

## **Dune: A Guide for the Bewildered**

This document is intended as a basic introduction to the Dune universe for those are unfamiliar with it or who need a reminder of the concepts. It should also be used by players who are familiar with the background story as a remainder of what their characters do and do not know. It uses information that would commonly be available given a background date of 10,192.

### ***The Imperium***

The Imperium spans thousands of planets and has existed for millennia. The current year is 10,192, but the Imperial calendar dates from the establishment of the Spacing Guild monopoly on interstellar travel. The time when Earth was the only planet occupied by humanity is a distant memory. Many alien forms of life have been encountered during humanity's exploration of the universe, but none of these are intelligent. Many languages are spoken in the Imperium, but the common tongue is called Galach.

### ***Melange***

The most important substance in the universe is Melange, commonly known as Spice. Spice makes interstellar travel possible. It also prolongs life, for those that can afford it, and to some it grants visions. Spice is found on only one planet: Arrakis, a harsh desert world, sparsely populated by tribes known as the Freman and home to the vast Sandworms. Arrakis is also known by its local name: Dune.

### ***The Emperor***

Imperial Society is feudal. Powerful families called Great Houses control individual planets and the Houses all hold fealty to the Padishah Emperor. The current Emperor is Shaddam IV of House Corrino. The Emperor's Sardaukar terror troops are the most feared fighters in the known universe.

### ***The Landsraad***

The Great Houses try to resolve disputes in a rough parliament called the Landsraad. However, feuds between Houses are commonplace. These feuds sometimes involve open warfare, but more often consist of assassinations, sabotage and duels, in what is known as a War of Assassins, or "Kanly". The biggest feud of recent times was between House Harkonnen and House Atriedes. This ended decisively nearly two years ago, when the Harkonnons took control of Arrakis by force from the Atriedes. Duke Leto Atriedes, his concubine Lady Jessica and his son Paul all died in the attack. Rabban "Beast" Harkonnen, nephew of Duke Vladimir Harkonnen, now governs Arrakis.

### ***The Great Convention***

All the Great Houses hold stockpiles of atomic weapons, known as Family Atomics. An ancient law known as the Great Convention prohibits any use of Atomics against humans. Any breach of this law would be met with reprisals in kind from all members of the Landsraad.

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### ***The Butlerian Jihad***

The other main law of the Imperium is a complete prohibition on computers, which has been in force since a religious war against machines called the Butlerian Jihad took place millennia ago. The main tenant of the Jihad states, "thou shalt not make a machine in the likeness of a human mind". This law makes the technology of the Imperium very "hands on", although there are some automatic devices that push the boundaries of the prohibition, most of which originate from the planet Ix, the so-called "machine planet" and source of sophisticated (and potentially heretical) technology.

### ***CHOAM***

The economy of the Imperium is controlled by a corporation called CHOAM (Combine Honnete Ober Advancer Mercantiles). Most Great Houses have shares in CHOAM, and to a large extent the size of their CHOAM holdings determines the importance of the House. The unit of currency in the Imperium is the Solari.

### ***The Spacing Guild***

Many Houses own spaceships. The most common type is called a frigate. None of these spaceships are capable of interstellar travel. All travel between the stars is controlled by the Spacing Guild. They operate vast ships known as Heighliners, which are capable of carrying many frigates. The Heighliners are controlled by Steersmen, who have been mutated by millennia of exposure to space and Spice. The Steersmen use the Spice to give them prescient visions of the space ahead of them, allowing them to steer a safe course when travelling faster than light.

The Guild is very powerful, as no House would dare risk jeopardising their access to interstellar shipping. However at the same time, the Guild is totally dependent on the supply of Spice, without which its Steersmen would be blind.

### ***The Great Schools***

There are several specialised schools of knowledge within the Imperium. The Bene Gesserit (the members of which are sometimes disparagely referred to as "witches") is an ancient sisterhood specialising in mysticism and the mental and martial arts. Mentats are human computers, trained to replace and exceed the functions once performed by thinking machines. Though still a Great House in it's own right, House Ginaz also acts as a school. The Swordmasters of Ginaz are highly trained in many forms of combat. The Suk school produce the finest doctors in the Imperium. The Bene Tleilaxu excels in all forms of genetic and biological engineering. Graduates of any of these schools are often prized employees of a Great House, with the exception of the Bene Tleilaxu, who are generally mistrusted because of their genetically manipulated or "twisted" products.

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### ***The Holtzman Effect***

The Holtzman Suspensor-Nullification Effect (to give it its full name) is the scientific theory that gives rise to two of the most important devices to shape Imperial society: the Shield and Suspensor.

The suspensor reduces or nullifies the effects of gravity or acceleration. Suspenders have numerous applications from transport to floating lighting (“glowglobes”).

A shield projects a force field that is impermeable to any fast-moving object. Buildings, vehicles and individuals can all be shielded (the latter wearing a small shield generator on a belt). This effectively makes firearms redundant, and re-establishes swords and knives as the weapons of choice in combat. Guns have not completely disappeared however; spring-loaded "maula" pistols can deliver a dart at short range that moves slowly enough to penetrate a shield. Lasers ("lasguns") are in use, but great care must be taken to never use them against a shielded target. A laser beam impacting a shield will create a feedback loop resulting in a small thermonuclear explosion, destroying both target and aggressor, and (even worse) such an explosion could be mistaken as a violation of the Great Convention. Great Houses and their military forces make extensive use of shields. The ordinary civilian population usually cannot afford them.

### ***'Thopters***

The forms of transport used in the Imperium are many and varied, and often adapted to the peculiar environment of a particular planet. The most common and adaptable vehicle is the ornithopter: an aircraft that can fly by flapping its wings like a bird. A 'thopter can land virtually anywhere and in the hands of a skilled operator is extremely manoeuvrable. For high speeds, the wings are locked into position and the auxiliary jets are employed. 'Thopters come in many shapes and sizes, from individual transports to large troop carriers. They are usually only owned by Great Houses or the very rich.