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By Frank Herbert

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Children of Dune

FRANK HERBERT



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> Muad'Dib's teachings have become the playground of scholastics, of the superstitious and the corrupt. He taught a balanced way of life, a philosophy with which a human can meet problems arising from an ever-changing universe. He said humankind is still evolving, in a process which will never end. He said this evolution moves on changing principles which are known only to eternity. How can corrupted reasoning play with such an essence?
>
> —Words of the Mentat, Duncan Idaho

A spot of light appeared on the deep red rug which covered the raw rock of the cave floor. The light glowed without apparent source, having its existence only on the red fabric surface woven of spice fiber. A questing circle about two centimeters in diameter, it moved erratically – now elongated, now an oval. Encountering the deep green side of a bed, it leaped upward, folded itself across the bed's surface.

Beneath the green covering lay a child with rusty hair, face still round with baby fat, a generous mouth – a figure lacking the lean sparseness of Fremen tradition, but not as water-fat as an off-worlder. As the light passed across closed eyelids, the small figure stirred. The light winked out.

Now there was only the sound of even breathing and, faint behind it, a reassuring drip-drip-drip of water collecting in a catchbasin from the windstill far above the cave.

Again the light appeared in the chamber – slightly larger, a few lumens brighter. This time there was a suggestion of source and movement to it: a hooded figure filled the arched doorway at the chamber's edge and the light originated there. Once more the light flowed around the chamber, testing, questing. There was a sense of menace in it, a restless dissatisfaction. It avoided the sleeping child, paused on the gridded air inlet at an upper

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corner, probed a bulge in the green and gold wall hangings which softened the enclosing rock.

Presently the light winked out. The hooded figure moved with a betraying swish of fabric, took up a station at one side of the arched doorway. Anyone aware of the routine here in Sietch Tabr would have suspected at once that this must be Stilgar, Naib of the Sietch, guardian of the orphaned twins who would one day take up the mantle of their father, Paul Muad'Dib. Stilgar often made night inspections of the twins' quarters, always going first to the chamber where Ghanima slept and ending here in the adjoining room, where he could reassure himself that Leto was not threatened.

I'm an old fool, Stilgar thought.

He fingered the cold surface of the light projector before restoring it to the loop in his belt sash. The projector irritated him even while he depended upon it. The thing was a subtle instrument of the Imperium, a device to detect the presence of large living bodies. It had shown only the sleeping children in the royal bedchambers.

Stilgar knew his thoughts and emotions were like the light. He could not still a restless inner projection. Some greater power controlled *that* movement. It projected him into this moment where he sensed the accumulated peril. Here lay the magnet for dreams of grandeur throughout the known universe. Here lay temporal riches, secular authority and that most powerful of all mystic talismans: the divine authenticity of Muad'Dib's religious bequest. In these twins – Leto and his sister Ghanima – an awesome power focused. While they lived, Muad'Dib, though dead, lived in them.

These were not merely nine-year-old children; they were a natural force, objects of veneration and fear. They were the children of Paul Atreides, who had become Muad'Dib, the Mahdi of all the Fremen. Muad'Dib had ignited an explosion of humanity; Fremen had spread from this planet in a jihad, carrying their fervor across the human universe in a wave of religious government whose scope and ubiquitous authority had left its mark on every planet.

Yet these children of Muad'Dib are flesh and blood, Stilgar thought. *Two simple thrusts of my knife would still their hearts. Their water would return to the tribe.*

His wayward mind fell into turmoil at such a thought.

To kill Muad'Dib's children!

But the years had made him wise in introspection. Stilgar knew the origin of such a terrible thought. It came from the left hand of the damned, not from the right hand of the blessed. The *ayat* and *burhan* of Life held few mysteries for him. Once he'd been proud to think of himself as Fremen, to think of the desert as a friend, to name his planet Dune in his thoughts and not Arrakis, as it was marked on all the Imperial star charts.

How simple things were when our Messiah was only a dream, he thought. *By finding our Mahdi we loosed upon the universe countless messianic dreams. Every people subjugated by the jihad now dreams of a leader to come.*

Stilgar glanced into the darkened bedchamber.

If my knife liberated all of those people, would they make a messiah of me?

Leto could be heard stirring restlessly in his bed.

Stilgar sighed. He had never known the Atreides grandfather whose name this child had taken. But many said the moral strength of Muad'Dib had come from that source. Would that terrifying quality of *rightness* skip a generation now? Stilgar found himself unable to answer this question.

He thought: *Sietch Tabr is mine. I rule here. I am a Naib of the Fremen. Without me there would have been no Muad'Dib. These twins, now . . . through Chani, their mother and my kinswoman, my blood flows in their veins. I am there with Muad'Dib and Chani and all the others. What have we done to our universe?*

Stilgar could not explain why such thoughts came to him in the night and why they made him feel so guilty. He crouched within his hooded robe. Reality was not at all like the dream. The Friendly Desert, which once had spread from pole to pole, was reduced to half its former size. The mystic paradise of spreading greenery filled him with dismay. It was not like the dream. And as his planet changed, he knew he had changed. He had become a far more subtle person than the one-time

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sietch chieftain. He was aware now of many things – of statecraft and profound consequences in the smallest decisions. Yet he felt this knowledge and subtlety as a thin veneer covering an iron core of simpler, more deterministic awareness. And that older core called out to him, pleaded with him for a return to cleaner values.

The morning sounds of the sietch began intruding upon his thoughts. People were beginning to move about in the cavern. He felt a breeze against his cheeks: people were going out through the doorseals into the predawn darkness. The breeze spoke of carelessness as it spoke of the time. Warren dwellers no longer maintained the tight water discipline of the old days. Why should they, when rain had been recorded on this planet, when clouds were seen, when eight Fremen had been inundated and killed by a flash flood in a wadi? Until that event, the word *drowned* had not existed in the language of Dune. But this was no longer Dune; this was Arrakis . . . and it was the morning of an eventful day.

He thought: *Jessica, mother of Muad'Dib and grandmother of these royal twins, returns to our planet today. Why does she end her self-imposed exile at this time? Why does she leave the softness and security of Caladan for the danger of Arrakis?*

And there were other worries: Would she sense Stilgar's doubts? She was a Bene Gesserit witch, graduate of the Sisterhood's deepest training, and a Reverend Mother in her own right. Such females were acute and they were dangerous. Would she order him to fall upon his own knife as the Umma-Protector of Liet-Kynes had been ordered?

Would I obey her? he wondered.

He could not answer that question, but now he thought about Liet-Kynes, the planetologist who had first dreamed of transforming the planetwide desert of Dune into the human-supportive green planet which it was becoming. Liet-Kynes had been Chani's father. Without him there would have been no dream, no Chani, no royal twins. The workings of this fragile chain dismayed Stilgar.

How have we met in this place? he asked himself. *How have we*

combined? For what purpose? Is it my duty to end it all, to shatter that great combination?

Stilgar admitted the terrible urging within him now. He could make that choice, denying love and family to do what a Naib must do on occasion: make a deadly decision for the good of the tribe. By one view, such a murder represented ultimate betrayal and atrocity. *To kill mere children!* Yet they were not mere children. They had eaten melange, and shared in the sietch orgy, had probed the desert for sandtrout and played the other games of Fremen children. . . . And they sat in the Royal Council. Children of such tender years, yet wise enough to sit in the Council. They might be children in flesh, but they were ancient in experience, born with a totality of genetic memory, a terrifying awareness which set their Aunt Alia and themselves apart from all other living humans.

Many times in many nights had Stilgar found his mind circling this *difference* shared by the twins and their aunt; many times had he been awakened from sleep by these torments, coming here to the twins' bedchamber with his dreams unfinished. Now his doubts came to focus. Failure to make a decision was in itself a decision – he knew this. These twins and their aunt had awakened in the womb, knowing there all of the memories passed on to them by their ancestors. Spice addiction had done this, spice addiction of the mothers – the Lady Jessica and Chani. The Lady Jessica had borne a son, Muad'Dib, before her addiction. Alia had come after the addiction. That was clear in retrospect. The countless generations of selective breeding directed by the Bene Gesserits had achieved Muad'Dib, but nowhere in the Sisterhood's plans had they allowed for melange. Oh, they knew about this possibility, but they feared it and called it *Abomination.* That was the most dismaying fact. Abomination. They must possess reasons for such a judgment. And if they said Alia was an Abomination, then that must apply equally to the twins, because Chani, too, had been addicted, her body saturated with spice, and her genes had somehow complemented those of Muad'Dib.

Stilgar's thoughts moved in ferment. There could be no doubt these twins went beyond their father. But in which direction?

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The boy spoke of an ability to *be* his father – and had proved it. Even as an infant, Leto had revealed memories which only Muad'Dib should have known. Were there other ancestors waiting in that vast spectrum of memories – ancestors whose beliefs and habits created unspeakable dangers for living humans?

Abominations, the holy witches of the Bene Gesserit said. Yet the Sisterhood coveted the genophase of these children. The witches wanted sperm and ovum without the disturbing flesh which carried them. Was that why the Lady Jessica returned at this time? She had broken with the Sisterhood to support her Ducal mate, but rumor said she had returned to the Bene Gesserit ways.

I could end all of these dreams, Stilgar thought. *How simple it would be.*

And yet again he wondered at himself that he could contemplate such a choice. Were Muad'Dib's twins responsible for the reality which obliterated the dreams of others? No. They were merely the lens through which light poured to reveal new shapes in the universe.

In torment, his mind reverted to primary Fremen beliefs, and he thought: *God's command comes; so seek not to hasten it. God's it is to show the way; and some do swerve from it.*

It was the religion of Muad'Dib which upset Stilgar most. Why did they make a god of Muad'Dib? Why deify a man known to be flesh? Muad'Dib's *Golden Elixir of Life* had created a bureaucratic monster which sat astride human affairs. Government and religion united, and breaking a law became sin. A smell of blasphemy arose like smoke around any questioning of governmental edicts. The guilt of rebellion invoked hellfire and self-righteous judgments.

Yet it was men who created these governmental edicts.

Stilgar shook his head sadly, not seeing the attendants who had moved into the Royal Antechamber for their morning duties.

He fingered the crysknife at his waist, thinking of the past it symbolized, thinking that more than once he had sympathized with rebels whose abortive uprisings had been crushed by his own orders. Confusion washed through his mind and he

wished he knew how to obliterate it, returning to the simplicities represented by the knife. But the universe would not turn backward. It was a great engine projected upon the gray void of nonexistence. His knife, if it brought the deaths of the twins, would only reverberate against that void, weaving new complexities to echo through human history, creating new surges of chaos, inviting humankind to attempt other forms of order and disorder.

Stilgar sighed, growing aware of the movements around him. Yes, these attendants represented a kind of order which was bound around Muad'Dib's twins. They moved from one moment to the next, meeting whatever necessities occurred there. *Best to emulate them*, Stilgar told himself. *Best meet what comes when it comes.*

I am an attendant yet, he told himself. *And my master is God the Merciful, the Compassionate.* And he quoted to himself: '*Surely, We have put on their necks fetters up to the chin*, so *their heads are raised; and We have put before them a barrier and behind them a barrier; and We have covered them, so they do not see.*'

Thus was it written in the old Fremen religion.

Stilgar nodded to himself.

To *see*, to anticipate the next moment as Muad'Dib had done with his awesome visions of the future, added a counter-force to human affairs. It created new places for decisions. To be unfettered, yes, that might well indicate a whim of God. Another complexity beyond ordinary human reach.

Stilgar removed his hand from the knife. His fingers tingled with remembrance of it. But the blade which once had glistened in a sandworm's gaping mouth remained in its sheath. Stilgar knew he would not draw this blade now to kill the twins. He had reached a decision. Better to retain that one old virtue which he still cherished: loyalty. Better the complexities one thought he knew than the complexities which defied understanding. Better the now than the future of a dream. The bitter taste in his mouth told Stilgar how empty and revolting some dreams could be.

No! No more dreams!

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CHALLENGE: 'Have you seen The Preacher?'
RESPONSE: 'I have seen a sandworm.'
CHALLENGE: 'What about that sandworm?'
RESPONSE: 'It gives us the air we breathe.'
CHALLENGE: 'Then why do we destroy its land?'
RESPONSE: 'Because Shai-Hulud *[sandworm deified]* orders it.'
—Riddles of Arrakis by Harq al-Ada

As was the Fremen custom, the Atreides twins arose an hour before dawn. They yawned and stretched in secret unison in their adjoining chambers, feeling the activity of the cave-warren around them. They could hear attendants in the antechamber preparing breakfast, a simple gruel with dates and nuts blended in liquid skimmed from partially fermented spice. There were glowglobes in the antechamber and a soft yellow light entered through the open archways of the bedchambers. The twins dressed swiftly in the soft light, each hearing the other nearby. As they had agreed, they donned stillsuits against the desert's parching winds.

Presently the royal pair met in the antechamber, noting the sudden stillness of the attendants. Leto, it was observed, wore a black-edged tan cape over his stillsuit's gray slickness. His sister wore a green cape. The neck of each cape was held by a clasp in the form of an Atreides hawk – gold with red jewels for eyes.

Seeing this finery, Harah, who was one of Stilgar's wives, said: 'I see you have dressed to honor your grandmother.' Leto picked up his breakfast bowl before looking at Harah's dark and wind-creased face. He shook his head. Then: 'How do you know it's not ourselves we honor?'

Harah met his taunting stare without flinching, said: 'My eyes are just as blue as yours!'

Ghanima laughed aloud. Harah was always an adept at the Fremen challenge-game. In one sentence, she had said: 'Don't taunt me, boy. You may be royalty, but we both bear the stigma of melange-addiction – eyes without whites. What Fremen needs more finery or more honor than that?'

Leto smiled, shook his head ruefully. 'Harah, my love, if you

were but younger and not already Stilgar's, I'd make you my own.'

Harah accepted the small victory easily, signaling the other attendants to continue preparing the chambers for this day's important activities. 'Eat your breakfasts,' she said. 'You'll need the energy today.'

'Then you agree that we're not too fine for our grandmother?' Ghanima asked, speaking around a mouthful of gruel.

'Don't fear her, Ghani,' Harah said.

Leto gulped a mouthful of gruel, sent a probing stare at Harah. The woman was infernally folk-wise, seeing through the game of finery so quickly. 'Will she believe we fear her?' Leto asked.

'Like as not,' Harah said. 'She was our Reverend Mother, remember. I know her ways.'

'How was Alia dressed?' Ghanima asked.

'I've not seen her.' Harah spoke shortly, turning away.

Leto and Ghanima exchanged a look of shared secrets, bent quickly to their breakfast. Presently they went out into the great central passage.

Ghanima spoke in one of the ancient languages they shared in genetic memory: 'So today we have a grandmother.'

'It bothers Alia greatly,' Leto said.

'Who likes to give up such authority?' Ghanima asked.

Leto laughed softly, an oddly adult sound from flesh so young. 'It's more than that.'

'Will her mother's eyes observe what we have observed?'

'And why not?' Leto asked.

'Yes. . . . That could be what Alia fears.'

'Who knows Abomination better than Abomination?' Leto asked.

'We could be wrong, you know,' Ghanima said.

'But we're not.' And he quoted from the Bene Gesserit Azhar Book: 'It is with reason and terrible experience that we call the pre-born *Abomination*. For who knows what lost and damned persona out of our evil past may take over the living flesh?'

'I know the history of it,' Ghanima said. 'But if that's true, why don't we suffer from this inner assault?'

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'Perhaps our parents stand guard within us,' Leto said.

'Then why not guardians for Alia as well?'

'I don't know. It could be because one of her parents remains among the living. It could be simply that we are still young and strong. Perhaps when we're older and more cynical . . .'

'We must take great care with this grandmother,' Ghanima said.

'And not discuss this Preacher who wanders our planet speaking heresy?'

'You don't really think he's our father!'

'I make no judgment on it, but Alia fears him.'

Ghanima shook her head sharply. 'I don't believe this Abomination nonsense!'

'You've just as many memories as I have,' Leto said. 'You can believe what you want to believe.'

'You think it's because we haven't dared the spice trance and Alia has,' Ghanima said.

'That's exactly what I think.'

They fell silent, moving out into the flow of people in the central passage. It was cool in Sietch Tabr, but the stillsuits were warm and the twins kept their condenser hoods thrown back from their red hair. Their faces betrayed the stamp of shared genes: generous mouths, widely set eyes of spice addict blue-on-blue.

Leto was the first to note the approach of their Aunt Alia.

'Here she comes now,' he said, shifting to Atreides battle language as a warning.

Ghanima nodded to her aunt as Alia stopped in front of them, said: 'A *spoil of war* greets her illustrious relative.' Using the same Chakobsa language, Ghanima emphasized the meaning of her own name – *Spoil of War.*

'You see, Beloved Aunt,' Leto said, 'we prepare ourselves for today's encounter with your mother.'

Alia, the one person in the teeming royal household who harbored not the faintest surprise at adult behavior from these children, glared from one to the other. Then: 'Hold your tongues, both of you!'

Alia's bronze hair was pulled back into two golden water rings. Her oval face held a frown, the wide mouth with its downturned

hint of self-indulgence was held in a tight line. Worry wrinkles fanned the corners of her blue-on-blue eyes.

'I've warned both of you how to behave today,' Alia said. 'You know the reasons as well as I.'

'We know your reasons, but you may not know ours,' Ghanima said.

'Ghani!' Alia growled.

Leto glared at his aunt, said: 'Today of all days, we will not pretend to be simpering infants!'

'No one wants you to simper,' Alia said. 'But we think it unwise for you to provoke dangerous thoughts in my mother. Irulan agrees with me. Who knows what role the Lady Jessica will choose? She is, after all, Bene Gesserit.'

Leto shook his head, wondering: *Why does Alia not see what we suspect? Is she too far gone?* And he made special note of the subtle gene-markers on Alia's face which betrayed the presence of her maternal grandfather. The Baron Vladimir Harkonnen had not been a pleasant person. At this observation, Leto felt the vague stirrings of his own disquiet, thinking: *My own ancestor, too.*

He said: 'The Lady Jessica was trained to rule.'

Ghanima nodded. 'Why does she choose this time to come back?'

Alia scowled. Then: 'Is it possible she merely wants to see her grandchildren?'

Ghanima thought: *That's what you hope, my dear aunt. But it's damned well not likely.*

'She cannot rule here,' Alia said. 'She has Caladan. That should be enough.'

Ghanima spoke placatingly: 'When our father went into the desert to die, he left you as Regent. He . . .'

'Have you any complaint?' Alia demanded.

'It was a reasonable choice,' Leto said, following his sister's lead. 'You were the one person who knew what it was like to be born as we were born.'

'It's rumored that my mother has returned to the Sisterhood,' Alia said, 'and you both know what the Bene Gesserit think about. . . .'

'Abomination,' Leto said.

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'Yes!' Alia bit the word off.

'Once a witch, always a witch – so it's said,' Ghanima said.

Sister, you play a dangerous game, Leto thought, but he followed her lead, saying: 'Our grandmother was a woman of greater simplicity than others of her kind. You share her memories, Alia; surely you must know what to expect.'

'Simplicity!' Alia said, shaking her head, looking around her at the thronged passage, then back to the twins. 'If my mother were less complex, neither of you would be here – nor I. I would have been her firstborn and none of this . . .' A shrug, half shudder, moved her shoulders. 'I warn you two, be very careful what you do today.' Alia looked up. 'Here comes my guard.'

'And you still don't think it safe for us to accompany you to the spaceport?' Leto asked.

'Wait here,' Alia said. 'I'll bring her back.'

Leto exchanged a look with his sister, said: 'You've told us many times that the memories we hold from those who've passed before us lack a certain usefulness until we've experienced enough with our own flesh to make them reality. My sister and I believe this. We anticipate dangerous changes with the arrival of our grandmother.'

'Don't stop believing that,' Alia said. She turned away to be enclosed by her guards and they moved swiftly down the passage toward the State Entrance where ornithopters awaited them.

Ghanima wiped a tear from her right eye.

'Water for the dead?' Leto whispered, taking his sister's arm.

Ghanima drew in a deep, sighing breath, thinking of how she had observed her aunt, using the way she knew best from her own accumulation of ancestral experiences. 'Spice trance did it?' she asked, knowing what Leto would say.

'Do you have a better suggestion?'

'For the sake of argument, why didn't our father . . . or even our grandmother succumb?'

He studied her a moment. Then: 'You know the answer as well as I do. They had secure personalities by the time they came to Arrakis. The spice trance – well . . .' He shrugged. 'They weren't born into this world already possessed of their ancestors. Alia, though . . .'

'Why didn't she believe the Bene Gesserit warnings?' Ghanima chewed her lower lip. 'Alia had the same information to draw upon that we do.'

'They already were calling her Abomination,' Leto said. 'Don't you find it tempting to find out if you're stronger than all of those . . .'

'No, I don't!' Ghanima looked away from her brother's probing stare, shuddered. She had only to consult her genetic memories and the Sisterhood's warnings took on vivid shape. The pre-born observably tended to become adults of nasty habits. And the likely cause . . . Again she shuddered.

'Pity we don't have a few pre-born in our ancestry,' Leto said.

'Perhaps we do.'

'But we'd . . . Ahh, yes, the old unanswered question: Do we really have open access to every ancestor's total file of experiences?'

From his own inner turmoil, Leto knew how his conversation must be disturbing his sister. They'd considered this question many times, always without conclusion. He said: 'We must delay and delay and delay every time she urges the trance upon us. Extreme caution with a spice overdose; that's our best course.'

'An overdose would have to be pretty large,' Ghanima said.

'Our tolerance is probably high,' he agreed. 'Look how much Alia requires.'

'I pity her,' Ghanima said. 'The lure of it must've been subtle and insidious, creeping up on her until . . .'

'She's a victim, yes,' Leto said. 'Abomination.'

'We could be wrong.'

'True.'

'I always wonder,' Ghanima mused, 'if the next ancestral memory I seek will be the one which . . .'

'The past is no farther away than your pillow,' Leto said.

'We must make the opportunity to discuss this with our grandmother.'

'So her memory within me urges,' Leto said.

Ghanima met his gaze. Then: 'Too much knowledge never makes for simple decisions.'