

Amber Eschrich

26<sup>th</sup> April 2024

A Feminist Revision: *Dune: Part Two*

*Dune: Part Two* made its theater debut March 1<sup>st</sup> and has garnered praise from critics and viewers alike. The film's director Denis Villeneuve captivates the audience with what the future of the sci-fi genre can look like. From stark sandy scenes, to filming in infrared to help the audience experience the black sun of the Harkonnen planet Giedi-Prime, it is almost impossible to not be completely absorbed into the harsh world Villeneuve creates.

Amidst the groundbreaking visuals, the film takes a drastic turn from the original Frank Herbert novel, changing the role of Paul's main love interest, Chani.

Before we get into the nitty-gritty of *Dune*, I need to explain some aspects of the *Dune* universe, as it can get very confusing, very fast.

The Fremen are the people who are native to the desert planet, Arrakis, which is where the story takes place. They have been historically exploited and have harnessed desert power to survive outside of the feudal system of the galactic empire.

The Bene Gesserit are a league of women that have special powers and are crossing bloodlines to breed the perfect man to be the Kwisatz-Haderach, an all-powerful, all knowing person that can see into the future. They also act as a behind-the-scenes political entity in the empire.

While *Dune* is a critically acclaimed novel across generations, and has increasingly relevant commentary on world issues, at the end of the day, it is still a novel written by a man in

the 1960s. This male-centric view is extremely evident throughout the novel and is blatantly clear in the way Herbert writes Chani. In the book, she supports Paul, is unwavering in her faith to him, has his child, but that's about it. Her character isn't very dynamic.

In the movie, Chani takes a much larger role. While she loves Paul, she does not blindly follow him. The change in Chani's character takes Herbert's original narrative and puts a more feminist spin on it. *Dune*'s fan base and the Sci-Fi genre has historically been male-dominated. Through this reinterpretation of Chani as an overall more dynamic character, Villeneuve helps to include women within the *Dune* fanbase and Sci-Fi as a whole. Not only does this change put a more feminist spin on the original narrative, but it also serves important narrative functions.

Chani stays firm in her belief that Paul is not the messiah throughout the film. She doesn't blindly follow him, and she repeatedly tells him that the messiah, the true liberator of the Fremen, must be Fremen. Chani is one of the first people to directly call out Paul's shift from teenage boy to messiah, she states, "... the way they look at you, they worship you."

From a narrative standpoint, Chani distrusting the prophecy is a crucial detail to understand *Dune*, because even within the text, it's easy to miss Herbert's main point with *Dune*. Paul is not the messiah. The messiah legend that the Fremen believe in was implanted by the Bene Gesserit centuries beforehand, as a political move to control the Fremen. Villeneuve makes this much more explicit in the film, and in doing so reinforces Herbert's original narrative, which shows how myths, legends, and holy stories can be used to colonize. But reinforcing Herbert's theme isn't the only thing Villeneuve strengthens with this change, in doing this, he makes Chani a much stronger, and much more dynamic character.

Towards the end of the film, Chani is depicted as the only non-believer in crowds of Fremen worshipping her boyfriend. This alone marks the stark difference between Chani in the novel and Chani in the film. She goes from a character who exists solely as a love interest, to someone who defies her love interest. This shows how the character is given more autonomy than in the novel and adds more depth to the story of Paul and Chani. In the film, while she still loves Paul, Chani is no longer just Paul's love interest, but is also the opposition to him.

Chani plays a role in the prophecy of reviving Paul from the dead. In the film, she actively denies this role, and after finding Paul dead from drinking the Water of Life to take his final step in becoming the Kwisatz Haderach, instead of helping Paul she yells at Lady Jessica, "You're the poison. You and your lies. Why would you do this?" With this action, Chani directly confronts two things, her established role, and directly calls out what she views as a bogus prophecy. She directly calls out the prophecy which Jessica and other Bene Gesserit have set in place, and calls it lies. When she doesn't fulfill her role in the prophecy willingly, Jessica mind-controls her to do so. However, her choice to not go along with the prophecy highlights the contrast between the novel and film versions of Chani. Chani refuses to enable Paul and defies the power systems within her society. Unlike the novel, this Chani actively disrupts the fulfillment of Paul's prophecy, and sees the prophecy for what it truly is, an act of colonization.

Additionally, at the end of the novel, after Paul has defeated the Harkonnens and the Emperor, Paul forces the Emperor's daughter, Princess Irulan, to marry him. While Herbert does depict Chani as a little upset about this, she's ultimately told to suck it up because she's the one Paul loves. Villeneuve changes this. He shows Chani storming out of the room and into the desert, leaving behind Paul entirely. It's shown rather explicitly that he has turned away from his

true love. While Paul says that he'll love her "...as long as I breathe..." it's very clear that Chani doesn't believe that, and Paul's actions do not reflect love towards Chani.

In depicting their crumbling love, Chani is defined not through extension of Paul, but through her own actions. She is skeptical of him being the messiah, and more importantly, she does not love the power-hungry person he has become. Villeneuve's choice to depict Chani and Paul's fracturing love not only exhibits Chani's autonomy in this narrative but helps map out Paul's decline.

Villeneuve's depiction of Chani matters, not only does it add another layer to the *Dune* story, but it also takes what would have been a weak character and depicts her as the truly tough woman that she is. In doing this, Villeneuve helps to carve out more space for women in Sci-Fi, and literally rewrites the male-centric narrative from the 1960s. Ultimately, changing Chani's character not only makes her a more dynamic character, but also a more dynamic narrative overall.

## **Revision Letter**

The first thing I changed with this revision is that I added more quotes from the film as per your suggestion. I added two more quotes from Chani to highlight how her character denied the prophecy throughout the film. Then, I changed the title of the article to something slightly punchier and more direct about feminism. I've always struggled with titles, and I didn't want to do anything too crazy, so I kept it pretty to the point. Additionally, I added another paragraph break and tried to cut out sentences where I was repetitive. I really liked my first submission of this, so maybe this wasn't the best piece to revise.

I think that with every writing class I take my writing gets better. I really appreciated being able to get feedback from my peers and being able to read my peers' work. Something I can work on is a better understanding of AP style guidelines. While I do understand basic grammar, I haven't made too much of an effort to get a better understanding of grammar, which is another thing I can improve upon. I've written creative nonfiction before, but I've never written from a journalistic lens before, so this class has been very eye-opening to a completely new style of writing.