

Title: *Don't Read the Comments*

Author: Eric Smith

Genre: Realistic Fiction

Reviewer Name and Grade: Lea N., 8th Grade

Date Reviewed: April 4, 2021

The story takes place in modern day, following a famous Glitch streamer- Divya, or better known by her alias, D1V. Her streams consist of her playing the game *Reclaim The Sun*, a popular MMORPG(Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game), and they, among other things such as sponsorships, are the reason Divya and her mother are able to pay the rent and, well, survive. However, with fame come problems, and the main one is the *Vox Populi*, a group of misogynists disguised as people who simply want “The best” for the streaming community. What started off as an attack in a supposedly peaceful game, led to online harassment, which was quickly followed by blackmail and physical threats such as the egging of Divya’s mother. Even after having involved the police, they still wouldn’t stop. But neither would D1V. Meanwhile, Aaron. Son of a doctor and her helping husband, he was expected to follow in their footsteps, rather than develop games and meet up with friends who do the same. However, his hope lies in one of his friends, Jason, who promised to cut him and Ryan, his best friend and illustrator, a part of the shares when they would sell their game that all three had worked on. If only Jason would finally pay him so that his mother would stop worrying about him getting taken advantage of. If only. Through an unexpected ingame encounter, the streamer and the casual gamer meet. Though hesitant, they quickly become good friends, Aaron choosing to stick by D1V’s side rather than keep pushing through with his game when things go sour for her. The threats keep coming, but there is one thing which Divya refuses to cancel: her panel at GameCon. Everything seemed to be going smoothly, or at least as smooth as something could be going considering her circumstances, until a couple days before GameCon, D1V meets with the *Vox Populi* while streaming with Aaron, and after everyone on her “team” being killed by them, all her internet profiles(game profile, social media, etc) were hacked, and she could no longer access any of them. Would she still be able to push through? Would Aaron still be able to find her with nothing but her game profile?

Did the plot keep you interested?

Although at the beginning the plot wasn’t very interesting, perhaps due to the overload of imagery(at least for me), later in the book it sped up and kept me hooked until the end, finishing off with a clean cut.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

As stated above, in the beginning of the book, the pace was a tad bit slow, but it smoothed out pretty quickly, segwaying into a nice pace, not too fast, not too slow.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book is appropriate for grade levels from 5 and up, although I would recommend it to middle schoolers.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this to a fan of science fiction, as although the book itself is realistic fiction, it is strongly centered around a video game, which itself would be a science fiction type. Because of this, it gives the book less of a realistic fiction feel.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

The book contains a lot of imagery, especially in the beginning when the readers are still being introduced to the characters, making it a little slow at times. However, the imagery makes it all the more exciting to read, and at times I felt like I was in the book/game, right next to Divya, exploring yet another planet by her side.

Out of a 5 star rating, I would *give this book a 5 star rating*. The book itself was amazing, and even if it had a lot of imagery, causing it to be more relaxed at times rather than constantly keeping you on the edge of your seat, the times at which tensions were high became all the more interesting. The more I read, the more I realised how the “long” explanations in the beginning helped shape together the entire story, including the characters. I also enjoyed the representation of LGBTQ+ characters without drowning the entire story with them(although I wouldn’t mind reading that either). The story contained romance, but as a side plot, sort of like an adventure that isn’t important for the completion of the game but adds that extra enjoyment. Overall, a good read!

Reviewer Name and Grade: Jason L., 7th Grade

Date Reviewed: December 30, 2021

Don’t Read the Comments is a realistic fiction book about two teens, Divya Sharma and Aaron Jericho, and the unexpected friendship that they form through an online game. Taking place in the 21st century, Divya, better known online as DIV, is a famous Glitch streamer that leads her loyal “Angst Armada” to explore the vast, virtual universe of *Reclaim the Sun*. With the little money that she earns from streaming and sponsorships, Divya and her mother are just able to scrape by, as they pay the rent and struggle to survive. However, Divya soon becomes harassed by a group of anonymous misogynists known as the *Vox Populi*. Aaron, on the other hand, comes from a family who has better conditions. His mother is a doctor, and his father assists her in the small medical practice that they own. Much to his mother’s frustration, Aaron has no interest in medical school and becoming a doctor like her. Instead, he spends his free time script writing for ManaPunk, a video game company that his friend Jason made. His mother worries about Aaron being taken advantage of, as Jason still has not paid him and his best friend Ryan, the illustrator of the game. One day, as Aaron is playing *Reclaim the Sun*, he unexpectedly ends up landing on the same planet that popular celebrity gamer DIV is on. After some hesitation on Divya’s part, the two become online friends, frequently exploring the universe and the many planets in the virtual world. However, as the trolls from *Vox Populi* seem to grow stronger by the day, becoming more and more numerous as they launch attack after attack, all coordinated. The virtual harassment soon becomes in person, as Divya is doxxed, blackmailed, and even her mom is egged. Aaron’s dreams are crushed when he is fired from ManaPunk due to his association with DIV, yet he still remains loyal to her and helps her push through. Divya manages to keep fighting back until suddenly, the *Vox Populi* hack all of her social media accounts, email, and gaming profile. Despite all of this, she refuses to give up and cancel one thing, which is her panel at GamesCon. She is determined to go and prove her worth, but is unaware of the imminent danger that she faces there. Aaron knows, but is unable to reach out or

communicate with Divya. Will Divya be able to push through and win the war over the trolls, or will Aaron fail to find and protect her from the incoming *Vox Populi*?

Did the plot (for fiction) or presentation of information (for nonfiction) keep you interested?

Yes, the plot of the book was very interesting, as there always seemed to be something new and unexpected around the corner that kept me hooked. The book was action packed and also did a great job of implementing modern day technology into the plot.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

The pace of the book was just right and not too boring to read, because like I stated above, there was always something new and interesting around the corner.

What grade level(s) is this book appropriate for?

This book is appropriate for grades 6 and above, but it is best appropriate for middle school students to read.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to people who are fans of gaming and online friendships. Even if you are not a gamer, I believe you will still enjoy this book because it explores real life issues as well, such as being a female content creator and online harassment.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

This book had some profanity in it, and contains aspects of cyberbullying, sexism, and racism. There was some minor violence in it, but also a subplot of teen romance between Aaron and Divya.

5 stars: I'm really glad I read this book; it was awesome!

I would rate *Don't Read the Comments* 5 out of 5 stars. I thoroughly enjoyed the gaming and technology aspect of it, and seeing Divya constantly fighting back and never giving up inspired me a lot. The book was extremely descriptive, action packed, and fun to read, as it kept me on the edge of my seat wanting to know what would happen next. I felt fully immersed in the virtual world of *Reclaim the Sun*, watching as Divya and Aaron fight for what they believe in. I would definitely recommend you to read this book, and I hope you will enjoy it as much as I did!

Reviewer Name and Grade: Sabrina, 7th Grade

Date Reviewed: July 26, 2021

Don't Read The Comments is a book by Eric Smith and it is about gamers Divya and Aaron. Online, Divya is known as celebrity gamer, DIV. She and her fans play the year's most popular game: *Reclaim the Sun* during her stream. Divya loves to stream and game, but she has many growing problems. She tries to help her mom pay rent for their New Jersey apartment while trying to defend herself from a large group of online bullies, the Vox Populi. Divya attempts to continue her stream while doubting if she should accept her once in a lifetime invitation to set up a booth at the biggest gaming event: GamesCon. After Divya and her best friend are attacked in person, she debates if getting rid of her stream would be the best and safest option for everyone close to her. She faces several challenges that require her to stand up for herself. Even after the constant online and in person attacks that she experiences, Divya ensures that the Vox Populi don't ruin the things she loves most.

Aaron writes scripts for a local game developer, Jason, in Philadelphia, trying to earn money and experience without working as a doctor like his parents. Aaron's mom disapproves of his aspirations to become a video game designer, and she expects him to work at the practice that the family owns. Aaron deals with lots of family drama, but uses *Reclaim the Sun* as a place to escape. He unexpectedly meets DIV online, struggling to gain her trust. Aaron steps far outside his comfort zone and he leans on his loyal best friend for support. As the Vox Populi destroy everything that Divya has worked hard for, Aaron works hard to defend his new online friend from the dangerous and strategized attacks that the Vox Populi have planned.

Did the plot keep you interested?

For the most part, the book was exciting and suspenseful at times, making me want to find out what happens next. Occasionally there were some boring and uneventful scenes, but the events that took place during the story were very interesting and exciting.

Was the pace of the book too fast, too slow, or just right?

I think the pace of the book was just right. It was not overwhelming with information and details about the characters but still explained everything thoroughly.

What grade level is this book appropriate for?

I think *Don't Read The Comments* is appropriate for teens in grade 7. The vocabulary that is used would be appropriate for kids in 7th grade.

What type of reader would you recommend this book to?

I would recommend this book to a reader who likes realistic fiction and drama. There is a lot of family and friend drama in the book with both main characters.

What other information do you think would be helpful for teens to know about this book?

Don't Read The Comments is not entirely clean. There are some inappropriate words scattered around the book.

4 stars: I enjoyed this book and found it worthwhile reading.

I enjoyed reading *Don't Read The Comments* and will add it to my list of favorite realistic fiction books. I rated *Don't Read The Comments* 4 stars because I lost interest in reading the book occasionally when there were uneventful scenes. There were lots of details in the book and most scenes were very eventful and exciting. Overall, I liked reading *Don't Read The Comments* and would definitely recommend this book to others.