

## Latest sci-fi releases aren't nerdy compared to forebears

by Kate Hinsche  
Opinion Editor



Nerd, dork, geek – these are the words that have for years described certain people, activities, hobbies, and interests deemed “uncool” by society. Included in the list of things deemed nerdy are science fiction and fantasy movies. These movies can be primarily represented by classics such as Star Wars, Star Trek, Lord of the Rings, and Harry Potter, epic sagas that have become ingrained in our culture. I have no qualms with these being labeled nerdy, but I feel the need to distinguish the nerdy sci-fi classics from the contemporary sci-fi releases that cannot be considered truly nerdy.

In order to explain my stance on this issue, I must first explain what Star Wars, Star Trek, Lord of the Rings, and Harry Potter all have in common that elevated them from average to legendary in the world of science fiction. Each of these epic sagas captured its fan base by building a complex world in which the film plays out. Each film

creates at least one new language (i.e. Klingon, Parseltongue, Elvish, and Shyriiwook) and multitudes of characters with complex personalities and backgrounds. These elements, combined with intriguing and intelligent plotlines, make for masterpieces that true fans not only fall in love with, but explore.

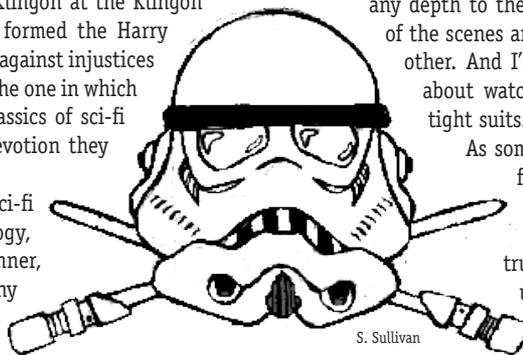
True fans of Star Trek can now major in Klingon at the Klingon Language Institute. Superfan-activists have formed the Harry Potter Alliance, a civil rights group that fights against injustices seen in both J.K. Rowling's fantasy world and the one in which we live. To sum it all up, what makes the classics of sci-fi nerdy is the depth of the stories, and the devotion they incite from their fans.

Now let's take a look at the contemporary sci-fi movies: Marvel's The Avengers, The Hobbit trilogy, Guardians of the Galaxy, and The Maze Runner, among countless others. I'm not going to deny that I loved The Avengers and Guardians of the Galaxy, but I chose to list them along with The Hobbit and The Maze Runner because

each of these films is just a huge CGI-coated battle scene. Back in December, I eagerly awaited for The Hobbit: Battle of the Five Armies to come to the Los Gatos Theater, only to be disappointed by such a lack of plotline and explanation that I left the movie trying to figure out who the five armies were. Ultimately, these new releases lack

any depth to the story. There is no complexity, most of the scenes are just attractive actors fighting each other. And I'm sorry, but there is nothing nerdy about watching buff actors running around in tight suits.

As someone who grew up with a deep love for the sci-fi classics, and who at one point tried to teach herself Elvish, it saddens me to see the loss of truly nerdy sci-fi movies. Unfortunately, unless sci-fi writers can conjure up a plot beyond killing everything, it appears that the glorious nerdy days of the genre are gone.



S. Sullivan

## Service projects are overrated

by Niamh Doyle  
People Editor



Every year, thousands of compassionate high school graduates and young adults set off for the rugged plains of Africa, or the exotic rainforests of South America. The volunteer gap year has become an increasingly popular method of travel, allowing young people to venture to locations they would otherwise never visit. I'm not here to argue against the benefits of travel. What goes into the volunteering side of the trip, on the other hand, is questionable to say the least. The willingness to extend a hand to those in need and to invest time and money in the poor is admirable. It's often difficult, however, to distinguish between a genuine desire to help impoverished citizens of third world countries, and a culturally imperialistic effort to spread the gospel of Western innovation to less advanced nations.

Renowned experts in developmental economics such as Paul Farmer and Jeffrey Sachs attest to the diversity and complexity of developing countries. No country with a struggling population is the same, making initiative and relief efforts like the UN's "Millennium Development Goals" extremely difficult to orchestrate. Whereas the US economy was able to exploit its myriad of natural resources, direct access to shipping routes, and ideal conditions such as fertile soil and ample rainfall to become a global superpower, other countries are not as lucky. Some struggle with a lack of physical and human capital, with environmental resources too depleted and populations too sick and hungry to stimulate economic growth. Other countries, like Bolivia and Ethiopia, suffer from geographical obstacles, such as high mountain ranges or a lack of navigable rivers, that limit development. Trade barriers, social oppression, and corrupt governments hinder nations like Liberia and Malawi from ever climbing the ladder of development and becoming socially and economically prosperous.

The United Nations and wealthy countries have invested millions of dollars into trying to unravel the complexity and individuality of these unstable countries. Despite their efforts, Haiti and similar countries will always need more trained doctors and more hospitals. They will always need more environmental conservationists who have the skills and knowledge to rekindle agriculture and wean the countries from their dependence on imported crops. They will always need advisors to stabilize their governments without imposing imperialistic force that restrains the development of foreign governments.

Instead, these countries receive armies of well-intended, enthusiastic, and compassionate young people. High school students arrive with no formal training, very little understanding of a country's political and social culture, and often with attitudes reflecting Americanized ideals that may not accommodate the needs of their destination. Americans who travel to South America to participate in ecotourism projects might feel great lending a helping hand in some NGO's initiative to save endangered monkeys, but they may be

oblivious to the cultural barriers they are pushing by spending their off-days lounging on the beaches of extremely conservative countries in bikinis.

Some countries are starting to cater to such good-intentioned (though ill-informed) volunteers. According to a 2011 UNICEF report studying orphanages and residential care in Cambodia, three out of every four children in orphanages have one or more living parents, but the number of orphanages in Cambodia has nearly doubled in the last five years. This is due to an increase in orphanage volunteering on the part of westerners, which contributes largely to Cambodia's tourism industry. Orphanages have been known to keep children out of school, away from their parents, and looking filthy in order to attract the sympathies of American do-gooders, which has crippling and life-long effects on these children.

Not only do these volunteers seem to cross cultural and political boundaries, but the implications about what these young adults are bringing back to the United States might be just as dangerous. High school students who travel abroad with very little experience in the subject matter they are dealing with – say, environmental conservation – are celebrated by their society even before they set off, and even despite their lack of knowledge or capabilities. These students are thus essentially being rewarded for having good intentions, though good intentions are not always indicative of productive results. We celebrate kids for the leadership skills they will develop and the life changing experiences they will have when making a difference in foreign countries before they even get on the plane.

So what does this mean? Well first of all, we inflate the egos of high school students, teaching them that a great attitude and valiant intentions are actually equitable to legitimate accomplishments. We tell kids teaching English in Africa that they're saving the world, despite the fact that their one-month stint in Nigeria means nothing to the Nigerian children who have been learning English from the hundreds of American high school students who have been in their classrooms that year. These Americans then come back to the States with a warped idea of what they can accomplish, and what their work actually means. Secondly, fostering ideals that glorify traveling abroad to "make a difference" as opposed to volunteering at home implies that we, righteous American high schoolers, have knowledge and experiences that can significantly impact the well-being of foreigners. In essence, making foreigners more like us will significantly improve their lives. These deluded and culturally imperialistic mentalities that students harbor may even be detrimental when they enter our workforce and start contributing more directly to our society.

Volunteers flock to poor countries, inspired by a sense of social justice and ready to impart their knowledge and skills onto the impoverished citizens of their destinations. This is not only unproductive, but debilitating to the economies these volunteers are invading. Mexicans do not need high schoolers to build houses. Africans don't need scrawny college students taking pictures with starving black children to post on Facebook. They need foreign aid from concerned nations, not from concerned high schoolers. They need policy makers, scientists, peacekeepers, economists, money, land, food, time. So go advocate for a larger foreign aid budget, earn your community service domestically, donate to major organizations like UNICEF that are doing good in the world. But when it comes to international development, there are just some things that high school graduates can't do – yet.

Sources: UNICEF, Haiti: After the Earthquake by Paul Farmer, The End of Poverty: Economic Possibility for Our Time by Jeffrey Sachs, The White Man's Burden: Why the West's Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done So Much Ill and So Little Good by William Easterly

## Favor health over APs

by Madeline Hagar  
Sports Editor



From the moment students walk through LGHS's doors, college becomes a reality rather than a distant pressure probing the back of their minds. While it might not always seem like it, the classes you take and activities in which you participate play a crucial role in shaping you as a college applicant. LGHS has a list of requirements that every student needs to fulfill before graduating, but many colleges require students to accomplish even more. In other words, even if LGHS does not require students to take math or science all four years, many colleges expect applicants to do so.

Four years quickly turns into the last four weeks before applications are due. All the while, people ask, "What are you doing to get into college?" According to scholarships.com, high school used to be "a strictly optional educational opportunity that could prepare students to land a decent real-world job," but now has a larger focus on preparing students for college. This shift leads to high schoolers taking multiple AP classes, overloading on club memberships, and, in general, overexerting themselves. Familyeducation.com states colleges are interested in individuals who demonstrate "challenging high school curriculum, strong grades with an upward trend, and quality involvement in activities." Therefore, students do all of the clubs and AP classes they can in hopes of impressing colleges rather than pursuing their passions or having a balanced life.

To satisfy the curriculum qualification, many teenagers decide to take several AP and honors classes. During freshman and sophomore year, this may mean one AP and one honors class. However, by junior and senior year, one or two advanced classes transforms into five or six. After junior year, many students who wish to take a math or science class have to sign up for AP Calculus AB, AP Biology, etc. For some subjects, the only options left are APs. AP classes can demonstrate how students are challenging themselves academically, but they come with undesirable stress and heavy workloads. However, if someone tries to opt out of AP classes for the regular course (if it is offered) that late in his or her high school career, he or she could be seen in a negative light by colleges. Thus, teenagers enroll in several AP classes, despite the fact it could be very stressful, in order to maintain a façade for colleges.

Moreover, colleges anticipate that students will become active members in their communities, both inside and outside of school. The drive to be "active" causes many students to join multiple clubs, even if they may not be extremely interested in the club. It is a good thing to explore different topics and clubs, for someone may discover a new passion, but many times clubs are simply a way in which students can check off a box on their college applications. Oftentimes, students participate or create clubs they aren't passionate about in order to bolster their college resumes.

Ultimately, all of these forced choices beg the question "How many is too many?" Well, as a student applying to college in the near future, it appears as if there are never too many classes or activities. After all, these activities could give someone

the appearance of a more skillful, diverse applicant. School becomes a race to do "enough things" for your college resume, causing some to overlook their passions in favor of trying to do a billion different activities.

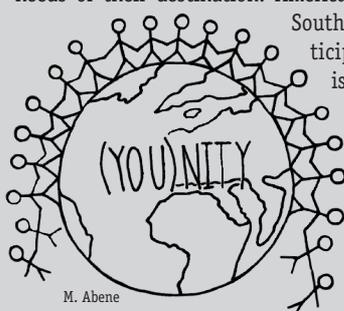
I recommend students focus more on their mental health and maintaining a balance in their lives over taking an extra AP class or joining another club. Mary Alvord, a clinical psychologist and public education coordinator for the American Psychological Association claims, "A little stress is a good thing. It can motivate students to be organized. But too much stress can backfire." Students should not participate in activities or take classes in order to please colleges, but focus on creating a schedule that fits their passions and abilities.

Sources: NPR, familyeducation.com, scholarships.com

Madeline's EXTRA CURRICULARS

1. Amigos
2. El Gato
3. Soccer
4. Students to Students
5. Model United Nations
6. Spanish Honors Society
7. Math Club
8. Science Olympiad
9. Girls in Computer Science
10. Mock Trial
11. Electric Ukulele
12. Brunch Club
13. Style 2 Spare
14. Socratic Society
15. part-time job
16. Interact Club
17. Red Cross Volunteering
18. Acapella Club

K. Hinsche



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