

## TechNews

STUDENT NEWSPAPER OF ILLINOIS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY SINCE 1928

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The mission of TechNews is to promote student discussion and bolster the IIT community by providing a newspaper that is highly accessible, a stalwart of journalistic integrity, and a student forum. TechNews is a dedicated to the belief that a strong campus newspaper is essential to a strong campus community.

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TechNews is published on the Tuesday of each week of the academic year. Deadline for all submissions and announcements is 11:59 p.m. on the Friday prior to publication. Articles, photos, and illustrations must be submitted electronically to the TechNews website at technewsiit.com.

## EDITORIAL POLICY

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## 'Nerd elitism' conveys passion, disconnect

By Ryan Kamphuis  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Those of you who know me know that many words can be used to describe me. Some would call me an Android-fan-boy, others would call me a Whovian, some would see me and refer to me as a Trekkie, and still others would call me everything from a Redditor to a Browncoat. But despite all of these different labels for who I am, they all fall under one umbrella label that has been with me since I first learned to talk and first started to interact with others: nerd.

When we look at the world around us, it's a good time to be a nerd. We live in an increasingly technological world. All around us people use things like smartphones and tablets to use services like Facebook and Twitter to keep in touch with their friends and family all around the world. The world we live in is amazing, and almost everyone realizes that the reason the world we live in is so cool is because of the nerds who created it. Almost every company that defines the world we live in today was started by a few nerds in a garage, dorm room, or parent's house; Google, Apple, Microsoft, Facebook, and Dell all claim this as their genesis. Society revels nerds and holds them high. Nerds are seen as cool, and pillars of nerd culture that were once thought to be the lamest of lame, like comic books, science fiction, and robotics, all enjoy mainstream popularity.

It wasn't always like this though. I remember being ostracized by my peers in elementary school. I remember eating alone in the cafeteria every day, being pointed and laughed at, and being mocked. It sucked, but I remember that through all of this, there was one point of solace for myself and my friends. It was an often quoted line by Bill Gates, who was at the time the richest man in the world. The quote was, "be nice to nerds. Chances are you'll end up working for one." In that line, which was later confirmed to never have been spoken by Bill Gates, rested our hopes; our hopes that one day we would all be company owners who could hire those who once mocked us and have the last laugh. We would be able to do it because we were smarter and had more drive than them. And we would make them pay. This quote wasn't just a point of solace for my small group of friends – it quickly became a battle call for nerd culture. Almost every nerd who grew up in the 90s heard that quote, took it to heart, and thought like I did. But as we all got older, we became more realistic. We still thought that we would be leaders in the new, technological world, but the revenge overtones all but went away; except for a few.

When we return to the present day where nerd culture is mainstream culture, there is something becoming more prevalent that I truly despise, and that is the idea of nerd elitism. It is the idea that nerds are better than others, and because of this, they can judge those who aren't into what they are into, or people who are trying to get into something new. You can see it all over. When people try to get into something nerds love like Doctor Who, Firefly, Lord of the Rings, or Star Wars, there are always groups of nerds who will not accept these newcomers. They will turn them away saying that these newcomers are late, or not good enough, or not true nerds. And there is something very wrong about this, the chief being: this is not how nerd culture is supposed to work! In the end, being a nerd really just boils down to one being passionate about something. John Green, a New York Times Bestselling Author summarizes it well by saying, "nerds like us are allowed to be un-ironically enthusiastic about stuff... Nerds are allowed to love stuff, like jump-up-and-down-in-the-chair-can't-control-yourself love it. Hank [John's brother, who this line is addressed to], when people call people nerds, mostly what they're saying is 'you like stuff.' Which is just not a good insult

at all. Like, 'you are too enthusiastic about the miracle of human consciousness.' Being a nerd is all about being passionate about something, which means anyone can be a nerd. This idea that you somehow have

awesome nerd culture is by being receptive of everyone. I don't know where this idea of nerd elitism came from, but ten bucks says it has roots in that "Bill Gates quote." Too many nerds have looked to that quote

for support, and now use it as a tool of division. Too many nerds think that that quote gives them superiority – that since one day, everyone will be working for nerds, nerds must be better, and the fact that nerds are better than everyone else must be preserved. But this couldn't be further from the truth. Yes, people may end up working for nerds, but this isn't because nerds are fundamentally better people. It's because nerds are passionate, and when one is passionate, they have drive. And when one has drive, one can work to do anything. Being a nerd isn't about being smart. It isn't about being weird. It isn't even about being into comic books, World of Warcraft, or H.P. Lovecraft. Being a nerd is about being passionate, or, as John Green says, "being un-ironically enthusiastic about stuff." Anyone can be a nerd, and everyone should be a nerd. We should all have that one thing that we are so excited about that we want to find a group of friends to talk about and go to conventions for it with. If you are really into football and watch the game with your buddies every Sunday, (I hate to break it to you) you are a nerd! And as a nerd, other nerds should always be welcoming. Because being a nerd isn't about being better than others – it's all about sharing something with others.



Image courtesy of quickmeme.com

to "prove" yourself or that you had to have been a nerd before it was cool to be accepted as nerd is completely asinine. For decades, nerds have been accepting of everyone who was passionate about what they were; it's a complete 180 degree turn from how nerd culture works to suddenly become selective once it became popular.

That is the other problem with this mentality of nerd elitism: it is no different from the mentality of those who once bullied us. We were bullied at one point in time because what we were into was lame, but now that we are popular, we have no excuse to do the same. In fact, we should be showing how

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