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Ready Player One: A Novel



Synopsis

In the year 2044, reality is an ugly place. The only time teenage Wade Watts really feels alive is when he's jacked into the virtual utopia known as the OASIS. Wade's devoted his life to studying the puzzles hidden within this world's digital confines—puzzles that are based on their creator's obsession with the pop culture of decades past and that promise massive power and fortune to whoever can unlock them. But when Wade stumbles upon the first clue, he finds himself beset by players willing to kill to take this ultimate prize. The race is on, and if Wade's going to survive, he'll have to win—and confront the real world he's always been so desperate to escape.

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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. He does an okay job of weaving it into the narrative, barring the examples above. I'm also a sucker for a well-done quest plot. This book delivers on the quest plot, big-time. The romance is bland. I never cared for the cardboard cutout that was Art3mis, so it just never connected. The EvilCorp subplot, unfortunately, hit ludicrous levels even for my geek brain, and would have cost it a star even from that point of view. Writer Brain agrees on the quest plot, but the 80s references? Pandering. Pure and simple. They're not even well done, with some just being pure name drops, a wink and a nudge intended to make me like the book - it's an easy emotional note to play, using the reader's nostalgic emotions as a crutch for the characters' emotions, which are difficult to access. Then there are the ludicrous plot contrivances, especially Parzival's "grand plan". No spoilers here, but you'll know it when you see it and it may drive you mad. Cline clearly painted himself into a corner and found a very far-fetched way out of it using magic tools never-before-mentioned. This happens in other places in the book, like a teenager becoming interested in and thoroughly studying the culture from six decades previous, but this is particularly egregious. So, we have the cons: relying too heavily on nostalgia, ridiculous plot contrivances, flat characters, and uneven pace. Then come the pros: a story that keeps you reading, a well-done quest plot, and - from my geeky perspective - feeding of the nostalgic urge. Thus, I recommend this book with several caveats. One, you absolutely must have a connection to the 80s. This must come across as a very hollow book without that connection. Two, if you have that connection, it should be a connection of the geekier stripe. Three, be prepared to turn your brain off and enjoy as if you would an action film. If you can do all of that, you might have a blast with it as I did, even while objectively knowing it's a bit iffy.

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.) Even with this disadvantage, because of his intelligence and his obsession with anything Halliday or 80's related he is able to figure out how to find the first key - the copper one, and figures out how to pass that first gate. The race is on, with other gunters and the Sixers in hot pursuit. The future of OASIS is at risk because Sorrento intends to start charging money for the use of OASIS, which would keep so many offline and unable to access it. And this competition poses real life dangers for the players as well. This is really a quest novel in the grand tradition of great fantasy literature. We have obstacles to overcome and evil-doers to defeat, and "magic," albeit computer generated, along the way.. There is plenty of action in this book and you will be turning the pages eagerly to read what happens next. One of the (many) things that makes this book so wonderful are all the 80's references, especially to the video games and music and movies that so many of us fondly remember. Note - don't worry if you weren't or aren't a big video game player or don't remember a lot about the 80's - if you are it might only add to your enjoyment of this novel but anyone can follow along. The story is both innovative and old-fashioned and it should appeal to anyone who loves to lose themselves inside a good novel. At heart, this is a book for anyone who has ever felt like an outsider or a geek, and for those of us who love to read. I haven't fallen in love with a book like this in a long time and I hope it gets the recognition and readership that it deserves. As an added plus, and without giving away any spoilers, there is an interesting twist of sorts at the end, that poses an ethical dilemma for anyone wielding power over OASIS. Highly recommended. Just a magical book with a cast of characters that you will really care about. Even though this takes place in the year 2044, the sense of nostalgia and the world created will take you back in time to the way you felt when you were 18. I promise.

I can't remember the last time I read a book as "fun" as this one. I just enjoyed it. Granted, I'm probably the very key demograph the book was aimed at, but it worked. I get the reviews from others claiming the book did too much exposition and pandering and self-indulgence, true. Also true is that I didn't care. Take the book for what it is, fun. Good ol' nostalgic fun. It felt very much like an 80's movie adventure. I can't wait to see what Spielberg does with it for the screen. Hopefully its as faithful an adaptation as possible.

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