

Steven Spielberg Doesn't Get to Complain About Netflix Movies Qualifying for Oscars in a Post-Ready Player One World

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Thanks, I hate it.

Image: Warner Bros.

Steven Spielberg has made many truly incredible movies in the past. He is, rightfully, one of the most lauded filmmakers ever. But as someone who had the distinct hell of watching *Ready Player One* on a flight recently, maybe we should consider that times have changed, and not *everything* he has to say is important.

Spielberg has [found himself in headlines](#) recently after it was reported by [Indiewire](#) that the director plans to launch a campaign at the next meeting of the Academy Board of Governors to get Netflix's narrative and documentary content struck from consideration at future Academy Awards. This comes after the streaming service [picked up awards at the Oscars](#) for *Roma* and *Period. End of Sentence*, projects that debuted on the streaming service before receiving limited runs in theaters that qualified them for Oscars consideration.

Spielberg [has long believed](#)—and is hoping to likewise convince a majority of the board when it meets in April—that Netflix's film content would be better suited to being recognized at the Emmys, thanks to the fact that it's primarily distributed through streaming on televisions, reaching a far bigger audience that way rather than any theatrical screenings.

The fact that Netflix only attains the minimum requirements it needs to qualify these films—and then has the marketing might to spend millions more dollars than smaller film studios to advertise them as awards season contenders—is naturally a sore point for a seasoned veteran like Spielberg. But it's hard not to feel like there's a sneering elitism running as an undercurrent to Spielberg's criticism, especially given it's in response to the fact that a film like *Roma* could *dare* come close to Academy success just for being nominated for Best Picture, even if it didn't actually win. After all, just one of his complaints essentially amounts to the fact that more people can see Netflix's film output than the average awards-season contender because they're reachable at home instead of just within the confines of a limited theatrical release. More people might watch a good movie, my *god*, perish the thought!

Several filmmakers have come out to support Netflix's inclusion at the Oscars—with creatives like [Ava DuVernay](#) citing the fact that they reach and tell stories for diverse audiences that the Academy has consistently failed to recognize in its history—but here's my own personal bugbear: The man who most recently gave the movie industry *Ready Player One* has no right to sneer at Netflix films as not being worthy enough for an Academy Award in the slightest.



Hard pass.

Image: Warner Bros.

Maybe this is just me being as grouchy as Spielberg is being. I recently flew to America to cover [New York Toy Fair](#) for io9 and Gizmodo, a flight that takes approximately just over eight hours (plus an hour and a half connecting flight to Germany) from my home in the UK. It's a long-ass time to be trapped in a metal box hurtling through the sky, and by the time I was making my way back home, I'd exhausted most of the in-flight movie options I'd wanted to see (*Deadpool 2*? Pretty

good. *Solo*? It's...still fine! *Crazy Rich Asians*? Michelle Yeoh continues to delight!). Unable to sleep, I flicked through the offerings one last time and found myself with a choice: *Ready Player One* or literally four of the worst episodes of *Star Trek: The Next Generation*'s first season ("Encounter at Farpoint" parts one and two, "Code of Honor", and "The Naked Now"). I chose *Ready Player One*, thinking it can't be [as bad as I'd heard it was](#).

Reader, it was worse.

The adaptation is admittedly stronger than Ernest Cline's original novel in some aspects, thanks to some minor changes and the fact that no one at any point fawnishly over-describes the exact minutiae of a playthrough of *Zork*, but it is also one of the most soulless blockbusters I've seen in a good, long time. When it's not narratively tumbling over itself to get to the next weightless, empty action sequence or vomiting a billion pop culture references into every frame of its being, it's content with being so heartlessly bland that there's no spark or connection to be had with the heroes or literally anything happening on screen outside of the primal brain-flicker of recognizing A Thing From Something Else.

The closest thing to joy I felt throughout the runtime was the fact that the digital avatar of Ben Mendelsohn's villain, businessman Nolan Sorrento, looked vaguely like the [Human Shrek from *Shrek 2*](#), which meant in turn that it looked like a CG replica of former UK Prime Minister and Chancellor of the Exchequer [Gordon Brown](#). Oh, and then when it ended and I was granted the sweet relief of not having to endure it anymore.

Anyway, aside from my point being that *Ready Player One* is bad, is that maybe Spielberg doesn't get to churn out creatively bankrupt features like that and then have hysterics that a streaming service's movies might be seen as valid by the Academy, as if *the art form itself* is under existential threat. Does something like *Ready Player One* have more inherent weight than *Roma* just because it played in movie theaters before going home to distribution? I mean, *Ready Player One* was never going to win an Academy award—it didn't even get a nod at the Razzies—but, as far as Spielberg's concerned, it's already elevated because it played the rules a specific way, got put out a specific way, and isn't like one of *those* films that streams on your *teevee*.

Maybe the lesson Spielberg should learn is that times change. Maybe some of the best films of the year will be found browsing your TV's streaming apps rather than at the box office. Maybe one of the best directors of the modern age can put out a soulless piece of garbage like *Ready Player One*. In an era where the Academy is, [in its own clunky way](#), trying to find a way to reflect an ever-changing movie industry, maybe denying films based on whether you could watch them at home on your TV or computer before you could see them in a movie theater is not the way they should go about that.

Also, god, maybe the lesson is also that if you find yourself unable to sleep on a long-haul flight, don't make the same mistake I made. Do literally anything else than watch *Ready Player One*.

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