

Letters to World Citizens

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When conservative Time Magazine recently featured William Shattner and Patrick Stewart on its cover, Star Trek was duly legitimized on Planet Earth!

These two—Captains Kirk and Jean-Luc Picard of the USS Enterprise 1 and 2—are familiar to millions of viewers in 75 countries. Star Trek movies have earned nearly \$500 million at the box office, and more than 63 million Star Trek books are in print. More than 20 million of us wait anxiously for the chance to experience a brief hour per week in the 24th century when war on Earth has been eliminated, poverty is no more, and many “alien” species cohabit peaceably amongst us humans. “Trekkies,” notes Time, “are true-believing optimists and a few of them are nuts.”

Well, as we Trekkies “look back” at the last years of the 20th century from our enlightened time-frame, we find practically the whole race going nuts! A few of us consider ourselves World Citizens, while the rest of us seem mentally and emotionally buried in the binding and mythical past.

I saw Star Trek Generations last week, the latest saga, in which Captains Kirk and Picard, recognizing where true duty lies, together save a planetary system from destruction—not, we hope, for the last time, though Kirk seems to die at the end. But you never know with Dr. Beverly Crusher and her miraculous gadgets hovering around still-warm corpses. Remember The Return of Spock?

It’s easy enough to analyze Star Trek’s popularity: pure escapism into fantasy; intimate contact with “alien” species all speaking English; surrogate adventures; the awesome idea of space itself with its boundless sweep and mystery; psychological and moral lessons in a setting far removed from humdrum earthbound compromise. Guinan, for instance, played by Whoopi Goldberg, is the perfect metaphor for the ancient, eternal Wise Woman, the Oracle found in many myths, while Commander Data is a Christ-like know-it-all who saves the beleaguered humans through his superior intelligence, courage, super-strength and lack of emotional hang-ups.

The team coordination and spirit of the Enterprise crew members, each with his or her different qualities and expertise, are admirable and exemplary. Gene Roddenberry, Star Trek’s creator, set down the line from the outset: no conflicts among crew members. Often, however, when a member balked at performing a hazardous task, Captain Picard would have to bark, “That’s an order!” And they would obey.

Brent Spiner (Commander Data) opines that “Gene Roddenberry had a point of view that space is infinite as far as we know, and therefore the possibilities for stories are infinite. In the original series I think they had explored some 18 percent of the universe. We went into another 15 percent. So that leaves 67 percent of the universe left to explore.”

Star Trek, in my humble opinion, is pointing a positive direction for humanity’s future. May Kirk and Picard and all the Enterprise crew prove worthy prophets!