

# The Door

What is a commander? I know they take part in the ceremonies with the handmaids, that much is obvious. We also know they're old and have some sort of power, seemingly the highest so far, but what do the most prominent men in Gilead actually do? Where did their power stem from? and can you become one? Searching for an answer online has never been so easy and yet so hard at the same time. Besides the occasional descriptions depicting them and their wives, we haven't been provided much information on what they do, which remains mysterious throughout the story. When Offred's commander unexpectedly invited her into his room at night, I was just as confused as she was. Below I drew that scene, Offred standing before that massive door of confusion, hope, and most importantly, opportunity.

Image of Offred standing before the Commander's Door.



One of the many laws of Gilead was broken with the commander's simple request that night in chapter 23; No Handmaid and commander should be alone together. This came off surprising to me at first, as I thought it contrasted with the little we have been told about the commander up to this page so far. "The commander is the head of the household. The house is what he holds. To have and to hold, till death do us part." (Chapter 14 pg3) One of the many roles household heads have is supporting the integrity of your family, keeping them safe in the process. In the case of the commander, abiding by the laws of Gilead and effectively shutting the door on the past times is crucial to the '*families*' safety, including his own. I decided to draw this need for an unwavering will as a Giant door. A giant door that must remain locked at all times, with it opening potentially threatening the entire household. This gate-like visualization puts into perspective the importance of the commander maintaining Gilead laws while opposing otherworldly thoughts. However, after analyzing past readings I realized my initial impression of the commander was incorrect. His gate was opening, and faith in Gilead was Wavering.

The commander's illegal request for Offred after hours isn't the first time we've seen him disrupt Gilead's household structure. The commander has taken advantage of moments in the past to draw somewhat closer to Offred privately. "He's looking into my room, dark against its light. I can see now, It's the Commander, he isn't supposed to be here" (Chapter 8 last page) His sly and inappropriate approaches made me question: what does it mean for a Commander of the Faithfuls' faith to waver? This question led me to draw an opening in the giant gateway, representing the commander's mysterious shell beginning to crack, opening for the rest of the world to see. The shining light represents his suppressed character, a character that was constantly being held back by Gilead and its large door of rules, regulations, and ranking. "'Aint like you're common" She means the commanders rank.'" (chapter 4 page 11) If Fred, a high-ranking commander of the faithful, can rebel against laws that have been put in place by seemingly other commanders, then how can I or anybody expect Gilead to last as a nation? This light not only serves as a representation of unshared values existing for higher-ups, but also as a beacon of hope for Offred.

Despite the Handmaid's shouldering the heavy burden of bearing children for the entire nation of Gilead, we've constantly seen them treated with little to no respect throughout the story. However, with the commander's request for Offred, opportunities arise for her to gain power. "There must be something he wants, from me. To want is to have a weakness. It's this weakness, whatever it is, that entices me." (Chapter 23 page3) Knowledge is power. In Gilead, they burn books, creating laws against reading and writing to better control women. The commander's desire for Offred can be withheld and delayed at her choice, effectively reversing this hierarchy. After being at the end of the rifle for so long, Offred's situation finally begins to lighten with hope. For this scene, I drew Offred standing in the middle of the door with light shining through the darkness onto her. She doesn't know what's on the other side, but it's an opportunity she will never pass up.

