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Death for Peace

The idea of time travel has existed for decades. Books, television series and movies have been created involving this fascinating concept of traveling backwards and forwards through time. While some forms of media use it to involve an interesting setting for their events to take place, others further investigate the other ideas that branch out from it. The concept of alternate realities by changes in the timeline has been enjoyed by many through the form of visual media; one form being the pop culture classic – “Star Trek”.

“Star Trek” was one of the first to pave the path of the subject of alternate realities; the show would eventually lead to the creation of other episodes in its other continuing series dealing with this concept. The one significant reason that alternate realities has been explored within the “Star Trek” universe was the numerous conflicts and dilemmas it creates against Trek’s most valued ideal, a universe where world peace and prosperity finally exists.

In the “Star Trek” episode “City on the Edge of Forever”, an accidentally drugged Doctor McCoy becomes mentally unstable and paranoid and beams down to a planet the USS Enterprise is currently surveying. On the planet’s surface, McCoy discovers a time portal, known as the Guardian of Forever, and travels back in time through it. Kirk and Spock beam down to the planet in an attempt to retrieve McCoy, but fail. Afterwards, they discover the Enterprise has suddenly disappeared, only to be told by the Guardian of Forever that McCoy has changed the course of history, which prevents the formation of the United Federation of Planets and the existence of the USS Enterprise, as well. Kirk and Spock decide that they must travel back in

time through the Guardian of Forever in order to prevent McCoy's unknown actions from occurring. Kirk and Spock are sent to the United States in the 1930s, during the Depression Era. During their journey to find McCoy, they meet Edith Keeler, a beautiful and headstrong woman who runs a homeless shelter.

As their journey continues, Kirk falls in love with Keeler. However, Kirk later discovers that, should Keeler continue to live her life, she would become a peace activist who will persuade the United States to delay its entry into the Second World War; by the time the United States enters the war, the power of Nazi Germany would be so great that it would have dominated the entire world and prevent the formation of a united Earth, as well as the United Federation of Planets and creation of the USS Enterprise. Concluding that McCoy prevented Keeler's death, Kirk and Spock continue to and eventually find him. Keeler sees the group from the other side of the street and crosses it, unknowingly in the path of a fast moving truck. McCoy attempts to save her, only to be held back by Kirk, resulting in Keeler's tragic death. Afterwards, the officers travel back to their time to discover that the timeline has been restored.

When "Star Trek" creator Gene Roddenberry came across the idea of producing the television series, he envisioned a fictional universe where poverty and suffering no longer existed and the people of Earth became a united political entity. The dark alternate reality created in "The City of the Edge of Forever" presents a polar opposite to Roddenberry's vision. When Kirk intervened to prevent McCoy from saving Keeler, a surprised McCoy states "[Kirk] deliberately stopped [him], [that he] could have saved her]", and asks if "[Kirk knew] what [he] just did." Spock promptly replies that "[Kirk knew]". Spock's remark refers to Kirk's knowledge that McCoy's seemingly small change in the past that had altered the course of

history for the worse, allowing Nazi Germany to invade the United States and the rest of the world. This alternate reality replaced Earth's progression for peace and diplomacy, which would have led to a united and technologically advanced Earth, with genocide, poverty, and political instability.

Another challenge to Roddenberry's vision that was presented in "City on the Edge of Forever" was the deadly possibility for someone to use time travel to cause pain and suffering for military or political reasons. Towards the end of the episode, as Kirk and the Enterprise crew are about to depart, the Guardian of Forever explains to Kirk that "many such journeys are possible" and proposes to him to "let [it] be [his] gateway." The Guardian of Forever foreshadows the fact that it would be possible to allow someone to travel back through time with intentions to alter history for his or hers own benefit. Throughout the many series and episodes of "Star Trek", there have been numerous conflicts involving different political factions and alien races that have threaten the peace Roddenberry had envisioned. If given the ability to travel back in time, someone would be able to change history for his or her favor, which would possibly lead to the misfortune and suffering of others in convenience for the person responsible for changing the timeline. Edith Keeler is a prime example of how one's death could significantly change the course of how history is played out. This possibility could threaten the existence of the peace and prosperity, therefore the meaning and basis of why "Star Trek" was created.

A few days before her death, Keeler stated that "one day soon, man is going to be able to harness incredible energies, maybe even the atom, energies that could ultimately hurl us to other worlds in... some sort of spaceship. And the men that reach out into space will be able to find ways to feed the hungry millions of the world and to cure their diseases. They will be able to find

a way to give each man hope and a common future. And those are the days worth living for.”

What is ironic and unfortunate about Keeler’s statement is that her vision would become a reality – only if she died. Her optimistic speech represents the viewing audience of the time’s desire for peace as they were currently in a world filled with violent conflicts, such as the Vietnam War; “City on the Edge of Forever” can also target today’s viewing audience as violence is continuously prevalent in the world.

Although certain aspects of “Star Trek”, such as faster-than-light speeds and transporters, have been deemed impossible to exist, worldwide peace and prosperity hasn’t. This idea was the basis for Roddenberry’s iconic show that was admired and cherished by its audience; it has been formed into a likeable character that no one wants to see die. Episodes such as “City on the Edge of Forever” emphasized its importance by depicting the alternate reality created without it. “Star Trek’s” depiction of peace and prosperity gives our current society hope as we continue to live in a world that is plagued with war, famine, and suffering.