

# **An Anarchist's Guide To Dune**

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*There is no escape—we pay for the violence of our ancestors.*

-Frank Herbert, *Dune*, 1965

## Introduction

A long time ago in a place called Olympia, Washington, there were a bunch of anarchists, just like today. However, back around 1999, there were certain anarchists of Olympia who enjoyed targeting nasty, ecocidal institutions, burning down ski resorts, freeing captured animals, all that wonderful stuff. Not every anarchist in Olympia was doing this, obviously, but it was fun to know it was happening. Likewise, not every anarchist in Olympia had read the sci-fi novel *Dune* by Frank Herbert, but those who had were in for a real treat, because the best friend of the late Frank Herbert, a poet named Bill Ransom, was a local Olympia professor who was often found at local Olympia literary events.

This might be heresy to say, especially in an article predominantly about *Dune*, but the trilogy that Frank Herbert and Bill Ransom wrote together, a trilogy which doesn't even have a proper name, is far superior to the *Dune* novels. Beginning with *The Jesus Incident*, the two friends created a colonized world called Pandora (sound familiar?), and on this world, not only is the native life psychotically hostile to the human colonizers, the entire planet, including its plants and animals, possess a singular consciousness. Like the *Dune* novels, this trilogy examines and dissects both power and religion, but it's far more kind in its depictions of the guerrilla eco-rebels, those who fight in league with the conscious kelp forests of Pandora. Again, while this might be heresy, Frank Herbert teaming up with a poet certainly made the books much easier to read, and prettier.

I first got to Olympia around this time, when the super-fun anarchists were still burning things down, and not only was green-anarchy in the air, not only was deep-ecology a sort of *de facto* baseline, but having Frank Herbert's buddy around to discuss ecology and guerrilla warfare with was definitely a treat. Beyond all that, Bill Ransom had served as a humanitarian medic during the civil war in El Salvador, and beyond suffering PTSD from what he experienced, he didn't talk about guerrilla war lightly, to say the least. Thanks to him, I didn't just learn all of the above, I was first introduced to the weird literary matrix that existed up there in the woods of Western Washington.

Without getting too academic, just imagine a bunch of bored, laid-off white male lumberjacks sitting in their shitty hut with no electricity and no television. Keep in mind, this is the mid 20th century we're talking about, so in these shitty little huts lit up by kerosene lamp and wood-stove, these fools read a bunch of books in their rainy boredom, and through this they accidentally got real smart, so smart they started holding their own literary readings at local logger bars. And then suddenly, unseen by the rest of the world, working class poets and writers were brawling at readings over things like style and form, inventing their own weird school of writing in the process.

I don't know what you'd call this school, but you probably heard of one example, the 1976 book *A River Runs Through It*, which became famous after Brad Pitt starred in the 1992 movie version. While that story takes place in Western Montana near Missoula, a lot of people don't realize that's the same bio-region as Olympia and Seattle, ecologically speaking. To make it more intense, most people don't know Idaho is between Montana and Washington.

Anyway, the list of white male Pacific Northwest authors goes on, with famous names like lumberjack Ken Kesey of Oregon and his 1962 novel *One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest*, another movie people might know about. This one's important, because most of this literary school were white guys, and here we see a prime example of how obsessed they were with the local indigenous, given *Cuckoo's Nest* is narrated by Chief Broom. Another example is Raymond Carver, the acclaimed short story writer who was born in Oregon, lived his last days in Port Angeles, Washington, and had several films based on his work. On the other side of the northern Olympic Peninsula is Port Townsend, and it was here that Frank Herbert and his wife Beverly settled down in 1972, living on a farm while Frank began writing *Children of Dune*, the book that catapulted him to stardom.

Frank Herbert was already famous at that point, and the cash from *Dune* and *Dune Messiah* allowed him to not only move to Port Townsend, but to give up his day jobs of teaching and journalism. When he was writing the first draft of *Dune* from 1959 to 1963, his wife Beverly became the main provider for their children. Luckily for them, the first draft of *Dune* was serialized in the sci-fi magazine *Analog*, bringing Frank Herbert nearly \$3,000, and when the final version of *Dune* was published in hardcover in 1965, the author was paid just over \$7,000. This was a lot of money for Frank, who grew up around Tacoma, Washington living in a shitty hut where he chopped his own wood, smoked his own salmon, and rowed his canoe in the Salish Sea with his indigenous friend.

Frank Herbert was very much part of this white-male-centric literary movement of the Pacific Northwest, and his *Dune* was published just as all their stars were rising. So now that you know a bit about Herbert's literary background, it's time for me to depersonalize this text a bit and officially present to you *An Anarchist's Guide to Dune*.

## I: Just Dune It

*Dune* is really fucking weird. It's told in the third-person, past tense, but the point of view is very chaotic. Not only will the narrative switch into the italicized first-person, present-tense point of view of a character, it will do so for multiple characters in the same scene or chapter. Other times, the point of view will remain fixed for an entire chapter, creating a strange, multi-dimensional ride. For all these reasons and more, *Dune* was considered unfilmable, even after the David Lynch movie from 1984, which was visually stunning but left out the core of what makes *Dune* compelling. The 2021 and 2024 film versions of *Dune* met with much greater success, and while they took major liberties in diverging from the plot, they successfully conveyed the grand story arcs embedded in the novel.

Were the 2021 version being faithful to the book, the first scene would have been the infamous *Box chapter*, where the Bene Gesserit witch holds a poison needle to Paul Atreides' neck and tells him to put his hand in a pain-inducing box. All of this is to test this royal teenager's ability to control his instincts, for if he removes his hand from the box, he will die. None of the movie versions opted for this to be the first scene, but in the novel, it serves to introduce the dark eugenic schemes of the Bene Gesserit and make clear the Atreides are walking into a trap by taking control of the spice fields of Arrakis. Paul survives the test, proving that he is human, not an animal, but it also proves he might be the Kwisatz Haderach, the outcome of 90 generations of eugenic breeding among the Great Houses.

Rather than have this be the first scene, the 2021 film version provides a montage from Arrakis narrated by Zendaya where the Fremen attack the ruling Harkonnens and their spice harvesters, suffer retaliation, and then watch as the Harkonnens are ordered to leave Arrakis and be replaced by the Atreides, another royal family.

After this, there are more scenes on the Atreides home world of Caladan that do not appear in the book, introducing Bene Gesserit skills like the Voice, showing the Imperial ceremony where Duke Leto Atreides accepts the Imperial command to take control of Arrakis, as well as introducing both Duncan Idaho and Gurney Halleck. In the book, Duncan Idaho doesn't appear in a scene until the Atreides land on Arrakis, but in the 2021 version, he and young Paul Atreides bro down for a while on Caladan, likely because Jason Momoa will depict the only steady character for the rest of the franchise, given Duncan Idaho is endlessly cloned back to life. Sorry.

All of the above scenes take place on Caladan, before the Atreides leave, and this first part of the 2021 film mirrors the first parts of the book, vaguely. In the book, Paul hangs out with every main character before leaving Caladan, including a human-computer Mentat named Thufir Hawat, and while this scene was purged from the recent movie, some of the lines made it through. For example, in the book, Paul describes to Thufir a debate he had with his Bene Gesserit mother Jessica, in which she said, *the mystery of life isn't a problem to solve, but a reality to experience*. In response, Paul quoted to her the *First Law of Mentat*, which goes, *a process cannot be understood by stopping it. Understanding must move with the flow of the process, must join it and flow with it*.

In the 2021 film version, all of these lines are delivered by Jamis, the Fremen that Paul stabs in ritual combat at the end of the first film (or near the middle of the book). Not only are these lines delivered by Jamis in the recent film, they are delivered during a spice-induced vision in Paul's head while he and Jessica are swirling around in a storms-worth of psychedelic sand, all before Paul ever meets Jamis and is forced to fight him. In this way, the film shows the inner psychic working of Paul's ability to see the future, which the book narrates extensively in a variety ways, none of which were literally translated into the film. Instead, these montages serve the same purpose, being highly subjective with trippy weird voices telling Paul to do things.

In the novel, Paul also hangs out with his dad Leto before leaving Caladan, a scene which takes place in the fight-training room, although the recent film sets it in the Atreides family cemetery where Leto is admiring his father's headstone which depicts the bull that killed him.

Unlike the film, the book portrays Leto as being pretty explicit in his attitude toward the native Fremen of Arrakis. After explaining to Paul how the Emperor's elite soldiers, the Sardaukar, were trained on the bleak, inhospitable world of Salusa Secundus, making them better fighters, he then explains how Arrakis is even more bleak and inhospitable, making the Fremen better fighters than the Emperor's own swords.

As he tells his son, *we have the potential of a corps as strong and deadly as the Sardaukar. It'll require patience to exploit them secretly and wealth to equip them properly. But the Fremen are there...and the spice wealth is there. You see now why we walk into Arrakis, knowing the trap is there*. In the 2021 film, Duke Leto doesn't use the word *exploit* to describe his plans for the Fremen, but he does tell Paul he wants to *tap* that shit.

In the film, the *Box scene* signals the end of the Caladan chapters, followed by a short montage of the Atreides departing for Arrakis. In the book, the narrative simply jumps from the father-son bro down on Caladan to Lady Jessica staring at boxes in her new home on Arrakis, with basically no description of the journey. In this long chapter, Jessica sees boxes containing Atreides family heirlooms, specifically a painting of Leto's father dressed as a matador, as well as the preserved

head of the bull that gored him to death. In the previously mentioned cemetery scene of the film, Paul uses his grandfather's penchant for bull-fighting as a reason he should be allowed to go to Arrakis with the first wave, although Leto just scoffs at this reference to Paul's grandfather, saying, *look where that got him*, ie: gored to death.

The recent movie made sure to include this, just as it shows the matador painting, the bulls head, and a tiny metal figurine depicting the goring. Just like in the novel, the film shows the preserved bull's head being unpacked from a box, although it vastly condenses this chapter. In the book, the reader learns that Jessica hates the painting and the head, given they represent wild genetic traits which have made the Atrides pariahs to the eugenic Bene Gesserit. In short, the Atrides take risks, and this makes them defiant and uncontrollable to the Sisterhood, who like to control things, especially bloodlines.

In the novel, Jessica stares at the matador painting and bull head, *she clenched her fists, glared at the painting. "Damn you! Damn you! Damn you!" she whispered.* In this moment, she is surprised by the appearance of the Shadout Mapes, her new Fremen servant. As depicted in the 2021 film, the Shadout offers Jessica a crysknife, the traditional Fremen weapon made from the tooth of their planet's giant sandworm, known as Shai-Hulud. The test Jessica must pass before receiving this knife is more drawn out in the book, but the result is the same as in the film: Jessica is perceived as the prophesied mother of the Lisan al-Gaib. However, in the book, the Shadout gets right to work after the knife offering, asking where she should hang the matador painting and bull head.

From this long scene in the book, we are also meant to gather that Duke Leto's matador father told him not to marry Lady Jessica, but rather keep her as a concubine. Had he allowed them to marry, none of *Dune's* sad story would have unfolded the way it did, and Jessica knows this, being one of the Bene Gesserit who set it all in motion with their eugenic quest to breed a super-being, the Kwisatz Haderach.

## II: Dune To Fuck

Eugenics is a scary word, given how the Nazis used it, but not long ago, in the liberal bastion of California, the state was allowed to sterilize any prisoner it deemed unfit, and in the writings that justified this law, there is language no different than what the Nazis used to justify their extermination camps. However, before the Nazis, before the US sterilization laws, there was a fringe movement called eugenics, and it aimed to allow men and women to have a choice in whether or not they had children, something all the major religions were against. For this reason and more, many early advocates of birth control were eugenicists, including the anarchist Emma Goldman.

Once upon a time, Emma Goldman found herself in Tacoma, Washington on June 1, 1899, and as she recounted, *everything had been prepared for a meeting there, but when I arrived, I found that the owner of the hall had backed out, and no other place could be secured.* Given this situation, she took a ferry out to the anarchist commune of Home and stayed there for a summer weekend, attending a party held in her honor and lecturing at the school house for all to hear. She returned to Tacoma on June 4 and resumed her cross-country lecture tour. A few years after she left, another anarchist came to Home, this one a eugenicist named Lois Waisebrooker.

In early 1901, this spiritualist trance-medium arrived at the anarchist community, and given she was 75 years-old, the community built her a house. While she contributed as much of her labor as she could, the community respected her beliefs and writings, especially after she took over editing a newspaper called *Lucifer, the Light-Bearer* in 1892 when its previous editor was jailed for defending birth control. Lois was an old-time anarchist, just as she was novelist, and among her works was an 1893 work of speculative fiction titled *A Sex Revolution* where women are given men's power for fifty years, as an experiment, and society quickly shifts for the better.

While she was living at Home, the relentless Lois Waisebrooker published a newspaper called *Clothed With The Sun*, and she was one of two anarchists from Home to be found guilty of a crime in the repression that followed the 1901 assassination of President McKinley at the hands of the anarchist Leon Czolgosz. Not only was she jailed for distributing obscene material relating to prostitution, poverty, and eugenics, the Home post office run by her co-defendant Mattie Penhallow was shut down by the federal government, just as the local Home newspaper *Discontent* ceased publishing.

Lois Waisebrooker left Home in 1904, although her newspapers and influence lingered in the region, given how famous her 1902 guilty verdict became. The year after she left, in 1905, a man named Otto Herbert arrived just to the north of Home in a struggling socialist community called Burley. There was certainly a lot of dialogue between Home and Burley, with many socialists defecting to their anarchist neighbors, largely because the anarchists were more exciting. However, despite all that, Otto Herbert never left Burley for Home, but he was known to be an avid reader, something his grandson Frank Herbert would later emulate.

Burley started out as the first part of a socialist colonization scheme aimed at one day seizing the Washington State government through legal means. The first dozen people moved there at the end of 1898, and they opened a hotel (Hotel Commonwealth), built a lumber mill, started a cigar factory (ie: burley tobacco), and began publishing a newspaper, the *Co-Operator*, out of an abandoned homestead that was freezing that first winter. Despite its utopian ambitions, it ended up just being a place where you could buy in to the community and pay for things.

It cost a dollar to join, as well as a dollar a month in membership dues, and when a member had paid in \$120, they became a *resident member* with access to the collective insurance and the ability to pay their dues in labor, not cash like the members. To make things pretty clear, in 1900, a Black man tried to become a member, and after a long meeting in Burley, it was decided a new colony should be formed for Black people, although by then the Black applicant was already gone. Unlike the anarchists of Home, the socialists of Burley were officially racist, which was quite common back then, for socialists.

By 1901, the Burley colony had 115 residents, with 45 men and 25 women. Again, unlike anarchist Home, where women were often in the majority, socialist Burley was dominated by men. Many residents ended up being elders, given how good the Burley insurance was, allowing any member to bring their family to Burley should they be disabled or ill and need a place to live. Also in 1901, the colony passed by-laws restoring private property and allowing members to make profits, without blinking, and they all made a lot of money cutting down trees, milling lumber, and making shingles, functioning as a joint-stock company. Soon after, their *Co-Operator* newspaper folded. In other words, socialism.

It was into this mess of a Burley that Otto Herbert arrived at in 1905 with his wife Mary and their six children. Otto was a Bavarian born in transit to the US in 1864, while Mary was an illiterate Kentucky hillbilly, and they moved across the country to the middle of nowhere. Otto

had become a socialist of the Social Democracy of America variety and was loyal to its leader, Eugene V. Debs. After buying land on the outskirts of Burley, the Heberts eventually ended up running the general store, or *Herbert's Store*, and according to Brian Herbert, the son of Frank, the store *had hay, grain, cow-feed, chickenfeed, clothing, medicines, dishes, hardware and most everything else imaginable, piled high to the ceiling. It was not a "green grocery," as it sold no fresh produce. The locals grew their own vegetables and fruit, and canned them.*

The *Co-Operator* newspaper was defunct around the time Otto arrived in Burley, but this wasn't the case with the anarchist press of Home, which was issuing *The Demonstrator* every week when he arrived. Besides this paper, it's known that the previous Home newspaper, *Discontent*, was widely circulated in Burley, given the two communities were just over ten miles apart and connected by ferry. Even the anarchist *Clothed With The Sun* made its way to Burley, and old man Otto likely had thick stacks of all these newspapers, given Burley lacked its own press when he arrived.

Down south in Home, things were surely popping off, and old Otto and Mary surely heard about some of it, given it was in all the local papers for years on end. In 1911, a bunch of Burns private detectives started creeping around the woods near Home, looking for people involved in the dynamiting of the *Los Angeles Times* building. Burley stopped being remotely socialist in 1912, formally detaching itself from its old socialist structure, but meanwhile Home was engulfed in scandal after scandal, a major one centered on nude bathing in the Salish Sea. It wouldn't be until 1915 that the anarchists learned a son of Home named Donald Vose had been informing to the Burns private detectives, leading to the arrest of one David Caplan, who was hiding up north on Bainbridge Island.

After that, everyone in the region knew Home was implicated in the bombing somehow, and Otto and Mary were surely among them. Home stopped being overtly anarchist in 1919, also succumbing to private property and legal charters, but dozens of anarchists remained in the region, just as Otto Herbert did with his family.

One of Otto's children was named Frank, and after being raised in Burley, young Frank helped his father run the general store, then started *Herbert Brother's* which also ran a gas station once the roads came through. Their company also ran a stage-line between Burley and Gig Harbor, an electrical repair shop, and a logging business. However, by 1919, young Frank was living in the big city of Tacoma where he met a woman named Eileen, who was soon pregnant. Frank was born in 1893, while Eileen was born in 1901, and their first son was named Frank Herbert, Jr., the future author of *Dune*, born on October 8, 1920. Despite living in Tacoma, the boy was often in Burley with his grandparents.

Little Frank's first memory was from Burley in 1921, an image of crawling under his grandmother Mary's *wooden dining room table covered with a white tablecloth*. According to his son, little Frank could read newspapers at the age of five, and it's not hard to imagine little Frank reading through Otto's collection of radical newspapers in 1925. He would have seen the anarchist *Discontent*, the eugenicist *Clothed With The Sun*, the socialist *Co-Operator*, the anarchist *Demonstrator*, *Agitator*, and *Why?*, the last of the Home-affiliated newspapers which ended in 1914. While he was only five, little Frank could read like little Alia in *Dune*, the freakishly smart infant with blue within blue eyes, and its unclear just how much of the local anarchist press he put into his Mentat-like brain.



### III: Dune Burn The Fires

In the novel *Dune*, Jessica is hanging out with the traitor Doctor Yueh, looking out from the palace on Arrakis. She doesn't yet know Yueh is a traitor, and she stares with the doctor down below the palace and sees that *a line of twenty palm trees grew there, the ground beneath them swept clean, barren*. This exact detail is faithfully translated into the 2021 film. However, in the book it's Yueh who delivers the following lines: *Those are date palms. One date palm requires forty liters of water a day. A man requires but eight liters. A palm, then, equals five men. There are twenty palms out there—one hundred men*. In the movie, an anonymous gardener delivers some of these lines to Paul, explaining that *these trees are sacred. Old dream*. By the way, Arrakis is all sand and rock, so any green life and water is more than sacred.

In regards to Doctor Yueh, the infamous traitor, there's no suspense in the novel, unlike the movie, where the viewer doesn't know he's the traitor until they see his face. In the book, the reader knows by the second chapter, and after the Atrides arrive on Arrakis, it becomes clear how he became a traitor. His wife Wanna was taken prisoner by the Harkonnens and placed in a *pain amplifier*, forcing Yueh to do their bidding. How a deadly Bene Gesserit witch could be captured is never explained, but the inner monologue of Doctor Yueh reveals a dark possibility. In regards to not bearing him any children, Yueh asks himself, *was there some Bene Gesserit reason? Was she, perhaps, instructed to serve a different purpose? What could it have been?*

What Yueh never realizes, what Frank Herbert vaguely insinuates, is that his wife Wanna was given to the Harkonnens by the Bene Gesserit themselves, part of a grander plot to give the Harkonnens the only tool with which they could infiltrate and bring down the Atrides. Whether poor Wanna knew about this purpose is unclear, and as Yueh tells himself, *she loved me, certainly*. Nothing is ever clear with the Bene Gesserit, but the torture of one of their own was used to break the conditioning of an Imperial Doctor and turn him into a traitor for the Harkonnens, allowing the eventual destruction of House Atrides. Only pieces of this make it into the 2021 film, and Doctor Yueh has far more scenes in the novel, and much more nuance.

For example, it's Yueh who gives Paul a *filmbook*, the talking projector depicted in the recent film, and it taught him all the terranic plants and animals that lived on Arrakis: *saguaro, burro bush, date palm, sand verbena, evening primrose, barrel cactus, incense bush, smoke tree, creosote bush...kit fox, desert hawk, kangaroo mouse*. Paul is thinking about these plants and animals right before a hunter-seeker drone burns into his room and tries to kill him, a scene semi-faithfully rendered in the film, with Paul looking at the filmbook projection of a desert plant when the hunter-seeker enters. Luckily, the Shadout Mapes walks in, allowing Paul to catch and crush the seeker as it darts for her.

After this episode, Duke Leto starts losing his shit, and despite being the royal ruler of a Great House, the book depicts him as having very anarchist thoughts: *the Duke felt in this moment that his own dearest dream was to end all class distinction and never again think of deadly order*. This was the defiance that earned Leto the scorn of the Bene Gesserit, a genetic flaw that made the Atrides prone to taking risks, and it was of a decidedly anarchist character. In another example, the Duke cries, *who asks for justice? We make our own justice. We make it here on Arrakis—win or die*. Further on, he takes it even further, sounding every bit the anarchist direct-actionist when he says, *let us not rail about justice as long we have arms and the freedom to use them*.

Pretty rich coming from a Duke, but that's straight from the book, only the 2021 film version reduces it all down to the Atrides *defiance in the eyes*, as quoted by Reverend Mother Gaius

Helen Mohiam. In the book, this defiance makes him say things like, *I wish we could sink back into anonymity among the people*, something no well-behaved Duke would wish for, at least according to the Bene Gesserit. This defiance also makes Duke Leto committed to harnessing the Fremen of Arrakis as his unbeatable army, a possibility the Bene Gesserit don't discount, despite the risks to their other plans. In both the book and film, the Bene Gesserit facilitate Paul's rise to power on Arrakis, but I'll get to that later.

No one knows much about the Fremen in the first half of the book, and their ability to ride sandworms is still a total mystery, suspected by no one. As Doctor Yueh tells Paul back on Caladan, the Fremen *compose poems to their knives. Their women are as fierce as the men. Even Fremen children are violent and dangerous*. Later on Arrakis, when Duncan Idaho finally appears in the book, he explains simply that *the Fremen are a pretty independent bunch*.

One major departure the 2021 film made from the book is with Doctor Liet Kynes, the Imperial ecologist, or *planetologist*. Not only did the film change Liet's gender from male to female, she was played by a Black woman named Sharon Duncan-Brewster, as opposed to the Liet of David Lynch's 1984 version, played by the very white Max von Sydow. In the book, this Liet is the father of Chani, but the 2021 and 2024 versions have seemingly purged this relationship from the screen. However, in both the recent film and the novel, Liet is presented as a type of leader among the Fremen, but this role is much stronger in the book, with Liet being even more respected than Stilgar, the tribal leader.

Both the book and film reveal that Liet gives his hosts Fremen *stillsuits*, clothing which reclaims the body's moisture, and as he inspects these royal's *stillsuits*, he (or she) finds only Paul has his fitted in the correct fashion, triggering a mystical episode in Liet, who has also succumbed to the prophecy implanted in the Fremen centuries earlier by the Bene Gesserit, one which speaks of their prophet the Lisan al-Gaib who would have a Bene Gesserit mother and know the desert ways as if born to them.

Like in the recent film, the book depicts Liet Kynes accompanying Duke Leto and his son Paul on an ornithopter journey across the spice fields, and on that note, it must be said that the 2021 version faithfully recreates Frank Herbert's vision of the dragon-fly-like ornithopters, even details like their glowing green console lights, helping bring this truly weird vision to life. The scene where Liet takes the Atrides on a flight over the spice fields is also faithfully recreated, albeit with some significant changes. For example, in the movie, Liet doesn't explain mid-flight that *most Fremen in the open desert rub their hands with juice from the creosote bush. It inhibits perspiration*. Unfortunately, the creosote bush is entirely excised from the recent films, along with the eagle that Duke Leto sees from the ornithopter, something he mistakes for an aircraft.

There is much more about Liet Kynes and his father Pardo in the first appendix of the *Dune* book, and in combination with the story, the reader learns that Liet is himself half Fremen, even if he is employed by the Empire like his father Pardo, whose vision of a green, watery Arrakis took hold of the Fremen imagination, for if they saved enough water over three centuries, they would only need to change three percent of the land to trigger an irreversible *self-sustaining cycle* where the dunes would fill with *camel sage, onion grass, gobi feather grass, wild alfalfa, burrow bush, sand verbena, evening primrose, incense bush, smoke tree, creosote bush*. This is what the gardener from the film means when he calls the twenty date palms an *old dream*.

The Fremen are committed to the Kynes vision of a green *self-sustaining cycle*, and some of this is reflected in the 2021 film, such as when the filmbook informs Paul and the viewer that *these plants cling to life in a parched, nutrient poor landscape*, much like the Fremen themselves, who

have been planting them for decades outside the gaze of the Empire. To be clear, the film mostly purges the weird ecological tangents in the novel *Dune*, but traces of it are there, enough to hint at the vast scope of the full story. The recent film rightly centers the twenty date palms, which it depicts faithfully, given they are a symbol of the green Arrakis of the indigenous imagination.

In another scene accurately recreated from the book, after the Empire and the Harkonnens invade Arrakis and massacre the Atreides, it was a *flame-lighted night. The palms along the road had been fired to illuminate the house. Black smoke from the flammables used to ignite the trees poured upward through orange flames.* This is all shown quite dramatically in the 2021 film, and just like in the book, without the viewer knowing too much about the Fremen and their plants, the sight of those date palms burning is meant to show how vile and wasteful their enemy is.

#### **IV: I Went Dune To The River And Prayed**

I know it's confusing, but Frank Herbert was the son of Otto Herbert, who was the grandfather of Frank Herbert Jr., the author of *Dune*. Before completely forgetting about the actual Frank Herbert, you should know that he drove the family bus-line between Tacoma and Aberdeen when his son Frank Jr. was born in 1920, but then that business went under and he became a salesman. After that, Frank became a cop, a motorcycle officer of the newly created Washington State Patrol, and meanwhile the region had surely changed.

Growing up, Burley was as isolated as could be, but now Frank, his wife Eileen, and their son could get in an automobile, drive to the car-ferry terminal, cross over to Gig Harbor, and then drive on paved roads to the former socialist colony. In 1928, the family moved to Burley full-time, given how easy it was to travel, and their son Frank fell in love with this backwoods settlement. As he would recall, *it was a curtain-twitching town, a place where gossip traveled fast, and unfortunately his parents were both alcoholics, forcing Frank Jr. to become a provider for the family, and he brought home trout, salmon, crabs, clams, rabbits, and grouse for the supper table. His mother, though she had a problem with alcohol, was a wonderful cook.*

When young Frank Jr. had any free time, he always went fishing and *he smoked much of the salmon he caught, and took it to school for lunch, along with fruits, vegetables and hard-boiled eggs from the family farm.* He would go out deer hunting with his uncles, Otto's brothers Marley and Louis, simply to get meat, not for sport, and one day Otto showed Frank Jr. his shotgun from Bavaria, an eight-gauge, *a muzzleloader, [built] by an independent craftsman under the old apprenticeship system, and was such a powerful, dangerous weapon that guns of its gauge would be outlawed a decade later.*

In 1929, when he was nine years old, a local from Burley named Logger Bill Nerbonne gave Frank Jr. a cedar canoe he'd carved out himself, triggering a dimensional shift in the young boy, for now he could explore the entire region, which was a giant inland sea with many branches. In 1930, young Frank Jr. rowed from Burley all the way to the San Juan Islands, around 200 miles, but he did tie himself to motor-barges and tugboats and steal lifts when he could. Later, he also went south to Longbranch, a much easier journey, only sixteen miles, and on this journey he would pass by the former anarchist community of Home.

In 1930, when young Frank Jr. rowed past, there were still dozens of anarchists at Home, many of them also fond of traveling on the water. Unfortunately for him, Frank and Eileen decided to move them up to Highline near Seattle so they could start a speakeasy dance hall, which was

incredible, given that Eileen (or Babe) had helped her cop husband Frank raid saloons once upon a time in the 1920s. Now there was a lot of money to be made, so Frank left the force, only nothing worked out for him or Babe or their son Frank Jr. and soon they were back in Tacoma. By 1933, Babe had given birth to a daughter named Patricia, and an angsty thirteen year-old Frank Jr. was off in Burley as often as possible, unable to stand his alcoholic parents.

On one of these excursions in the mid-1930s, he rowed from Tacoma across the sea to Fox Island, about halfway to Burley, and it was here he met an indigenous Hoh man named Henry, who would soon become his close friend, teaching him numerous native fishing and survival techniques. Fox Island had long been a cross-roads for the nomadic Coast Salish peoples who lived on the water in their canoes just as Frank Jr. wished to every chance he could. Henry was a long way from his tribe when he met Frank Jr. on Fox Island, and the rumor was he had been exiled, but no one knows much about Henry, just that he was nomadic, and alone.

As his son Brian would recount, *my father admired the link between Native Americans and their environment, the way they lived for centuries in harmony with nature, not wreaking havoc upon it as the white man did. Frank Herbert developed a deep respect for the natural rhythms of nature. The ecology message, so prevalent in much of his writing, is one of his most important legacies.* Clearly, much of this outlook developed in Frank Jr. as he rowed across all of the Salish Sea, even up to the panhandle of Alaska, and according to his son, he wrote an unpublished novel called *Circle Times* that depicts *a fictionalized but historically accurate account of the wars of the Coast Salish.*

As mentioned above, the local press at Burley had collapsed in the 1900s, but the anarchist press had chugged along, and Frank Jr. would have been exposed to these newspapers growing up in the 1920s and 1930s, given they were the only local reading material not from Tacoma. There was even an old news-writer living in Burley named Henry W. Stein who regaled Frank Jr. *with tales of life on a big-city newspaper.* Knowing the power of words, it makes sense that he drifted into high-school journalism before working summer jobs at *The Tacoma Ledger.* However, his life at home finally exploded in 1938 when he ran away to Oregon with his five year-old sister, leaving his alcoholic parents in the dust.

They were taken in by an aunt in Salem, but after his sister returned home, Frank stayed in Oregon to finish high school, graduating in 1939. After briefly reuniting with his family in California, he stayed in Salem and worked for *The Oregon Statesman* newspaper. It was here he met his first wife Flora, and they drove up to Tacoma to get married in June of 1941. Within months, Flora was pregnant, so the couple moved to San Pedro where Frank's father now worked at a shipyard. After the US joined WWII, that shipyard was militarized and Frank had to register for the draft on February 15, 1942. The next day, his first daughter Penelope was born, but by July he had to enlist, so he joined the Navy and was assigned to the Norfolk Naval Shipyard in Portsmouth, Virginia, serving as a Photographer Second Class V-6 in the US Naval Reserve. It was here, in the winter of 1942, that Frank received a *Dear John* letter from Flora, asking for a divorce.

## **V: Let Me See You Go Dune**

Growing up in Burley, it's likely that Frank Herbert saw copies of *Discontent*, the anarchist newspaper of Home that ran from 1898 to 1902, producing a thick tome-worth of writing. The word *discontent* likely swirled around Frank Herbert's brain because of this, especially when his

imagination latched onto the fierce rebels who lived in the woods around Home, who assassinated presidents and blew up buildings, stories likely embellished by his cop father. This word *discontent* plays a strange role in the novel *Dune*, as you will soon see.

In the chapter that follows the traitor Doctor Yueh knocking out Duke Leto, the reader learns that the Harkonnens and Sardukar have invaded Arrakis. Like every other chapter, it begins with a quote, this one from Paul sometime in the future: *there should be a science of discontent. People need hard times and oppression to develop psychic muscles.* Not only does this allude to the darkness described later in *Dune Messiah*, it evokes the *Discontent* of Home, a place that suffered fierce repression and produced fierce rebels, a theme explored in *Dune* through the Fremen.

In the novel, as well as the recent film, the Fremen are presented as strict materialists, and nothing better illustrates this than the *sphincter-seal*. After the invasion of Arrakis, both Paul and Jessica are able to escape thanks to the traitor Doctor Yueh, who leaves them a *fremkit*, which includes a *still-tent*, a tent that reclaims the body's lost moisture into drinkable pockets. After hiding out for a night in this *still-tent*, they find it covered in sand, and as he debates leaving, Paul *felt the sphincter-seal of the tent's entrance*. A sphincter is a seal we all have, it is efficient, and the materialist use of the word is meant to convey much about the Fremen and their technology.

Before they actually leave through the *sphincter-seal*, Paul has a mystical acid trip after huffing a tent-load of spice, also depicted in the recent film, but the book goes one step beyond. In a wild passage at the end of this spice illumination, *he remained silent, thinking like the seed he was, thinking with the race consciousness he had first experienced as terrible purpose. He found that he no longer could hate the Bene Gesserit or the Emperor or even the Harkonnens. They were all caught up in the need of their race to renew its scattered bloodlines in a great new pooling of genes. And the race knew only one sure way for this—the ancient way, the tried and certain way that rolled over everything in its path: jihad.*

Okay. So, before we even get to the *jihad* part, let's just focus on *race consciousness* for a second. It doesn't sound great in 2024, but it meant something else back in the old days. Let's just take an example from Frank Herbert's birthplace of Tacoma, an anarchist newspaper called *Why?* published by a woman who harbored a dynamite-smuggler and a man once jailed for conspiring to assassinate President McKinley. In the February 1913 issue, we find the following sentence in an article about Leo Tolstoy: *the final aim of education should be to make men free and race conscious and must encourage a greater respect for the rights of others.* Later, in the May 1913 issue, we find: *this function entails responsibility, a greater degree of class consciousness—race consciousness; the toiler must learn to dispense with all artificial regulation and become a real conscious entity—not a mere tool.*

Back then, *race consciousness* was basically a hippie type of anarchist phrase, meaning we should all aspire to ignore ethnic or national distinctions and view the entire *human race* as a freely associating collection of conscious entities striving to create the best conditions for all: anarchy. Speaking of hippy, the big mama of anarchy herself, Emma Goldman, publisher of *Mother Earth* newspaper, provides one of the most memorable descriptions of *race consciousness* in her 1914 lecture *The Significance of the Modern Drama*.

In her rousing language, Emma Goldman describes *the new woman as a reborn, regenerated spirit; the woman who has emancipated herself from her narrow outlook upon life, and detached herself from the confines of the home; the woman, in short, who has become race-conscious and therefore understands that she is a unit in the great ocean of life, and that she must take her place as an independent factor in order to rebuild and remold life. In proportion as she learns to become*

*race-conscious, does she become a factor in the reconstruction of society, valuable to herself, to her children, and to the race.*

This passage reads a lot like *Dune*, to be honest, which begs the question, why the fuck is Frank Herbert having Paul spouting flowery hippy anarchist phrases like *race consciousness* while tripping balls in a *still-tent* with his mom? Well, as I've tried to explain, it's likely because he grew up reading old anarchist newspapers, starting at the age of five. Trust me, the anarchist literature of that era is filled with the phrase *race consciousness*, and I've provided just two examples, one of them from Tacoma, the other widely reproduced.

Paul thinks about *race consciousness* right near the end of Book I, when he's still tripping balls in a spice-hot-boxed tent, and he still hasn't come close to opening the *sphincter-seal*. It's only a few pages into Book II that Paul wakes his mother and *his voice came from the vicinity of the tent's sphincter-seal*. After this, the relationship of the *sphincter-seal* to Fremen materialism becomes clear. In one riveting sentence, *Paul crouched at the sphincter, his stillsuit hood adjusted for the open desert—forehead capped, mouth filter in place, nose plugs adjusted*. All of it is there, Fremen materialism, both clothing and shelter, and sphincter is in fact just a word for an efficient seal. In this case, *sand rasped as he opened the sphincter and a burred fizzle of grains ran into the tent before he could immobilize it with a static compaction tool. A hole grew in the sandwall as the tool realigned the grains*.

While the 2021 film makes no mention of *sphincter-seals*, the film-makers did faithfully recreate one for the *still-tent* scene, after Paul comes down off his acid trip. Earlier in the film, Duncan Idaho shows him a Fremen object identified as a *sand-compacter*, which he describes as one of many *ingenious things* the Fremen manufacture. It's clearly made of plastic, and when Paul has to finally use one after his escape, he first turns it on inside the tent, showing the viewer how it *realigned the grains*. After this, Paul puts the *sand-compacter* into the center of the *sphincter-seal* and finally opens the tent. Again, all of this is faithfully recreated in the film, minus the word *sphincter*. By the way, in case you were wondering, the word *jihad* was entirely purged from the recent films, but I'll get to that later.

## VI: Dune Look Back

Frank Herbert was crushed when his first wife Flora left him and took their daughter Penelope. He went all the way down to her hometown of Bandon, Oregon but her parents wouldn't say where she was, so he left crying. Bandon is still the middle of nowhere by the way, surrounded by ocean and forest, and eventually Frank Herbert drifted far north to the big nasty industrial city of Seattle where he got a job at the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. He was laid off in 1946 to make way for combat veterans, given Frank Herbert never saw combat in WWII, so he was out on his ass.

All he had going was his enrollment at the University of Washington where he was taking a creative writing class, English 139, and it was here he met Beverly Forbes, who would soon become his wife. They both were published writers, with stories in various magazines, and they married on June 23, 1946, and for their honeymoon they hiked a mountain and camped in a lookout cabin. Their first son Brian was born a year later on June 29, 1947, and after this work took the family away from the Pacific Northwest to the city of Santa Rosa, California.

While living here, Frank worked for the *Santa Rosa Press Democrat* newspaper and became friends with Irene and Ralph Slattery, who introduced him to Jungian psychology, the collective unconscious, ESP, epigenetics, and Zen Buddhism. Sporting a thick beard through the 1950s, Frank's son described him as *a beatnik before they came into vogue*, although having a beard was simply a Pacific Northwest habit. In 1951, Frank and Beverly had their second son, Bruce, and it was also during the 1950s that Frank took psychedelic mushrooms, peyote, hashish, and morning glory seeds, but it was also during this time that his first wife Flora began to demand support payments.

Flora and their daughter Penelope, or Penny, now lived in Florence, Oregon, the northern edge of the famed Oregon Dunes, with the town of Florence partially protected from dune encroachment by the Suislaw River. In 1957, just after deciding to move back to Tacoma, a friend told Frank *about a US Department of Agriculture research station that was, coincidentally, near Florence. It was in an area of unstable sand dunes that were being driven by wind over buildings and roads, inundating them. By planting poverty grasses the USDA had discovered a successful method of stabilizing dunes, preventing them from traveling.*

Frank chartered a plane to fly over these dunes so he could write a story, given he *was intrigued. He knew from his studies of history that the Sahara and other desert regions had not always been desolate. Once they had been green and fertile, sustaining great and powerful civilizations. Many of these civilizations were subsequently buried by slow-moving, relentless sand encroachment, causing more destruction than any human invader could.* During his flight, Frank *gazed down on sand dunes that were like waves on a great sea, and he felt an emotional pull.* The next year, Frank began working on a novel called *Dune*, and the family moved to Longbranch, just a few miles south of anarchist Home.

This didn't last very long, and the family eventually moved back to California, first to Stockton, then to San Francisco, where Frank worked for the *San Francisco Examiner* and Beverly wrote advertisements for a department store. All the while, Frank wrote *Dune*, first in an apartment on Potrero Hill, then a house next door at 412 Mississippi Street.

Well before the summer of love, from 1959 to 1965, a bearded Frank Herbert finished his greatest book and got it published through an auto-repair manual press, being paid \$7,500, which was a lot of money, especially given Beverly had just been laid off at the department store. Once again, the family moved north to Seattle, where Frank found employment at his old job with the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*.

*Dune* won the Hugo Award and the Nebula Award in 1966, slightly increasing the sales, but Frank had to keep his day-job at the newspaper. Nevertheless, *Dune* was spreading among the emerging counter-culture, and by 1968 the novel was featured in the fall issue of the uber-hippie *Whole Earth Catalog*. It was before that, in the *summer of love* itself, that Herbert finished the sequel, *Dune Messiah*, which was published serially from June to October, 1969, with the book following shortly after. It was quite a shock to the legion of new fans to see what the revolution of Paul Muad'Dib turned into, and many disliked the novel given their hero had become a tyrant. While Paul's millions of acolytes told fortunes with their *Dune Tarot* cards and channeled off some of their leader's psychic ability, the old tyrants were preparing to reassert themselves.

## VII: Dune It Feel Good?

To be clear, Frank Herbert wrote propaganda for a Republican political candidate, was fine rubbing shoulders with reactionary Republicans in the 1950s, and was essentially a libertarian of the US variety, which is its own strange beast, for those of you in other countries. While *libertarian* might mean anarchism in Germany, Chile, Greece, Spain, and even Japan, the US is the only country where it has come to mean something other than anarchism. This is the fault of one anarchist, Benjamin Tucker, the sole creator of both US libertarianism and the abomination known as anarcho-capitalism. Without a doubt, Tucker birthed a monster by the time he died in 1939, and his strain of libertarianism was flourishing by the late-1960s, a wave Frank Herbert was certainly part of.

While this article might be titled *An Anarchist's Guide To Dune*, I in no way wish to convey the idea that Frank Herbert was himself an anarchist. Influenced by them, certainly, as I've shown, but not an anarchist, and I'll elaborate more on this later. When he does use the word *anarchy* in the novel *Dune*, it is to describe the force always threatening centralized power, which isn't inaccurate, but largely neutral. Nevertheless, the Fremen are part of that *anarchy* poised to engulf the Empire, at least before they are converted into a living prophet's standing army, the foot-soldiers of a new religious Empire. If the reader is able to detach (or examine) their empathy for the characters of *Dune*, the entire story becomes an anarchist fable of a free people who *fall into the hands of a Hero*.

Speaking of anarchism, it's not long after Paul and Jessica emerge from the *sphincter-seal* of the *still-tent* before they're picked up in an ornithopter by Duncan Idaho and Liet Kynes, who has defected from the Empire and promised them refuge among the Fremen. As they descend into an Imperial Ecological Testing Station, Paul *felt himself touched briefly by his powers of prescience, seeing himself infected by the wild race consciousness that was moving the human universe towards chaos*. At this point, Paul is afraid of this *race consciousness*, a total awareness of all humans as one collective group.

In the book as well as the recent movie, Liet Kynes risks their life to help Paul and Jessica, and as described in the book, this is partially due to *the Atreides sincerity*, the genetic defect which gave them *that tremendous, almost naive honor*, at least according to Jessica. Later, after Duncan Idaho dies to save them in the Testing Station, the mother and son get in an ornithopter and are chased into a huge desert storm, a scene faithfully recreated in the film. However, while the film portrays Paul as tripping balls on spice and hearing weird voices as they spin in the storm, the book is much more materialist, with Paul simply steering them into an updraft until they can glide out.

After crashing and fleeing to the rocks, a sandworm eats their ornithopter, something the film leaves out. As they walk along the rockface, Paul and Jessica stop when he notices *there are growing things over there*. After handing his mother the binoculars, she confirms it is saguaro cactus, *scrawny stuff*. A version of this scene is also included in the film, although the *growing things* are barely visible and simply referred to as *greenery*. Nevertheless, both scenes include Paul deducing that there must be Fremen nearby, for how else would anything grow? Earlier, Paul rescued Jessica from a sand-slide, just as they both recovered their buried *fremkit*, and before crossing the dunes to the next rock formation, Jessica tells Paul, *today you panicked...you know your mind and bindu-nervature perhaps better than I do, but you've much yet to learn about your body's prana-musculature*.



Given that Jessica is called a *witch* throughout the text, it's semi-appropriate that part of her secret Bene Gesserit training is advanced yoga techniques, taken to their absolute limit. The term *bindu* is from Hatha Yoga, something practiced at anarchist Home as early as 1910, and while *bindu* relates to energy within the body flowing up the spine, correlating with the nervous system, *prana* is what flows into the body from the outside via the rhythm of breathing, something which allows them to be aware of and fully control their entire body. Not only do Bene Gesserit witches meditate, they can change their cellular structure through hyper-advanced yoga techniques and are able to choose whether they give birth to a boy or girl, just by willing it.

In this regard, the Bene Gesserit also have their own embodied materialism, one that Jessica soon wields over the veritable Fremen materialism. Before that, when they're still crossing the dunes, Paul walks into drum-sand and rouses a sandworm, which soon comes to eat them. After barely escaping with their lives, Jessica is overwhelmed, *it took intense concentration of her Bene Gesserit training to put down the primal terrors, subduing a race-memory fear that threatened to fill her mind*. Obviously sandworms don't have a race, and what Jessica feels is an epigenetic *race-memory* from the past of all humans, telling her to fear this gigantic creature.

Meanwhile, the Harkonnens have thrown Liet Kynes into the desert without a *stillsuit*, and as he wanders delirious across the dunes, Liet hallucinates his father Pardo, the man who introduced the green paradise into the Fremen imagination. As his hallucination explains, *movement across the landscape is a necessity for animal life. Nomad people's follow the same necessity. Lines of movement adjust to physical needs for water, food, minerals. We must control this movement now, align it for our purposes*. All this from the hallucinated voice of an Imperial Ecologist.

As this hallucination makes clear to his dying son Liet, *the historical system of mutual pillage and extortion stops here on Arrakis. You cannot go on forever stealing what you need without regard to those who come after*. He then elaborates, *Arrakis is a one crop planet. One crop. It supports a ruling class that lives as ruling classes have lived in all times while, beneath them, a semihuman mass of semislaves exists on the leavings. It's the masses and the leavings that occupy our attention. These are far more valuable than has ever been suspected*. This semi-anarchist rant goes until a spice-mass explodes in the desert, sucking Liet into into a sandy grave. Again, Liet is the father of Chani, at least in the novel, the woman who will eventually become Paul's lover.

Meanwhile, when Paul and Jessica are still out in the rocks and dunes, the recent film depicts this mom and her little guy dressed in *stillsuits* and robes, descending a sandy path down a rock-face. Utilizing all their combined nerd powers, the filmmakers recreated the image from the original 1965 hardcover edition of *Dune*, a truly remarkable feat. It also faithfully recreates their flight from the sandworm and their eventual encirclement by a band of Fremen.

When their leader Stilgar tries to kill Jessica, her son disables several fighters until she gets Stilgar under her knife. While he pleads for his life, giving his word that they will be safe if she spares him, he tells her, *out here, woman, we carry no paper for contracts. We make no evening promises to be broken at dawn. When a man says a thing, that's the contract*. In the film, when Jessica has Stilgar under a knife, she sniffs his head to see if he's lying, being able to detect such things with her Bene Gesserit training, and this is one of the few expositions of her skills, and also one that doesn't happen in the book. Nevertheless, the Bene Gesserit can smell everything in the novel *Dune*, as you will soon see.

In the book, one of the fighters Paul knocked out was Jamis, and he is certainly bitter as Stilgar leads these strangers into one of their *sietches*. On the way, Stilgar tells many secrets, such as how *we bribe the Guild with a monstrous payment in spice to keep our skies clear of satellites and such*

*that none may spy what we do to the face of Arrakis.* This reality that keeps Arrakis hidden is absent from the recent film aside from a brief moment where the Baron Harkonnen says simply, *there are no satellites over Arrakis*, without any further commentary.

While the Fremens invite Jessica to become their new Reverend Mother, young Paul is tripping balls out in the corner of the *sietch*, and *he sensed it, the race consciousness that he could not escape.* To make it all worse, Paul is forced to engage in a ritual knife fight with Jamis, all the while stoned out of his mind on spice. In the recent film, this fight takes place before they get to any *sietch*, but in both cases Paul wins. However, the book provides something important, for right after Paul kills Jamis, his mother thinks to herself, *now is the terrible moment. He has killed a man in clear superiority of mind and muscle. He must not grow to enjoy such a victory.* These lines are really crucial, and I'll repeat them later when they can make more sense.

For now, just know that the book depicts Paul tripping even harder on spice after he kills Jamis, and *he could feel the demanding race consciousness within him, his own terrible purpose, and he knew that no small thing could deflect the juggernaut. It was gathering weight and momentum. If he died this instant, the thing would go on through his mother and his unborn sister. Nothing less than the deaths of all the troop gathered here and now—himself and his mother included—could stop the thing.* In other words, there was either the *jihād* of the Fremens, or the feudal barbarity of the Imperial status quo, and Paul's *race consciousness* could not let him choose the status quo. Even if he was a product of his mother's Bene Gesserit training, even if the Bene Gesserit seeded the religion on Arrakis which now gave him a prophet status, the religious *jihād* was the only way to ensure that the eugenic plans of the Bene Gesserit would never again reign over the galaxy.

This brings us over halfway through the novel *Dune*, or the end of the film *Dune: Part One*, and I will leave you with one final quote before returning to Frank Herbert, the author. I've already mentioned *fremkits* and *still-tents* and *sphincter-seals*, but after Jessica watches the Fremens reclaim the water from Jamis' body, she notices that *the water flowed off those walls without binding tension. She saw a profound clue to Fremens technology in the simple fact: they were perfectionists.*

## VIII: Dune Buggy

In April of 1970, Frank Herbert spoke at the first ever Earth Day held in Philadelphia, telling the crowd, *I refuse to be put in the position of telling my grandchildren, 'Sorry, there's no more world for you. We used it up.'* After this, he asked the assembled 30,000 to take the *Frank Herbert Pledge*, where all of them would pledge to drive their current cars into the ground and never buy another until the internal combustion engine was abolished. 30,000 took this pledge on the first ever Earth Day.

The next month, after the Kent State Massacre, Frank Herbert joined a protest in Seattle that marched onto the Interstate 5 freeway and blocked traffic for hours before marching on the federal courthouse. Frank was also there as a reporter for the *Post-Intelligencer*, and he reported favorably on the protest while also making a living. However, with sales of his *Dune* novels rising, Frank wanted to write something new, so inspired by the memory of his friend Henry, the exiled Hoh, he visited numerous tribes in Western Washington and talked with their elders about legends and history. What came out of that was a stand-alone novel called *Soul Catcher*.

The first draft was finished by the fall of 1970, but after attending an indigenous seminar where the indigenous *expressed their anger toward white society*, Frank Herbert burned the manuscript. As his son Brian put it, *he'd always told himself that the experiences he'd had with Indians as a child...provided him with a unique insight into the condition of Native Americans, enabling him to write accurately about what it meant to be one. But a sinking sensation told him the book he had labored over for the better part of a year was hogwash, written from the wrong point of view.*

He based the new story off an actual event where an indigenous Makah woman was raped and beaten by white men near Port Angeles, leading her brother to castrate each of her assailants. In *Soul Catcher*, a university educated indigenous man kidnaps the son of a US government official, takes him deep into the Olympic Peninsula, evades the authorities, and eventually kills the boy. He does this because his sister was raped and killed by white men, and so one innocent would pay for another.

The book was eventually published in April of 1972, and most of the reviews were positive. Many local indigenous loved the ending, emphatically, but Herbert's childhood friend, part Quileute, didn't think the kidnapped boy should have been killed. *Soul Catcher* was even nominated for that year's National Book Award, although it didn't win, and after the film rights were eventually purchased, the production was killed because Herbert wouldn't change the ending.

*Soul Catcher* wasn't the only book Herbert worked on between the *Dune* book, but it's the most relevant, largely because this novel has been heavily utilized by his socialist critics, who claim he projected western violence onto the local tribes, a violence completely foreign to their inherently peaceful natures. This is all bullshit, and I'll just use one local example.

In the fall of 1970, the Puyallup and Nisqually tribes set up a protest encampment along the Puyallup River over restriction of their fishing rights, and when the police came in to rip out their nets, tribal members opened fire on the police and then set fire to the main railroad bridge over the river. All of this was just miles north from industrial Tacoma, and it clearly wasn't peaceful. It was around this time that Frank Herbert burnt the first draft of *Soul Catcher* and wrote a more violent one, appropriate for the spirit of the times.

While all of this was going on, Frank Herbert's young son Bruce got really into drugs, mostly prescription amphetamine, and soon he stopped pretending he was straight. Shortly after *Soul Catcher* was published, Bruce left the house, although whether Frank kicked him out remains unclear. Regardless, Bruce ended up shooting speed in a Seattle flop-house, only occasionally stopping by to see his mother Beverly. After a while, Bruce moved to San Francisco where he could be openly gay, unlike his brother Brian, who recalled that his father once wrote a poem that went, *homosexuals, bureaucrats and bullyboys increase before each fall into darkness.*

Frank Herbert was indeed homophobic, and I will have much more to say on this soon enough, but he was also abusive to his children. In many ways, he was a tyrant, which makes the tyrants depicted in his *Dune* novels stand in starker relief. By 1972, all of his children were out of the house, no longer subject to their father-tyrant, and shortly after Christmas, Frank and Beverly left Seattle and moved across the Salish Sea to the outskirts of Port Townsend. It would be here that Frank would write the bulk of *Children of Dune*, and in this wild novel, Alia, the hyper-intelligent child who could speak, read, and write as a toddler, becomes possessed by the genetic memory of her grand-father Baron Harkonnen. Just like Alia, the young Frank Herbert could read at the age of five, and just like Alia, he became possessed by a tyrant towards the end of his life.

## IX: Dune Being Totally Out Of Control

In the novel *Dune*, the stadium fight-scene on the Harkonnen home world of Giedi Prime takes place right after Paul watches the corpse of Jamis be rendered of its water and placed into a common pool for the native Fremens. Earlier, Paul obviously killed Jamis in ritual combat, and another type of ritual combat soon takes place on Giedi Prime, this one involving Paul's opposite, his anti-christ, the na-Baron Feyd Rautha.

The recent film has the stadium fight take place much later in the plot, after Jessica has become a Reverend Mother, but it does strive for as much accuracy as possible. Just like in the book, the fight takes place in a *triangular arena*, just as something is off about the sun on Giedi Prime. This star is identified in the novel's glossary as Ophiuchi B (36), an actual star in our reality, and Giedi Prime is said to have a *low active-photosynthesis range* thanks to this star's light, which is also accurate to our reality, given Ophiuchi B is a K-type main sequence star with less UV light output than our sun, something vital for photosynthesis. In the film, the outdoors of Giedi Prime are shot in infrared, the opposite end of the visible light spectrum from UV, rendering the images black and white.

The recent film makes a grand anti-fascist gesture when the stadium announcer describes the audience as being beneath the *black sun*, a well-known fascist symbol, and then goes on to describe the fight as involving *blood and honor*, a well-known fascist slogan. In this manner, the Harkonnens are depicted as being overtly fascist, something they certainly are in the novel. In fact, the recent film makes na-Baron Feyd Rautha even more depraved than in the book, but both mediums use these various elements to convey a simple point: unlike Paul, young Feyd Rautha enjoys killing humans.

Unfortunately, the filmmakers removed a character that had already been cast, Count Hasimir Fenrig, a *genetic eunuch* and lethal killer. In the novel, Hasimir is on Giedi Prime with his wife Lady Margot Fenrig to watch Feyd Rautha fight in the stadium. Hasimir is the Emperor's best friend and aid, and he is also there to deliver a message to the Baron Harkonnen, and in order to ensure no one hears them, they walk into a *sound-deadening field* known as a *cone of silence*, something which is shown in *Dune: Part One*, although in a different scene on Giedi Prime, the one where the Baron explains Arrakis has no satellites.

Count Fenrig and the Baron argue a lot, given the Emperor is furious at the Baron, and in this scene, the Baron *looked up at the new talismans flanking the exit to his hall—the mounted bull's head and the oil painting of the Old Duke Atrides, the late Duke Leto's father. They filled the Baron with an odd sense of foreboding, and he wondered what thoughts these talismans had inspired in the Duke Leto as they hung in the halls of Caladan and then on Arrakis—the bravura father and the head of the bull that had killed him.* While the vile Baron is meditating on this, Fenrig blurts out something interesting.

He claims that *mankind has ah only one mm-m-m science*, and when the Baron asks him to elaborate, he explains, *it's the um-m-m-ah-h science of ah-h-h discontent.* Just like the earlier quote from a future Paul, we see again the word *discontent*, and in this case, Fenrig is claiming that *discontent* is what truly moves the evolution of mankind. Recalling the *Discontent* anarchist newspaper from Home, it's wise for me to point out that its full title was *Discontent: Mother of Progress*, implying that *discontent* is what propels humans to advance forward in a more positive direction. Again, young Frank Herbert likely read copies of this paper at his grandfather Otto's in Burley, and it seems to have left a mark.

Before you forget, Fenrig is a *genetic eunuch*, meaning he was born without genitals, and he walked in *Dune* so that other literary eunuchs could run, such as Manan from *The Tombs of Atuan* by Ursula K LeGuin or the famed Lord Varis of *A Song of Ice and Fire* by George R.R. Martin. By completely purging this character from *Dune: Part Two*, the filmmakers have deprived the cinematic world of yet another eunuch, one who was played by Tim Blake Nelson before all of his scenes were cut. However, the filmmakers kept his wife Lady Margot Fenrig, and just like the book, she is there to watch Feyd Rautha fight in the fascist Harkonnen stadium, among other things.

Lady Margot is also a Bene Gesserit, and the recent film makes clear Margot is at the fight to ascertain whether Feyd Rautha can be controlled, given he will soon be the legal ruler of Arrakis. Hedging their bets, the Bene Gesserit want to put Feyd on a leash in the case that Paul doesn't win on Arrakis, and so in both the film and book, Margot sets out to sexually seduce Feyd and become pregnant with his child, *saving that bloodline* which Jessica almost destroyed by having a son, not a daughter.

In the recent film, Margot gets Feyd into her room after the fight and then puts a poison needle to his neck, telling him to put his right hand in a pain-inducing box, the same test Paul underwent. In the book, Margot simply tells her husband Hasimir that Feyd *will be more amendable to control* and then tells him she will seduce him, securing the bloodline. Taking place right after Paul kills Jamis in ritual combat, this scene not only shows Feyd enjoying killing people in ritual combat, but that the Bene Gesserit would be fine with this monster named Feyd taking power over the Empire, so long as they can sit beside him near the throne.

Unlike the film, the book jumps from Giedi Prime back to Arrakis where Paul and Jessica are finally being led into Sietch Tabr, having traveled along the Tuono Basin. As she is lead into the cavern of the *sietch*, Jessica comments on the odors to Stilgar, asking if they make paper, plastics, and chemical explosives. In awe, one Fremen gasps, *you know this from what you smell?* This is the main scene in the book that reveals the Bene Gesserit sense of smell, while in the film there's only the bit where Jessica smells Stilgar before fully believing his words.

While the film doesn't show these plastic factories, everything the Fremen use in the movie is clearly made of plastic, and the only items made of plastic they throw away, the *thumper*, are devoured by the great sandworm Shai-Huluh, which has acid in its stomach that can dissolve metal. Another detail the film omits is Paul having to take responsibility for Jamis' wife Harah and her two children, something the filmmakers didn't think the 2024 public would enjoy, given the patriarchal element, but in the novel Harah and her children play a supporting role for the second half of the story, with Harah upset that Paul doesn't desire her sexually and will let her go when the mandatory Fremen year of bondage has elapsed.

This entry into Sietch Tabr is a whirlwind of sites, with Paul seeing *men and women working with stand-mounted machinery in a large, bright chamber*. When he asks Harah what they're doing, she tells him, *they hurry to finish the quota in the plastics shop before we flee. We need many dew collectors for the planting*. Unlike the recent film, the book shows the Fremen abandoning Sietch Tabr once Paul and Jessica arrive, given the Empire is so close, and Paul is astounded that they *take the time to...make...dew collectors*. But what's a *dew collector*?

As the reader learns, when the Fremen plant anything, it is *planted most tenderly in its own little pit. The pits are filled with smooth ovals of chromoplastic. Light turns them white. You can see them glistening in the dawn if you look down from the right place. White reflects. But when Old Father Sun departs, the chromoplastic reverts to transparency in the dark. It cools with extreme*

*rapidity. The surface condenses moisture out of the air. The moisture trickles down to keep our plants alive.* This all was unfortunately purged from the recent *Dune* films, but perhaps we'll see them in *Dune Messiah*. In any case, the books depicts Harah walking Paul past more chambers for *food processing and stillsuit maintenance* and even a classroom where the Fremmen work until the last minute, life going on as usual until they need to break apart the *sietch* equipment and move onward.

Later in the *sietch*, Paul begins to fear *the wild jihad, the religious war he felt he should avoid at any cost*. When his newly adopted children ask him if he is the prophesied Lisan al-Gaib, he *sensed the jihad in their words*. Soon it is decided that Jessica will become the new Reverend Mother of the Fremmen, given their old one is dying, and as she prepares for this mysterious ritual, the old *Sayyadina* tells Jessica, *we have known flight and death. The young go on that our people shall not die*. Shortly after this, Jessica drinks an unknown substance, but with her Bene Gesserit training, she realizes it's ultra concentrated spice, a blue liquid they call the Water of Life.

Back at her Bene Gesserit school, Jessica never knew how a Reverend Mother assumed her powers, but she realizes it was through a drug like this one, which opens her mind and allows it to meld with the old Reverend Mother, absorbing not only her memories, but that of every *Sayyadina* of the Fremmen, going back centuries. She breaks apart the cellular structure of the spice drug with her mind, transmuting it from a lethal poison into a powerful psychedelic, but she's still overwhelmed by the epigenetic memories that flood in *like a lecture strip in a subliminal training projector at the Bene Gesserit school*. While she's in this trance, she tells the assembled Fremmen to drink from the Water of Life she has safely transmuted, allowing them to indulge in a *spice orgy*.

This event isn't depicted, but while everyone is sipping the now safe blue liquid, Jessica and the old Reverend Mother are still sharing memories. Jessica experiences the Fremmen being chased from planet to planet until finding Arrakis, she feels all the repression and slavery they suffered, and she hears a spice-tripping Fremmen scream their tribal slogan, *Never to forgive! Never to forget!* In this moment, she learns what the Water of Life is: the extracted blue bile of a baby sandworm drowned in water.

While she finishes absorbing the old Reverend Mother's consciousness, allowing her to die in peace, Paul and Chani drink the non-lethal Water of Life but don't stick around for the *spice orgy*, instead they go to a room and trip balls, then they kiss, and when Paul says *stay with me* to Chani, she replies, *always*. After this, Book II comes to an end, and the bulk of what's contained in *Dune: Part Two* is within Book III, the final 200 pages of the original 896 page novel (minus 80 pages of appendices, glossary, and map).

## **X: Dune On Your Luck**

Frank Herbert and his wife Beverly settled on six acres on the rural outskirts of Port Townsend, perched on the north-eastern tip of the Olympic Peninsula. While living in the old farmhouse, they built a three level A-frame, and at the top of the A was Frank's new office, evocative of the massive structure from which Alia looks down at her subjects in *Children of Dune*. Not only did he write this novel here, he began planning to turn the land into an Ecological Demonstration Project, a place *where he could establish a nearly self-sufficient farm and test the practicality of alternative energy sources, such as power from wind, sun, hydrogen and methane*.

While living on this farm, Frank wrote his *Circle Times*, a novel about the history and wars of the Coast Salish peoples. Despite his immense fame, no one wanted to publish it, and when he finally sold the rights to a television studio, they scrapped everything when Frank was *trying to remain too true to historical facts, at the expense of drama*. Later, having already sold off the film rights to *Dune*, the producer organizing the whole thing suddenly died, leaving the project in limbo. It was around this time that Frank really plunged into finishing *Children of Dune*, just as he also brought his mother Babe up to live with him.

Frank Sr. had died in 1968, and Babe had been living in a trailer in Vader, Washington before coming to live full-time in Port Townsend. When people came looking for the famous author in town, the locals pretended not to know where he lived, protected his family's privacy, and the couple lived in peace with Babe until a fateful day in 1974 when Beverly collapsed and had to be flown across the sea to Seattle. When the doctors finished treating and examining her, the diagnosis was lung cancer, and as her son Brian recalled, *two daily packs of Lucky Strikes, a brand having extremely high quantities of tar, nicotine and carbon monoxide, had taken their toll*.

Frank centered his life around Beverly, and money became even more precious, so it was with some relief that a French production company decided to film *Dune*, with the project to be directed by Alejandro Jodorowsky, creator of *El Topo* and *The Holy Mountain*. All this brought some money to Frank and Beverly, who was recovering after radiation treatments and became healthy enough to go to Europe with Frank in 1975. Shortly after they returned, the serialized publication of *Children of Dune* began in *Analog* magazine, with the entire print run selling out across the US. In the midst of this good news, Beverly relapsed again because of a medication imbalance, but she soon stabilized.

With the sales of *Analog* as proof, Frank's editor at Putnam convinced the suits in the skyscraper to print 75,000 hardcover copies of *Children of Dune* rather than 7,500. This was a first in science-fiction history, and when the third *Dune* book was released it became a best-seller, requiring the printing of another 50,000 within a few months. Riding high on this windfall, Frank and Beverly went to Paris to check in on Alejandro Jodorowsky, only to find his script would require a fourteen-hour film, and he had already spent \$2 million of the \$9.5 million budget. However, when they got back, old time Italian producer Dino De Laurentis offered to buy the rights from the French, and Frank agreed, even being offered the chance to write the script.

Now he and Beverly had lots of money, so Frank took some of the Italian cash and bought a sailboat which he named *Ghanima*, the daughter of Paul and Chani. With their lives more stable, Frank continued onward with his Ecological Demonstration Project, and created a solar-heat collection system to warm his house. The panels were sandwiches of plywood, thermopane glass, aluminum beer cans, and fiber-glass insulation. This system was enough to heat their house through most of the year, but that was the bulk of the Ecological Demonstration Project, given Frank had too much on his plate. Money was always needed, so he kept writing, and when *Star Wars* came out in 1977, he was *livid* at seeing his *Dune* mercilessly pillaged.

That same year, Bruce came up to Port Townsend for a visit and finally confided in his brother Brian that he was gay. Beyond this, he felt part of his being gay had to do with the way their father treated them. As he told Brian, *after seeing how Dad treated children, I didn't want to have any*. Like a good brother, Brian kept this confidential, and Bruce soon returned to San Francisco where he made a living fixing and maintaining the instruments of rock and roll bands. Bruce later became

involved with Act Up when the AIDS epidemic hit San Francisco, and he lived through one of the darkest times in San Francisco, hardly ever going up north to see his parents.

Meanwhile, his father teamed up with a poet he met in Port Townsend named Bill Ransom and together they started a novel called *The Jesus Incident*, set on the mostly water world of Pandora. Because it used part of an earlier copy-written story, Frank and Bill had to completely rewrite the story and were unhappy with the results. Nevertheless, *The Jesus Incident* is far more fluid than *Dune*, the politics clearer, the ecological themes more pronounced. This burst of money, along with a renewal of the film rights from Italy, allowed Frank and Beverly to begin considering more options, and eventually they decided to move to Hawaii, given they didn't know how long she'd be around.

In late 1979, Frank began writing what would become *God Emperor of Dune*, which is possibly the most famous, given the main character Leto II is now a giant sandworm. With the assurance of more money on the horizon, they began construction of a house in Kowloa and during a visit there Bruce turned up, although his mom kept pestering him about getting married. As it turned out, Beverly Herbert was a fan of Ronald Reagan, while Frank Herbert wasn't, knowing him to be a liar.

As mentioned, Bruce stayed away from Port Townsend in this time period when his father was writing *God Emperor of Dune*, a chronicle of the tyranny of Leto II, the half-human, half-sandworm Emperor of the galaxy, whose reign is so cruel it eventually causes an event called the Scattering, an exodus of humans into the furthest reaches, something planned for by Leto II. One can't help but see the flight of Bruce in this Scattering, only rather than the tyrant worm Leto II, he was fleeing the tyrant Frank Herbert. A lot to think about there, assuredly.

In 1980, the famed actor Robert Redford contacted Frank hoping to acquire the film rights to *Soul Catcher*, and that summer the two had a secret meeting in Port Townsend. While Frank and Beverly were settling into Kowloa, it turned out that Ridley Scott, the director slotted for the Italian produced *Dune*, had to back out to film *Blade Runner*, so the film project returned to limbo. Nevertheless, the Herberts were fine in Hawaii, and the new house was solely for Beverly.

It was when they were in Hawaii that Bruce informed his parents he was gay, and according to his brother Brian, they *were not at all pleased by this information*. From this moment onward, Bruce had little contact with his parents and seems to have never seen Frank again. Meanwhile, the fourth in the *Dune* series, *God Emperor of Dune*, had just been released, becoming an instant best-seller, #4 on the *New York Times* hardcover best-seller list, and a director was finally found for the *Dune* film, thirty-five year-old David Lynch. Before the first print runs of *God Emperor* even sold out, Frank was already signing a deal for the fifth volume, *Heretics of Dune*. Again, all of this money went into making Beverly happy in her last days.

Frank Herbert liked the screenplay David Lynch wrote for *Dune*, even with all the embellishments, and soon Frank met up with poet Bill Ransom to write a sequel to *The Jesus Incident*, a novel called the *Lazarus Effect*, although Bill did most of the writing, given Frank had to be with Beverly. All the while, *God Emperor of Dune* remained on the hardcover bestseller list throughout 1982, with the publishers milking every last drop of spice before allowing a paperback edition, which wasn't issued until 1983. Meantime, work on David Lynch's *Dune* continued to progress, with Frank enthusiastic about what he saw, and by the summer of 1983, he was paid an insanely large amount of money for the sixth volume of the *Dune* series, even though *Heretics of Dune* hadn't yet been released.



This final volume was titled *Chapterhouse: Dune*, a title suggested by Beverly, and Frank soon began writing it. After the deal with Robert Redford to make a *Soul Catcher* film fell through, Frank was approached by Paul Newman and Warner Brothers with a similar deal. However, despite all the big names involved, this film never got off the ground. All of these matters were suddenly dwarfed that fall of 1983 when Beverly suddenly took a turn for the worst. According to Brian Herbert, when his brother Bruce tried to figure out a good time to come visit his dying mother, Frank was *delaying in giving him a time that would be convenient. My brother wondered, but did not say so to Dad, if this had anything to do with his homosexuality, which our father had never accepted.* Beverly Herbert died on February 7, 1984, and she never saw her youngest son again.

## XI: Dune Stop The Music

In the novel *Dune*, Book III is entitled “The Prophet,” and it begins with the Baron Harkonnen having killed a sex-slave who tried to assassinate him. This sex-slave was a boy because the Baron is clearly identified as being gay, as well as obese. Earlier in the book, the reader learns that the Baron is gay when he asks for a slave be sent to him and thinks to himself that the boy looks like Paul Atreides. Now, after surviving an assassination attempt at the hand of a slave, the Baron summons his nephew na-Baron Feyd Rautha, the person who organized the attempt on his life.

This is where things get really weird, and revealing, given what you’ve learned about Frank Herbert’s relationship with his youngest son Bruce. When the Baron summons Feyd, he asks a servant where his nephew is and learns he’s with the women sex-slaves, causing the Baron to tremble *with the effort of suppressing anger.* The Baron doesn’t like his nephew’s taste for women, so after calling out Feyd for the assassination attempt and then entrapping him into subservience, the Baron punishes his nephew by ordering him to *kill all the women in the pleasure wing* while he watches. In this evil manner, the Baron tries to enforce his sexuality on Feyd. In a less murderous way, this parallels the way Frank Herbert tried to enforce his sexuality on Bruce.

I know that’s a big can of worms I just opened, but for now, just know that this scene was entirely scrubbed from *Dune: Part 2*, for obvious reasons. While the Baron may remain obese in the film, he is certainly not depicted as gay, a wise choice for the filmmakers, albeit a revisionist one. In his depiction of absolute evil, Frank Herbert described an obese, gay man who floated around on suspensors and whose first name was Vladimir. As mentioned above, the epigenetic memory of the Baron is what possesses Alia in *Children of Dune*, and as you will soon learn, Paul and his sister Alia are both half Harkonnen.

In the previous scene with Baron, the reader also learns that the Fremens have been drastically hindering spice production with their attacks. Two years have elapsed since the end of Book II, a gap not reflected in the fast-paced film, and when we re-encounter Paul, he’s just eaten *a meal heavy with spice essence*, meaning he’s tripping balls again, thinking to himself, *I am a prey to the imperfect vision, to the race consciousness and its terrible purpose.* He starts seeing the future, glimpses of a raid with the Fremens where they find his father’s skeleton and make a shrine to his skull, a scene which is briefly reconstructed in the 2024 film. Paul still hasn’t taken the Water of Life at this point, but in the film, that is when the viewer learns the truth: Lady Jessica is *a natural daughter (Bene Gesserit reference) of the Siridar Baron Vladimir Harkonnen.*

I left this out, but way back when he's tripping balls in the *still-tent*, debating whether or not to open the *sphincter-seal*, he has a spice vision of his genetic past, making him tell his mother, *the Baron sampled many pleasures in his youth, and once permitted himself to be seduced. But it was for the genetic purposes of the Bene Gesserit, by one of you.* Jessica never knew who her parents were and was raised at the Bene Gesserit school, but now that you know this, I want you to remember a quote from Jessica, one I asked you to remember.

Right after Paul kills Jamis, the future Reverend Mother thinks to herself, *now is the terrible moment. He has killed a man in clear superiority of mind and muscle. He must not grow to enjoy such a victory.* She doesn't want Paul to enjoy killing, but she also doesn't know she's Harkonnen. In this moment, she defies all the genetics in her body, given she comes from evil, murderous people, and unlike her father the Baron, she wants Paul to hate killing.

Not only does Jessica do this in spite of her genetic heritage, her choice to have a son and not a daughter was an act of rebellion that no one planned on, certainly not her Bene Gesserit superiors. Prior to her rebellion, Jessica had followed orders, but even after raising Paul and seeing him withstand the box test, the Bene Gesserit don't fully abandon Jessica, trusting she will achieve the maximum with their implanted religious beliefs among the Fremen. In every regard, Jessica is the true hero of *Dune*, her choices even more important than those of her son Paul. While he only fulfills a plan, Jessica is the one who makes it.

Back in the *sietch*, where Paul is tripping on spice, he eventually encounters his mother and while they discuss his sister, Jessica says, *you think me an unnatural mother.* This quote is in regards to Alia, who is a fully conscious and verbal adult in a two year-old's body, her eyes blue within blue. However, this phrase *unnatural mother* finds a strange echo in the works of both Elsa Morante and Elena Ferrante, with both of them using this phrase to describe neglectful cat mothers or weird stalky beach moms who leave their kids.

In fact, this phrase *unnatural mother* made a quite prominent appearance in the 2021 film *A Lost Daughter*, based on the book by Elena Ferrante where the phrase also appears. Regardless, Paul insists that he doesn't think she's an *unnatural mother*. Speaking of motherhood, the 2024 film completely deleted Chani and Paul's son Leto from the script. It doesn't really matter that much, to be honest, given this young Leto is only mentioned in the novel, never appearing in a scene.

Anyway, in the book, the scene where Paul rides the worm takes place closer to the climax, and leading up to this final test, Paul is tripping balls as usual. As he thinks to himself, *terrible purpose remained. Race consciousness remained. And over all loomed the jihad, bloody and wild.* As he's walking with Stilger up the dune to plant his *thumper*, Paul thinks, *every move I make this day. Live or die, it is a legend. I must not die. Then it will be only legend and nothing to stop the jihad.* High as a kite, he *thought of how the Fremen were a people whose living consisted of killing, an entire people who had lived with rage and grief all their days, never once considering what might take the place of either.*

The recent film remains mildly faithful to the worm-riding scene, including Stilgar's lines from the book like *remember what I told you. Do it simply and directly—nothing fancy, or you don't have to impress anyone with your courage. We know you are brave, or I'll not have you shame my teachings.* After these lines, Stilgar hands Paul a *thumper*, which was *a plastic rod about a meter long from beneath his robe. The thing was pointed at one end, had a spring wound clapper at the other end*, a detail included in the recent film.

Another detail the film recreated was the worm-rider technique where, *for as long as a forward edge of a worm's ring segment was held open by a hook, open to admit abrasive sand into the sensitive interior, the creature would not retreat beneath the desert. It would, in fact, roll its gigantic body to bring the opened segment as far away from the desert surface as possible.* After this feat is accomplished, the scene shifts to Jessica, who eagerly awaits news of Paul's success, and as she participates in a Fremen religious ritual, she hears their tribal slogan, *Never to forgive! Never to forget!* In the middle of this ceremony, Jessica learns Paul has passed his final test to become a full Fremen. Now all he must do is drink the Water of Life and become the *Kwisatz Haderach* he was programmed to be.

## **XII: I Dune Know About You**

Frank was crushed by Beverly's death. Before she passed, Beverly made several requests of her family. The first was that no one cry for her, and as her husband wrote in the dedication of *Chapterhouse: Dune*, his wife *recognized tears as part of our animal origins. The dog howls at the loss of its master.* Not only does this conjure up the Fremen prohibition against tears, but the Bene Gesserit hatred for all things animal. Her second request was that Frank remarry, and after her passing he moved back to Port Townsend, perched along the Salish Sea of his youth. However, as his childhood friend noted, *Frank was a genius, and Bev was equal to but different from him. She had more power than he had. He was only a shell after she died.*

*Heretics of Dune* was published in the spring of 1984, shortly after Beverly died, and it instantly became a bestseller. At the same time, Frank had just finished *Chapterhouse: Dune*, and the spice was still flowing. Around a year after his wife's death, he shaved his beard and began a relationship with Theresa Shackelford, a representative from the Putnam publishers. She was 28 years-old, while Frank was 64, and he moved from Port Townsend to not only be near her in Los Angeles, but to oversee the final touches on the *Dune* film, which was the most heavily promoted blockbuster of 1984.

The premier was at the John F. Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts in Washington DC, and Frank took Theresa as his companion. Together, they met and shook hands with President Ronald Reagan and First Lady Nancy Reagan, and the President assured Frank he really liked the movie version of *Dune*. Not only did Frank hate Ronald Reagan once upon a time, his son Bruce was involved in ACT UP in the middle of AIDS epidemic, and if you don't know, the Reagan's were surely malevolent throughout that time period and widely despised in the gay community. Anyway, as it turned out, Ronald Reagan was one of the few people who liked the *Dune* film directed by David Lynch.

I was one of those kids who watched the full director's cut of this *Dune* when it aired on the brand new *Sci-Fi Channel*, which came with early basic cable in the 1990s. That was new for me, basic cable, and before that I literally read the TV guide in the daily newspaper to see what was playing on broadcast, antenna-based television. All this yelling at clouds aside, I really liked the *Dune* movie from 1984 when I was a kid, even though parts of it freaked me the fuck out, namely the Baron. The imagery of Arrakis was amazing, the worms were pretty cool, I liked the *stillsuits* and most of the aesthetic, but the version everyone saw in theaters or watched later on VHS cassette tape was pretty shitty, and there was much consensus about this in 1984. However, at least David Lynch tried to portray a fully-birthered Alia.

While sales for the original *Dune* novel burst through the ceiling, that probably only made things worse, given how jagged and incomplete the theatrical release was. From a five hour movie, they gave the public just over two hours of weirdness, and all the critics hated it. *Dune* failed to break even, and Frank received no share of the profits, given there weren't any. By then, he was back on Hawaii, and *Chapterhouse: Dune* was released in the spring of 1985, keeping the proverbial spice flowing. Shortly after this, Frank asked Theresa Shackelford to marry him, and she said yes. They were married in Reno on May 18, 1985, and lived in Hawaii while debating a move to Mercer Island near Seattle.

Meanwhile, not only had *The Lazarus Effect* been released, he and Bill Ransom had started the third volume of that neglected trilogy, *The Ascension Factor*. Frank and Theresa soon moved to Mercer Island, and within days he and Bill were teaching a writing seminar in Utah. Once that was over, Frank and Theresa went on a long vacation to Hawaii, China, and Australia. He was in good spirits when he got back and began writing the projected seventh volume of then *Dune* books. However, later that fall, he was diagnosed with liver cancer.

He ended up at the Swedish Hospital in Seattle when his condition worsened, and he was laying in his hospital bed watching the space shuttle *Challenger* take off when it suddenly exploded on January 28, 1986. Frank was so disturbed he started shaking, and his doctor turned off the television. Just over a week later, Frank Herbert passed away on February 11, 1986. Shortly after he died, his youngest son Bruce came up to be with his family.

As his older brother Brian would recall, Bruce started crying, but *he didn't cry from love, because he didn't feel he loved the man. He said he cried from what he had never experienced in the relationship with his father. As he told Brian, I never saw the good side he showed to you. He wasn't there for me.* When his older brother suggested that Frank loved him but didn't know how to show it, that perhaps Bruce loved him back in some way, Bruce didn't say a word. Not long after, Frank's ashes were buried in the woods of the Olympia Peninsula. Bruce does not appear to have attended the ceremony.

At some point in the 1980s, Bruce contracted AIDS and was lucky enough to receive the support of the Sisters of Perpetual Indulgence, a San Francisco based support group created in those dark times. He lived his last days with friends Elaine and Bruce in San Rafael, California, just across the bay from the city, and he passed away there on June 15, 1993. His brother Brian was there for him constantly in those final days, and to give full credit, most of this biography is gleaned from his *Dreamer of Dune*, the full biography of Frank Herbert. That's it. That's the short version of his story.

### **XIII: Dune With The Empire**

In every version of the *Dune* movies, a variation of this line from the novel is delivered: *the people who can destroy a thing, they control it.* Paul delivers these lines when he refuses to slay Stilgar in ritual combat and take his place as Fremen leader. Instead, Paul claims he needs Stilgar, that he is changing their custom of slaying the old leader. Soon he is acknowledged as not just their leader, but the rightful Duke of Arrakis, a title he needs to take control of the Empire.

Earlier, Paul and the Fremen ambushed a band of smugglers, and among them was Gurney Halleck, the young Duke's fight trainer. Another element the recent *Dune* films left out was the Harkonnen plot to convince Gurney that Lady Jessica was the traitor, not Yueh. When he finally

gets brought to the *sietch* where she's staying, Gurney tries to kill her, only Paul and Jessica talk him down and convince of the truth. It isn't just Gurney who thinks she's the traitor in the book, but also the Mentat human-computer Thufir Hawat, who has begun working for the Baron Harkonnen. Gurney Halleck made the final cut of *Dune: Part Two*, but not Thufir Hawat, who is entirely absent and presumed to be dead in the film. As mentioned, there was no plot to undermine Jessica in the film.

Speaking of Jessica, when she recalls how she got to her present *sietch*, she visualizes *riding amidst a host of worms, the palanquins and pack platforms piled high with necessities for the coming campaign*. All of that imagery is recreated in *Dune: Part Two*, and it's while she's lost in these kind of reveries that Gurney sneaks in and tries to kill her. After he backs down in shame, Jessica crosses over to Paul and tells him, *I suddenly see how I've used you and twisted you and manipulated you to set you on a course of my choosing...a course I had to choose—if that's any excuse—because of my own training. Paul...I want you to do something for me: choose the course of happiness. Your desert woman, marry her if that's your wish. Defy everyone and everything to do this. But choose your own course.*

This rousing dialogue is interrupted when Gurney opens up his *stillsuit* and tells Jessica to stab him, but Jessica tells him to chill the fuck out. After this, Paul drinks the Water of Life, and as soon as he wakes up from his coma, he can see the past and future simultaneously, just in time for the campaign, or the *jihād*. As depicted in the recent film, the Fremen use the old Atreides atomic warheads to blast open the rock *shield-wall* that protects the capitol city of Arrakeen, then they flood in atop their worms and wipe out the Harkonnen and Saurdakkar soldiers protecting the Emperor, who is there because the spice has stopped flowing. The battle is over pretty quickly, and as Paul says to Stilgar, *it's been so long since guerrillas were effective that the mighty have forgotten how to fight them.*

Just as their victory is becoming clear, Paul gets word that an Imperial sneak-attack killed his son Leto back in the *sietch*, and during the raid, his sister Alia was captured and taken to the Emperor. The scene then shifts to beneath the Emperor's spaceship in the temporary Imperial base, *a single metal hutment, many stories tall, [that] reached out in a thousand-meter circle from the base of the lighter—a tent composed of interlocking metal leaves*. This was also faithfully recreated in the 2024 film, although not the process of it unfolding from the Imperial spaceship. All of the Imperial court is there, as well as the Baron and Feyd Rautha, guarded by legions of Sardaukar.

Among them is Alia, their prisoner, but she soon reveals who she is, the sister of Paul Atreides, the rebel leader now attacking Arrakeen. As the hutment begins to rumble in the attack, Alia kills her grandfather the Baron with a poison needle, and soon the entire Imperial entourage is taken prisoner by the Fremen. As they settle into their victory, Paul is talking with Stilgar, and when his former comrade gasps in awe at one of his utterances, *Paul saw how Stilgar had been transformed from the Fremen naib to a creature of the Lisan al-Gaib, a receptacle for awe and obedience. It was a lessening of the man, and Paul felt the ghost-wind of the jihād in it.*

Before confronting the Emperor, Paul also talks with his mother, and Jessica tells him, *don't make the mistake your father made!* What she means is, don't marry the Imperial Princess Irulan to cement his power of the throne, marry Chani, the woman you love. As she thinks to herself, *he must not make the mistakes I made*. However, Paul is unswayed by his mother's concerns, not only numb to his child's death, but able to see the branching pathways of the future, given he is the Kwisatz Haderach. In the novel Jessica doesn't want Paul to marry the Princess, but in the

recent film the opposite is the case, with both Jessica and unborn Alia reminding Paul he needs to reserve his hand for an Imperial marriage.

When he finally confronts the Emperor, Paul sees his Truthsayer at his side, the Reverend Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam of the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood, and as he argues with her, Paul says, *I'll give you one thing. You saw part of what the race needs, but how poorly you saw it. You think to control human breeding and intermix a select few according to your master plan!* When the Reverend Mother interrupts him, Paul uses the Voice to scream, *Silence!* This demonstration of power over the most powerful Bene Gesserit is recreated in the recent film, although the Reverend Mother calls Paul an *abomination* in response, something she calls Alia in the book.

After this, Thufir Hawat refuses to kill Paul as he had been instructed to and dies as a result, although not before revealing he never lost faith in the Atrides. The recent film obviously purged this as well, but the climax of both the films and the book is a final scene of ritual combat in which Paul fights Feyd Rautha. No one understands why Paul is taking this risk by fighting, but the reader should understand this is the genetic flaw in the Atrides that the Bene Gesserit couldn't trust, this willingness to take risks, to stare the bull in the eyes and let it charge. Obeying the rules of the Empire, Paul and Feyd take their blades and circle around each other. As they do, Paul has a final epiphany as he beholds the Fremmen watching him enact this ritual combat.

Just before he fights, Paul realizes that *here was the unborn jihad, he knew. Here was the race consciousness that he had known once as his own terrible purpose. Here was reason enough for a Kwisatz Haderach or a Lisan al-Gaib or even the halting schemes of the Bene Gesserit. The race of humans had felt its own dormancy, sensed itself grow stale and knew now only the need to experience turmoil in which the genes would mingle and the strong new mixtures survive. All humans were alive as an unconscious single organism in this moment, experiencing a kind of sexual heat that could override any barrier. And Paul saw how futile were any efforts of his to change any smallest bit of this. He had thought to oppose the jihad within himself, but the jihad would be.*

While they fight, the point of view hops from character to character, with Feyd thinking to himself *this yokel Duke* couldn't possibly beat him. Meanwhile, the Reverend Mother Mohiam is fretting over what might happen if both Feyd and Paul should die, leaving Alia the *abomination* as the culmination of all their eugenic conspiracies. Ultimately, Paul kills Feyd with his knife, but in the book there is one more enemy standing in the way of the throne, the *genetic eunuch* Count Hasimir Fenrig. The Emperor tells Hasimir to kill Paul, being an even more lethal fighter than Feyd, but Hasimir disobeys.

In this moment, Paul realizes *Fenrig was one of the might-have-beens, an almost-Kwisatz Haderach, crippled by a flaw in the genetic pattern—a eunuch, his talent concentrated into furtiveness and inner seclusion. A deep compassion for the Count flowed through Paul, the first sense of brotherhood he'd ever experienced.* Both Paul and Hasimir are the product of the eugenic Bene Gesserit conspiracies, and this burst of empathy with Hasimir comes just pages before the end, cementing for the reader how much Paul hates what has been done to both of them. Meanwhile, no one dare attack Arrakis, given the Fremmen are willing to poison their spice fields and permanently destroy the precious substance forever.

After Paul decides to marry Princess Irulan and become official Emperor, Jessica is trying to comfort Chani, who is much more docile in the book, by the way. The movie has her run out and angrily catch a sandworm at the end, but in the book, Jessica simply tells her, *that princess will have the name, yet she'll live as less than a concubine—never to know a moment of tenderness from*

*the man to whom she's bound. While we, Chani, we who carry the name of concubine—history will call us wives.* Those are the last lines of *Dune*, published in 1965, nearly sixty years ago.

## Epilogue

The poet Bill Ransom finished *The Ascension Factor* alone, the last of *The Jesus Incident* trilogy set on the water world of Pandora, a planet with sentient kelp. Despite it being mostly his novel, *The Ascension Factor* carried Frank Herbert's name on the cover alongside Bill's, and it sold just as well as the others when it was published in 1988. While writing this article, I learned on the internet that this trilogy does have a name, *The Pandora Sequence*, given to it by WordFire Press, who released a new boxed set edition. Again, it's better than the *Dune* books.

Once upon a time in Olympia, I went to some literary function, and afterward there was a party at some hippy house, and I ended up sitting around a bonfire with Bill Ransom and a bunch of other freaks. One of these literary wankers brought up how Ernest Hemingway's wife lost all his manuscripts, and after a few lightly misogynistic comments, Bill silenced everyone with a haunting story of coming home one day to find his garage writing-office burning to the ground, the fire lit by his wife. The way Bill told the story, it was clear he might have deserved it, although he didn't say how, and none of the young losers around the bonfire had anything to say, probably lost in thought, contemplating what someone would have to do to make their wife burn their office and all their writing.

Bill Ransom used to be a choke-setter as a kid, one of those extinct monkeys that used to climb up a felled tree and tie a choke around it, a chain-loop used to pull it down a skid. Pretty insane job, but as evidence of how common it was in the region, the mascot for Gray's Harbor College is the Choker, even though no one does that job anymore. Gray's Harbor County is where Aberdeen is located, the gnarly city where Kurt Cobain grew up, and it lies fifty miles west of Olympia. Logging was something a lot of people did for work, just as a lot of people grew up in the same backwoods-ass way as Frank Herbert, catching his own salmon and chopping his own wood, and this rugged Pacific Northwestern lifestyle produced its own strange beasts.

For example the insanely, naive actor George Clooney recently made a film called *The Boys in the Boat*, a chronicle of the US row-crew in the 1936 Olympic Games, held in Nazi Berlin. While the film excises the Berlin pogroms that took place before the Olympics in 1936 (something featured in the book), it does focus on the overblown Nazi conception of *Aryan* physical superiority, and showcases how eight rowers who grew up in shitty huts in the Pacific Northwest beat the Nazis in a test of physical strength. In the film, the row-crew meets Jessie Owens, the Black track sprinter who would also go on to beat the Nazis, but in meeting him, a certain theme becomes clear. Just as the rugged Pacific Northwest shaped this white row-crew with its uncompromising conditions, so too was Jessie Owens shaped by his merciless, racist environment.

This is also a major theme in *Dune*. While the Imperial soldiers, the Saurdakar, are trained on a brutal planet where six out of thirteen of them die, the conditions for the Fremen on Arrakis are much worse, allowing them to defeat the Saurdakar. The phrase *prison planet* occurs every so often in *Dune*, and the rulers all want to exploit Arrakis' ability to create ruthless soldiers right up to the last moment, when those organic, ruthless soldiers, the Fremen, begin their ruthless *jihad*.

*Dune: Part Two* dropped in the midst of Israel's assault on Gaza, a place often described as *the world's largest prison* or *an open-air prison*, and for this reason, those who see the film will easily equate the Fremen with the Palestinians, especially with all the Arabic. From this prison-strip of Gaza, a massive attack was launched against the tyrannical Israelis, one that took them by surprise and required massive coordination to accomplish. Hundreds of miles of tunnels were dug, most of which are still functional, and entire missile batteries were hidden across Gaza. Beyond this, their Houthi allies shooting rockets at cargo-ships from the coastal dunes of Yemen does nothing but evoke the Fremen and their raids on spice harvesters. At the time of this writing, just over thirty Houthis have died in their campaign, but they have already disrupted the flow of spice through the global economy to the tune of billions.

As you have seen, *Dune* was written by a homophobe named Frank Herbert who was supported in his homophobia by his homophobic wife Beverly. Their son Bruce was gay, as you have seen, and some of his friends would often bring up *Dune*, after which he stopped being their friend, given he didn't want to hear about a story involving a son who loved his nearly perfect father, and was loved in return. Frank Herbert's homophobia comes through in *Dune* solely through his depiction of the Baron, and while the recent film excised this, it nevertheless remains in the 1965 novel. Despite all this, *Dune* clearly has a lasting power, largely from the themes it brings up, especially religion.

All those who support the Palestinians right now should also be thinking about religion, because just as *Dune* asserts, religion is a powerful force that isn't going away. As anarchists, we cannot make anyone stop being religious, nor can we force them to listen to us, or share our beliefs, but as *Dune* also points out, religions are vastly open to exploitation by non-religious actors. Beyond the critique of religion, *Dune* is also a giant anarchist parable of power, a Machiavellian opera depicting the clockwork of the tyrants, written by a domestic tyrant. *Hero* is a bad word in *Dune*, and the freest people in the story, the Fremen, are reduced into the standing army of a hero named Paul Atreides, a eugenic experiment grown autonomous from his masters. As the anarchist saying goes, *no one is fit to rule, and no one deserves to be a slave*, and *Dune* illustrates this perfectly.

As you might remember, the socialist colony of Burley, the place where Frank spent his childhood, was a racist place, for sure. In contrast, just a dozen miles to the south, the anarchist Home Colony was an open and accepting place, to everyone. While little is known about this person, there was one resident of Home who today would be called *trans*, and they lived happily at Home for a while before moving on. Keep in mind, this was back around 1910, a decade before Frank was born, but it reveals much about the Burley he grew up in. Frank Herbert was close to the anarchists, he likely read their newspapers, he was certainly influenced by their ideas, but he was never one of them. He was a *libertarian*. And when the spice was flowing, he knew how to spend those *solaris*.

The *Dune* books made Frank Herbert a lot of money, and now they are making Warner Brothers a lot of money through the cinematic adaptation. Everyone roped into the recent *Dune* mania will surely be astounded by the projected third film, *Dune Messiah*, and the overall anarchist message will become clear. By the end of that second novel, the reader has to ask, is the *jihād* worth defending? It's likely the viewer will have to ask themselves the same question, but clearly, millions of people have now seen both of the new *Dune* films, and as for the book's lasting power, the worms have a lot to do with it.



The sheer weirdness of *Dune* is its lasting power, as well as the complexity of that weirdness and the multiple dimensions of its critique on power. The ecological themes just add to that weirdness, as do the Bene Gesserit yoga techniques. As many other critics have noted, *Dune* lacks computers or robots, making it unique from most science fiction, but that's thanks to the backstory Frank Herbert created. Ten thousand years before the events in *Dune*, humans wage a war against billions of sentient robots in an event called the *Butlerian Jihad*.

After this victory, humans lost their sense of united purpose and returned to feudalism, warring among each other for thousands of years. However, humans began to develop their minds so they would never again rely on thinking machines, and so groups like the Bene Gesserit were formed. After exactly 10,191 years of humans warring with each other instead of against robots, the Bene Gesserit produced Paul Atreides, who went on to take over the galaxy in his *jihad*. His power is always crumbling, and when he passes the throne to Alia, her power is always crumbling, but eventually Leto II takes the throne as a giant sandworm and rules for thousands of years, so brutal he causes the Scattering, a vast migration of humans fleeing the Imperial tyranny.

From this Scattering come the Honored Matres, who return from their exile and begin laying waste to the galaxy. It turns out they were once Bene Gesserit, but now they are something else, brutal and ruthless, and eventually the reader has to ask, *are the Bene Gesserit good now?* However, despite this role reversal, the fighting human sects don't realize the robots they thought were destroyed 15,000 years back had actually just been hiding, and so once again the humans have to unite. Unlike the previous *jihad*, the machines eventually agree to coexist with humans, and by then basically every original character from *Dune* has been cloned back to life. Frank Herbert never got to write this, his son Brian did, but that was the ultimate point of the *Dune* novels: if the rebels become tyrants, there will be more rebels against these new tyrants, and the cycle will go on for thousands of years until it is broken, not through war, but through cooperation.

This extremely long article is appropriate for the extremely long book called *Dune*, and I make no apologies. I hope you have learned something, and I hope *Dune* and its author make more sense now. Despite his critique of what rebels can turn into, Frank Herbert clearly sided with the Fremen, and his original *Dune* was being read during the 1967 war against Israel, waged by the surrounding Arab nations, a war which was unfortunately lost. Almost sixty years later, *Dune: Part Two* is being watched as Israel wages a war against a giant open-air prison called Gaza, a place so brutal that it produces the hardest, most dedicated fighters. Frank Herbert was correct in illustrating this dynamic, and while Palestinians raised in the prison-land of Gaza fight Israeli soldiers raised in Beverly Hills or Berkeley, the world cannot help but admire the Palestinians, who still haven't been defeated, just like Fremen. As anarchists, we have to ask ourselves the questions *Dune* raises about religion, just as we have to be clear whose side we are on, and why. So on that note, let me conclude.

**Death to the Empire!**

**Long live the fighters!**

**Long live anarchy!**

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