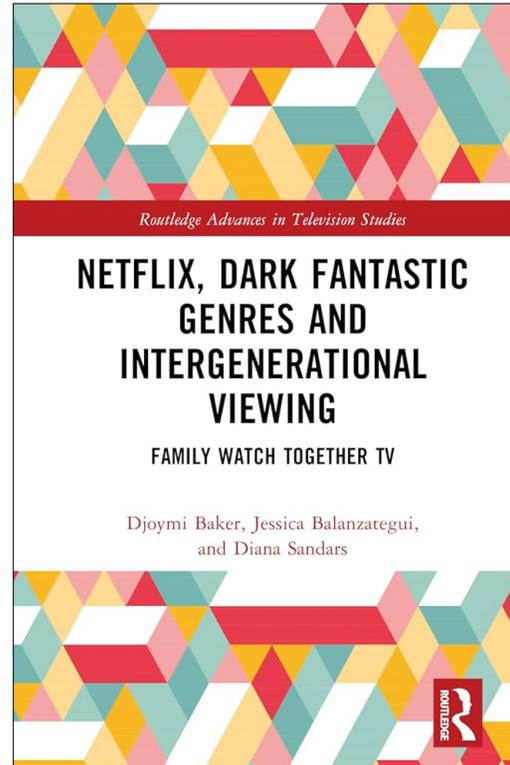


Djoyimi Baker, Jessica Balanzategui, and Diana Sandars, **Netflix, Dark Fantastic Genres and Intergenerational Viewing: Family Watch Together TV**, London, UK: Routledge, 2023, 238 pp., \$136.00 (hardcover).

Reviewed by
Gina Junhan Fu
National University of Singapore

In the flourishing era of subscription video-on-demand (SVOD), Netflix has emerged as a prime destination for discovering new content, with family television, especially the dark telefantasy genre, gaining increasing prominence for both the platform and viewers. **Netflix, Dark Fantastic Genres and Intergenerational Viewing: Family Watch Together TV** is a pioneering work that explores this contentious genre. Dark telefantasy series, a bricolage of science fiction, horror, and fantasy, tend to be categorized under the “Family Watch Together TV” label on Netflix’s interface. The authors describe this tag as a discursively constructed cultural category that invites covieing across age groups and generations. Within the scope of this book, Netflix is positioned at a transformational junction between linear legacy television and future digital media, characterized by its fluid classification system. The malleable approach to content taxonomy often leads to the authors’ alignment of the “Family Watch Together TV” tag with dark telefantasy when discussing Netflix’s family-oriented content.



Structured into seven chapters, this book, beyond its introduction, dedicates each chapter to a case study of a different Netflix series, following their chronological order of release. Beginning with the global success of *Stranger Things* (The Duffer Brothers, 2016–2022), Netflix replicated its model to launch more dark family content in the subsequent years, including the adaptation of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (Harris, 2017) and the reboot of *Lost in Space* (Arragon, Drake, Collins, & Schofield, 2018) as part of Netflix’s continuous efforts to regenrify telefantasy that was previously considered gritty and adult oriented. This was followed by the production of *Age of Resistance* (Peruggi, 2019) and *Raising Dion* (Phillips, Ricourt, Feeney, & Monroe, 2019). The book concludes with discussions on the new season of *Stranger Things* (The Duffer Brothers, 2016–2022) and the unprecedented superhit *Squid Game* (Hwang, 2021) as potentially marking the winding down of the telefantasy cycle amid the ever-evolving dynamics between over-the-top (OTT) platforms, shifting market preferences, and the changing role of television in family life.

By weaving together stories of the production and reception of Netflix's dark fantastic series, the book meticulously explores how the company has reshaped the landscape of family-friendly television and solidified its position as a cultural hegemon that continuously ushers in new genre cycles. Employing a blend of audience research methods (including online surveys and in-depth interviews with Netflix-subscribing families) and textual analysis, the authors emphasize the prominent position of dark fantasy series in fostering family covieing culture and intergenerational dynamics. The book addresses a crucial gap in understanding the intertwining relationship between Netflix, dark family-oriented content, and intergenerational viewership. Unfortunately, the predominant focus on the textual qualities of the programs leaves some aspects of the reception context insufficiently explored, albeit rich audience data is collected.

The introduction chapter underlines a critical loophole in Netflix's analysis of users' viewing data: With the account-sharing subscription plan, the platform can only collect data about each user's viewing history of "Family Watch Together TV," however the data cannot reflect whether family members watch the show on the same device or separately in their own rooms. Hence, the authors have conducted empirical research to probe real-life happenings of covieing. The findings show that parents and children sometimes do watch Netflix together and the transgenerationality of media content fosters interaction between family viewers and forges connections between audiences in different age cohorts. Accompanying each chapter, the authors identify moments of "plural audience address" (p. 118) where the programs simultaneously cater to children's preferences while evoking a sense of "haunted nostalgia" (p. 32) for adult audiences to savor.

By tracing the genealogy of dark telefantasy programming from the TVI to TVIV age, discourses around parents' perception of the suitability of the genre were closely examined. The deregulation of cable channels in the 1980s paralleled by increasing production of family and children horror content prefigured the investment and prioritization of dark telefantasy by Netflix. The platform capitalizes on the nostalgic value and intergenerational significance of "Family Watch Together TV" while shunning its moral and regulatory responsibilities for protecting children from watching inappropriate content. Furthermore, through the over-the-top operations of side-lining the labels of horror and dark sci-fi and rebranding telefantasy into "Family Watch Together TV," Netflix presents a familial imaginary where the platform can be entrusted to provide a safe harbor for intergenerational viewing. By calling for more parental oversight, Netflix urges viewers to rework intergenerational relationships in TV viewing, thereby promoting kinship within households. Such catalogue organization and algorithmic curation of content provide multiple pathways of access that eventually feed into an ever-expanding subscriber base for Netflix.

Consequently, the book's discussion on the transformational tension of dark telefantasy centers around the "Netflixification" of family TV, tracing developments from *Stranger Things* (The Duffer Brothers, 2016–2022) to *Squid Game* (Hwang, 2021). The authors aptly outline how Netflix has established and consolidated a new dark family genre cycle in the SVOD sector, challenging traditional perceptions of family content as safe, conservative, and child-centric. In a sense, the benchmark hit of *Stranger Things* (The Duffer Brothers, 2016–2022) heralded a paradigm shift in the model of family viewing, opening new avenues for intergenerational audience research. The revived discourses of "family viewing around a single TV set," (p. 16) with an emphasis on Netflix's "Original" flagship family-friendly productions, counters the narrative that streaming services tend to prioritize individualized, adult-centric

horror content, bringing about the death of child-appropriate, communal viewing. The authors posit that Netflix's telefantasy content has repositioned television at the center of family entertainment, where it is seen as an extension of audiences, a cultural glue, and a communal reconfiguration of spectatorship.

Pitched as "Family Watch Together TV" on the interface of Netflix, the alt-genre tag occupies an ambiguous and liminal position between gritty adult content and child-appropriate programming. To engage a transgenerational audience, Netflix emphasizes the quality of family TV by benchmarking it against the high-profile adult-oriented "Originals" while foregrounding the value of the programs as "reviving a communal experience reminiscent of 'the old days' of broadcast television" (p. 35). Nostalgic pastiche is crafted using an assemblage of intertexts, aesthetic elements, and media texts from the last century like the 1980s' artifacts in *Stranger Things* (The Duffer Brothers, 2016–2022). Through an ostensibly incompatible marriage of nostalgia and novelty, Netflix's family TV fosters a viewing experience that nurtures affective intimacy across generations. This approach underscores the platform's strategic pillars: transcending age-based barriers and uniting diverse audiences in a shared viewing journey. Meanwhile, the authors argue against the notion that this nostalgic intertextuality primarily benefits older generations in the transfer of memories. Instead, they propose that children are also empowered through "surrogate nostalgia," which facilitates intergenerational conversations and a shared understanding of the past.

Reading from the cover page and preface, the book seems to be intended for readers who are interested in reception studies about family viewing in the streaming age. However, the book's focus on platform analysis and the textual qualities of Netflix's content somewhat overshadows the empirical audience research component. While it scrupulously presents a new approach to conceptualizing dark fantastical family television in the SVOD context, a deeper dive into how the evolution of this genre impacts real-world family viewing dynamics would have enriched the analysis. Questions also arise about whether the "Family Watch Together TV" label, reflective of Netflix's strategy of blending genres and fostering intergenerational connections, truly meets family audiences' expectations for communal viewing. Despite the book's comprehensive mixed-method design, it lacks a thorough examination of the intergenerational dynamics that these Netflix shows are said to evoke, particularly about the authors' own conversations with actual viewers. A more harmonious integration of audience interviews with textual and platform analysis could have provided clearer insights into the continuities and disruptions of domestic viewing culture between the legacy televisual mediascape and the SVOD ecosystem.

The conclusion of the book poses new questions about the next alt-genre that Netflix could popularize for family audiences and points us toward an emerging research avenue in intergenerational dynamics on and off screen when maneuvering gatekeeping measures for controlling children's media consumption. Beyond being a significant first move toward an understudied yet complicated field of media studies, the book provides new frontiers for studying the relationship between children, adults, and media by revisiting the cultural and industrial deliberations of the SVOD ecology. Throughout the book, the authors skillfully engage with a wide array of scholarly research, archival data, and cross-checking paratextual discourses to provoke readers to reconsider the association between OTT platforms at large and intergenerational relationships.

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