



*Rareș Moldovan*

## **The State of Play: Geektopia in *Ready Player One***

---

**Abstract:** The paper looks at the figure of the “geek” in popular culture, and especially in Ernest Cline’s novel *Ready Player One*, also with a view towards the forthcoming adaptation directed by Steven Spielberg. Tracing the contours of the geek imaginary, the paper looks at its inscription in popular culture, political economy, it explores nostalgia as an enabling force, modes of community, sociability and socialization, building toward the unlikely concept of “geektopia.”

**Keywords:** Cultural Theory; Pop Culture; Geek; Nerd; 80s; Virtual Communities; Gaming; Utopia.

**RAREȘ MOLDOVAN**

Babeș-Bolyai University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania  
rareshmoldovan@gmail.com

DOI: 10.24193/cechinox.2017.32.20

### **Back to the Same Future**

This article looks forward to a film that does not yet exist. We know its release date, the 30th of March, 2018, we know its director, Steven Spielberg, and we have learned more about what seems to be an inspired cast over the last few months. The book that it adapts, by first time geek writer Ernest Cline, was undoubtedly a hit, but I think we can safely assume that when the film is released it will represent the pop culture apotheosis of the geek, in the medium that helped mould and foster this cultural icon. It will also signal, with a sort of half-baked irony, a late, reiterated victory and “revenge of the nerds.”

Forged in the bland basement dungeons of Smallville, U. S. A., as well as in the virtual dungeons ardently imagined by teenagers gathered round to the play the legendary RPG *Dungeons and Dragons*, the figure of the geek<sup>1</sup> has over the past four decades, accrued considerable status. Initially distributed somewhat evenly across American suburbia, and redistributed at key symbolic nodes in the cultural demographics, the geek and his sometime alter-ego, the nerd (these figures coalesce or develop separately, in variation<sup>2</sup>) have colonised a swath of American film and



television, tailored suitable narratives, amassed a Pantheon of (super)heroes, created a cult of collectibles, made gaming cool, invaded countless message boards across the Internet, migrated to new archipelagos such as YouTube and Twitch, and even provided a specific form of sociability and a model for community. In the words of one famous geek:

Today, geek is no longer a four-letter word. Fantasy subcultures have shifted from the fringe to pockets of cool, and their associated terminology and cultural references [...] have been absorbed into the mainstream.<sup>3</sup>

From a peripheral spectre in youth culture, bullied and derided, to an indispensable agent (most films and TV series nowadays come with a complimentary geek) is no mean feat, but beyond the rise and rise of the geek, in “absorption,” a host of phenomena are busily, systemically at work. They circumscribe its traits within a larger, and largely for profit, cultural economy. In this line of thought – which sketches the reentry of an earlier irritant into a dynamic of lucrative leisure and recognition – Cline’s novel and Spielberg’s film represent sanctioned re-appropriations. Sanctioned by geeks everywhere, surely, since they have turned the novel into a howling success and will doubtlessly flock to see the film too, this aging geek included; but what this indicates is an unsolved contradiction between geek and system. *Ready Player One* embodies and thematises this problem at the same time: as an object within this cultural economy, it is subject to the money making machine created by its existence; as a narrative, by

and large it opposes dystopian corporate capitalism and ends on the big note of geeks with money vowing to end world poverty. Geeks with money and a hyperbole of redistribution are much better than corporations; perhaps this is also a dig at the likes of Facebook or Google, or at how they’ve turned out.

But geeks have always been about saving the world. Whereas, arguably, geek representations thrive naturally in a comedic environment – from Ferris Bueller to the cult TV show *Freaks and geeks* to the more recent grown-up geeks sitcom *The Big Bang Theory* – the quintessential geek sits squarely at the centre of a salvation fantasy. An unlikely hero, like the hobbits that were its hallowed proto-forms, the geek’s story arc is usually a quest (like most game and film narratives these days), and his ultimate role is soteriological. *Ready Player One* and Cline’s second novel, *Armada* (2015), are such quests, of course, but one can think of much earlier examples. One instance, which Cline re-utilises in *Ready Player One* is the 1983 film *Wargames*, in which David Lightman, played by Matthew Broderick, must save the world from a computer bent on starting a nuclear war between the United States and the Soviet Union. Similarly, in *The last starfighter* (1984), a film that inspired Cline’s *Armada*, Alex Rogan, a trailer park teenager who masters the eponymous arcade game, becomes the hero in a space war. The symptom that most interests me in this repeated, repetitive pattern is the operation of short-circuiting. In *Wargames*, the societal dimensions of age, class, expertise, state and military security vanish as if by magic, in *The last starfighter*, interstellar distances, in *Back to the future*, time is malleable and



rewritable. The geek's skill in some aspect of technology (the brave new world of computers, gaming etc.), or even only his proximity, as is the case with Marty McFly, make all solid barriers melt into air.

In this short-circuit, the suburban realism of these stories, to which they are but tenuously anchored anyway, is subverted; which by itself is banal since fantasy always short-circuits realism. What also becomes transparent, however, is the structure and the scale of geek desire: geeks yearn big. This yearning recruits the nearly unfathomable potential of technology: in these films, and in many others, *technology is a portal*, skill and knowledge are the key, an axiom of geekdom if there ever was one. It is a simplified arrangement of aptitude and adversity, and the same pre-disposition of (super)hero and (super)villain that comics have hammered for decades in the geek imaginary, replicated at different orders of magnitude. Obstacles are often displaced and reconfigured as extraneous to immediate social reality, in a magnifying projection in which the constricting milieu becomes a trifling circumstance. Some “nerd” narratives – especially in the teen, romance, and college genres, and their various hybrids – are undoubtedly about social acceptance<sup>4</sup>, but geek tales that weld sci-fi and fantasy aim outside the social arrangement, outside the world, often *through* the world, rendering, at least temporarily, immaterial.

Therein lies the insoluble ambivalence of such narratives. On the one hand, the *quest* is a historically sedimented *response* to juvenile geek desire that sees itself dramatically frustrated and shackled by its circumstances, so that the way to go is understandably hyperbolic, as it is, for instance, in video games: bigger battles,

stronger bosses, greater distances and challenges, ampler worlds. On the other hand, the quest is *offered*, not to say administered, as form prepared in advance, tuned to the boundary conditions that the economy of pop culture has established, and which it keeps enforcing. At the nexus of an economy of desire and an economy of profitable cultural artefacts, the quest is not only phantasmal and mythological retreat; it is, each time, economic recycling, the replication of the same structure of production and consumption. Thus the future is formally set in advance, in a perverse reformulation of Aristotle, the form is indeed prior. In 2018, when Spielberg's adaptation is released, like so many before it, but also like countless others in the future will always return us to the same form. As one famous producer and screenwriter mordantly noted:

“Once you spend more than \$100 million on a movie, you have to save the world,” explains Lindelof. “And when you start there, and basically say, I have to construct a MacGuffin based on if they shut off this, or they close this portal, or they deactivate this bomb, or they come up with this cure, it will save the world – you are very limited in terms of how you execute that.”<sup>5</sup>

Within geek stories, galaxies far far away may be the limit, but the boundaries of the narrative resonate to the mean tune of average satisfaction. The culture industry foresees (this we've known for a long time); its ominous prophecy ensures that wherever we may roam we are within this other “final frontier”: the same future awaits.



### Past is Prologue: Wielding Nostalgia

The geek imaginary is destinal with respect to its overarching redemptive hope, it is equally devoted to figments of past and future as escapist portals from the frustrating present, but the otherworldly Kyber crystal that powers its lasers, intensifies its emotional force and multiplies its tonal midichlorians is *nostalgia*:

For me, it was more about exploring the origins of geek culture. I was part of the first generation to have video games, to have computers, to have a VCR. I wanted to pay tribute to that. Nostalgia, I think, is good. Nostalgia is like video games, or music, or movies. It's a form of escapism.<sup>6</sup>

This has come to pass, naturally, as the first generations of geeks grew up and their Peter Pan syndrome surfaced<sup>7</sup>. Still, from mere behavioural conjecture, nostalgia with its array of references and constellations has been shaped culturally as enveloping force. It is not by accident, I believe, that *Ready player one* begins with:

Everyone my age remembers where they were and what they were doing when they first heard about the contest. I was sitting in my hideout watching cartoons, when the news bulletin broke in on my video feed, announcing that James Halliday had died during the night.<sup>8</sup>

“Everyone my age” seems neutral enough, but it hints at the geek tribe more than at a biological generation. It is the first “wink” that signals the story as marked

territory, already addressing those who would recognize it. Several remembrances are conflated in the single first verb: from beyond the end of the story to the beginning of the story (which is set around the year 2045), and from that future the remembrance to the time that provides the codes for the quest: the 1980s. Nostalgia inserts itself into the texture of memory at this point; 80s nostalgia is quintessential for most first generation geeks. In the novel it generates the criterion used to separate the worthy from the mass: the mysterious billionaire Halliday, an eccentric with “a lifelong obsession with the 1980s, the decade during which he'd been a teenager”<sup>9</sup>, has devised an elaborate and cryptic competition, an “Easter egg hunt” (a geek specialty, from games to films) whose winner stands to inherit his entire fortune. The best weapon the hunter could equip is extensive knowledge of the age's pop culture trivia; the force that wields the weapon is, for Halliday, obsessive nostalgia, which he would force unto his legion of padawans as discovered passion. Even the intro described in the novel's prologue, the so-called “invitation” by Halliday's avatar Anorak<sup>10</sup>, or the “call to adventure”<sup>11</sup>, if you will (to use Joseph Campbell celebrated phrase that later found George Lucas and was then distributed lavishly all over geekdom), is a reconstructed 80s extravaganza of “obscure pop references,” up for grabs, ripe for recognition.

To be clear, geek nostalgia is no weak force; neither does it bear much languishing. On the contrary, it is determined and precisely targeted at the idea of “return”: back to the... past, when that past is reconstituted as the present of repeated hedonistic replays and saves, the keen edge



of playing not having been dulled by repetition (or so Cline would have us believe). Also, this manic nostalgia twists past artefacts, as if by magic, into virtualities for a future past that is ever accessible.<sup>12</sup>

[F]inding Halliday's Easter egg became a popular fantasy among adults and children alike. It was a game anyone could play, and at first, there seemed to be no right or wrong way to play it. The only thing Anorak's Almanac seemed to indicate was that a familiarity with Halliday's various obsessions would be essential to finding the egg. This led to a global fascination with 1980s pop culture. Fifty years after the decade had ended, the movies, music, games, and fashions of the 1980s were all the rage once again. By 2041, spiked hair and acid-washed jeans were back in style, and covers of hit '80s pop songs by contemporary bands dominated the music charts. People who had actually been teenagers in the 1980s, all now approaching old age, had the strange experience of seeing the fads and fashions of their youth embraced and studied by their grandchildren.<sup>13</sup>

The foci of geek attention and fascination shift, undeniably. As new generations take on the mantle and the name, the 80s partially give way to the 90s as auroral reference realm, and more recently even to the early noughties (two such geek supernovae exploding with the adaptations of *The lord of the rings* and the *Harry Potter* series). *Ready Player One* recuperates the 80s, although it is part of a broader revival: recent films such as *Guardians of the galaxy*

and acclaimed TV show *Stranger things* are other notable instances of repackaging these "fads and fashions" for a younger audience. The fact that they have been successful cannot be attributed solely to nostalgia striking a chord; rather, I would argue, it is an effect of aura. The vintage filter bathes the past, revivifies it as prologue to stories yet untold.

This drift reveals yet another facet of geek agency in relation to (pop) culture: it is indelibly linked to the immediacy of lived experience, but even more poignantly to its communal investment as shared experience. Geeks are fiercely territorial with their cultural selection, as even a casual visit to their conversational lobbies will prove, but the attachment, fuelled by nostalgia, only acquires its full relevance beyond the critical mass of shared pleasures and endlessly debated minutiae. Geek hermeneutics is brewed slowly in interpretive communities; in them the aura of lived experience is transferred to artifacts, which it "enchants" and sanctifies as powerful relics.

*Ready Player One* is forceful in the attempt to synthesise the aura of an entire decade and inject it back into circulation; just as Anorak is Halliday's avatar, Halliday is Cline's. A hyperbolic projection of the author, with added nods towards founding fathers such as Gary Gygax and geeks turned billionaires such as Steve Jobs or Bill Gates, the figure of the otiose mastermind is used to drive not only the plot but also a subjacent political irony about the geek wizard being corrupted by the corporate CEO. Halliday reacts to the call of the dark side by retreating, much like Yoda or Obi Wan Kenobi in *Star wars*, in order to prepare "the return of the geek," which the novel chronicles. The analogy is



transparent: IOI, the corporation in question, is the Empire; geeks – called “gunters” in the novel, from “Egg hunters” – are the Rebel Alliance. Isn’t it ironic, one might ask, that a novel in which true geeks would rather die than let themselves be exploited by evil corporate drones will be used to make billions by movie studios?<sup>14</sup> While the irony remains, the sobering observation should be made that, unlike in geek fantasy stories, geek culture has from very early organised and administered itself as creative entrepreneurship, often hand in hand with corporate capital and the various branches of the culture industry, the latter effectively enabling the former and allowing it to develop in the global phenomenon it is today.<sup>15</sup>

The Kyber crystals of geek nostalgia pulsate impurely, streaked with darker veins than the wielders would admit.

### Geeking Out: Sociability, Sharing, and Individualism

Sociologically, the issue of “geeks” has been thoroughly explored in the educational system and in the culture of consumption, and illuminated in the terms of the theory of status relations by Murray Millner Jr.<sup>16</sup> Other avenues of thought in recent works by Kentaro Toyama<sup>17</sup> and Gaspard Koenig<sup>18</sup> devote remarkable critical attention (although formulated from very different theoretical and ideological standpoints) to geek myths or presumably geek-inspired models in relation to real world issues. With both authors, a certain geek profile (the tech geek) is magnified as key agent in social models that are the ominous shape of things to come. My considerably more modest proposal in this

article proceeds by sketching a profile in the world-oblivious light of their mindless pleasures.

When I say “profile,” I do so with the full knowledge of the stereotype and of the partiality that the term must incur here. Traditionally, the geek master-narrative has been a heavily gender-biased<sup>19</sup> and a racially biased<sup>20</sup> affair. In brief(s), a white boy’s story.<sup>21</sup> The cultural stereotype of the asocial, awkward and apt white adolescent, reinforced time and again by the very same 80s, has only recently begun to be challenged in the sense of inclusion and diversity of representation. *Ready player one* takes big strides to address the issue, by having a girl geek, Art3mis, as one of the protagonists, and with a twist which, in good geek fashion, I shall not spoil. Although far from the subtlety with which, in his 2003 novel, *The fortress of solitude*, Jonathan Lethem reworks a geek narrative to include the multiracial Brooklyn of the 70s and 80s, Cline manages to make geek diversity not look ham-fisted.

To return to the point, geek sociability is contradictory: geeks are as dialogic as they are retractile. A common form of interaction or social practice is “geeking out,” in which one form of immersion (often solitary) is exchanged for reliving it intersubjectively with a fellow geek, or a few fellow geeks. The pleasures of geeking out are those of the connoisseurs sharing; it’s an exercise in marking pop culture territory as *owned*, for lack of a better term, and owned together in a ritual of mutual recognition. Part of it is about the commonality of lived experiences (playing the same games, having seen the same movies and experienced similar emotions etc.), but it wouldn’t be authentic if it didn’t include disagreement,



feigned or real. Here is a sample of geeking out, courtesy of Cline's avatars Parzival and Aech:

He grinned. "Why? So you can read the article on *Ladyhawke*?"

"Maybe."

"Man, you just love that crapburger, don't you?"

"Blow me, Aech."

"How many times have you seen that sapfest? I know you've made me sit through it at least twice." He was baiting me now. He knew *Ladyhawke* was one of my guilty pleasures, and that I'd seen it over two dozen times.

"I was doing you a favor by making you watch it, noob," I said. I shoved a new cartridge into the Intellivision console and started up a single-player game of *Astrosplash*. "You'll thank me one day. Wait and see. *Ladyhawke* is canon."

"Canon" was the term we used to classify any movie, book, game, song, or TV show of which Halliday was known to have been a fan.

"Surely, you must be joking," Aech said.

"No, I am not joking. And don't call me Shirley."<sup>22</sup>

If you're a geek, you caught that last one. Anyway, as it turns out, the particle in the phrasal verb is partly misleading: in a sense, geeking *out* is actually geeking *in*, a sort of closure. The circle of sociability is closed (according to criteria of knowledge and affinity, even when there's friction about tastes), the interaction is closed in repetitive patterns, and the whole practice is en-closed in a well defined cultural horizon (see the recurrent idea of "canon" that Cline nods to above). Even punctually, it

consists of multiple micro-closures, since at every step something is judged, evaluated, a case is closed. The world of geeking "out" is electively and selectively shrunk, a small, safe mini-world marking its closures on the deceptively fluid surface of cultural play<sup>23</sup>. Recursive, it will follow the same grooves and deepen them, "discovering" again and again, with the quasi-infantile delight of repetition. As it with gaming, one might say, practice makes perfect.

The model of socialization that the original geeks adopted – the circle of friends in a basement caught in a communal fantasy – furnished the pattern that would evolve as a cultural trope and a code of behaviour at the same time. Although the latter created the former in real social history, it can also be argued that the former then enforced and fostered the latter even among new adepts. With online migration, the model evolved into something else, more complex, something resembling a tribe or, with the word gamers and Cline prefer, a "clan." Much has been written<sup>24</sup> about the tribalisation of online groups and communities, about their structure and social effects, and a discussion is beyond the scope of this paper, but I will touch on a few aspects. Besides the obvious fact that tribes are, well, fitting closures held together by code, norm and ethos, one should also mention dispersal as that dark energy continuously pushing for dissolution into a non-place and non-individuals. Or, to borrow the elegant French of Koenig:

Mais surtout nomades vis-à-vis de nous-mêmes, abandonnant toute identité fixe pour entrer dans le tourbillon des appartenances multiples et des arrangements multipolaires. Nous ne sommes plus membres d'un groupe,



mais de mille; nous n'avons plus une personnalité, mais une collection de pseudos et d'avatars.<sup>25</sup>

A collection of pseudos and avatars! Why, yes please, say all geeks as one. What for the French philosopher is an ultimately distressing diagnosis about the shattered vessel of the individual, for the geek anywhere is a utopian (meaning non-placeable) guarantee, non-localised, virtually “nomadic” even if one is really immobile. In reality, things are perhaps less drastic than Koenig would have us believe, geeks and non-geeks alike tending to stick to a handful of communities at most, but disseminating oneself in avatars and aliases is current practice. The principle behind any MMORPG, and behind Cline’s vast, world-replacing, virtual reality simulation, the OASIS, is the leeway of the avatar, which in fact enables interactions (geeking out included) that would otherwise never exist. Geeks have always been discreet and discrete entities, with a certain pulverised quality, but as avatars they can find each other across the vast blankness of physical space, and in the rabble of dabblers.

A final trait merits a mention here: geeks, while gregarious, are also fiercely individualistic and competitive. *Ready player one*, after all, is a quest based on a contest that is also a labyrinth, a quiz, and a puzzle. There can be, that is clear, only one winner. It comes from gaming really, this rule that states that within the common space (even within the same community) a territory will be set aside for “PvP,” Player vs. Player. One player is always Player One. At its agonial core, the model, evidently, is the medieval tourney, or the duel. Even when not in combat, players will compete, within the

tribe, within the immediate circle, or with anyone who is “wrong on the internet.”

All these do not immediately recommend geekdom (another mediievally inspired coinage) as an auspicious realm for solidarity and redistribution. Is there a conceivable form for a call that would have “geeks of the world unite”?

### The State of Play and the Limits of Geektopia

While play happens, the world is immaterial. Immersion is also refusal of the world. Geek or non-geek, while at play you are at once within a world and worldless. The entire geek universe, and, one could argue, the entire pop culture industry revolves around play and immersion, a titanic endeavour of world effacement. Game worlds are, of course, fictional worlds, open worlds, story worlds, imaginary worlds, non-worlds, addictive simulacra, simulations, second-hand, surrogate, seductive, versatile multiverse versions:

Other virtual worlds soon followed suit, from the Metaverse to the Matrix. The Firefly universe was anchored in a sector adjacent to the Star Wars galaxy, with a detailed re-creation of the Star Trek universe in the sector adjacent to that. Users could now teleport back and forth between their favorite fictional worlds. Middle Earth. Vulcan. Pern. Arrakis. Magrathea. Discworld, Mid-World, Riverworld, Ringworld. Worlds upon worlds.<sup>26</sup>

Cannibalising worlds upon worlds, *Ready player one* offers its own immersive eclectic metaworld. Worlds galore,





conglomerated, agglutinated. Still, beyond this novel, and beyond films and games, the banal game of endless world generation, which is not about escapism, although escapism is its most encountered real world avatar, obscures an astonishing finesse: geektopia is the otherworldly totality of play. Which makes it, I guess, a true utopia. One life is never enough for this, not nearly enough for one player. One player always gets another life. Not a second life, or a third, or an  $n^{\text{th}}$ , although sometimes they are numbered and they used to be quartered; always another life. Cline formulates it differently, a near miss, I would say: “you have an extra life”<sup>27</sup>, the game tells Wade Watts, the protagonist.

The totality of play includes the state of being played. One of the weirdest and most interesting moments in *Ready player one* is when, within the OASIS, after passing through a gate in his quest, Wade finds himself playing Galaga, an old arcade game and:

Then, as I finished clearing the wave on Galaga, I noticed my reflection in the game’s screen. It wasn’t my avatar’s face I saw there. It was Matthew Broderick’s face. A young pre-Ferris Bueller and pre-Ladyhawke Matthew Broderick.

Then I knew where I was. And who I was.

I was David Lightman, Matthew Broderick’s character in the movie *WarGames*. And this was his first scene in the film.

I was in the movie.<sup>28</sup>

The player must let himself be played by the movie/ game, relinquishing himself to the story he must respect with every move and every line. In a restricted sense, it is the ultimate geek test, uniting the gamer and the film buff in Wade. Nevertheless, the example hints at something more general in a structure of desire that exceeds mere hedonism. One could argue that every game requires the player to let themselves be played, and one could go on toying with this idea towards the possibility that every game gets another life by playing the player.

This totality, beyond all gaming relations, is the state of play. Geektopia is no state, unless it is the state of play. After indulging this totality for two thirds of its course, flirting with its inhuman possibility, *Ready player one* readies itself for setting the limit that will betray it. It sets the predictable limit: the return to the world, or rather, the return of the world. The real fictional world is messed up in *Ready player one*, there’s climate change, wars, a Big Energy Crisis, impoverished people live in stacks, which are vertical trailer parks, and the predominant economic relation is indentured servitude to mega-corporations. Halliday’s OASIS is at haptically gloved hand and visor, virtually free, and everybody retreats from the world to its better surrogates. The dystopian plot displaces geektopia, and, as one blurb says “an epic struggle between good and evil” ensues. An unlikely hero finds himself on a quest to... you know. Save it, he must.

---

## NOTES

1. A detailed physiognomy cannot be pursued here, for obvious reasons. It can be gleaned from films, of course, some of which I mention here, from its own “Bible” or miscellany – Stephen H. Segal (ed.), *Geek wisdom: the sacred teaching of nerd culture*, Quirk Books, 2011 –, from one of the über-geeks – Will



Wheaton, *Just a geek*, O'Reilly, 2003. Or see Brad King, John Borland, *Dungeons and dreamers: the rise of computer games from geek to chic*, McGraw Hill/Osborne, 2003.

2. See, for instance, Lori Kendall, "Nerd nation: Images of nerds in US popular culture," *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, volume 2 (2), SAGE Publications, 1999, pp. 260-83; Tracy L. Cross, "Nerds and geeks: Society's evolving stereotypes of our students with gifts and talents," *The gifted child today*, 28 (4), pp. 26-7.

3. Ethan Gilsdorf, *Fantasy freaks and gaming geeks*, The Lyons Press, 2008, p. 49.

4. Even the celebrated *Revenge of the nerds*, see Kendall, "Nerd Nation," pp. 267-8.

5. "Star script writer Damon Lindelof explains the new rules of blockbuster screenwriting," a 2013 interview available at <http://www.vulture.com/2013/08/script-doctor-damon-lindelof-on-blockbuster-screenwriting.html> [retrieved February 11th 2017].

6. "Imagining the future is dangerous," an interview with Ernest Cline, online at [http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future\\_tense/2015/07/an\\_interview\\_with\\_ernest\\_cline\\_author\\_of\\_ready\\_player\\_one\\_and\\_armada.html](http://www.slate.com/articles/technology/future_tense/2015/07/an_interview_with_ernest_cline_author_of_ready_player_one_and_armada.html) [retrieved February 11th 2017].

7. See, for instance, Gilsdorf, *Fantasy freaks*, pp. 46-8.

8. Ernest Cline, *Ready player one*, Arrow books, 2012, p. 1.

9. *Ibidem*, p. 2.

10. Dictionaries, especially urban dictionary, but Wikipedia also, note that "anorak," initially a derogatory British term for a socially inept person, is in fact another word for geek.

11. Originally published in 1949, Campbell's monomyth story is one of the archi-texts that would build future geek narratives. See Joseph Campbell, *The hero with a thousand faces*, Princeton University Press, 2004, pp. 46-7.

12. Harry Knowles, another famous geek reviewer, also noticed this: "but this isn't a nostalgia, it is a mystery, an incredibly viable science-fiction future," <http://www.aintitcool.com/node/45490> [retrieved February 11th 2017].

13. Cline, *Ready player one*, p. 7.

14. An apt and funny geek reply to ideas of this sort can be found in the mantra "shut up and take my money" (also the name for an online retailer specialising in geek stuff), which acknowledges the system but simply, frankly, doesn't care.

15. See King and Borland, *Dungeons and dreamers*, pp. 41-60, 87-116.

16. Murray Millner Jr, *Freaks, geeks, and cool kids: American kids, schools, and the culture of consumption*, Routledge, 2004, especially pp. 34-90.

17. Kentaro Toyama, *Geek heresy: rescuing social change from the cult of technology*, Public Affairs, 2015.

18. Gaspard Koenig, *Le révolutionnaire, l'expert et le geek: combat pour l'autonomie*, Plon, 2015, pp. 174-227.

19. Kendall discusses this in her article in relation to nerds, see "Nerd nation," pp. 271-2, 276-9.

20. See Ron Eglash, "Race, sex, and nerds: from black geeks to Asian-American hipsters," *Social Text*, 20:2, Summer 2002, pp. 49-64. Available online at <http://homepages.rpi.edu/~eglash/eglash.dir/ethnic.dir/nerds.dir/nerd.htm> [retrieved February 12th 2017].

21. Aptly, and often ineptly, much of the slang and humour of geeks on the internet revolves around male sexuality (& genitalia) or is scatological. See, for instance, Neill Cumpston's NSFW reviews on Aintitcool.com. Neill Cumpston was an online alias of comedian Patton Oswalt.

22. Cline, *Ready player one*, p. 40.

23. A synthetic and critical assessment of how this encloses the individual is found in Toyama, *Geek heresy*, pp. 61-3.

24. See Tyrone L. Adams, Stephen A. Smith (eds.), *Electronic tribes: the virtual words of geeks, gamers, shamans and scammers*, University of Texas Press, 2008. Also, King and Borland, *Dungeons and dreamers*, pp. 41-57, 229-50.

25. Koenig, *Le révolutionnaire*, pp. 222-3.

26. Cline, *Ready player one*, p. 49.

27. *Ibidem*, p. 344.

28. *Ibidem*, p. 108.