

Sisterhood of Dune

By Brian Herbert, Kevin J. Anderson

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It is eighty-three years after the last of the thinking machines were destroyed in the Battle of Corrin, after Faykan Butler took the name of Corrino and established himself as the first Emperor of a new Imperium. Great changes are brewing that will shape and twist all of humankind.

The war hero Vorian Atreides has turned his back on politics and Salusa Secundus. The descendants of Abulurd Harkonnen Griffen and Valya have sworn vengeance against Vor, blaming him for the downfall of their fortunes. Raquella Berto-Anirul has formed the Bene Gesserit School on the jungle planet Rossak as the first Reverend Mother. The descendants of Aurelius Venport and Norma Cenva have built Venport Holdings, using mutated, spice-saturated Navigators who fly precursors of Heighliners. Gilbertus Albans, the ward of the hated Erasmus, is teaching humans to become Mentats…and hiding an unbelievable secret.

The Butlerian movement, rabidly opposed to all forms of "dangerous technology," is led by Manford Torondo and his devoted Swordmaster, Anari Idaho. And it is this group, so many decades after the defeat of the thinking machines, which begins to sweep across the known universe in mobs, millions strong, destroying everything in its path.

Every one of these characters, and all of these groups, will become enmeshed in the contest between Reason and Faith. All of them will be forced to choose sides in the inevitable crusade that could destroy humankind forever….

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Editorial Review

Review

“With their useful fidelity to the vision of the late Frank Herbert, coauthors Herbert (Frank's son) and Anderson (The Winds of Dune) continue to illuminate heretofore hidden areas of the Dune time line. Fully realized characters and intricate plotting will put this title high on fans' to-read list.” ?*Library Journal Starred review*

“Characters and plot are thus beautifully set up, the timing is precise….the universe conceived by Frank Herbert is so vast, complex and fascinating that the magic lingers.” ?*Kirkus Reviews*

“[A] fun blend of space opera and dynastic soap opera…The narrative is broken into short, jazzy chapters studded with familiar names like Atreides, Harkonnen, and Arrakis that will grab the attention of longtime Dune fans.” ?*Publishers Weekly on Sisterhood of Dune*

“Delivers solid action and will certainly satisfy.” ?*Booklist on The Winds of Dune*

“Fans of the original Dune series will love seeing familiar characters, and the narrative voice smoothly evokes the elder Herbert's style.” ?*Publishers Weekly on The Winds of Dune*

“This sequel to Paul of Dune is an important addition to the Dune chronology and will be in demand by Herbert fans.” ?*Library Journal, starred review on The Winds of Dune*

“Unquestionably, Herbert & Anderson can spin a great yarn; while technically producing a vivid, mystifying universe, filled with characters that are both endearing, and loathsome. I recommend this one highly, but be warned, if this is the first Dune book you are reading, get ready to hit the bookstore, because I promise you, it will not be the last!” ?*BookSpotCentral on The Winds of Dune*

“Drawing on Frank Herbert's massive body of notes, the coauthors of the new Dune series continue their expansion and illumination of the unexplored pieces of one of the genre's most significant and powerful stories. A priority purchase for libraries of all sizes. Highly recommended.” ?*Library Journal, starred review on Paul of Dune*

“Dune addicts will happily devour Herbert and Anderson's spicy conclusion to their second prequel trilogy.” ?*Publishers Weekly on Dune: The Battle of Corrin*

About the Author

BRIAN HERBERT has been nominated for both the Hugo and the Nebula Awards. In 2003, he published Dreamer of Dune, a Hugo Award-nominated biography of his father.

KEVIN J. ANDERSON has been nominated for the Nebula Award, the Bram Stoker Award, and the SFX Reader's Choice Award. He set the Guinness-certified world record for the largest single-author book signing.

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After being enslaved for a thousand years, we finally overwhelmed the forces of the computer evermind Omnius, yet our struggle is far from ended. Serena Butler's Jihad may be over, but now we must continue the fight against a more insidious and challenging enemy—human weakness for technology and the temptation to repeat the mistakes of the past.
—MANFORD TORONDO, *The Only Path*

Manford Torondo had lost count of his many missions. Some he wanted to forget, like the horrific day that the explosion tore him apart and cost him the lower half of his body. This mission, though, would be easier, and eminently satisfying—eradicating more remnants of mankind's greatest enemy.

Bristling with cold weapons, the machine warships hung outside the solar system, where only the faintest mist of dwindled starlight glinted off their hulls. As a result of the annihilation of the scattered Omnius everminds, this robot attack group had never reached its destination, and the population of the nearby League star system never even realized they had been a target. Now Manford's scouts had found the fleet again. Those dangerous enemy vessels, still intact, armed, and functional, hung dead in space, long after the Battle of Corrin. Mere derelicts, ghost ships—but abominations, nonetheless. They had to be dealt with accordingly.

As his six small vessels approached the mechanical monstrosities, Manford experienced a primal shudder. The dedicated followers of his Butlerian movement were sworn to destroy all vestiges of forbidden computer technology. Now, without hesitation, they closed in on the derelict robot fleet, like gulls on the carcass of a beached whale.

The voice of Swordmaster Ellus crackled over the comm from an adjacent ship. For this operation, the Swordmaster flew point, guiding the Butlerian hunters to these insidious robot vessels that had drifted unnoticed for decades. "It's an attack squadron of twenty-five ships, Manford—exactly where the Mentat predicted we'd find them."

Propped in a seat that had been specially modified to accommodate his legless body, Manford nodded to himself. Gilbertus Albans continued to impress him with his mental prowess. "Once again, his Mentat School proves that human brains are superior to thinking machines."

"The mind of man is holy," Ellus said.

"The mind of man is holy." It was a benediction that had come to Manford in a vision from God, and the saying was very popular now with the Butlerians. Manford signed off and continued to watch the unfolding operation from his own compact ship.

Seated next to him in the cockpit, Swordmaster Anari Idaho noted the position of the robot battleships on the screen and announced her assessment. She wore a black-and-gray uniform with the emblem of the movement on her lapel, a stylized sigil that featured a blood-red fist clenching a symbolic machine gear.

"We have enough weaponry to destroy them from a distance," she said, "if we use the explosives wisely. No need to risk boarding the ships. They'll be guarded by combat meks and linked fighting drones."

Looking up at his female attendant and friend, Manford maintained a stony demeanor, though she always warmed his heart. "There is no risk—the evermind is dead. And I want to gaze at these machine demons before we eliminate them."

Dedicated to Manford's cause, and to him personally, Anari accepted the decision. "As you wish. I will keep you safe." The look on her wide, innocent face convinced Manford that he could do no wrong in her eyes, make no mistakes—and as a result of her devotion, Anari protected him with ferocity.

Manford issued brisk orders. "Divide my followers into groups. No need to hurry—I prefer perfection to haste. Have Swordmaster Ellus coordinate the scuttling charges across the machine ships. Not a scrap can remain once we're finished."

Because of his physical limitations, watching the destruction was one of the few things that gave him pleasure. Thinking machines had overrun his ancestral planet of Moroko, captured the populace, and unleashed their plagues, murdering everyone. If his great-great-grandparents had not been away from home,

conducting business on Salusa Secundus, they would have been trapped as well, and killed. And Manford would never have been born.

Though the events affecting his ancestors had occurred generations ago, he still hated the machines, and vowed to continue the mission.

Accompanying the Butlerian followers were five trained Swordmasters, the Paladins of Humanity, who had fought hand-to-hand against thinking machines during Serena Butler's Jihad. In the decades after the great victory on Corrin, Swordmasters had busied themselves with cleanup operations, tracking down and wrecking any remnants of the robotic empire they found scattered throughout the solar systems. Thanks to their success, such remnants were getting more and more difficult to locate.

As the Butlerian ships arrived among the machine vessels, Anari watched the images on her screen. In a soft voice, which she used only with him, she mused, "How many more fleets like this do you think we'll find, Manford?"

The answer was clear. "I want all of them."

These dead robotic battle fleets were easy targets that served as symbolic victories, when properly filmed and broadcast. Lately, though, Manford had also become worried about the rot, corruption, and temptation he observed within the new Corrino Imperium. How could people forget the dangers so quickly? Soon enough, he might need to channel his followers' fervor in a different direction and have them perform another necessary cleansing among the populations.…

Swordmaster Ellus took care of the administrative details, sorting the robotic ships onto a grid and assigning teams to specific targets. The five other ships settled in among the derelict machines and attached to individual hulls. Then the respective teams blasted their way aboard.

Manford's team suited up and prepared to board the largest robotic vessel, and he insisted on going along to see the evil with his own eyes, despite the effort it entailed. He would never be content to stay behind and watch; he was accustomed to using Anari as his legs, as well as his sword. The sturdy leather harness was always close by in case Manford needed to go into battle. She pulled the harness onto her shoulders, adjusted the seat behind her neck, then attached the straps under her arms and across her chest and waist.

Anari was a tall and physically fit woman and, in addition to being faultlessly loyal to Manford, she also loved him—he could see that every time he looked into her eyes. But *all* of his followers loved him; Anari's affection was just more innocent, and more pure than most.

She hefted his legless body easily, as she had done countless times before, and settled his torso onto the seat behind her head. He didn't feel like a child when he rode on her shoulders; he felt as if Anari were part of him. His legs had been blown off by a deluded technology-lover's bomb that had killed Rayna Butler, the saintly leader of the anti-machine movement. Manford had been blessed by Rayna herself, in the moments before she died of her injuries.

The Suk doctors called it a miracle that he'd survived at all, and it was that: *a miracle.* He'd been meant to live on after the horrifying day. Despite the physical loss, Manford had seized the helm of the Butlerian movement, and led them with great fervor. *Half a man, twice the leader.* He had a few fragments of pelvis left, but very little remained below his hips; nevertheless, he still had his mind and heart, and did not need anything else. Just his followers.

His curtailed body fit neatly into the socket of Anari's harness, and he rode high on her shoulders. With subtle shifts of his weight, he guided her like part of his own body, an extension below his waist. "Take me to the hatch, so we can be the first to board."

Even so, he was at the mercy of her movements and decisions. "No. I'm sending the other three ahead."

Anari meant no challenge in her refusal. "Only after they verify there is no danger will I take you aboard. My mission to protect you outweighs your impatience. We go when I have been advised that it is safe, and not a moment sooner."

Manford ground his teeth together. He knew she meant well, but her overprotectiveness could be frustrating. "I expect no one to take risks in my stead."

Anari looked up and over her shoulder to gaze at his face, with an endearing smile. "Of course we take risks

in your stead. We would all lay down our lives for you."
While Manford's team boarded the dead robotic ship, searching the metal corridors and looking for places to plant charges, he waited aboard his own vessel, fidgeting in his harness. "What have they found?"
She did not budge. "They'll report when they have something to report."
Finally, the team checked in. "There are a dozen combat meks aboard, sir—all of them cold and deactivated. Temperature is frigid, but we've restarted the life-support systems so you can come aboard in comfort."
"I'm not interested in comfort."
"But you need to breathe. They will tell us when they're ready."
Though robots did not require life-support systems, many of the machine vessels had been equipped to haul human captives in the cargo bays. In the final years of the Jihad, Omnius had dedicated all functional vessels to the battle fleet, while also building huge automated shipyards to churn out new war vessels by the thousands.
And still the humans had won, sacrificing everything for the only victory that mattered.…
Half an hour later, the atmosphere in the machine ship reached a level where Manford could survive without an environment suit. "Ready for you to come aboard, sir. We've located several good places to plant explosive charges. And human skeletons, sir. A cargo hold, at least fifty captives."
Manford perked up. "Captives?"
"Long dead, sir."
"We're coming." Satisfied, Anari descended to the connecting hatch, and he rode high on her back, feeling like a conquering king. Aboard the large vessel, the air was still razor-thin and cold. Manford shuddered, then grasped Anari's shoulders to steady himself.
She gave him a concerned glance. "Should we have waited another fifteen minutes for the air to warm up?"
"It's not the cold, Anari—it's the evil in the air. How can I forget all the human blood these monsters spilled?"
Aboard the dim and austere ship, Anari took him to the chamber where the Butlerians had pried open the sealed door to reveal a jumble of human skeletons, dozens of people who had been left to starve or suffocate, likely because the thinking machines didn't care.
The Swordmaster wore a deeply troubled and hurt expression. For all her hardened fighting experience, Anari Idaho remained astonished by the offhand cruelty of the thinking machines. Manford both admired and loved her for her innocence. "They must have been hauling captives," Anari said.
"Or experimental subjects for the evil robot Erasmus," Manford said. "When the ships received new orders to attack this system, they paid no further attention to the humans aboard." He muttered a silent prayer and blessing, hoping to speed the lost souls off to heaven.
As Anari led him away from the human-cargo chamber, they passed an angular, deactivated combat mek that stood like a statue in the corridor. The arms sported cutting blades and projectile weapons; its blunt head and optic threads were a mockery of a human face. Looking at the machine in disgust, Manford suppressed another shudder. *This must never be allowed to happen again.*
Anari drew her long, blunt pulse-sword. "We're going to blow up these ships anyway, sir … but would you indulge me?"
He smiled. "Without hesitation."
Like a released spring, the Swordmaster attacked the motionless robot; one blow obliterated the mek's optic threads, more blows severed the limbs, others smashed the body core. Deactivated for decades, the mek didn't even spurt a stream of sparks or lubricant fluid when she dismembered it.
Looking down, breathing heavily, she said, "Back at the Swordmaster School on Ginaz, I slew hundreds of these things. The school still has a standing order for functional combat meks, so trainees can practice destroying them."
The very thought soured Manford's mood. "Ginaz has too many functional meks, in my opinion—it makes me uneasy. Thinking machines should not be kept as pets. There is no useful purpose for any sophisticated machine."

Anari was hurt that he had criticized her fond recollection. Her voice was small. “It’s how we learned to fight them, sir.”

“Humans should train against humans.”

“It’s not the same.” Anari took out her frustration on the already battered combat mek. She bludgeoned it one last time, then stalked toward the bridge. They found several other meks along the way, and she dispatched each one, with all the ferocity that Manford felt in his heart.

On the robotic control deck, he and Anari met up with the other team members. The Butlerians had knocked over a pair of deactivated robots at the ship’s controls. “All the engines function, sir,” one gangly man reported. “We could add explosives to the fuel tanks just for good measure, or we can overload the reactors from here.”

Manford nodded. “The explosions need to be big enough to eradicate all the nearby ships. These vessels are still operational, but I don’t want to use even the scrap metal. It’s … contaminated.”

He knew that others did not have such qualms. Beyond his control, groups of corruptible humans were scouring the space shipping lanes to find intact fleets like this for salvage and repair. Scavengers without principles! The VenHold Spacing Fleet was notorious for this; more than half of their ships were refurbished thinking-machine vessels. Manford had argued with Directeur Josef Venport several times over the issue, but the greedy businessman refused to see reason. Manford took some consolation in the knowledge that at least these twenty-five enemy warships would never be used.

Butlerians understood that technology was seductive, fraught with latent danger. Humanity had grown soft and lazy since the overthrow of Omnius. People tried to make exceptions, seeking convenience and comfort, pushing the boundaries to their perceived advantage. They wheedled and made excuses: *that* machine might be bad, but *this* slightly different technology was acceptable.

Manford refused to draw artificial lines. It was a slippery slope. One small thing could lead to another, and another, and soon the downgrade would become a cliff. The human race must never be enslaved by machines again!

Now he swiveled his head to address the three Butlerians on the bridge. “Go. My Swordmaster and I have one last thing to do here. Send a message to Ellus—we should be away within fifteen minutes.”

Anari knew exactly what Manford had in mind; she had, in fact, prepared for it. As soon as the other followers returned to their ship, the Swordmaster removed a small gilded icon from a pouch in her harness, one of many such icons that Manford had commissioned. He held the icon reverently, looked at the benevolent face of Rayna Butler. For seventeen years now, he had followed in that visionary woman’s footsteps.

Manford kissed the icon, then handed it back to Anari, who placed it on the robotic control panel. He whispered, “May Rayna bless our work today and make us successful in our critically important mission. The mind of man is holy.”

“The mind of man is holy.” At a brisk trot, breathing out warm steam in the frigid air, Anari hurried to their ship, where the team sealed the hatch and disengaged from the dock. Their vessel drifted away from the rigged battle group.

Within the hour, all the Butlerian strike vessels rendezvoused above the dark robot ships. “One minute left on the timers, sir,” Swordmaster Ellus transmitted. Manford nodded, his gaze intent on the screen, but he spoke no words aloud. None were necessary.

One of the robot ships blossomed into flame and shrapnel. In rapid succession, the other ships detonated, their engine compartments overloading or their fuel ignited by timed explosions. The shock waves combined, swirling the debris into a soup of metal vapor and expanding gases. For a few moments, the sight was as bright as a new sun, reminding him of Rayna’s radiant smile … then it gradually dissipated and faded.

Across the calm, Manford spoke to his devout followers. “Our work here is done.”

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Users Review

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