

CRIXEO

WE NEED A CAPTAIN PLANET REBOOT, LIKE, YESTERDAY

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A LARGE MAJORITY OF AMERICANS SUPPORT DOING 'WHATEVER IT TAKES TO PROTECT THE ENVIRONMENT.' FOR US, A CAPTAIN PLANET REBOOT COULDN'T COME SOON ENOUGH.

If there's one thing that could bring new attention to environmental issues in a way that Al Gore can't, it's *Captain Planet*. The inconvenient truth is that what the planet needs right now isn't scientific consensus; it's fandom.

In the early '90s, *Captain Planet* gave environmentalism a superhero makeover with six seasons of action-packed eco-fighting. Five Planeteers of different nationalities possessed rings that gave them the elemental powers of Earth, Wind, Fire, Water and Heart. The Planeteers took on a variety of eco-villains who wanted to destroy, extract and steal from the Earth. With their powers combined, they could summon Captain Planet, a superhero whose only weakness was direct contact with pollution.

With a *Captain Planet* reboot for a contemporary audience, theaters could be filled with people who want to see a good action superhero movie as well as environmentalists who want to see polluters get their butts kicked in the name of eco-justice. Imagine if the same sort of fandom generated by *The Avengers* and *Wonder Woman* were formed around a cast of environmental heroes. *Captain Planet* could literally change the world through a script that would push environmental issues into superhero conventions, the news, social media and merchandizing. In much the same way that *Wonder Woman* created a space for moviegoers to talk about equity of the sexes, *Captain Planet* could get millions to take up the fight for environmental justice.

Often, environmental issues are presented in dry, repetitive and overly technical terms. Readers often skip articles on the topic, and front-page news typically features environmental content only in the event of a massive disaster. Typically if journalists want to talk about global warming, they sneak the issue into something more attention-grabbing, such as politics, business or technology.

Still, news and documentary films have had their go at global warming. They've shown they can get information out to the public. For example, National Geographic's 2016 climate documentary *Before the Flood* had over [60 million views](#) across all platforms. However, these forms alone aren't creating the energetic communities necessary to fight something as big and immediate as global warming.

In just one example of the difficulty of communicating about environmental issues, consider burning coal and acid rain, which are featured in the *Captain Planet and the Planeteers* episode “Rain of Terror.” Acid rain is caused by acidic compounds like sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxide mixing with water lowering the pH level of water (bored yet?). Acidic emissions come primarily from burning coal. Acid rain wreaks havoc on lands, crops and wildlife. I could launch into an even deeper scientific explanation of acid rain, but I’ll spare you.

If the problems with burning coal were set up in a new movie as they are in *Captain Planet and the Planeteers*, with an eco-villain purposely creating acid rain to destroy a forest and plotting to have it pour over a city, suddenly viewers might want to know more about this diabolical anthropogenic phenomenon. Acid rain is a current problem in China, destroying fields, corroding metal infrastructure and impacting human health. Acid rain could again become a major problem in North America if we begin to burn coal like we did in the '80s and early '90s — something coal advocates today would prefer we not remember.

To stop the eco-villain Verminous Skumm from producing acid rain, the Planeteers fight their way into an abandoned factory. But the Planeteers are eventually locked up in a roomful of barrels of toxic waste. In this tense moment, we also learn about the dangers of stored waste, something all too common in factories that go bankrupt.

Kwame: “This room is full of toxic chemicals.”

Linka: “It was irresponsible for these to have been left behind when the factory closed.”

Wheeler: “No problem. I’ll just burn a hole in this wall.”

Gi: “Wheeler, don’t! One spark and these chemicals could explode like a bomb.”

Wheeler: “Gee, I didn’t think of that.”

Kwame: “I will start an earthquake that will crack this building open like an egg.”

Gi: “No, Kwame. An earthquake would spill these chemicals and poison the ground.”

Linka: “My wind power might release toxic fumes in the atmosphere.”

Gi: “My water power might contaminate an underground spring.”

The characters' concerns are related to real-world problems of waste storage. Toxic waste entered Puerto Rico's water system after Hurricane Maria flooded the island and washed stored waste into streams and rivers. Hurricane Harvey created poisonous fumes in Houston from hazardous waste. Some of America's [76,430 tons of nuclear waste](#) are stored near fault lines, creating the risk of waste being spilled by earthquakes. Fire is an obvious danger. Currently near St. Louis, an underground landfill fire threatens nuclear waste and other hazardous material. Linka's choice of "irresponsible" may not be a strong enough word to describe America's approach to toxic waste disposal.

If you didn't know about these environmental events, don't feel bad. Environmental news is often undershared and ignored because it tends to be glum. Who wants to start their day thinking about how the entire world is experiencing one environmental disaster after another? Al Gore said in his recent film, [An Inconvenient Sequel: Truth to Power](#), "Despair can be paralyzing." This is true for many people who are concerned about the environment but feel powerless to create the changes necessary to prevent global disasters. Gaia, the Earth spirit in *Captain Planet*, has a message for us: "With courage, you can accomplish anything."

Critics of a *Captain Planet* reboot might argue that an environmental movie is too politically partisan to bring in a blockbuster audience, but protecting the environment is not as much of a partisan issue as is often portrayed. In a Pew Research Center survey conducted in 2016, 74% of Americans support doing "[whatever it takes to protect the environment](#)," and Captain Planet and the Planeteers represent that goal by battling villains like Hoggish Greedily, who terrorizes villagers to get them to leave their homes so he can strip-mine their lands. Watching Captain Planet beat up evil polluters would be as thrilling to modern audiences as it has been for us to see Captain America punch Nazis.

Some villains in *Captain Planet* are set up as evil incarnate, but later villains like Doctor Blight bring in more complexity and would be perfect for a contemporary adaptation. In different episodes, Doctor Blight unleashes a computer virus, builds a time machine to sell nuclear weapons to Hitler and runs for political office. In the finale of the first season, "Heat Wave," Doctor Blight tries to kill Gaia and the Planeteers by trapping them in an island-sized bubble of greenhouse gases. This story line on the big screen would make the causes and effects of climate change an exciting plot-driving force for viewers who might otherwise skip the climate section on their favorite media site.

The Planeteers also lend toward an international cast. Kwame is from Ghana, Gi is from Asia, Linka is from Eastern Europe, Wheeler is from Brooklyn, and Ma-Ti is from the Amazon of Brazil. Captain Planet is a blue man, and his original voice actor, David Coburn, is American. Gaia, the spirit of the Earth, is a Black woman originally voiced by Whoopi Goldberg.

Internationalism in *Captain Planet* would build on other superhero films that feature characters from across the globe, but for this flick different nationalities would not only give the characters separate identities; they'd also show how people from many nations must work together to solve a global problem like climate change.

When the current administration pulled America out of the international [Paris Climate Agreement](#), it set America on a path toward isolationism. Global warming cannot be solved without broad multinational cooperation. *Captain Planet* demonstrates that working together on planetary issues across national boundaries is the only way to solve problems that affect the entire Earth. As the theme song goes, we need to bring "pollution down to zero."

There have been murmurs that Leonardo Di Caprio, who produced *Before the Flood*, was [planning](#) a Captain Planet reboot, but those whispers have died down. What do you think? Is a #CaptainPlanetReboot worth a Hollywood investment? When it comes to fighting for the planet, remember, as Captain Planet says, "The power is yours!"

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