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Chapter House Dune

FRANK HERBERT

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Those who would repeat the past must control the teaching of history.

—Bene Gesserit Coda

When the ghola-baby was delivered from the first Bene Gesserit axoloti tank, Mother Superior Darwi Odrade ordered a quiet celebration in her private dining room atop Central. It was barely dawn, and the two other members of her Council – Tamalane and Bellonda – showed impatience at the summons, even though Odrade had ordered breakfast served by her personal chef.

'It isn't every woman who can preside at the birth of her own father,' Odrade quipped when the others complained they had too many demands on their time to permit of 'time-wasting nonsense'.

Only aged Tamalane showed sly amusement.

Bellonda held her over-fleshed features expressionless, often her equivalent of a scowl.

Was it possible, Odrade wondered, that Bell had not exorcized resentment of the relative opulence in Mother Superior's surroundings? Odrade's quarters were a distinct mark of her position but the distinction represented her duties more than any elevation over her Sisters. The small dining room allowed her to consult aides during meals.

She had her own private kitchen with chef on standby though most of her meals came up from communal facilities. You never knew when an extra guest might sit at her table or when she and aides might need to restore depleted energies.

Major assistance stood near. Someone from Bell's Archives could be here in minutes or, by projection to the worktable, within seconds.

Bellonda glanced this way and that around Odrade's dining room, obviously impatient to be gone. Much effort had

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been expended without success in attempts to break through Bellonda's coldly remote shell.

'It felt very odd to hold that baby in my arms and think: This is my father,' Odrade said.

'I heard you the first time!' Bellonda spoke from the belly, almost a baritone rumbling as though each word caused her vague indigestion.

She understood Odrade's jest, though. The old Bashar Miles Teg had, indeed, been the Mother Superior's father. And Odrade herself had collected cells (as fingernail scrapings) to grow this new ghola, part of a long-time 'possibility plan' should they ever succeed in duplicating Tleilaxu tanks. But Bellonda would be drummed out of the Bene Gesserit rather than smile at Odrade's witticism.

'I find this frivolous at such a time,' Bellonda said. 'Those madwomen hunting us to exterminate us and you want a celebration!'

Odrade held herself to a mild tone with some effort. 'If the Honoured Matres find us before we are ready perhaps it will be because we failed to keep up our morale.'

Bellonda's silent stare directly into Odrade's eyes carried frustrating accusation: '*Those terrible women already have exterminated sixteen of our planets!*'

As she frequently did, Bellonda, without even speaking the words, managed to focus the Mother Superior's attention on the hunters who stalked them with such savage persistence. It spoiled the mood of quiet success Odrade had hoped to achieve this morning.

She forced herself to think of the new ghola. *Teg!* If his original memories could be restored, the Sisterhood once more would have the finest Bashar ever to serve them. A Mentat Bashar! A military genius whose prowess already was the stuff of myths in the Old Empire.

But would even Teg be of use against these women returned from the Scattering?

By whatever gods may be, the Honoured Matres must not find us! Not yet!

Teg represented too many disturbing unknowns and possibilities. Mystery surrounded the period before his death in the destruction of Dune. *He did something on Gammu to ignite the unbridled fury of the Honoured Matres. His suicidal stand on Dune should not have been enough to bring this berserk response.* There were rumours, bits and pieces from his days on Gammu before the Dune disaster. *He could move too fast for the human eye to see!* Had he done that? Another outcropping of wild abilities in the Atreides genes? Mutation? Or just more of the Teg myth? The Sisterhood had to learn as soon as possible.

An acolyte brought in the three breakfasts and the Sisters ate quickly, as though this interruption must be put behind them without delay because time wasted was dangerous.

Those damnable hunters! Always somewhere in our thoughts!

Even after the others had gone, Odrade was left with the aftershock of Bellonda's unspoken fears.

And my fears.

She arose and went to the wide window that looked across lower rooftops to part of the ring of orchards and pastures around Central. Late spring and already fruit beginning to form out there. *Rebirth. A new Teg was born today!* No feeling of elation accompanied the thought. Usually she found the view restorative but not this morning.

What are my real strengths? What are my facts?

The resources at a Mother Superior's command were formidable: profound loyalty in those who served her, a military arm under a Teg-trained Bashar (far away now with a large portion of their troops guarding the school planet, Lampadas), artisans and technicians, spies and agents throughout the Old Empire, countless workers who looked to the Sisterhood for survival, and all the Reverend Mothers with Other Memories reaching into the dawn of life.

Odrade knew without false pride that she represented the peak of what was strongest in a Reverend Mother. If her personal memories did not provide needed information, she had others around her to fill the gaps. Machine-stored data as well, although she admitted to a native distrust of such things. *Didn't it all come through human hands? Then let the humans judge and present it!*

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Odrade found herself tempted to go digging in those other lives she carried as secondary memory – a spectrum of subterranean layers deep in awareness. Perhaps she could find brilliant solutions to their predicament in experiences of Others. Dangerous! You could lose yourself for hours in there, fascinated by the multiplicity of human variations. Better to leave Other Memories balanced in there, ready on demand or intruding out of necessity. Consciousness, that was the fulcrum and her grip on identity.

Duncan Idaho's odd Mentat metaphor helped.

Self-awareness: facing mirrors that pass through the universe, gathering new images on the way – endlessly reflexive. The infinite seen as finite, the analogue of consciousness carrying the sensed bits of infinity.

She had never heard words come closer to her wordless awareness. 'Specialized complexity,' Idaho called it. 'We gather, assemble and reflect our systems of order.'

Indeed, it was the Bene Gesserit view that humans were life designed by evolution to create order.

And how does that help us against these disorderly women who hunt us? What branch of evolution are they? Is evolution just another name for God?

Her Sisters would sneer at such 'bootless speculation'.

Still, there *might* be answers in Other Memory.

Ahhhh, how seductive!

How desperately she wanted to project her beleaguered self into past identities and feel what it had been to live then. The immediate peril of this enticement chilled her. She felt Other Memory crowding the edges of awareness. '*It was like this!*' '*No! It was more like this!*' How greedy they were. You had to pick and choose, discretely animating the past. And was that not the purpose of consciousness, the very essence of being alive?

Select from the past and match it against the present: learn consequences.

That was the Bene Gesserit view of history, ancient Santayana's words resonating in their lives: '*Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.*'

The buildings of Central itself, this most powerful of all Bene Gesserit establishments, reflected that attitude wherever Odrade turned. Usiform, that was the commanding concept. Little about any Bene Gesserit working centre was allowed to become

non-functional, preserved out of nostalgia. The Sisterhood had no need for archaeologists. Reverend Mothers embodied history.

We have no attic storerooms. Recycle everything!

Slowly (much slower than usual) the view out her high window had its calming effect. What her eyes reported, that was Bene Gesserit order.

But the Honoured Matres could end that order in the next instant. The Sisterhood's situation was far worse than what they had suffered under the Tyrant. Odrade felt many of the decisions she was forced to make were odious. Some of that feeling bled off into her surroundings. The workroom where she went now was less agreeable because of actions taken here.

Write off our Bene Gesserit Keep on Palma?

That suggestion was in Bellonda's morning report waiting on the worktable. Odrade fixed an affirmative notation to it. '*Yes.*'

Write it off because an Honoured Matre attack is imminent and we cannot defend them or evacuate them.

Eleven hundred Reverend Mothers and the Fates alone knew how many acolytes, postulants and others dead or worse because of that one word.

No rescue operation possible. No. No. Retreat once more. Yes. Yes.

No and yes became equally offensive.

The strain of such decisions produced a new kind of weariness in Odrade. Was it a weariness of the soul? Did such a thing as a soul exist? She felt a deep fatigue where consciousness could not probe. Weary, weary, weary.

Even Bellonda showed the strain and Bell feasted on violence. Tamalane alone appeared above it but that did not fool Odrade. Tam had entered the age of superior observation that lay ahead of all Sisters if they survived into it. Nothing mattered then except observations and judgments. Most of this was never uttered except in fleeting expressions on wrinkled features. Tamalane spoke few words these days, her comments so sparse as to be almost ludicrous.

'Buy more no-ships.'

'Brief Sheeana.'

'Review Idaho records.'

'Ask Murbella.'

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Sometimes, only grunts issued from her, as though words might betray her.

And always the hunters roamed out there, sweeping space for any clue to the location of Chapter House.

In her most private thoughts, Odrade saw the no-ships of the Honoured Matres as corsairs on those infinite seas between the stars. They flew no black flags with skull and crossbones, but that flag was there nonetheless. Nothing whatsoever romantic about them. *Kill and pillage! Amass your wealth in the blood of others. Drain that energy and build your killer no-ships on ways lubricated with blood.*

And they did not see that they would drown in the red lubricant if they kept on this course.

There must be furious people out there in that human Scattering where the Honoured Matres originated, people who live out their lives with a single fixed idea: Get them!

It was a very dangerous universe where such ideas were allowed to float around freely. Good civilizations took care that such ideas did not gain energy, did not even get the chance for birth. When they did occur, by chance or accident, they were to be diverted quickly because they tended to gather mass.

Odrade was astonished that the Honoured Matres did not see this or, seeing it, ignored it.

'Full-blown hysterics,' Tamalane called them.

'Xenophobia,' Bellonda disagreed, always correcting, as though control of Archives gave her a better hold on reality.

Both were right, Odrade thought. The Honoured Matres behaved hysterically. All *outsiders* were the enemy. The only people they appeared to trust were the men they sexually enslaved, and those only to a limited degree. Constantly testing, according to Murbella (*our only captive Honoured Matre*), to see if their hold was firm.

'Sometimes out of mere pique they may eliminate someone just as an example to others.' Murbella's words and they forced the question: *Are they making an example of us? 'See! This is what happens to those who dare oppose us!'*

Xenophobia was not a new experience to the Bene Gesserit. *Our response*, Odrade thought, *is the response of balanced intelligence*

that dampens the wide oscillations we find. And wasn't there too much pride in such a thought?

'We have our own personal xenophobia,' she had cautioned her Council. 'We have fallen into defensive paranoia focused on the Honoured Matres.'

And what did captive Honoured Matre Murbella say to all of this?

'You've aroused them. By all accounts, once aroused, they will not desist until they have destroyed you.'

Get the outsiders!

Singularly direct. 'A weakness in them if we play it right,' Odrade said.

Xenophobia carried to a ridiculous extreme?

Quite possibly.

Odrade pounded a fist on her worktable, aware that the action would be seen and recorded by Sisters who kept a constant watch on Mother Superior's behaviour. She spoke aloud then for the omnipresent comeyes and the watchdog Sisters behind them.

'We will not sit and wait in defensive enclaves! We've become as fat as Bellonda (*and let her fret over that!*) thinking we've created an untouchable society and enduring structures.'

Odrade swept her gaze around the familiar room.

'This place is one of our weaknesses!'

She took her seat behind the worktable thinking (of all things!) about architecture and community planning. Well, that was a Mother Superior's right!

Sisterhood communities seldom grew at random. Even when they took over existing structures (as they had with the old Harkonnen Keep on Gammu) they did so with rebuilding plans. They wanted pneumotubes to shunt small packages and messages. Lightlines and hardray projectors to transmit encrypted words. They considered themselves masters at safeguarding communications. Acolyte and Reverend Mother couriers (committed to self-destruction rather than betray their superiors) carried the more important messages.

She could visualize it out there beyond her window and beyond this planet – her web, superbly organized and manned, each Bene Gesserit an extension of the others. Where Sisterhood

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survival was concerned, there was an untouchable core of loyalty. Backsliders there might be, some spectacular (as the Lady Jessica, grandmother of the Tyrant) but they slid only so far. Most upsets were temporary. 'I know better than you!' vanished when threats to the order were recognized.

And all of that was Bene Gesserit pattern. A weakness.

Odrade admitted a deep agreement with Bellonda's fears. *But I'll be damned if I allow such things to depress all joy of living!* That would be giving in to the very thing those rampaging Honoured Matres wanted.

'It's our strengths the hunters want,' Odrade said, looking up at the ceiling comeyes. *Like ancient savages eating the hearts of enemies. Well... we will give them something to eat all right! And they will not know until too late that they cannot digest it!*

Except for preliminary teachings tailored to acolytes and postulants, the Sisterhood did not go in much for admonitory sayings, but Odrade had her own private watchwords: '*Someone has to do the ploughing.*' She smiled to herself as she bent to her work much refreshed. This room, this Sisterhood, these were her garden and there were weeds to be removed, seeds to plant. *And fertilizer. Mustn't forget the fertilizer.*

> When I set out to lead humanity along my Golden Path I promised a lesson their bones would remember. I know a profound pattern humans deny with words even while their actions affirm it. They say they seek security and quiet, conditions they call peace. Even as they speak, they create seeds of turmoil and violence.
>
> —Leto II, the God Emperor

So she calls me Spider Queen!

Great Honoured Matre leaned back in a heavy chair set high on a dais. Her withered breast shook with silent chuckles. *She knows what will happen when I get her in my web! Suck her dry, that's what I'll do.*

A small woman with unremarkable features and muscles that twitched nervously, she looked down on the skylighted yellow-tile floor of her audience room. A Bene Gesserit Reverend Mother

sprawled there in shigawire bindings. The captive made no attempt to struggle. Shigawire was excellent for this purpose. *Cut her arms off, it would!*

The chamber where she sat suited Great Honoured Matre as much for its dimensions as for the fact that it had been taken from others. Three hundred metres square, it had been designed for convocations of Guild Navigators here on Junction, each Navigator in a monstrous tank. The captive on that yellow floor was a mote in immensity.

This weakling took too much joy in revealing what her so-called Superior named me! She's loaded with shere, too!

But it still was a lovely morning, Great Honoured Matre thought. Except that no tortures or mental probes worked on these witches. How could you torture someone who might choose to die at any moment. And did! They had ways of suppressing pain, too. Very wily, these primitives.

Great Honoured Matre relished the fact that thumb screws, iron boots and the blessed auto-da-fé of Thomas Torquemada's day had given way to the trappings of science for extracting desired responses from captives. T-probes and their various improvements from the Scattering could remove data even from newly dead brains. Pain induction did not require that you destroy flesh, only (occasionally) nerves. A major improvement, Great Honoured Matre thought. The brain within the flesh knew it would survive for more and even greater agonies.

Of course, a science that produced one powerful tool always seemed to give rise to a countervailing force – a science to obstruct pain-makers and T-probes. *Shere!* A body infused with that damnable drug deteriorated beyond the reach of probes before it could be examined adequately.

Great Honoured Matre signalled an aide. That one nudged the sprawled Reverend Mother with a foot and, at a further signal, eased the shigawire bindings to allow minimal movement.

'What is your name, Child?' Great Honoured Matre asked. Her voice rasped hoarsely with age and false bonhomie.

'I am called Sabanda.' Clear young voice, still untouched by the pain of probings.

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'Would you like to watch us capture a weak male and enslave him?' Great Honoured Matre asked.

Sabanda knew the proper response to this. They had been warned. 'I will die first.' She said it calmly, staring up at that ancient face the colour of a dried root left too long in the sun. Those odd orange flecks in the crone's eyes. A sign of anger, Proctors had told her.

A loosely hung red-gold robe with black dragon figures down its open face and red leotards beneath it only emphasized the scrawny figure they covered.

Great Honoured Matre did not change expression even with a recurrent thought about these witches: *Damn them!* 'What was your task on that dirty little planet where we took you?'

'A teacher of the young.'

'I'm afraid we didn't leave any of your young alive.' *Now why does she smile? To offend me! That's why!*

Great Honoured Matre lifted the little finger of her right hand. A waiting aide approached the captive with an injection. Perhaps this new drug would free a witch's tongue, perhaps not. No matter.

Sabanda grimaced when the injector touched her neck. In seconds she was dead. Servants carried the body away. It would be fed to captive Futars. Not that Futars were much use. Wouldn't breed in captivity, wouldn't obey the most ordinary commands. Sullen, waiting.

'Where Handlers?' one might ask. Or other useless words would spill from their humanoid mouths. Still, Futars provided some pleasures. Captivity also demonstrated they were vulnerable. Just as these primitive witches were. *We'll find the witches' hiding place. It's only a matter of time.*

> The person who takes the banal and ordinary and illuminates it in a new way can terrify. We do not want our ideas changed. We feel threatened by such demands. 'I already know the important things!' we say. Then Changer comes and throws our old ideas away.
>
> —The Zensunni Master

Miles Teg enjoyed playing in the orchards around Central. Odrade had first taken him here when he could just toddle. One of his earliest active memories: hardly more than two years old and already aware he was a ghola, though he did not understand the word's full meaning.

'You are a special child,' Odrade said. 'We made you from cells taken from a very old man.'

Although he was a precocious child and her words had a vaguely disturbing sound, he was more interested then in running through tall summer grass beneath the trees.

Later, he added other orchard days to that first one, accumulating as well impressions about Odrade and the others who taught him. He recognized quite early that Odrade enjoyed the excursions as much as he did.

One afternoon in his fourth year, he told her: 'Spring is my favourite time.'

'Mine, too.'

When he was seven and already showing the mental brilliance coupled to holographic memory that had caused the Sisterhood to place such heavy responsibilities on his previous incarnation, he suddenly saw the orchards as a place touching something deep inside him.

This was his first real awareness that he carried memories he could not recall. Deeply disturbed, he turned to Odrade who stood outlined in light against the afternoon sun, and said: 'There are things I can't remember!'

'One day you will remember,' she said.

He could not see her face against the bright light and her words came from a great shadow place, as much within him as from Odrade.

That year he began studying the life of the Bashar Miles Teg whose cells had started his new life. Odrade had explained some of this to him, holding up her fingernails. 'I took tiny scrapings from his neck – cells of his skin and they held all we needed to bring you to life.'

There was something intense about the orchards that year, fruit larger and heavier, bees almost frenetic.

'It's because of the desert growing larger down there in the

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south,' Odrade said. She held his hand as they walked through a dew-fresh morning beneath burgeoning apple trees.

Teg stared southward through the trees, momentarily mesmerized by leaf-dappled sunlight. He had studied about the desert, and he thought he could feel the weight of it on this place.

'Trees can sense their end approaching,' Odrade said. 'Life breeds more intensely when threatened.'

'The air is very dry,' he said. 'That must be the desert.'

'Notice how some of the leaves have gone brown and curled at the edges? We've had to irrigate heavily this year.'

He liked it that she seldom talked down to him. It was mostly one person to another. He saw curled brown on leaves. The desert did that.

Before leaving Central with Odrade that morning, he had listened silently while a farm overseer uttered questions full of tensions. *Couldn't Weather Control be more generous? What was the use of all those satellites and reflectors in orbit up there if they could not put a bit more water where it was so desperately needed?*

Deep in the orchard, they listened quietly for a time to birds and insects. Bees working the clover of a nearby pasture came to investigate but he was pheromone-marked as were all who walked freely on Chapter House. Bees buzzed past him, sensed identifiers and went away about their business with blossoms.

'He's one of us.'

Odrade, caught by the linear persistence of human association with fruit trees, spoke of this as they stood there.

Apples. She pointed westward. *Peaches.* His attention went where she directed. And yes, there were the cherries east of them beyond the pasture. He saw resin ribbing on the limbs.

Seeds and young shoots had been brought here on the original no-ships some fifteen hundred years ago, she said, and had been planted with loving care.

Teg visualized hands grubbing in dirt, gently patting earth around young shoots, careful irrigation, the fencing to confine the cattle to wild pastures around the first Chapter House plantations and buildings.

By this time he already had begun learning about the giant sandworm the Sisterhood had spirited from Rakis. Death of

that worm had produced creatures called sandtrout. Sandtrout were why the desert grew. Some of this history touched accounts of his previous incarnation – a man they called 'The Bashar'. A great soldier who had died when terrible women called Honoured Matres destroyed Rakis.

Teg found such studies both fascinating and troubling. He sensed gaps in himself, places where memories ought to be. The gaps called out to him in dreams. And sometimes, when he fell into reverie, faces appeared before him. He could almost hear words. Then there were times he knew the names of things before anyone told him. Especially names of weapons.

Momentous things grew in his awareness. This entire planet would become desert, a change started because Honoured Matres wanted to kill these Bene Gesserits who raised him.

Reverend Mothers who controlled his life often awed him – black-robed, austere, those blue-in-blue eyes with absolutely no white. The spice did that, they said.

Only Odrade showed him anything he took for real affection and Odrade was someone *very* important. Everyone called her Mother Superior and that was what she told him to call her except when they were alone in the orchards. Then he could call her Mother.

On a morning walk near harvest time in his ninth year, just over the third rise in the apple orchards north of Central, they came on a shallow depression free of trees and lush with many different plants. Odrade put a hand on his shoulder and held him where they could admire black stepping stones in a meander track through massed greenery and tiny flowers. She was in an odd mood. He heard it in her voice.

'Ownership is an interesting question,' she said. 'Do we own this planet or does it own us?'

'I like the smells here,' he said.

She released him and urged him gently ahead of her. 'We planted for the nose here, Miles. Aromatic herbs. Study them carefully and look them up when you get back to the library. Oh, do step on them!' when he started to avoid a plant runner in his path.