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Ready Player One



Synopsis

At once wildly original and stuffed with irresistible nostalgia, Ready Player One is a spectacularly genre-busting, ambitious, and charming debut - part quest novel, part love story, and part virtual space opera set in a universe where spell-slinging mages battle giant Japanese robots, entire planets are inspired by Blade Runner, and flying DeLoreans achieve light speed. It's the year 2044, and the real world is an ugly place. Like most of humanity, Wade Watts escapes his grim surroundings by spending his waking hours jacked into the OASIS, a sprawling virtual utopia that lets you be anything you want to be, a place where you can live and play and fall in love on any of 10,000 planets. And like most of humanity, Wade dreams of being the one to discover the ultimate lottery ticket that lies concealed within this virtual world. For somewhere inside this giant networked playground, OASIS creator James Halliday has hidden a series of fiendish puzzles that will yield massive fortune - and remarkable power - to whoever can unlock them. For years, millions have struggled fruitlessly to attain this prize, knowing only that Halliday's riddles are based in the pop culture he loved - that of the late 20th century. And for years, millions have found in this quest another means of escape, retreating into happy, obsessive study of Halliday's icons. Like many of his contemporaries, Wade is as comfortable debating the finer points of John Hughes's oeuvre, playing Pac-Man, or reciting Devo lyrics as he is scrounging power to run his OASIS rig. And then Wade stumbles upon the first puzzle. Suddenly the whole world is watching, and thousands of competitors join the hunt - among them certain powerful players who are willing to commit very real murder to beat Wade to this prize. Now the only way for Wade to survive and preserve everything he knows is to win. But to do so, he may have to leave behind his oh-so-perfect virtual existence and face up to life - and love - in the real world he's always been so desperate to escape. A world at stake. A quest for the ultimate prize. Are you ready?

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This book illustrated the difference between reading as a reader and reading as an author. The crux of the problem: my inner geek fell in love with this book, while the objective side of my mind had a hard time overlooking the flaws. This is an attempt to tackle critique from both viewpoints. Keep that in mind if this review is a bit fractured. My two sides didn't always war; they agreed on the characters, or rather, the lack thereof. I had difficulty forming a clear view of the characters early on. It took me some time to figure it out, dazzled as I was by the nostalgia rushing through my system: they are stereotypes. The reclusive loner. The so-punk-it-hurts snarky girl who helps the protagonist "level up" at relationships by accepting her despite her one small flaw. The jock. The honorable Japanese character. Cline misses a big chance to make up for this by turning his villains into generic "Bob Evils" of "Evilcorp" stand-in company IOI. We learn that the antagonist once designed video games, but see no hint of how he went from a benign game designer to a soulless murderer. Lost opportunity there. Unfortunately, pacing presents a problem. Geek mind was pleased with a perceived brisk pace, and wanted to tear right through it. It's tough to give a book bad marks for pacing when that occurs, except Cline stops the show almost every time a pop culture reference comes along, offering a detailed explanation. This might have been meant to help the younger readers, but it murders the pace. Then we have the plot: it spoke right to my geeky soul. From the book title itself (a reference to the arcade games of my youth) to the numerous 80s film and music references, the author knows his subject matter well and wears it like a badge of honor.

Brief summary and review, no spoilers. The year is 2044 and the world is an unpleasant and grim place. Famine and poverty are rampant, and to escape the bleakness of real life most people choose to instead enter the world of OASIS. Let me explain OASIS - this is a virtual world that is very elaborate and realistic, and it contains multiple planets and landscapes. It was created in main part by a man named James Halliday, the ultimate lonely computer geek, who was obsessed with the 1980's. Halliday died some time before the start of this story but had stated in his will that his vast fortune would go to the person who could find three magical keys hidden in OASIS, pass the portals associated with them, and then find the ultimate prize - the hidden egg. Over the years many people

have searched for these magic keys and gates but none have prevailed. Those who search call themselves gunters. Also at play is a villainess corporation called IOI led by a man named Sorrento - who's agents searching for the egg are called Sixers. The main protagonist of this story is an 18 year old named Wade Watts. Wade lives in abject poverty with his uncaring and cruel aunt. Because Wade's life is so grim, like so many others he spends almost all of his time in OASIS. It's where he goes to school and it's in OASIS where he meets his friends - avatars named Aech and Art3mis. Because everyone he meets via OASIS is an avatar, it's hard for anyone to distinguish friend from foe. Because of his real world lack of money and help, Wade has few powers and weapons for his avatar (which he named Parzival, a takeoff of Percival the Knight which was already taken).

Ready Player One is a geektastic novel that invokes a nostalgic feeling for 80s geek culture. The 80s was, in many ways, the birthplace of the modern geek culture. Between video games, amazing geek-centric movies, the popularity and damning of role playing games like Dungeons and Dragons and the rise of progressive bands like Rush, much of what constitutes geek culture in the 2000s can trace its roots back to the 1980s. Author Ernest Cline obviously has a fondness for the time period and knows his stuff as he fills Ready Player One to the brim with pop cultural nods and firmly ties the 80s the entire plot of the novel. It's 2044 and the world is in shambles. Poverty, war and other standard dystopian plot devices rule the day. Most of the population spends the majority of their time in a virtual world (think World of Warcraft on crack) called OASIS. OASIS started as a video game that grew in popularity to encompass multiple worlds and planets and systems that encompass virtually any geekdom you can think of (e.g. Star Wars, Star Trek, Blade Runner, steampunk, etc.). Pretty much anything and everything is done in OASIS now. Even schooling. Ernest Cline spends a good chunk of the early novel setting up OASIS and creates a fairly believable depiction of what life would be like if we increasingly spent time in the virtual world as opposed to the real one. Wade Watts is a typical teenager in 2044. He's poor and goes to school in OASIS, where he is stuck on his school's planet because everything in OASIS involves real world transactions. In an interesting nod to the current financial situations engulfing our current world, OASIS currency is valued higher than "real" money and for those who don't have money, you're as stuck in OASIS as you would be in the real world.

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