

Dear Horrors,

I just finished listening to your episode about Cogenitor and I was really surprised that you didn't pick up that the aliens in this episode are a Trekification of the dystopian Republic of Gilead in Margaret Atwood's 1985 novel *The Handmaid's Tale*. Given that *The Handmaid's Tale* was recently turned into a Hulu series that has become kind of a big deal, I figured that everyone who cares about *Enterprise* (so, like twelve of us) would know this. But I haven't found any mention of it online, so I don't know, maybe I'm crazy and seeing connections that aren't really there. But it really seems to me that the Vissans are a **direct** and **intentional** copy of the Republic of Gilead. You tell me:

1. Cogenitors have no names. In *The Handmaid's Tale*, handmaids are stripped of their own names and are referred to by a patronymic derived from the first name of the Commander they currently serve.

2. Cogenitors are necessary for Vissan reproduction but represent a tiny fraction of the Vissan population, so they are passed around from couple to couple to facilitate the production of children, which they then have no claim to. In the dystopic future of *The Handmaid's Tale*, all but a tiny fraction of the country's women (and men, but the government denies this) have been rendered sterile by pollution and whatnot, so the few remaining fertile women are forced into service as handmaids to bear children for high-ranking men and their wives. A handmaid moves to a new household every two years or after she gives birth to a baby, whichever comes first. She has no claim to the children she produces.

3. Cogenitors are not educated and cannot read. All women in *The Handmaid's Tale* are forbidden to read.

4. Cogenitors and handmaids both get their own rooms in the homes of the couples they serve, and they eat the same food as the couple. They both have pretty much nothing to do except wait around until they are called to participate in baby making, and the people in power think that this treatment is very kind. In both stories, the people in power are shocked and appalled when the cogenitor/handmaids rebel against the status quo.

5. The death of a cogenitor or a handmaid is seen as a great tragedy not because of the loss of the person but because it is the loss of a valuable commodity.

Fortunately, the *Enterprise* episode tiptoes around the seriously rapey implications of the cogenitors' situation (yay!), while this is a major theme in *THT*. Normally I'm opposed to avoiding obvious rapeiness because I think this normalizes rape and rape culture, but *Star Trek* has proven to be so bad at handling rape stories that in

this case I think just avoiding it is the lesser of two evils.

So anyway, am I crazy or did the writers intentionally rip off The Handmaid's Tale?
And if they did, does knowing this change how you feel about the episode?

Yours in the Sphere Builders,
Alice