

For Better or Worse, ‘Ready Player One’ is Nostalgia at its Purest

Submitted by [JonHC](#) [1] on March 29, 2018 - 12:19pm

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CHICAGO – Just in time for Easter, there’s a film filled with enough Easter eggs to drown a small country. “Ready Player One” is a “Where’s Waldo” of mostly 80’s pop culture references that are meant to trigger our (and especially filmmaker Steven Spielberg’s) sentimental, nostalgic cores by bombarding us with reminders of our childhood. These trips down memory lane are fun until they’re not.

“Ready Player One” offers us a visual buffet, combining the live action excitement of a video game with recognizable visual cues. Unfortunately, this feast doesn’t want us to eat until we are full, but to go past that point and into Jabba the Hut territories of gorging. When every scene becomes an attempt at an iSpy game, the film’s effect turns from being a treat to being overwhelmingly taxing. That’s not to say that every film, game and television reference isn’t fun, but they mostly provide a clever smokescreen meant to keep us preoccupied so that we don’t see how empty and the film’s story really is.

Steven Spielberg’s talent is undeniable. He understands the power of visual mediums and never fails to deliver on that front. In “Ready Player One”, he is able to fully unleash his inner geek onscreen and show us some of the most important influences in his life. In a way, he is a creator of his own OASIS, much like the character Halliday, as he creates these films that are meant to transport you from your own lives. “Ready Player One” is less of a film because it was meant to be an experience. For people old enough to have grown up during the 80’s, this film will offer a way to recap the decade and provide a rabbit hole that will lead you back to your own memories. For the younger viewers, it will be a history lesson and probably help provide a frame of reference for where all the source material for the TV shows and films that are currently being remade originated.



Virtual is the new real in ‘Ready Player One’
Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Adapting a novel as heartfelt and adventurous as "Ready Player One" is an ambitious task. What do you keep? What can be left out? What can and should be changed? Many authors don't like the film version of their novels because they tend to overly condense the story, altering the author's vision and meaning. "Ready Player One" is the rare film that not only has the novel's author (Ernest Cline) working on the screenplay but also has the help of veteran comic book film writer Zak Penn to fine tune it into a cinematic experience. The problem with turning this novel into an experience is that it suddenly emphasizes the visual spectacle, which cripples the emotional core of the story.

Spielberg turns this film into a whimsical adventure. Sure, it's full of danger and death, but it never loses the sense of childlike wonder and lighthearted tone. This works well if it were a film like "The Goonies" or "E.T." where the protagonists are children, but where most of the protagonists are adult-age, it just feels too sugar-coated. The "danger" in the film feels less threatening when the characters are easily able to shrug off the deaths of family members as if it were a daily occurrence. The biggest sense of danger (and terror) comes from a scene involving the recreation of the film "The Shining", which is the film's best moment and makes up for every disappointment leading up to that point.

Once you look past the visuals and 80's musical score, you notice inconsistencies in the film's message. The film is all about the OASIS being a safe haven for people seeking connection, but at the same time ultimately demonizes the idea of constant connectivity. The story revolves around a quest that people have dedicated their lives to, created by Halliday who has become a sentient, permanent presence in the online world he ultimately wants people to disconnect from. The prize is control of the OASIS, but more importantly, enough money so that the winner wouldn't have to use the virtual world as an escapist retreat from the real one. Any attempt at social commentary suddenly becomes moot when the film can't even seem to reconcile its own viewpoint.



Journey to save the real world in 'Ready Player One'

Photo credit: Warner Bros. Pictures

Despite the film's muddled message, there is enough cinematic nostalgia in "Ready Player One" to give the film a genuine heart, if only a borrowed one from the 80's. The character relationships that the film does focus on are strong, making us invested in the bonds that tie all of the characters (and all of humanity) together. There is a balance in the casting that even the film as a whole lacks. The cast is made up of both comedic and dramatic actors, and people who fall squarely in between. Actors like Tye Sheridan, Olivia Cooke, Ben Mendelsohn and Mark Rylance are there to provide emotional depth to the film, while the likes of Lena Waithe, Simon Pegg, and T.J. Miller provide moments of levity.

"Ready Player One" delivers another Spielberg spectacle that is meant to be escapism from the bleakness of the real world (and Trump's America). The film's inconsistencies prove to be of little consequence since it is meant to guide our senses and not so much our minds. The film offers adventure and a noble quest, and like the hunt for the Holy Grail, it delivers exactly that, but without all the heavy, religious details and a much more "Monty Python and the Holy Grail"-type attitude.

"Ready Player One" opens everywhere on March 29th. Featuring Tye Sheridan, Olivia Cooke, Ben Mendelsohn, Mark Rylance, Lena Waithe, Simon Pegg, and T.J. Miller. Directed by Steven Spielberg. Written by Zak Penn and Ernest Cline. Rated "PG-13"



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