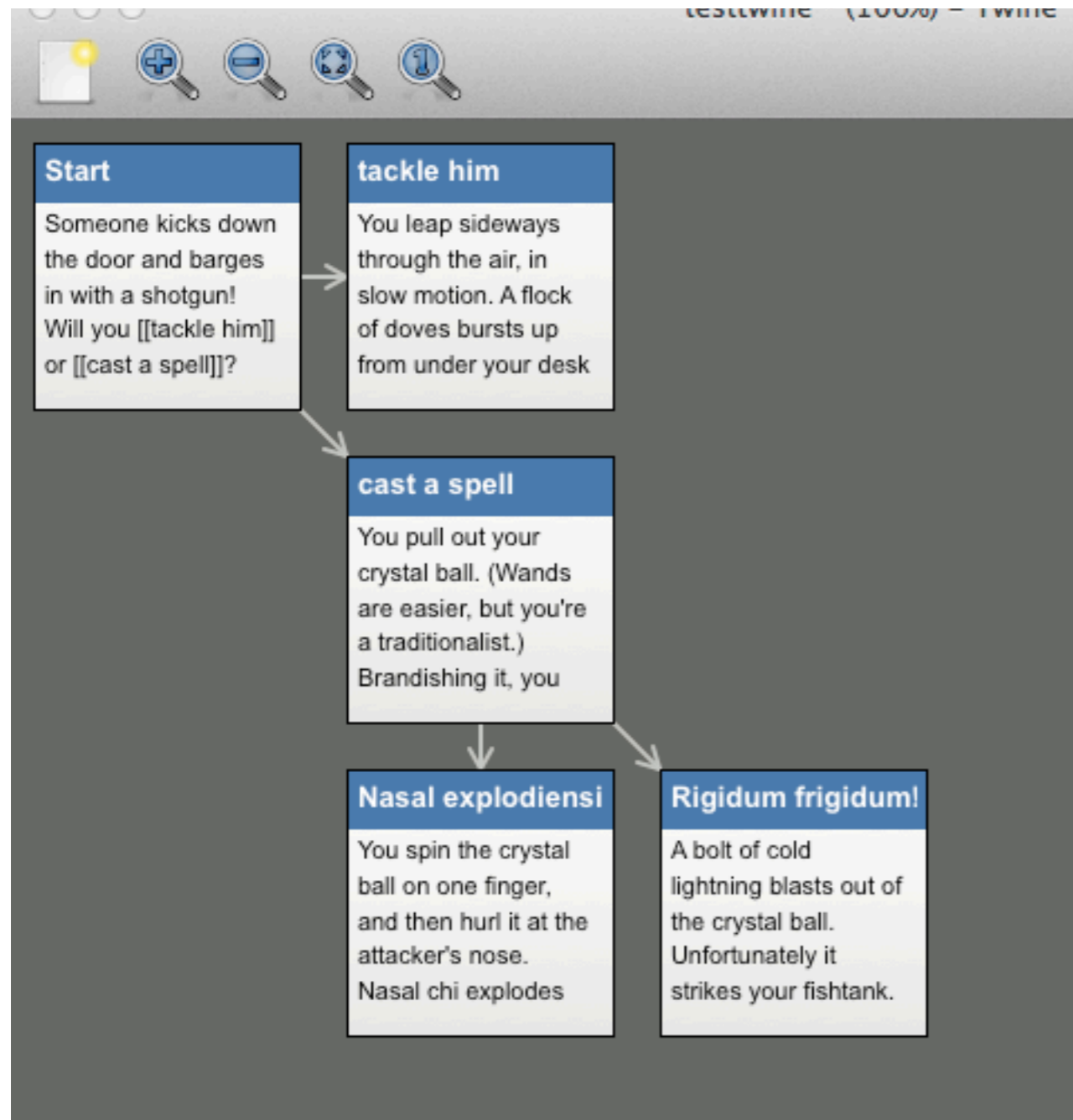
# Key Transmedia Debate: <u>Content</u> v. Marketing

- *Bandersnatch* and Storyboarding

  - Transmedia franchise

  - Interactive storytelling

- How do you plan such a complicated narrative?



A NETFLIX ORIGINAL

A **BLACK MIRROR** EVENT

**BANDERSNATCH**

**28 DEC** | **NETFLIX**
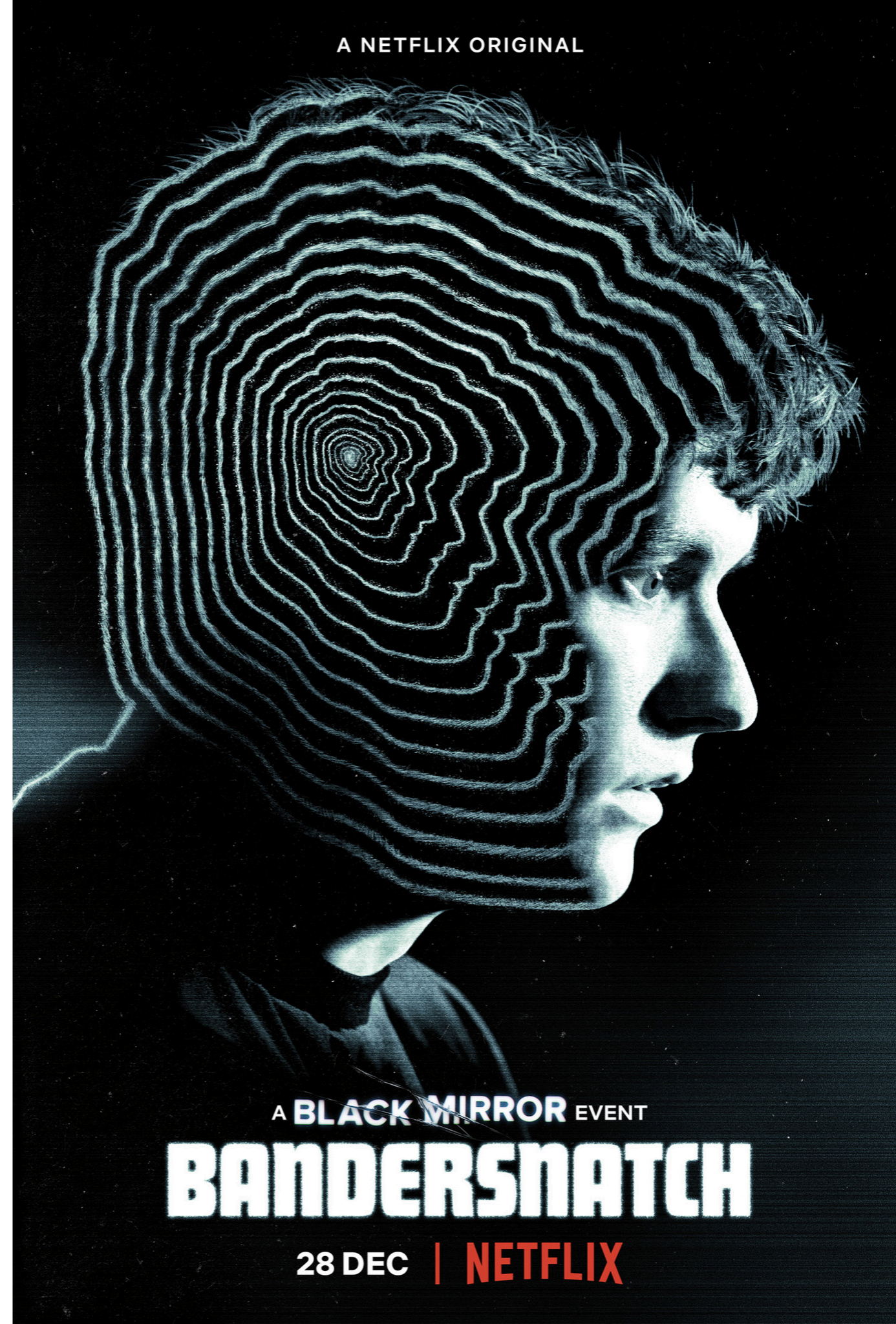
# Bandersnatch

# Key Transmedia Debate: Content v. Marketing



- How do you plan such a complicated narrative?

  - Charlie Baker used free, open-source software: Twine

  - Open Question: Should students create a project in Twine OR study an existing project?

# Key Transmedia Debate:
## Content v. Marketing

- Twine Example #1

- Twine Example #2

- Open Question: Should students create a project in Twine OR study an existing project?

# Key Transmedia Debate:
## <u>Content</u> v. Marketing

*Bandersnatch* is a monumental storytelling effort AND elaborate data-mining experiment

Assignment goal: understand what transmedia authorship/ participation looks like in a digital world.

**Black Mirror:**

#Bandersnatch
where you think you're
controlling Stefan but
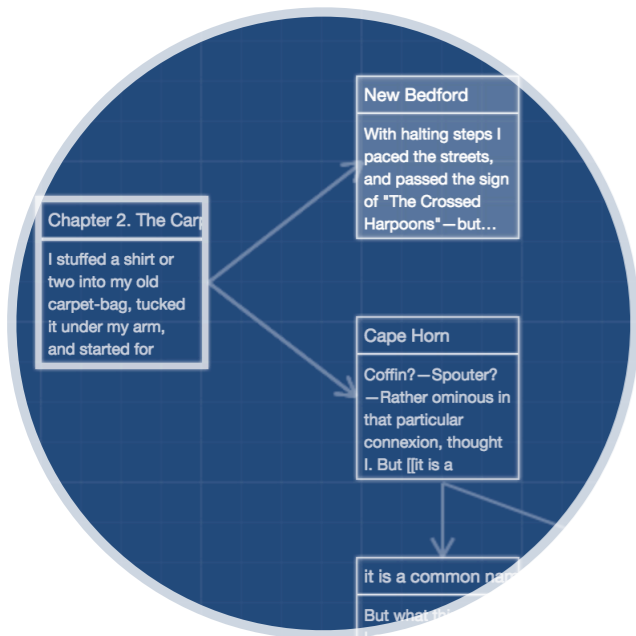in reality Netflix is
controlling you.

BANDERSNATCH

# Final Assignment: Transmedia Franchises


Board game


Storyboarded video game


Character social media profile


Scavenger hunt

- Task: Students build their own transmedia extensions for one of the media properties we've studied that semester.

- Goal: This assignment would require them to theorize the industrial incentives (marketing) for such projects as well as think through the narrative structure (content) of transmedia franchises