

# DUNE

## The “Unfilmable” Galactic Classic Gets New Life

### Denis Villeneuve’s Take on Dune Is an Admirably Understated Sci-Fi Spectacle

To call Denis Villeneuve’s science-fiction extravaganza *Dune* a good example of its type of thing is probably damning it with fainter praise than it deserves. As someone who has zero interest in most books beloved by proselytizing, glassy-eyed dudes of the 1970s and 1980s, I always figured I could never be a *Dune* person. But I sort of enjoyed Villeneuve’s *Dune*—premiering out of competition at the Venice Film Festival and opening in the United States later this fall—and though it’s hard to say if serious *Dune* dudes will approve, what Villeneuve has put onscreen proves, at the very least, that he respects the source material to just the right degree. He neither genuflects to it nor tries to tart it up as a flashy, self-satisfied blockbuster flimflam. As movie spectacles go, it’s admirably understated: What can you say about a movie that makes the absolute most of

Frank Herbert’s 1965 novel has long been considered unfilmable: Chilean-French filmmaker Alejandro Jodorowsky tried, unsuccessfully, to tackle it in the 1970s, and David Lynch’s 1984 version was widely viewed as a disappointment. Admittedly, Villeneuve (*Arrival*, *Blade Runner 2049*) has a bunch of modern filmmaking tools available to him that those filmmakers didn’t, but at least he makes good use of them. The story is set in the year 10191, on a dry desert planet, Arrakis, that’s rich in “spice,” a substance needed for interplanetary travel. The planet’s longtime inhabitants are the Fremen, desert people who have found ways to survive in a harsh environment—one of their mysterious and dignified denizens, Chani (Zendaya), shimmers into view in a series of dream sequences, before materializing in real life.

For the

Fremen, spice is a consciousness-enhancing substance, and they value it dearly. But other inhabitants of their interplanetary network think nothing of harvesting all the spice they want, giving the Fremen people nothing in return. (*Dune*, in case you haven’t guessed, is heavy with geopolitical and religious symbolism of all sorts.) The emperor of all the planets puts the head of a noble family, Duke Leto Atreides (Oscar Isaac, in a woolly gray beard), in charge of Arrakis. Atreides intends to be fair and benevolent. But when he moves to this unwelcoming, parched planet with his concubine, Lady Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson), and his teenage son, Paul Atreides (Timothée

**“Fear is the mind-killer. Fear is the little-death that brings total obliteration. I will face my fear. I will permit it to pass over me and through me.”**

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