

# [***'Dune: Part Two' dazzles visually but moves like it's walking in sand***](https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:6BCR-TJ31-JBSS-S2Y0-00000-00&context=1516831)

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**Body**

(CNN) &#8212; If David Lynch's 1984 "Dune" movie raced through the book, the second half of director [*Denis Villeneuve's version*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/21/entertainment/dune-adaptations-history-lynch-villeneuve-cec/index.html) at times moves as if it's walking in sand, figuratively as well as literally. Still visually dazzling and overwhelming in its scale, "Dune: Part Two" becomes enmeshed in the political denseness of author Frank Herbert's world, unevenly marching through this part of the story before rather abruptly coming to an end.

Much has changed since [*the first movie*](https://www.cnn.com/2021/10/20/entertainment/dune-review/index.html) was simultaneously released in theaters and via streaming during the height of the pandemic (a decision the director [*sharply criticized*](https://variety.com/2020/film/news/dune-denis-villeneuve-blasts-warner-bros-1234851270/)), and the reloaded cast remains plenty starry, including a meatier role for [*Zendaya*](https://www.cnn.com/2024/02/09/style/zendaya-dune-red-carpet-dressing/index.html) in this chapter.

The technical wizardry, which earned the 2021 film [*six Oscars*](https://www.cnn.com/2022/03/27/entertainment/academy-awards-2022/index.html), certainly lends itself to big-screen consumption, and Warner Bros. (like CNN, a unit of Warner Bros. Discovery) should cash in more handsomely this time around.

Still, if the first film meticulously set up the pieces and players, the latest movie shifts into what amounts to an extended origin story for Paul Atreides ([*Timothee Chalamet*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/15/entertainment/timothee-chalamet-barbie/index.html)) as he lives among the Fremen, learns to ride giant worms and gradually embraces his destiny as the warrior messiah they call Mahdi.

To do that - and gain the vengeance he seeks - Paul must first be accepted by the Fremen in their guerrilla war against the invading Harkonnens, led by the bloated Baron (Stellan Skarsgard) and his repulsive nephews, the Beast Rabban (Dave Bautista) and Feyd-Rautha ([*Austin Butler*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/01/10/entertainment/austin-butler-golden-globes-elvis-cec/index.html), having happily shed his "Elvis" vocal affectation, as well as his eyebrows).

Like Sting before him, Butler makes the most of his role as a sneering psychopath whose ruthlessness prompts the Baron to unleash him upon the Fremen, hoping to ensure the uninterrupted flow of spice, the galaxy's most precious resource. Other new players include Christopher Walken and Florence Pugh as the emperor and his daughter, Lea Seydoux, and briefly, Anya Taylor-Joy.

With composer Hans Zimmer's muscular score (and the overall sound) working overtime, Villeneuve is at his best when depicting the fascistic power of the Harkonnens and their sprawling military machine. At the same time, the pacing proves more halting, particularly in the first hour or so of this 166-minute spectacle, which plunges deeply into the intricacies of imperial ***politics*** and Fremen customs, punctuated by skirmishes in the larger war.

That languid opening stretch comes back to haunt the movie toward the end, when it feels as if Villeneuve (who shares screenplay credit with Jon Spaihts) is rushing toward a climax that again sends the message - or the hope - that this might not be the last we'll see of "Dune." There's also a questionable decision in having Paul's witchy mom, Lady Jessica (Rebecca Ferguson), communicating with her unborn daughter who "speaks" to her from the womb.

A true Warner Bros. MVP between this and [*"Wonka,"*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/12/04/entertainment/wonka-review-timothee-chalamet-prequel/index.html) Chalamet credibly shoulders the weight of a character maturing from callow youth into commanding savior, but those playing the villains frankly appear to be having a lot more fun, except possibly Javier Bardem as Stilgar, whose faith makes him Paul's biggest Fremen fan.

From a more earthbound perspective, after [*a delay due to Hollywood's twin strikes*](https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/25/entertainment/dune-2-delayed/index.html), the "Dune" sequel has emerged as the latest ray of hope in Hollywood's often-frustrating crusade to entice people back into theater seats, nearing the end of a discontented winter that has produced few bright spots.

Like "Dune's" first half and the "Avatar" movies, "Part Two" possesses state-of-the-art cinematic qualities that reward soaking in its grandeur, at least for anyone who hasn't entirely lost the moviegoing habit. After the initial promise, though, the film only sporadically rises to the level of its sky-high expectations - a somewhat ironic sign of how quickly the worm can turn.

"Dune" premieres March 1 in US theaters. It's rated PG-13.

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