

The Banner Saga

An RYG Analysis

Platform: PC (Windows 7 only)
DRM: Steamworks (Steam)
Digital Distributor: Steam

Developer: Stoic Studio
Publisher: Versus Evil

RYG's ASSESSMENT

1a. Product Info

Note: **Alternative digital vendors** in which The Banner Saga's sold. Be advised that each vendor will bundle their unique DRM system in addition to Steam.

Note: **The Banner Saga: Factions** is playable only through Steam.

Note: Linux port for The Banner Saga is currently in **development**.

1b. Digital Dwnld

Note: **Alternative payment options** provided on Steam.

Note: Refer to Section 3, **Billing, Payment & Other Subscriptions** in respect to preorder refunds for Players living in the EU.

Note: Difference in prices for The Banner Saga can be found via. **Steam Apps Database**.

60% BARGAIN-BASEMENT MATERIAL 64% and below

Looking at how much information is provided on The Banner Saga on the Steam site prior and on release.

- ✓ The Banner Saga released globally on 15.01.2014
- ✓ The Banner Saga sold through multiple digital ventors
- ✓ DRM-Free release through **Good Old Games** (as of 06.02.2014)
- ✓ Base game and soundtrack available as a separate and/or bundled purchase
- ✓ Minimum and recommended playing specs provided through Steam
- ✓ Demo provided as a free-to-play multiplayer game
- ✓ Advised Steamworks (Steam) DRM was to be used for The Banner Saga
- ✓ Advised how Steam DRM would activate The Banner Saga through Steam
- ✓ Manual and Readme found on **bannersaga.gamepedia.com**
- ✓ EULA, **Privacy Policy** and **TOS** fully accessible on **steampowered.com**
- ✓ All game-related information can be found on **steampowered.com**

- ✗ Available only on Windows and MacOS
- ✗ Minimum and recommended download specs not provided through Steam

Looking at Steam as a digital distributing service for PC games.

- ✓ Available worldwide through **steampowered.com**
- ✓ Minimum and recommended specs provided
- ✓ Advised Steamworks (Steam) DRM was to be used for The Banner Saga
- ✓ Advised how Steam DRM would activate The Banner Saga through Steam
- ✓ Alternative payment options provided
- ✓ Confirmation of purchase and receipt provided
- ✓ Free and unlimited access and downloads after purchase
- ✓ Can **backup purchased games "offline"** (e.g. external or optical drives)
- ✓ Refunds offered for pre-orders only
- ✓ Can access personal data

- ✗ The Banner Saga on Steam is priced inconsistently across global regions
- ✗ Download / Client Manager is required, including for gameplay

Note: Downloading The Banner Saga will take ~2.1Gb.

Note: Refer to [Section 7\(A\): Disclaimers](#) under The Steam's Subscriber's Agreement in relation to "as is".

Note: Valve will **not delete** any Players accounts voluntarily.

Note: Please refer to Part 3b, EULA / TOS in relation to Steam's Subscriber's Agreement

2a. Privacy Policy

Note: Please note that The Banner Saga will connect to Google Analytics via Adobe Air, even in offline mode. Stoic Studio's Privacy Policy won't specify this in relation to the game.

2b. Privacy Policy

Note: Privacy Policy contains ~1,860 words. Last updated August 2012.

Note: Please refer to *Personally Identifiable Information* under Valve's Privacy Policy.

Note: Please refer to *Use of Personally Identifiable Information* under Valve's Privacy Policy.

Note: Accessing personal info can be found within the Players Account Settings once logged into Steam.

Note: Refer to Steam Privacy Policy's [readability scores](#).

Note: Valve, however, won't send personal info to third parties for marketing purposes.

Note: Please refer to *Use of Personally Identifiable Information* under Valve's Privacy Policy.

- ✗ Players account creation is required
- ✗ Currency conversion not provided at the time of purchase
- ✗ Minimum and recommended download specs not provided through Steam
- ✗ No refunds or exchanges for purchased games
- ✗ The Banner Saga is provided "as is" with limited warranties
- ✗ Cover waived against any unforeseeable damages and/or disruptions of service
- ✗ No options to voluntarily terminate Steam account
- ✗ Account termination voids past purchases and licenses to play them
- ✗ Consumers prevented from disputing and validating Steam TOS breaches
- ✗ Can't review and question changes made to Steam TOS
- ✗ Past purchases voided after refusing to accept Steam TOS

Looking at The Banner Saga's Privacy Policy through Stoic Studio / Versus Evil

- ✓ Privacy Policy found on stoicstudio.com
- ✗ Policy only applies to the website only and not directly to The Banner Saga

Looking at The Banner Saga's Privacy Policy through Valve

- ✓ Privacy Policy found on steampowered.com
- ✓ Policy applies to The Banner Saga, Steam and Steam DRM
- ✓ Privacy Policy formatted for easy reading on the web
- ✓ "Personally-identifiable" & "non-personally identifiable" info are clearly defined
- ✓ Policy explicitly specifies which info are collected before & during gameplay
- ✓ Info is stored at Valve Corporation within the US
- ✓ Data centres are 100% safe and secure
- ✓ Policy explicitly specifies which information are used
- ✓ Players can opt-out of marketing and/or promotional material
- ✓ Players can access their personally-identifiable information
- ✓ Players can modify their personally-identifiable information
- ✓ Players have full control over their personally-identifiable information
- ✓ Players can validate the info they've provided via Email
- ✗ Privacy Policy was not written for easy comprehension
- ✗ Players not visibly notified of any changes made to the Policy
- ✗ Players not consulted on future revisions to the Privacy Policy
- ✗ Third parties are not identified
- ✗ Players cannot export their information
- ✗ Players data is retained by Valve for an extended period of time
- ✗ Can't review and query changes made to the Privacy Policy
- ✗ Valve may transfer all players information in the event of a sale or merger
- ✗ Players must accept ALL changes made before playing The Banner Saga

3a. EULA (GAME)

3b. EULA (STEAM)

Note: 7,431 Words found in Steam's EULA. Last updated July 2013.

Note: Steam's Video Policy can be found the [Legal Info](#) section.

Note: Refer to Steam EULA's [readability scores](#).

Note: Valve will **not delete** any Players accounts voluntarily.

See Also: Section 12, *Dispute Resolution / Binding Arbitration / Class Action Waiver*

4. Setup / Install

Note: Installing games through Steam to a different folder and drive can be done by altering the Steam shortcut to add "-dev" (via. [RPS](#))

Note: Downloading The Banner Saga will take ~2.1Gb.

Looking at The Banner Saga's EULA from Stoic Studio.

- ✓ EULA / TOS wasn't found / wasn't required.

Looking at Steam Subscriber's Agreement through Steam.

- ✓ EULA / TOS is found on steampowered.com
- ✓ EULA / TOS covers The Banner Saga, Steam and Steam DRM
- ✓ Users visibly notified of any changes made to the EULA / TOS prior to purchase
- ✓ Terms and conditions for Steam DRM are clearly defined
- ✓ Can back-up copies of The Banner Saga
- ✓ Allows monetisation of clips relating to Steam through video-sharing sites
- ✓ Won't blacklist specific background services or software
- ✓ Users can criticise or provide criticism about the game without reprisals
- ✗ EULA / TOS was not formatted for easy reading on the web
- ✗ EULA / TOS was not written for easy comprehension
- ✗ Drafted to only abide by the laws of the US
- ✗ Players not consulted on future revisions to the EULA / TOS
- ✗ Can't review and query changes made to the EULA / TOS
- ✗ License to play the game only provided
- ✗ No refunds or exchanges for purchased games
- ✗ Circumvention of Steam DRM prohibited
- ✗ Steam's source code isn't to be modified or reverse-engineered
- ✗ Not permitted to create "mods" for Steam
- ✗ Steam is provided "as is" with limited warranties
- ✗ Cover waived against any unforeseeable damages and/or disruptions of service
- ✗ Termination process dictated by Valve
- ✗ Arbitration process overseen by an external party within the US
- ✗ Limited options for players to take any legal action

Looking at how The Banner Saga is installed on Windows PCs only.

- ✓ Custom installation options are provided
- ✓ All files are installed within folders designated by Players
- ✓ Steam DRM files installed within folders designated by Players
- ✓ Currently-executing background services won't interfere with installation
- ✓ Error-free installation
- ✓ Installation completed within 20 minutes (using an ADSL2+ connection)
- ✗ No installation logs of files and registry keys

5. Updates / Patching

Note: The latest version (~400Mb) evaluated required no patches or updates.

Note: There is a **workaround** for disabling any automatic updates without doing the checks for every game one by one.

Looking at how The Banner Saga is patched prior and after gameplay.

- ✓ Can opt-in / opt-out of automatic updates
- ✓ Can play the game unpatched
- ✓ No other DRM files or registry keys are installed
- ✓ Details of patches provided via steampowered.com
- ✓ Users can be advised of game patch's availability
- ✓ Can play an update version of The Banner Saga with previous save games

- ✗ Patches only installed via. Steam's client manager
- ✗ Changes to the Privacy Policy / EULA / TOS not provided until updates begin
- ✗ No installation logs of files and registry keys
- ✗ Rollback option not provided
- ✗ No plans to sunset Steam DRM (*See Section 1a for alternative options*)

6. DRM & Activation

Note: It is recommended that (new) Players should install and update Steam first before installing The Banner Saga.

See Also: How to play The Banner Saga in **offline mode**.

Note: Installing, updating Steam and installing The Banner Saga for the first time will connect to the following companies: Valve (*Highwinds Network Group, QWest Communications, Limelight Networks, Amazon Web Services, Level 3 Communications, ChinaNet, Telstra and Verisign*)

Looking at Steam DRM in relation to The Banner Saga and its effects on Windows PCs only.

- ✓ Won't interfere with currently-executing background services or software
- ✓ Firewall and AV settings aren't modified or required to be modified
- ✓ Players are aware and advised on how The Banner Saga will be activated
- ✓ Players name, password and email are only required
- ✓ Unlimited online activations to any one PC
- ✓ Can play single-player game offline
- ✓ Only Steam DRM is implemented
- ✓ Unlimited hardware activations
- ✓ Unlimited installations
- ✓ Support and troubleshooting process provided
- ✓ Activation is simple and hassle-free

- ✗ No instructions provided on the activation process
- ✗ Can't verify the safety and reliability of the activation process
- ✗ A non-transferrable Players account is required
- ✗ Game is locked to specific account after activation

7. Gameplay Experience

Note: There are limited graphical options presented. Arbitrary visual settings provided under "Good" and "Best". The Banner Saga does provide flexible windowed resolution settings.

Looking at the gameplay aspects of The Banner Saga and how it interacts with PC Windows.

- ✓ Can play on minimum specs
- ✓ Can play a backup copy of the game
- ✓ Can play in borderless full screen mode
- ✓ Can play in (flexible) windowed mode
- ✓ Can play with (English) closed captions / subtitles
- ✓ Can play offline
- ✓ Can access DLC offline
- ✓ Can play without connectivity issues on an ADSL connection
- ✓ Can play error-free for more than 5hrs
- ✓ Won't interfere with services and background software
- ✓ Will resume at the last checkpoint

Note: The Banner Saga was designed primarily for the mouse configuration.

Note: Refer to [Google Analytic's Flash Tracking feature](#) that can be implemented within Adobe Flash components. The Banner Saga uses Adobe Air.

Note: Steam will still connect to Steam Achievements in offline mode.

Note: Refer to The Banner Saga's [lack of modding capabilities](#).

Note: Saves found within the / AppData/Roaming/TheBanner-Saga/ folder. No known configuration files exist.

- ✗ Can only play The Banner Saga on fixed keyboard / mouse settings
- ✗ Only playable on mouse and keyboard
- ✗ No separate volume controls provided
- ✗ Can only play The Banner Saga in English audio and English subtitles
- ✗ No options for user-generated audio and/or closed captions / subtitles
- ✗ Will "phone home" to Steam and Google Analytics
- ✗ Will not advise users that it connects to third-party servers in offline mode
- ✗ Cannot opt out of Steam achievements
- ✗ No options for manually saving the game during gameplay
- ✗ Can only play on one PC at a time per game / account
- ✗ Can't modify savegame and/or ini file
- ✗ DRM and monitoring services will operate during and after gameplay

8. **PC** Checkup

Looking at whether The Banner Saga will modify certain PC settings without Players permission / consent.

- ✓ PC clean after scanning for viruses
- ✓ PC clean after scanning for malware and spyware
- ✓ PC clean after scanning for rootkits
- ✓ HOSTS wasn't modified
- ✓ Played The Banner Saga without major errors
- ✓ Start-up settings remain unaltered
- ✓ No DRM and monitoring services running in the background
- ✓ System configuration files remain unaltered

9. **Removal** Uninstall

Looking at how clean, efficient and effective the removal process is for The Banner Saga (How much legacy material is there after the removal of The Banner Saga?)

- ✓ Direct uninstallation shortcut provided through Steam's client manager
- ✓ Backup savegames prompt provided / Savegames retained
- ✓ External tool provided at steampowered.com
- ✓ External tool to remove game + DRM files is easy to use
- ✗ Steam registry keys remain after the uninstallation of Steam / The Banner Saga
- ✗ Remaining Steam keys will remain after using external tool(s)

10. **Customer** Support

Looking at the customer support side of The Banner Saga through Stoic Studio's Community Forums

- ✓ Customer service / support found in one place at stoicstudio.com/forum/
- ✓ Stoic Studio's forum is easy to use and navigate
- ✓ Searching on Stoic Studio's forum is direct and quick
- ✓ Info is easy to read and understand
- ✓ Customer services is quick to respond within 24 hours
- ✓ Customer service will resolve issues within 24 hours

Note: Stoic Studio's support service is accessible via the forum, Twitter and through emails.

Note: This is only in relation to Steam. See Section 3b. EULA (Steam).

RYG's VERDICT

60%



- ✓ Tone and language used is warm, inviting and personable
- ✓ Focused on understanding problems and providing an effective solution
- ✓ Focused on understanding problems and providing an effective solution
- ✓ Options for providing feedback on the service and quality of customer support
- ✗ No arbitration / resolution service for unresolved customer service queries
- ✗ Legal action waived once arbitration process is initiated

BARGAIN-BASE- MENT MATERIAL

64% and below

SHOWS PROMISE & POTENTIAL

Between 65% and 84%

WORTH SUPPORTING

85% and above

While the gameplay of The Banner Saga was as absorbing, challenging and fun as promised through their Kickstarter campaign (The Banner Saga is a fun 10+ hour game), it does come with considerable issues in its packaging and through Steam, along with its legal, compliance and privacy-related concerns. In addition to this is the disconnect in its Privacy Policy, which excludes The Banner Saga because the game will connect in offline mode to Google Analytics in respect to its web-based tracking feature embedded within Adobe Air. If players are interested in playing The Banner Saga they should consider finding alternative (DRM-Free) options once it becomes publicly available and playing the game with the Internet connection forcibly removed during gameplay.

Colophon

This analysis of The Banner Saga was compiled by Lisa and Martin Pham. Typeface used is ITC Stone Sans. RYG thanks Anna Henriksson, **Josh Bush**, **Ethan Lee**, **Adam Ames** and **David Hatch** for their insights and suggestions in the design of this analysis. The Banner Saga was bought with RYG funds through Steam.

Disclaimer

These analyses are only a guide and represent RYG's perspective into The Banner Saga as a product. We believe everyone should perform their own research and reach their own conclusions. This is one view of many. Again, we thank you for taking the time to read our analysis of The Banner Saga and hope you continue to support our work.

RYG is a user research and design studio for video game developers and publishers. Our focus is planning and designing games with a gamers'-first mentality through Players and product research. RYG is led by a husband-and-wife team of Lisa and Martin Pham. RYG is operated in the heart of Sydney.

RYG Analysis: The Banner Saga
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www.reclaimyourgame.com @projectryg
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