

On Page and Screen: Adaptations of Literature in Recent Film

Session 5: Dune

Welcome




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Epigraph

Hearts of Darkness?



Apocalypse Now (Coppola, 1979)

‘And this also,’ said Marlow suddenly,
‘has been one of the dark places of
the earth.’

Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*
(1899)



Dune Part 2 (Villeneuve, 2024)

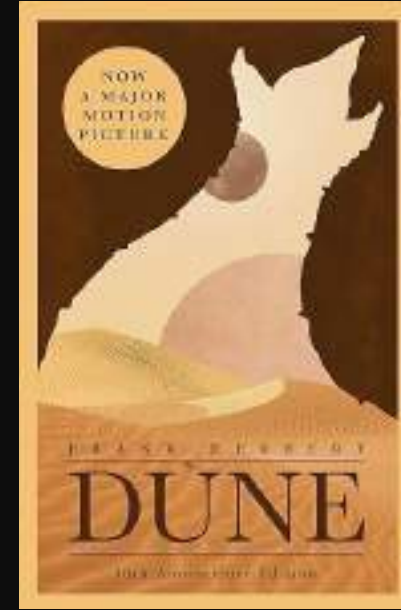
Dune: comparison with Apocalypse Now (Francis Ford Coppola)



- Baron Harkonnen (*Dune, Part Two*): 'And the Fremen: kill them all'
- *Heart of Darkness* (Conrad): [A] kind of note at the foot of the last page, scrawled evidently much later in an unsteady hand ... luminous and terrifying, like a flash of lightning in a serene sky: 'Exterminate all the brutes!'
- Paul (final words, *Dune, Part Two*): 'Lead them to Paradise'

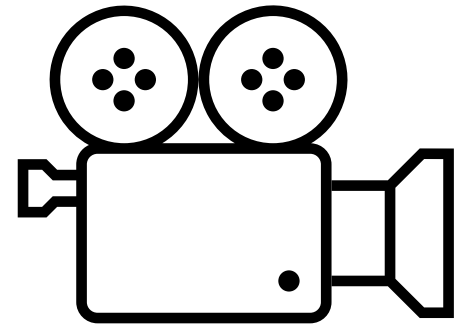
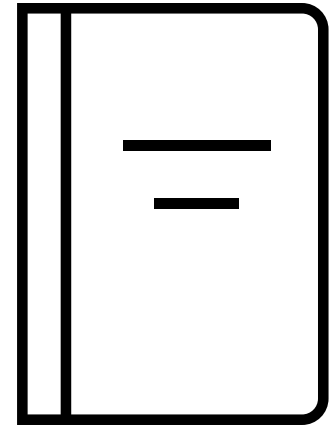
What did you think of this week's book and film?

- What interested you about the book and/or film?
- What did the film do differently to the book?
- What is gained in the translation from book to film and what is lost?
- What, for you, were the main issues in the book/film?
- What do you think of the artistic choices made by Frank Herbert and Denis Villeneuve?
- Were there any moments in book or film that struck you as particularly interesting?

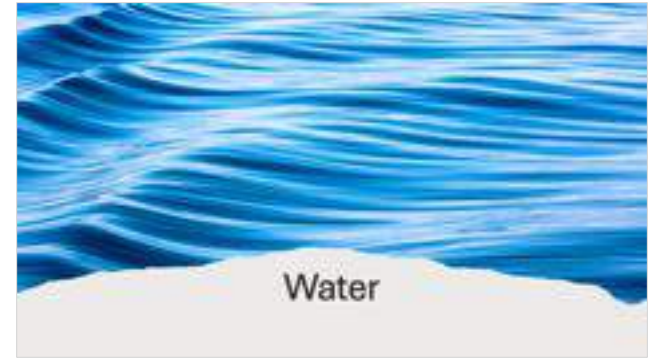


A few of the differences between book and film

- The book has several appendices, providing background on the world of *Dune*
- Paul understands he's a Harkonnen sooner in the book.
- Chani has a friend, Shishakli, in the film and their conversations allow Chani's perspective to be fleshed out.
- Paul's sister, Alia, is born in the film, but remains unborn in the book (except in a vision)
- Skepticism among some Fremen about Paul's religious destiny is more fully articulated in the film (e.g. through Chani and Shishakli).
- We see more of the guerilla actions in which Paul is involved in the film.
- The complexities of explosive 'pre-spice' accumulations in the desert don't feature in the film.
- The book ends with Jessica telling Chani concubines are powerful political figures; in the film, Chani heads off on her own.



Some of the topics we might discuss this evening





Politics



Arrakis' complex political map

Emperor and
Sardaukar

Spacing
Guild

Bene
Gesserit

Fremen

Spice
Smugglers

House
Atreides

House
Harkonnen

Other Great
Houses



Early exposition: Jessica is reminded of how things stand

[Rev. Mother Gaius Helen Mohiam:] ‘Don’t be facetious, girl! You know as well as I do what forces surround us. We’ve a three-point civilization: the Imperial Household balanced against the Federated Great Houses of the Landsraad, and between them, the Guild with its damnable monopoly on interstellar transport. In politics, the tripod is the most unstable of all structures. It’d be bad enough without the complication of a feudal trade culture which turns its back on most science.’

Desert power

- [Duke Atriedes to Paul:] ‘On Caladan, we ruled with sea and air power,’ the Duke said. ‘Here, we must scrabble for **desert power**. This is your inheritance, Paul. What is to become of you if anything happens to me? You’ll not be a renegade House, but a guerilla House – running, hunted.’
- [Paul to Thufir Hawat:] ‘[The Reverend Mother] said a ruler must learn to persuade and not to compel. ... Then she said **a good ruler had to learn his world’s language**, that it’s different for every world. And I thought she meant they didn’t speak Galach on Arrakis, but she said that wasn’t it as all. She said she meant **the language of the rocks and growing things**, the language you don’t hear just with your ears.’





Desert

Frank Herbert on the origins of *Dune*

- The idea came from an article (I was going to do an article [in 1953], which I never did) about the control of sand dunes. ... [I]t was [in] an area where sand dune blew across ... US Highway 1, frequently blocking the highway, and the forest service put in a test station down there to determine how they could control the flow of these sand dunes.
- And I got fascinated by sand dunes, because I'm always fascinated by the idea of something that is either seen in miniature and then can be expanded to the macrocosm or which, but for the difference in time, in the flow rate, and the entropy rate, is similar to other features which we wouldn't think were similar. Like a river ... Sand dunes are like waves in a large body of water; they just are slower. And the people treating them as fluid learn to control them. ... Fluid mechanics, with sand. And the whole idea fascinated me, so I started researching sand dunes and of course from sand dunes it's a logical idea to go into a desert.

From 1969 interview with Prof. Willis E. McNelly (California State College, Fullerton, 1969)





Frank Herbert on the desert and religion

- [W]e all know that many religions began in a desert atmosphere. ... [I]n studying sand dunes, you immediately get into not just the Arabian mystique but the Navaho mystique and the mystique of the Kalahari.
- [T]he black foot [people] of the Kalahari ... utilize every drop of water. You can't just stop with the people who are living in this type of environment: you have to go on to how the environment works on the people and how they work on their environment.

1969 interview with Willis McNelly

How do the film and the book use the desert setting?



In the film, Fremen fighters literally emerge from the desert





Water

How does *Dune* explore the significance of water?
What meanings does it take on in the film and book?



Water and the body politic

Spit

The Fremmen [Stilgar] stared at the Duke, then slowly pulled aside his veil, revealing a thin nose and full-lipped mouth in a glistening black beard. Deliberately he bent over the end of the table, **spat** on its polished surface.

As the men around the table started to surge to their feet, Idaho's voice boomed across the room: 'Hold!'

Into the sudden charged stillness, Idaho said: 'We thank you, Stilgar, for the **gift of your body's moisture**. We accept it in the spirit with which it is given. And Idaho spat on the table in front of the Duke.

Aside to the Duke, he said: 'Remember how **precious water** is here, Sire. That was a token of respect.'

Tears

Blindly, he groped his way back to his place in the circle, sank to the rock floor.

A voice hissed: 'He sheds **tears**! [for Jamis]'

It was taken up around the ring. 'Usul gives moisture to the dead!'

He felt fingers touch his **damp cheek**, heard the awed whispers.

Jessica, hearing the voices, felt the depth of the experience, realized what terrible inhibitions there must be against **shedding tears**. She focused on the words: '*He gives **moisture to the dead***.' It was a gift to the shadow world – tears. They would be sacred beyond a doubt.

Nothing on this planet had so forcefully hammered into her the **ultimate value of water**. Not the water-sellers, not the dried skins of the natives, not stillsuits or the rules of water discipline. Here there was a substance more precious than all others – it was **life itself** and entwined all around with **symbolism and ritual**.

Water.

'I touched the cheek,' someone whispered. 'I felt the gift.'

The body politic: the water of the dead

‘They’re recovering **Jamis’s water**,’ Chani said, and her thin voice come out nasal past the nose plugs. ‘It’s the rule. The flesh belongs to the person, but his **water belongs to the tribe** ... except in the combat.’

‘They say the water’s mine,’ Paul said.

Jessica wondered why this should make her suddenly alert and cautious.

‘Combat water belongs to the winner,’ Chani said. ‘It’s because you have to fight in the open without stillsuits. The winner has to get his water back that he loses while fighting.’

‘I don’t want his water,’ Paul muttered. He felt that he was a part of many images moving simultaneously in a fragmenting way that was disconcerting to the inner eye. He could not be certain what he would do, but of one thing he was positive: he did not want the water distilled out of Jamis’s flesh.

‘**It’s ... water**,’ Chani said.

Jessica marveled at the way she said it. ‘Water.’ So much meaning in a simple sound. A Bene Gesserit axiom came to Jessica’s mind: ‘*Survival is the ability to **swim in strange water**.*’ And Jessica thought: *Paul and I, we must find the currents and patterns in these strange waters ... if we’re to survive.*

‘You will **accept the water**,’ Jessica said.

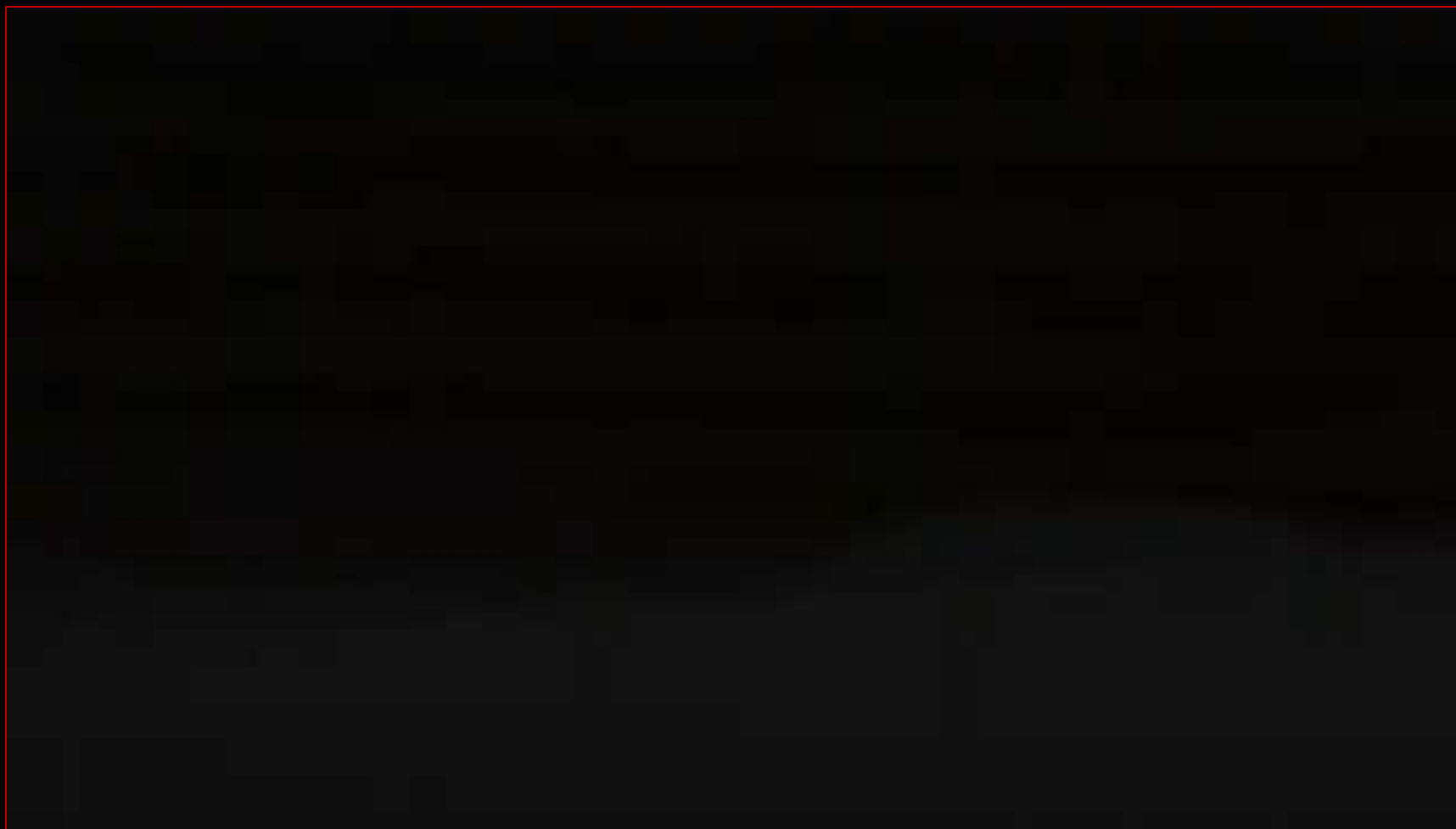


Images of water are frequently used to describe Paul's sense of destiny in the book

- *That girl!* [Paul has seen Chani for the first time]. She was like a touch of destiny. He felt **caught up on a wave**, in tune with a motion that lifted his spirits.
- It was as though **he rode within the wave of time**, sometimes in its trough, sometimes on a crest – and all around him the other waves lifted and fell, revealing and then hiding what they bore on their surface.
- Through it all, the wild jihad still loomed ahead of him, the violence and the slaughter. It was like a promontory above the **surf**.
- His entire future was becoming **like a river** hurtling toward a chasm – the violence nexus beyond which all was fog and clouds.



The deadly water of life





Ecology

Frank Herbert on ecology

- I got off on a different kick because of the science fiction angle and the emphasis on ecology. It's been my belief for a long time that man inflicts himself on his environment ... that is, Western man.
- Bev [Herbert's wife] and I were up on the Washington coast last year and an area unspoiled, originally very primitive area where the Mawka tribes lived, and so on, and even there, down among the driftwood logs on that primitive beach, that almost unspoiled beach, you frequently, much too frequently, come on these blue, orange, green, white plastic containers ... Purex, Ivory Soap ... and they're virtually indestructible.
- [E]cology, as somebody said ... I don't recall where I encountered it ... I did read over two hundred books as background for this novel ... somebody said that ecology is the science of understanding consequences.

1969 interview with Willis McNelly



Liet-Kynes hallucinates a conversation with his(?) ‘planetologist’ father before he dies



A thought spread across his mind – clear, distinct: *The real wealth of a planet is in its landscape, how we take part in that basic source of civilization – agriculture.*

[...]

The Harkonnen troopers had left him here without water or stillsuit, thinking a worm would get him if the desert didn't. They had thought it amusing to leave him alive to die by inches at the impersonal hands of his planet.

[...]

‘The highest function of ecology is understanding consequences.’

The voice shocked him because he recognised it and knew the owner of it was dead. It was the voice of his father who had been planetologist here before him.

‘This historical system of mutual pillage and extortion stops here on Arrakis,’ his father said. ‘You cannot go on forever stealing what you need without regard to those who come after. The physical qualities of a planet are written into its economic and political record.’

‘Our timetable will achieve the status of a natural phenomenon,’ his father said. ‘A planet’s life is a vast, tightly interwoven fabric. Vegetation and animal changes will be determined at first by the raw physical forces we manipulate. As they establish themselves, though, our changes will become controlling influences in their own right – and we will have to deal with them, too.’

Stilgar, inspired by Liet, sees the Fremen's purpose as ecological

‘And what is it you do to the face of Arrakis that must not be seen?’ [Jessica asked]

‘We change it – slowly but with certainty – to make it fit for human life,’ [Stilgar replied]. Our generation will not see it, nor our children nor our children’s children nor the grandchildren of their children ... but it will come.’ He stared with veiled eyes out over the basin. ‘Open water and tall green plants and people walking freely without stillsuits.’



Ecology extends beyond nature to encompass cultural and social interactions

Paul hesitated before joining her [Harah, mother of Jamie's children, for whom Paul is now responsible] on the ledge. He felt a sudden reluctance to be alone with this woman. It came to him that he was surrounded by a way of life that could only be understood by postulating **an ecology of ideas and values**. He felt that this Fremen world was fishing for him, trying to snare him in its ways. And he knew what lay in that snare – the wild jihad, the religious war he felt he should avoid at any cost.



Messiah

Paul's speech





The film's interrogation of the function of messiahs and prophecy

- Chani: 'You want to control people? Then you tell them the Messiah will come. Then they'll wait, for centuries.'
- Paul challenges Jessica when she mentions prophecy: 'It's not a prophecy. It's a story that you keep telling. But it's not their story, it's yours.'

Paul's first vision (1 of 2)



Something had happened to his awareness this night – he saw with sharpened clarity every circumstance and occurrence around him. He felt unable to stop the inflow of data or the cold precision with which each new item was added to his knowledge and the computation was centered in his awareness. It was Mentat power and more.

[...]

Paul's mind had gone on in its chilling precision. He saw the avenues ahead of them on this hostile planet. Without even the safety valve of dreaming, he focused his prescient awareness, seeing it as a computation of most probable futures, but with something more, an edge of mystery – as though his mind dipped into some timeless stratum and sampled the winds of the future.

...

[...]

He remembered once seeing a gauze kerchief blowing in the wind and now he sensed the future as though it twisted across some surface as undulant and impermanent as that windblow kerchief.

[...]

The thing was a spectrum of possibilities from the most remote past to the most remote future – from the most probable to the most improbable. He saw his own death in countless ways. He saw new planets, new cultures.

People.

People.

He saw them in such swarms they could not be listed, yet his mind catalogued them.

Paul's first vision (2 of 2)



His mother's grief [for Duke Atriedes] could still be heard.

His own lack of grief could still be felt ... that hollow place somewhere separated from his mind, which went on its steady pace – dealing with data, evaluating, computing, submitting answers in something like the Mentat way.

And now he saw that he had a wealth of data few such minds ever before had encompassed. But this made the empty place within him no easier to bear. He felt that something must shatter. It was as though a clockwork control for a bomb had been set to ticking within him. It went on about its business no matter what he wanted. It recorded minuscule shadings of difference around him – a slight change in moisture, a fractional fall in temperature, the progress of an insect across their stilltent roof, the solemn approach of dawn in the starlighted patch of sky he could see out the tent's transparent end.

The emptiness was unbearable. Knowing how the clockwork had been set in motion made no difference. He could look to his own past and see the start of it – the training, the sharpening of talents, the refined pressures of sophisticated disciplines, even exposure to the OC Bible at a critical moment ... and lastly, the heavy intake of spice. And he could look ahead – the most terrifying direction – to see where it all pointed.

I'm a monster! he thought. A freak!



Paul: heroic self-realisation or ... fate?

‘The things that can happen here, I cannot begin to tell you,’ he said [to Jessica]. ‘I cannot even begin to tell myself, although I’ve seen them. This *sense* of the future – **I seem to have no control over it.** The thing just happens. The immediate future – say, a year – I can see some of that ... *a road* as broad as our Central Avenue on Caladan. Some places I don’t see ... shadowed places ... as though it went behind a hill’ (and again he thought of the surface of a blowing kerchief) ‘... and there are branchings ...’

He fell silent as memory of that *seeing* filled him. No prescient dream, no experience of his life had quite prepared him for the totality with which the veils had been ripped away to reveal naked time.

Recalling the experience, he recognized **his own terrible purpose – the pressure of his life spreading outward like an expanding bubble ... time retreating before it.**

Paul as the seed from which the future will sprout

And he thought: *I'm a seed.*

He suddenly saw **how fertile was the ground into which he had fallen**, and with this realization, the terrible purpose filled him, creeping through the empty place within, threatening to choke him with grief.

He had seen two main branchings along the way ahead – in one he confronted an evil old baron and said: ‘Hello Grandfather.’ The thought of that path and what lay along it sickened him.

The other path [contained] a warrior religion [...] a fire spreading across the universe with the Atreides green and black banner waving at the head of fanatic legions drunk on spice liquor. [...]

Jessica cleared her throat, worried by his silence. ‘Then ... the Fremen will give us sanctuary?’

He looked up, staring across the green-lighted tent at the inbred, patrician lines of her face. ‘Yes,’ he said. ‘That’s one of the ways.’ He nodded. ‘Yes. They’ll call me ... Muad’Dib, “The One Who Points the Way.” Yes ... that’s what they’ll call me.’

And he closed his eyes, thinking: *Now, my father, I can mourn you.* And he felt the tears coursing down his cheeks.





As Paul (seemingly) becomes the Lisan al-Gaib, he is increasingly isolated

‘My mother’s sick with longing for a planet she may never see,’ Paul said. ‘Where water falls from the sky and plants grow so thickly you cannot walk between them.’

‘Water from the sky,’ Stilgar whispered.

In that instant, 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 jihad in it.

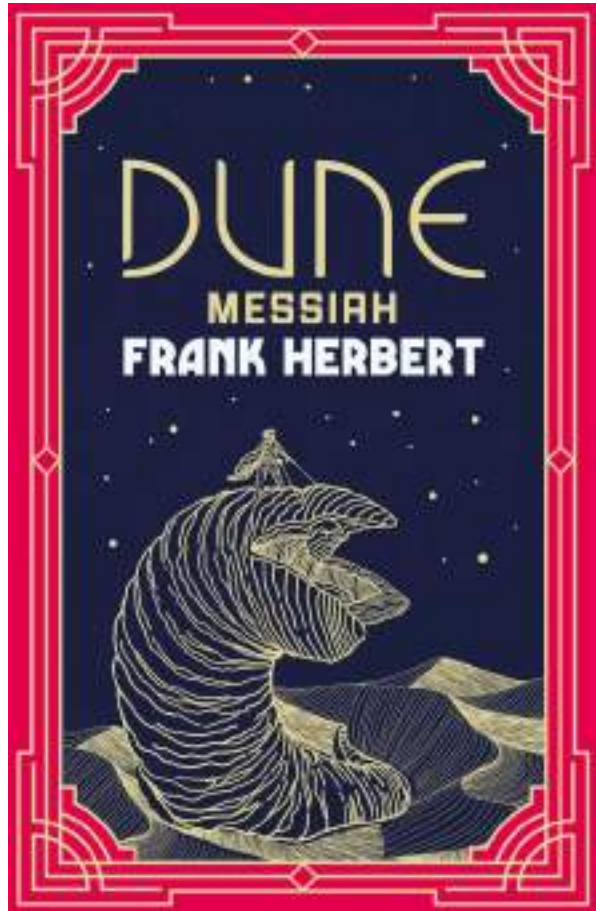
I have seen a friend become a worshiper, he thought.

In a rush of loneliness, Paul glanced around the room, noting how proper and on-review his guards had become in his presence. He sensed the subtle, prideful competition among them – each hoping for notice from Muad’Dib.

Muad’Dib from whom all blessing flow, he thought, and it was the bitterest thought of his life. *They sense that I must take the throne*, he thought. *But they cannot know I do it to prevent the jihad*.



Paul and Jessica encounter a sandworm



Where the dunes began, perhaps fifty meters away at the foot of a rock beach, **a silver-gray curve broached from the desert, sending rivers of sand and dust cascading all around. It lifted higher, resolved into a giant, questing mouth.** It was a round, black hole with edges glistening in the moonlight.

The mouth snaked toward the narrow crack where Paul and Jessica huddled. Cinnamon yelled in their nostrils. Moonlight flashed from crystal teeth. [...]

Paul felt a kind of elation. In some recent instant, he had crossed a time barrier into more unknown territory. He could sense the darkness ahead, nothing revealed to his inner eye. It was as though some step he had taken had plunged him into a well ... or into the trough of a wave where the future was invisible. The landscape had undergone a profound shifting.

Instead of frightening him, the sensation of time-darkness forced a hyper-acceleration of his other senses. He found himself registering every available aspect of the thing that lifted from the sand there seeking him. Its mouth was some eighty meters in diameter ... crystal teeth with the curved shape of crysknives glinting around the rim ... the bellows breath of cinnamon, subtle aldehydes ... acids ...

The worm blotted out the moonlight as it brushed the rocks above them. A shower of small stones and sand cascaded into the narrow hiding place.

Paul crowded his mother farther back.

Cinnamon!

The smell of it flooded across him.

What has the worm to do with the spice, melange? He asked himself. And he remembered Liet-Kynes betraying **a veiled reference to some association between worm and spice.**



Sandworms: symbols of fate?

Paul awaits his initiation as a sandworm rider

The group's watermaster began the morning chanty, adding to it now the call for the rite to initiate a sandrider.

'The world is a carcass,' the man chanted, his voice wailing across the dunes. 'Who can turn away the Angel of Death? **What Shai-hulud has decreed must be.**'

Paul listened, recognising that these were the words that also began the death chant of his Fedaykin, the words the death commandos recited as they hurled themselves into battle.

Will there be a rock shrine here this day to mark the passing of another soul? Paul asked himself. Will Fremen stop here in the future, each to add another stone and think on Muad'Dib who died in this place?

He knew this was among the alternatives today, a *fact* along lines of the future radiating from this position in time-space. The imperfect vision plagued him. **The more he resisted his terrible purpose and fought against the coming of the jihad, the greater the turmoil that wove through his prescience.** His entire future was becoming like a river hurtling toward a chasm – the violence nexus beyond which all was fog and clouds.



Paul prepares to ride the sandworm

And Chani's words of caution, whispered at night when her fear for him overcame her, filled his mind: 'When you take your stand along the maker's path, you must remain utterly still. You must **think like a patch of sand**. Hide beneath your cloak and **become a little dune** in your very essence.'

Slowly, he scanned the horizon, listening, watching for the signs he had been taught.

It came from the southeast, a distant hissing, a sand-whisper. Presently he saw the faraway outline of the creature's track against the dawnlight and realized he had never before seen a maker this large, never heard of one this size. It appeared to be more than half a league long, and the rise of the sandwave at its cresting head was like the approach of a mountain.

This is nothing I have seen by vision or in life, Paul cautioned himself. He hurried across the path of the thing to take his stand, caught up entirely by the rushing needs of this moment.

Paul rides the sandworm



Paul rides the sandworm

Paul waited on the sand outside the gigantic maker's line of approach. *I must not wait like a smuggler – impatient and jittering*, he reminded himself. **I must be part of the desert.**

[...]

The wild maker, the old man of the desert, loomed almost on him. Its cresting front segments threw a sandwave that would sweep across his knees.

Come up, you lovely monster, he thought. *Up. You hear me calling. Come up. Come up.*

The wave lifted his feet. Surface dust swept across him. He steadied himself, his world dominated by the passage of that sand-clouded curving wall, that segmented cliff, the ring lines sharply defined in it.

Paul lifted his hooks, sighted along them, leaned in. He felt them bite and pull. He leaped upward, planting his feet against that wall, leaning out against the clinging barbs. This was the true instant of the testing: if he had planted the hooks correctly at the leading edge of a ring segment, opening the segment, the worm would not roll down and crush him.

The worm slowed. It glided across the thumper, silencing it. Slowly, it began to roll – up, up – bringing those irritant barbs as high as possible, away from the sand that threatened the soft inner lapping of its ring segment.

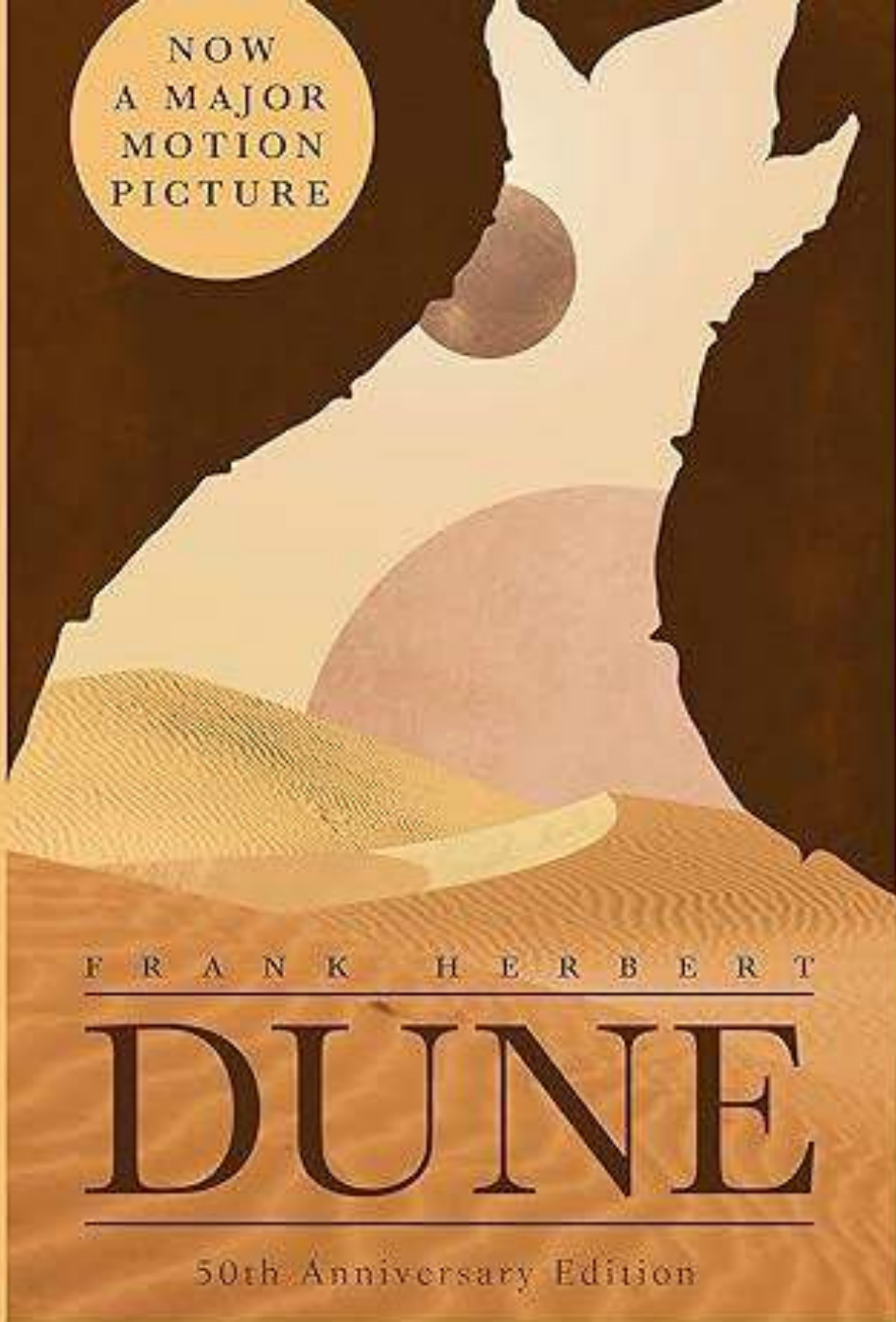
Paul found himself riding upright atop the worm. **He felt exultant, like an emperor surveying his world.** He suppressed a sudden urge to cavort there, to turn the worm, to show his mastery of this creature.

Suddenly he understood why **Stilgar had warned him once about brash young men who danced and played with these monsters**, doing handstands on their backs, removing both hooks and replanting them before the worm could spill them.





Ending



The book's ending

‘I swear to you now,’ he whispered, ‘that you’ll need no title. That woman over there will be my wife and you but a concubine because this is a political thing and we must weld peace out of this moment, enlist the Great Houses of the Landsraaad. We must obey the forms. Yet that princess shall have no more of me than my name. No child of mine nor touch nor softness of glance, nor instant of desire.’

‘So you say now,’ Chani said. She glanced across the room at the tall princess.

‘Do you know so little of my son?’ Jessica whispered. ‘See that princess standing there, so haughty and confident. They say she has pretensions of a literary nature. Let us hope she finds solace in such things; she’ll have little else.’ A bitter laugh escaped Jessica. ‘Think on it, Chani: 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.’

The film's ending



Next week:
more ambiguous
prophets ... and
more Timothée
Chalomet!

