

## Is Amazon the Reader's Friend? – Liveblog

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Len Edgerly

I took a wrong turn on the subway and reached Brooklyn before I realized I was a long way from the Kaufman Center in Manhattan. I arrived late at the Intelligence Squared debate on the resolution "Amazon is the Reader's Friend."

We are now into questions from the audience. It's been a fantastic discussion, organized in classic debate style with some innovations introduced by the steady, savvy moderator, John Donvan.

Arguing for the resolution are author Joe Konrath and journalist Matthew Yglesias. Arguing against are author Scott Turow and Franklin Foer, former editor of The New Republic. Here's what's happening...



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And the winner is....

Two votes, before and after. The team that changed the most wins. Before debate 41 percent agreed 28 against. 42 percent for the For team, up 1 percentage point. Against gained 50 percent for the win, grabbing most of the undecideds.

Interesting. The combattants are shaking hands with apparent civility and good humor.

I'm not surprised at the outcome, because the Against team had more debating skills. Foer was well prepared with statistics and quotes at the ready. Konrath won the Most Passionate Award for the night. This topic is personal to him. Turow seems like a dark presence to me, full of venom and suspicion. Too many crime plots?

I'm very glad I made it to this, via Brooklyn! Over and out...



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There is an app for Intelligence Squared debates.



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Next debate will be the 100th for Intelligence Squared. Will focus on a big picture look at prospects for the nation. Declinists be damned, bet on America. That's the resolution to be debated. They will be looking at power the rest of the season.



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I just pressed button number 1 on my remote control, to register that I agree with the resolution, Amazon is the reader's friend.

Excellent debate, well run.

Donvan congratulates Konrath for overcoming the traditional shyness of the writer, and Foer for speaking so bravely, knowing Amazon is watching. Light touch.



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Foer: We live in a fast moving world. Disruption is our secular religion. A lot of things that get disrupted get replaced by something good. Americans are optimistic, assume it will work out for the best. Economics of book industry are about to change. It could be wonderful. It could be a dystopian hell. Amazon is already there, with lots of power over books. I guarantee Amazon is watching tonight. Send a message: be careful. We're watching you. You are carrying precious cargo. Maybe you don't believe the worst hypothetical scenario. But you care about the word. Be brave. Take a stand. Be good stewards of word and thought.

He wins the battle of the closing statements.



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Yglesias: Opponents have raised hypothetical ideas with red herrings and distractions. Question is has Amazon been a friend. Has it made books cheaper, and outcompeted biggest technology companies. If certain impossible things come true, Amazon could become the enemy. If there was no Amazon it would be hard to find books about metaphysics that would be helpful understanding these ideas. Amazon is the reader's friend. Their nefarious plan for taking over the book world is to create the cheapest, best way to get books to readers.



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Turow: Refers to Saturday Night Live character saying baseball been very very good to me. Amazon has been very good to me. I get a full royalty on discounted books. Jeff Bezos even invited me to his authors retreat until I called Amazon the darth vader of publishing. I spent 20 years trying to get published. I was Joe Konrath. I am concerned about authors. I am happy Joe has found an audience. We will lose good writers if Amazon forces the publishers out of business.



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Konrath: I will bribe you if you change your vote. I will give you all of my books for free, and all of Scott's eBooks. I'm kidding. I have the ability through Amazon to give my books away, lower the price. Amazon allows me to do that. Tell me that's not being a friend to a reader. Please vote: Amazon is the reader's friend.



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Round 2 of the debate is concluded. Closing statements.



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Q. Stock market values Amazon at high level even though it doesn't make profits. That's because they assume it will be more profitable in the future. Is it possible that Amazon is a friend to readers today but won't be five years from now?

A: Yglesias: stock is down 25 percent, because investment community is losing faith in the model. I don't think it's true the stock market thinks that. Do they have the ability to secure a monopoly and then jack up prices? Wall Street doesn't seem to think so.



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Q. Isn't Amazon the reader's friend for out-of-print books?

Yglesias: Public domain books available for free from Amazon. Good for readers.



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Q from Jeremy Greenfield, former Digital Book World director: What about reader in rural area who wants to read the next Scott Turow book. Isn't Amazon his or her friend?

Turow: Of course Amazon has contributed to the reading world. It's an enormous library and great for the person in the rural area. The problem is they will not agree to anything but their model. They want to crush the publishers. When that happens the literary culture will be poorer.

Audience, based on applause seems fairly evenly split, with perhaps more energy audible from the Amazon partisans.



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The anti-Amazon duo leans heavily on fear of future bad behavior by Amazon, once it has conquered the landscape. This seems to be a reasonable fear, but it's about something we don't see yet. One big player picking winners and losers is the fear of Foer and Turow.

Yglesias: If there are no other competitors to Amazon, then that's a threat. Granted. But you have to assume a crazy series of events to get from here to there. There's no way it could happen.