

Nurdberger

Named for a famous scene in *The Empire Strikes Back*, Nurdberger bases its menu on pop culture, too. There's even a steak sandwich made with Cheez Whiz.

KATHY MONTGOMERY

NOT SO LONG AGO, for reasons far, far beyond the food, Nurdberger became a Force in Globe.

A fan of *Star Wars*, comic books and gaming, owner Taylor Harrison made his tiny restaurant a shrine to pop culture, with movie posters, a Super Nintendo and tables adorned with comic book decoupage.

The restaurant's name is a playful acknowledgement of its nerdiness, as well as a twist on an insult from *The Empire Strikes Back* — it recalls the memorable scene in which Princess Leia calls Han Solo a “stuck-up, half-witted, scruffy-looking nerf herder.” Harrison devotes an entire wall to *Star Wars* and another to *The Lord of the Rings*, rotating displays from his impressive collection quarterly.

Nurdberger's pop culture theme extends to the menu, with the *Raising Arizona* Berger (pepper jack cheese, green chiles, crispy jalapeños and jalapeño bacon), the *Always Sunny* Philly (a steak sandwich “wit” Cheez Whiz and onions), and chicken sandwiches named for each member of *Pokémon*'s trio of legendary birds, including the fiery Moltres (with buffalo wing sauce and pepper jack cheese). Nuka-Cola, a whipped-cream-topped blend of iced coffee and Coke, appeals to fans of both the *Fallout* video game series and Coca-Cola BlàK, which inspired the Nurdberger version.

Before opening Nurdberger in 2015, Harrison had planned to create a tavern-style coffee shop with a *Lord of the Rings* theme. He expanded the concept when George Rodriguez sold his burger joint,

and a star was born.

It's not surprising that Nurdberger became an instant hit in a town where a young Lynda Carter, who went on to portray Wonder Woman, attended school. And everything went smoothly until Harrison asked San Carlos Apache artists Carrie Curley and Robert Wilson to paint a mural with *Star Wars* characters and the Nurdberger logo on the side of the building. Because the restaurant sits in a historic district, that got Harrison sideways with the city and preservationists. “It was quite an ordeal,” he recalls.

Eventually, Harrison got the right approvals and permits, and the mural survived, to the delight of fans everywhere. Ultimately, the controversy was good for business: The day after a Phoenix TV station aired a segment about it, business was booming. “The town really showed up and supported us,” Harrison says, “and didn't leave us in the dark.” (Or the Dark Side.)

Whether geeks will inherit the Earth remains to be seen. But, for now, Nurdberger has conquered Globe.



GLOBE Nurdberger, 420 S. Hill Street, 480-316-0882, nurdberger.com