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Alien Infertility in Science Fiction

Part II

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Alien infertility has also featured in all of the popular SF television series, particularly in *Star Trek*, and the next section will be devoted to alien infertility in the *Star Trek* universe.

In an interesting twist on the praying-mantis theme, men are truly needed, albeit briefly, in the two *Star Trek* episodes, *The Lorelei Signal* (1973)¹ and *Favorite Son* (1997),² in which beautiful females feed off the 'life energies' of males, thus killing men to retain their immortality at the expense of infertility.

In *When the Bough Breaks* (1988), the starship *Enterprise* encounters a planet that is deliberately kept cloaked using a form of sophisticated stealth technology. While the *Enterprise* is in orbit, seven of the ship's children are kidnapped by the alien inhabitants, an otherwise kindly



¹ 'The Lorelei Signal', dir. by Hal Sutherland, *Star Trek The Animated Series*, September 1973.

² 'Favorite Son', dir. by Marvin V. Rush, *Star Trek Voyager*, March 1997.

humanoid race who claim they are sterile and that they wish to teach the human children their customs and use them to repopulate their species. The *Enterprise* doctor discovers that they are suffering from radiation poisoning caused by the overhead planetary cloak, leading to infertility. This story makes several assumptions: that humans can interbreed with aliens and that cumulative radiation effects on fertility can somehow, even in an alien species, be repealed.³ A similar storyline is developed in the television series *Starhunter* wherein genetically modified and sterile human soldiers abduct children in order to maintain their numbers.⁴

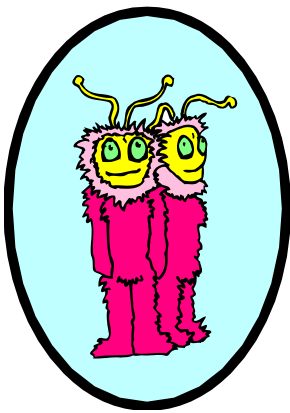
The original series *Star Trek* crew also encounter infertility on an alien planet, on which they find just five survivors who invade the *Enterprise* by stealth, and are invisible to the human crew because of a hyperaccelerated metabolism that permits them to move at velocities that are too fast for the human eye to register. Their aim is to overpower the crew members of the *Enterprise* and to hook them to a life-support system to be used as mating stock since their males have been rendered sterile by the radiation released by volcanic eruptions. Naturally, the *Enterprise* crew prevails and abandons the planet.⁵

The *Enterprise* NX-01 series crew also encounter the relics of a sterile race that had passed away on an ancient planet centuries before, leaving behind a genetically engineered virus that is capable of mutating other races – both bodies and minds – into their species in an attempt to perpetuate the race.⁶ However, it is inconceivable that a species capable of such advanced feats of genetic engineering would be incapable of treating themselves for infertility.

Only one individual of the ‘Caretaker’ race is encountered by the *Voyager* crew. The Caretakers had inadvertently destroyed a planet’s ecology and a Caretaker couple had been left to supervise the survival of the inhabitants of the planet, but when one of the couple leaves, and the remaining Caretaker ages and approaches death, he unsuccessfully attempts to seek a mate and reproduce in order to leave behind another Caretaker to

supervise the planet.⁷ Yet another *Star Trek* episode involves a humanoid race based on the planet which shifts between this dimension and another, wherein the inhabitants exist as pure consciousness and are unable to procreate. Starfleet manages to establish a means of stabilizing the planet such that it remains locked in this, our native dimension, allowing the aliens to reproduce.⁸ A similar situation is depicted in *Hell’s Pavement* (1955), when the protagonist finds himself in a circumscribed area of the Earth where humans and their habitat exist solely in the mind, and where sex simply does not exist, so the inhabitants survive by relying on the state dumping their unwanted in this area, which is considered a penal colony of no return.⁹

Somewhat illogically, the *Star Trek Voyager* episode *Ashes to Ashes* (2000) portrays an alien species that reproduce by reanimating the newly deceased of other species, and over a period of months, the dead DNA is remodeled into alien DNA.¹⁰ This is unsound on many counts as the aliens could just reanimate themselves when they



³ ‘When the Bough Breaks’, dir. by Kim Manners, *Star Trek The Next Generation*, February 1988.

⁴ G. Philip Jackson and Daniel D’or, *Starhunter*, The Movie Network, 2001–2003.

⁵ ‘Wink of an Eye’, dir. by Jud Taylor, *Star Trek The Next Generation*, November 1968.

⁶ ‘Extinction’, dir. by LeVar Burton, *Star Trek Enterprise*, September 2003.

⁷ ‘Caretaker’, dir. by Winrich Kolbe, *Star Trek Voyager*, January 1995.

⁸ ‘Meridian’, dir. by Jonathan Frakes, *Star Trek Deep Space 9*, November 1994.

⁹ Damon Knight, *Hell’s Pavement* (New York: Lion Books, 1955).

¹⁰ ‘Ashes to Ashes’, dir. by Terry Windell, *Star Trek Voyager*, March 2000.

die. In addition, neighboring species would consider such practices as grave robbing and would totally destroy their dead. Moreover, this practice would potentially pose a significant moral dilemma to this species in that a family wishing to have a child would be able to acquire one by killing a child of another species, and then reanimating the corpse. While this is not true infertility, scouring space for the purposes of corpse scavenging would be quite population limiting.

Genetic engineering has also been shown to cause sterility in aliens, and the ‘Son’a’ race in *Star Trek Insurrection* (1998), are sterile as a result of damage caused by biological and genetic experimentation that they themselves attempted in an effort to attain longevity.¹¹

Aliens have not been spared nuclear mishaps and in the *Friendship One* (2001), the accidental misuse of antimatter causes devastating explosions on an extrasolar planet that trigger a nuclear winter and produce alien, radiation-damaged babies.¹²

The *Star Trek* episode *Elogium* (1995), depicts the alien but humanoid females of the species ‘Ocampa’ who undergo their ‘elogium’ once in their lifetime, and this is a physiological change wherein an Ocampan female becomes sexually mature, but with a twist, in that this is the only time in an Ocampan female’s lifetime wherein they may become pregnant. This is an unusual choice of name for such a process as an elogium is more commonly known as the praise bestowed on a person or thing; a panegyric or eulogy. At face value, the elogium is illogical as this would result in halving of the species’ total numbers in each generation, so the only logical assumption is that the outcome of each pregnancy is multiple (twins or more), although this is never alluded to in the entire series.¹³

The 1970s television series *Space 1999* also used the alien sterility premise in the episode *Earthbound* where humanoid aliens are found fleeing an unexplained process that rendered all life on their planet progressively sterile.¹⁴ In similar vein, in *I Married a Monster from Outer Space* (1958), the menfolk of an American town are taken over by an alien species whose females have been rendered sterile by the collapse of their solar system’s sun, and have come to Earth to marry and breed with Earth human females in order to revive their race,¹⁵ clearly a spin-off of the classic *Invasion of The Body Snatchers* (1956).¹⁶

Tanith Lee’s *Beauty* (1983)¹⁷ takes this further by turning human females into surrogate mothers, with no genetic contribution to their offspring, who have embryos implanted by sterile aliens in an attempt to perpetuate their race. Similarly May’s *The Many-Colored Land* (1981) depicts an alien race in Pliocene Earth (5.3-2.5 million years ago) who use humans who travel back to this time as breeding stock, since their own females have impaired fertility, and human women are forced to undergo tubal ligations to ensure that they do not gestate any human babies. Interestingly, the alien gynaecologist who



¹¹ *Insurrection*, dir. by Jonathon Frakes (Paramount Pictures, 1998).

¹² ‘Friendship One’, dir. by Mike Vejar, *Star Trek: Voyager*, April 2001.

¹³ ‘Elogium’, dir. by Winrich Kolbe, *Star Trek Voyager*, September 1995.

¹⁴ ‘Earthbound’, dir. by Charles Crichton, *Space 1999*, January 1976

¹⁵ *I Married a Monster from Outer Space*, dir. by Gene Fowler Jr, (Paramount Picture, 1958).

¹⁶ *The Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, dir. by Don Siegel (Allied Artists Pictures Corporation, 1956).

¹⁷ Tanith Lee, ‘Beauty’, in *Red as Blood, or Tales from the Sisters Grimmer* (New York: DAW, 1983).

performs these ligation reversals is infertile, as she is a male who has had a sex change. Human males are also forced to become genetic donors.¹⁸ Alien male infertility is not depicted as a problem as only one male in the saga is depicted to be infertile. Indeed the alien king is extremely fertile and exercises *droit de seigneur* on all human females in order to increase their chances of rapid impregnation. *Droit de seigneur* was the purported medieval lord's legal right to deflower virgins on their first married night.¹⁹ Also, in Nour's *Love's Captive* (2005), interstellar pirates abduct fertile females as wives for the men of a planet whose race is endangered due to their women's sterility.²⁰

A more menacing approach is taken in the *X-Files*, whose protagonists thwart a government conspiracy to help inimical aliens colonize the Earth, including attempts to create a slave race of human-alien hybrids through the use of bio-weapons. The female protagonist is abducted, her ovaries are removed for human-hybrid experimentation purposes and she is implanted with an alien embryo. Although she is saved, she is now technically sterile, having no ova, and indeed, should pass into menopause as explained earlier. However, she eventually still manages to become pregnant.²¹ An unusual and unexplained infertility theme is also seen in the television series *Lost* (2004), which is set on a desert island and where pregnant women die on the island before they can give birth.²²

A combined human-alien infertility interaction is depicted in Groom's *The Purple Twilight* (1948) where the protagonist travels to Mars in search of the descendants of Atlantis and instead finds the telepathic members of the dying intelligent Martian race, who had attacked and destroyed humans on Atlantis in self-defense and then fell into an arms race that led to a nuclear war that sterilized the Martian race. When the protagonist returns to Earth he finds a similar arms race developing and recounts his cautionary tale in vain.²³ Sterile Martians are also represented in *A Rose for Ecclesiastes* (1963), and the human protagonist manages to father a child with a female Martian, to the chagrin of the Martians as it contradicted their fatalistic expectations of racial extinction, an event in the distant past that had sterilized the race.²⁴

To Be Continued.

¹⁸ Julian May, *The Many-Colored Land* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1981).

¹⁹ Jörg Wettlaufer, 'The *Jus Primae Noctis* as a Male Power Display: A Review of Historic Sources with Evolutionary Interpretation', in *Evolution and Human Behavior*, 21 (2000), 111–23.

²⁰ Myra Nour, *Love's Captive* (Lake Park: New Concepts Publishing, 2005).

²¹ 'Requiem', dir. by Kim Manners, *The X-Files*, May 2000.

²² 'The Other Woman', dir. by Eric Laneuville, *Lost*, March 2008.

²³ Pelham Groom, *The Purple Twilight* (London: T. Werner Laurie, 1948)

²⁴ Roger Zelazny, 'A Rose for Ecclesiastes', *The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction*, November 1963.