



The Dune Encyclopedia

Willis Everett McNelly (Editor)

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Eight years in the making, the work of painstaking scholarship and research, containing thousands of entries and cross-references...

Futurist, journalist, bestselling author, world-maker Frank Herbert's magnificent future history, *The Dune Chronicles*, has proven itself the most popular and enduring work of speculative fiction of our age—not only for the grandeur of its epic sweep, but for the complexity and intricacy of its world. Now, for the first time, Dune is revealed in panoramic detail—the people, the desert planet, the ecology, the history, the entire universe of the visionary masterpiece!

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- The Dune tarot; or the Golden Path
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The Dune Encyclopedia Details

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Phillip Lozano says

Fun and mostly rewarding set of articles, stories and extrapolations based on Frank Herbert's first four (five?) 'Dune' novels. This really needs a reprint, as it completely blows away anything that Brian Herbert and Kevin Anderson have crapped out in the guise of prequels and sequels in intelligence, imagination, skill and taste.

Todd says

This was published fairly soon after "God Emperor of Dune", and as such only covers the first four core Dune books. It's utility waned when "Heretics of Dune" and "Chapterhouse of Dune" were published..., and officially became non-canon once Brian Herbert started spamming the sci-fi world with seemingly infinite amounts of "DuneLite" material.

As such, this book is now a bit of an anachronism, and perhaps best read/consulted as an after diner snack after feasting on the main course of the first four core books. Anyone purchasing this at an used book store and unaware of the publishing timeline might be disappointed how this doesn't fit the last two Frank Herbert Dune books -- and how Brian Herbert ignored this source material altogether.

Mason says

The information was written (and it is most certainly not canonical) before God Emperor was complete. I liked it well enough, but its rarity makes it worth owning.

Tim Clouse says

Wonderful background material that is consistent with Herbert's work. Brian Herbert's failure to use it is an tremendous blunder.

Glad I have kept it all these years. Looks to be a collector's item.

Teggan says

Yes I am a big enough dork to give the Dune Encyclopedia a fifth star. This is also the only book that I've ever stolen in my life. I stole it from my high school library. This is still the only thing that I've done that I feel deeply ashamed of. I know that I'm not a terribly good person so I believe that means that I have one seriously screwed up conscience.

Andrew says

This is a fascinating addition to the original Dune series - (it was published long before the additional volumes were even thought about). As such its entries really only cover those books from Frank Herbert (Okay I know that the later books are taken from notes and ideas discovered years after his death but we can argue over those all night).

The book is presented like a true encyclopaedia which does mean at times it gets a little dry but once you start the usual hop-scotching through the various entries finding links from one subject to the next you can very quickly find yourself completely different world than you started (literally).

This really only appeals to the fans of the whole saga - if you dont really get Dune then this books is not for you and I guess that is one of its downfalls. The series though widely known and much praised is a huge world to break in to - yes that is part of its appeal that it is so precisely and carefully constructed but it also comes at a cost, you have to invest in this world. But if you do enjoy the worlds that the Spice created then this is a wonderful addition and sadly much missed in print.

M.M. Strawberry Reviews says

I just love this book. The entries are fascinating and far better than the tripe that Brian Herbert and Kevin Anderson wrote to "add" to the Dune universe. As far as I am concerned, this and the 6 Dune books by Frank are the only Dune canon.

D.A. says

After many years of reading and re-reading the Dune series (through God Emperor) I've concluded this: the Dune Encyclopedia is the best reason to have read these novels which, while variously awesome, excellent, and interesting, are never quite as magnificent and fun as this.

Simon Mcleish says

Originally published on my blog here in March 1999.

If you look at the back cover, The Dune Encyclopedia may seem to have been the ultimate accessory for the fan of Frank Herbert's Dune series. What is written there makes it sound as though it contains systematically ordered material from the archive of Herbert's own background notes to the series. It lists specific items, which are mostly exaggerated descriptions of articles in the encyclopedia itself ("complete guide to the art of kanly", for example, just means a description of a few of the more common methods of assassination). It is endorsed by Herbert, so it can nevertheless, so it can lay some claim to being authoritative. (He explicitly reserves the right to change the ideas in any later books written in the series, and certainly did so: both Heretics of Dune and Chapterhouse Dune contradict the Encyclopedia.)

The Encyclopedia is not, however, a systematic collection of Herbert's background materials. I am sure that these existed (given the complexity of Herbert's imagined setting for these novels), and they may well have been used to produce much of the material here. The individual articles vary wildly in interest (the one on the geology of Arrakis is particularly yawn inducing) and quality. There is little consistency in coverage; for example, the biographical studies of the major characters are too variable in type and depth to be permitted in a real encyclopedia (which this pretends to be; it uses the conceit that it is a reference work of the far future). The one to avoid is the account of Jessica, mother of Paul Atreides, as the fulfilment of each of Jung's list of human archetypes - male as well as female - and particularly what it has to say about the archetype of "Mother".

Characters are invented for no apparent reason - a playwright, who is basically Shakespeare, right down to the details of the authorship controversy, for example. Some of the articles are distinctly ill advised - whoever wrote the Imperial Poetry account and included quotations from the best poetry of the period must have a very high opinion of their own writing.

There are interesting articles among them; these are mainly the ones to do with people from before the date of the first book, such as the early emperors, the founders of the Spacing Guild and so on.

The conclusion is that this book could certainly have done with a firmer editorial hand.

Terence says

Fortunately, this work was compiled before Brian Herbert began that truly awful continuation of his father's masterpiece (overall, there were some pretty weak entries in Herbert pere's oeuvre, let's be honest).

It pretends to be a collection of select finds from the Rakis Hoard, discovered 2 millennia after Leto II's death, and there's a wealth of fascinating material that brings a richness and depth to the Corrino and Atreides Imperia. For example, there are biographical entries for all of the major characters of the series. Sometimes more than one - Paul gets three entries, one of which is the highly edited version produced under the God Emperor.

There are also entries that explain the Holtzman Effect, which produced both the personal shield and the means for FTL travel. There's a history of the Bene Gesserit that can be read as an accurate portrayal of a matriarchal cabal that has existed since the Neolithic or as the self-serving chronicle of an organization that can trace its origins to the Butlerian Jihad. There's an explanation of Imperial administration and the Great Convention that governed human affairs for 10 millennia; the origins of Mentats and Sardaukar; an exploration Fremmen poetry; the role of the Missionaria Protectiva; a rundown of Duncan Idaho and the gholas who served the Atreides for 3,000+ years; and a furtive look at the vile Bene Tleilax and their face dancers.

There's also a fascinating essay (supposedly one of the few writings that can be attributed to Paul Maud'dib) about the origins, purpose and influence of the Orange Catholic Bible.

Overall, a wonderful companion to the *Dune* series (though I wish it could have incorporated some of the material from the later books, particularly the Honored Matres).

Brian says

This is probably the nerdiest book I've ever reviewed for Goodreads, despite all the RPG books I've reviewed since I started using this website.

The Dune Encyclopedia is, as the name might imply, a chronicle of the events, places, people, and things in the Dune series, from Dune through to God Emperor of Dune, the latest novel in the series at the point it was published, though Heretics of Dune came out later that same year. That would make it interesting enough for someone who loves world-building as much as I do, but the real payoff comes in the presentation: it's an in-world encyclopedia, presented as a complication of historical records cached by the God-Emperor and discovered by later archeologists, and then edited together by a team of scholars. So not only is it a comprehensive encyclopedia, it's a comprehensive in-world encyclopedia set into the fiction of that world.

This is totally fantastic. The in-world nature gives it a much more interesting format than the various "authorized guides to [blah]," and it's constantly referring to books, poems, plays, the work of other scholars in archeological or historical journals, and other material in the Dune universe that doesn't show up in any of the actual books but would logically exist. The multiple scholars that compiled it, who sign the entries they're responsible for, mean that not every entry is written from the same perspective or to the same ends. The entry for Duke Leto Atreides is a relatively straightforward catalog of the Red Duke's accomplishments and biography, for example, whereas the entry for Lady Jessica Atreides--written by a different scholar--contains a short section about her life and then paragraph after paragraph of mystical speculation about her embodiment of the Mother, the Hetaira, the Amazon, and the Medial at different moments in her life and how that reflected on her relations with others.

There's a huge variety of information here. The melange entry has the chemical structure of the spice and the exact effects on the metabolism. There's one entry--the "Al-Harba Question"--that's devoted entirely to a parody of the Shakespeare authorship question. If you've ever wondered why it is that the Fremen speak essentially comprehensible Arabic, you can look into the Fremen language entry and learn the answer: because of the Reverend Mothers' ancestral memories and respect for tradition. There's also an entry for Galach, and while it's not as developed as any of Tolkien's languages, there's at least a pronunciation and conjugation guide for the main language of the Imperium.

Are you curious about a list of every single emperor of the known universe from the time of the Butlerian Jihad through the ages to the God-Emperor? You can find it! Fremen poetry? It's in here, with examples! An explanation of how shields work, why they blow up when shot with a lasgun, and how the same principle that makes shields work makes interstellar travel and communications possible? Yep! The reason that Dune has a breathable atmosphere despite barely having any vegetation at all couched in an explanation of sandworm biology? You got it! The specifics of the Bene Gesserit training program? The way Fremen dress in their sietches? The number of votes each House Major has in the Landsraad? That's all there, along with pretty much any other question you might ask.

One thing I love is the way that the scholars compiling the historical documents filter everything through their own socio-political understanding. At that point, the vast majority of human history has been a feudal imperium under the single rule of an emperor balanced by a council of noble houses, and that view gets extended backward even to times when it's not appropriate. For example, in the Atomics entry, there's a reference to the first use of atomics in war being during a "provincial dispute" between House Washington and House Nippon back during the semi-legendary days of the First Empire. Elsewhere, there are notes about that conflict being the impetus for House Washington seizing the imperial throne from House Windsor.

Another bit that I found great is the history of the Butlerian Jihad. In *Dune*, there's not really much explanation about it except the idea that thinking machines were limiting humanity's potential and only by divesting themselves of their crutches could humanity really determine their destiny, which makes sense because applying that to messianism and prescience is one of the major themes of the Dune series. *The Dune Encyclopedia's* more expanded version doesn't go into too much detail, but it does have some suggestions of a machine conspiracy to perform a breeding program to make humanity into a sub-sapient race of slaves, though it's possible this was only occurring on a single planet. Then religious revulsion for what the Butlerians found there turned what was originally a small rebellion into a full-fledged jihad that swept the known universe.

There's also some evidence that the child Butler was going to have was going to be the Kwisatz Haderach, but was scheduled for an unnecessary abortion by the machines to keep humanity under their thumb. Robo-thumb. Cyberthumb? Whatever. I'm not as much a fan of this, but it *would* be just like the Bene Gesserit to attribute every major historical event to their influence. The entry about them has data on them going back to Terran history and groups of Bene Gesserit manipulating everyone from pre-history through the colonization, the Jihad, the Imperium, and beyond.

This is apparently non-canonical now, but since the canon is really stupid, with telekinetic sorceresses and thinking machines being evil because what is love and basically none of the themes of Herbert's original works, *The Dune Encyclopedia* will forever be my canon. Though admittedly, even in Herbert's published works there are some differences--see above about this being published the same year as *Heretics of Dune*.

Oh, there's also a nice exploration of the imperial feudal system, and how it actually takes a lot of effort to maintain space nobles and a space empire, it's not just a natural state that governments fall into. And there's even a bibliography of all the fictional books used by the fictional scholars at the end.

Basically, I wish that every universe that I really like had one of these to go with it. World-building is one of my favorite parts of reading about invented universes, and *The Dune Encyclopedia* brings that in spades. It's a niche product, but in that niche it's unparalleled. Highly recommended.

Ericthehamster says

"A must for every Dune fanatic. Some great speculative back story for the Dune Universe. I was disappointed Brian Herbert and Kevin Anderson didn't follow it more closely in their ""preludes"" to Dune. "

Marlene Waldron says

I hunted for this book for years and ended up just giving up ever reading it. Then one day, at a yard sale, I found it wedged between 2 Danielle Steel pieces of crap. I grabbed it and it was like pulling Excalibur from the stone, it shone in the light as I lifted it up above my head and laughed. It was in great condition and looked like it had never been opened in its 30 years. Secretly I smiled as I went to the owner with my precious and other items when she said, "Oh, just take whatever books you want. They're going in the trash if no one takes them by the end of the day."

JOY!!!! I got 'The Dune Encyclopedia' FOR FREE! After I stopped shaking in my car, I picked it up and

became engrossed in the history and back story of one of my all time favorite novels, happily forgetting I was blocking someone in the parking lot until the horn honking pulled me back to reality.

Some of the people and places, events and actions are created by McNelly, but with the approval of Frank Herbert. I would much rather read The Encyclopedia than any of the tripe that Herbert Jr. and Anderson the hack spew out on a yearly basis. Speaking of Danielle Steele level of writing...

Mike says

Not canon, but interesting as all get out. Works best if the reader "picks and chooses" what they consider canon out of it. Some of the entries you'll like, others you'll think "that's not how I picture the universe working."

Lois says

Interesting and detailed. I quite enjoyed this.
