Dune

Author: Frank Herbert

Herbert was an American science-fiction author, best known for his 1965 novel *Dune* and its five sequels. His son, Brian Herbert, took over the Dune universe and wrote several more books in the series. Hebert also wrote short stories and worked as a newspaper journalist, photographer, book reviewer, ecological consultant, and lecturer.

Herbert's environmental research on the Oregon sand dunes formed the basis of the speculative ecological work of the Fremen, which parallels real-world efforts and tactics of sand dune management.

Dune and the *Dune* saga constitute one of the world's best-selling science fiction series and novels; *Dune* in particular has received widespread critical acclaim, winning the Nebula Award in 1965 and sharing the Hugo Award in 1966, and is frequently considered one of the best science fiction novels ever, if not the best.

By the end of 1972, Herbert had retired from newspaper writing and became a full-time fiction writer. During the 1970s and 1980s, he enjoyed considerable commercial success as an author. He divided his time between homes in Hawaii and the Olympic Peninsula in Washington. His home on the peninsula was intended to be an ecological demonstration project. During this time, he wrote numerous books and pushed ecological and philosophical ideas.

Learn more about Frank Herbert's passions

Current sand dune management in Oregon.

Website for all things *Dune*.

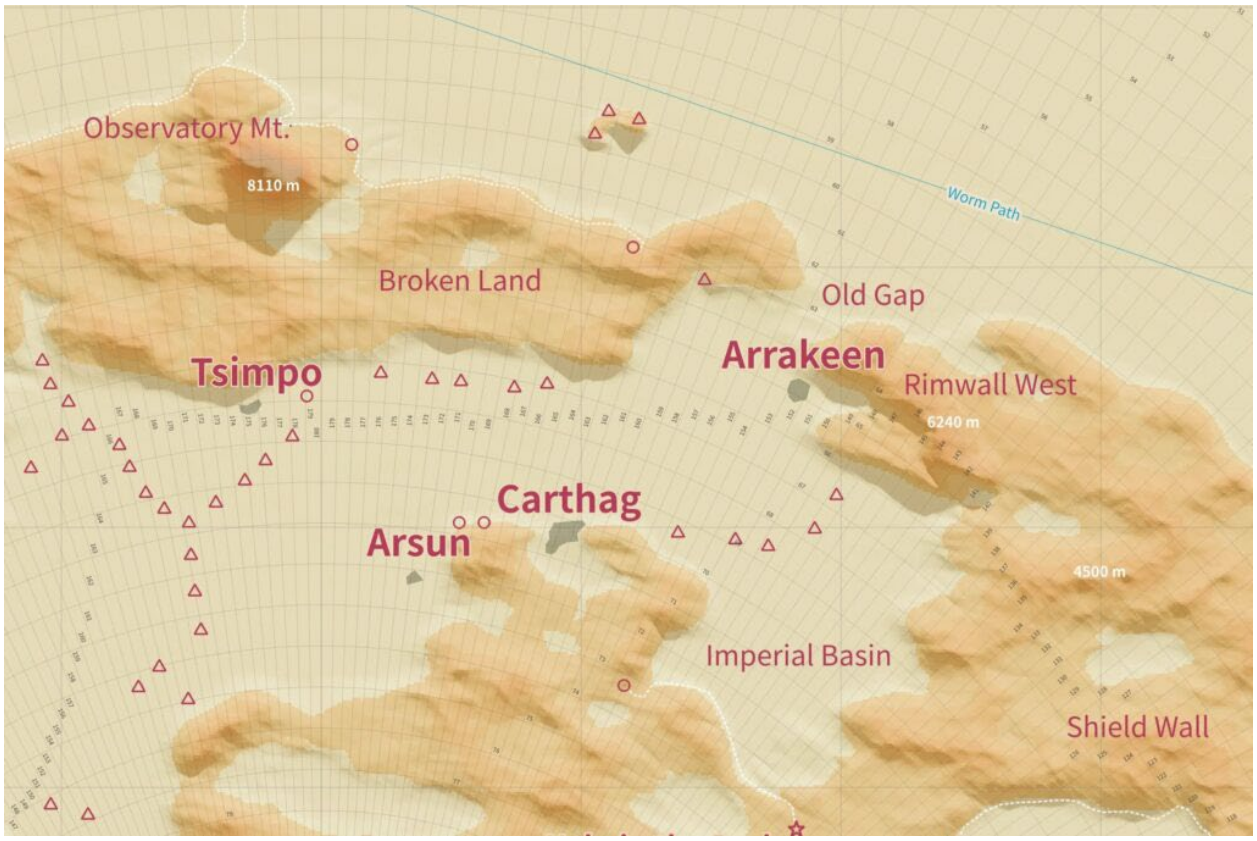
Gale Environmental Studies is a database available to Burbank Public Library patrons.

Other books by Frank Herbert

There are two ways to read the Dune universe – the order in which they were written and the chronological order of the stories, including ones written by other authors. Go to the website Dune Novels for both approaches and an all-inclusive list of books by Herbert. Below are the main Dune books that he wrote. Burbank Public Library has all of the main cannon, as well as the movies and some of the other materials written by his son and others.

Dune, *Dune Messiah*, *Children of Dune*, *God Emperor of Dune*, *Heretics of Dune*, and *Chapterhouse: Dune*.

Map of Dune:



Dune Map

Other books recommended by Burbank Public Library staff:

Ecology themed Science Fiction:

Water Knife by Paolo Bacigalupi. Great murder mystery set in the near future when Texas and California run out of water. Bacigalupi is known for his writings that take on ecology issues.

Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler. Set in a near future California where climate change & social collapse, have led to violence; a woman, after she loses her community, gathers followers as they try to adapt to the new reality.

The Kaiju Preservation Society by John Scalzi. Reads like a Carl Hiaasen with quirky characters running amok trying to reverse climate change.

Theocracy themed Fiction

The Handmaid's tale by Margaret Atwood. Set in a polluted and infertile future United States, a diary is found that shows one woman's subjugation under a theocratic government.

City of Stairs by Robert Jackson Bennett. Murder mystery placed in a city (Bulikov) with literal stairs leading nowhere and shifting alleyways due to the destruction of its gods, blending geopolitical intrigue with magical elements.

The Witness for the Dead by Katherine Addison (pseudonym for Sarah Monette). While this is a sequel to *The Goblin Emperor*, you do not need to have read it first. A role that is a cross between a monk and a detective, the witness for the dead solves a murder.

Discussion Questions for *Dune:*

Dune was published in 1965 in the middle of the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union. At this time, no major wars between the United States and Middle Eastern countries had happened yet.

Jihad is a central concept in *Dune*. Frank Herbert, drawing on his research on Islam and Middle Eastern cultures, understood *jihad* to mean a struggle of some kind—against your own internal evil, against external oppression, or in a search for knowledge. Herbert was also familiar with *jihad* through a number of Sufi-led fights against French, Russian, and English imperialist oppressors during the 19th and early 20th centuries.

1. How might this information change the way you interpret the use of the term *jihad* throughout *Dune*?
2. Overall, how do you think changes in American culture, politics, and prejudices since 1965 may have shaped the way you initially read the novel?
3. *Dune* is a sci-fi classic and is often read by newcomers to the sci-fi genre. Do you think familiarity with *Dune*'s 1965 context is necessary in order to fully understand the novel's ideas?
4. Speculative fiction like sci-fi and fantasy is often critiqued for the quality of its worldbuilding: how well the author makes the fictional world feel "realDoes the world of *Dune* feel "real" to you? Why or why not?
5. In a 1978 interview, Herbert stated: "If you want to give the reader the solid impression that he is not here and now, but that something of here and now has been carried to that faraway place and time, what better way … than to give him the language of that place."
    - With this quote in mind, why do you think Herbert specifically uses words taken from Arabic, Farsi, and Turkish throughout *Dune*? What effect was he trying to create? Do you think he succeeded?

6. Each chapter of *Dune* begins with a fictional epigraph from the writings of Princess Irulan. Typically, an epigraph is a short quotation included at the beginning of a work in order to suggest its theme.
    - Why do you think Herbert included these quotations from Princess Irulan? How did they change—or not change—the way you understood the book?

7. Herbert has often discussed his intentions to challenge a traditional "savior narrative" with *Dune*. For instance, he once described *Dune*'s larger message as follows: "Don't give over all of your critical faculties to people in power, no matter how admirable those people may appear to be. Beneath the hero's facade you will find a human being who makes human mistakes. Enormous problems arise when human mistakes are made on the grand scale available to a superhero."
    - Do you agree with what Herbert is saying here? Why or why not? Feel free to bring in examples from your own life to justify your answer.

8. Consider the major female characters of this novel: Jessica, Chani, Alia, Lady Fenring, and the Reverend Mother. How are they characterized and do they have power?

9. The Bene Gesserit use the gom jabbar to identify people who are "humans" as opposed to "animals."
    - How do the Bene Gesserit define "humans" and how do they define "animals"?

10. Paul is the protagonist of *Dune* and Baron Harkonnen is the antagonist, which typically means we are supposed to root *for* Paul and *against* Baron Harkonnen.
    - What difference do you see between the ways in which Paul uses the lives of Arrakis' people to gain power and the ways in which Baron Harkonnen uses them and do you think Paul is a "hero" at the end of the novel?