

“We do not eat,” he said.

“No,” I said. “You must!”

“No,” he laughed. “It is not necessary.”

In the light, it was clear that he was running very ragged. He looked very depleted, in comparison to earlier, so much that I could hardly believe it was the same man. I tried to get him to come back with me to eat some of the food in my suitcase, but he only laughed. His hands sat at his side like a praying mantis, though he turned them over as he talked.

The next morning I woke up and the man with the pith helmet and the boy were gone. I got right out of bed and went outside, where it was overcast, and some of the men were loitering about, pondering their flutes. I walked from hovel to hovel, seeing only empty holes. I went further up the pit and eventually discovered a young guy in his twenties who was wearing the pith helmet.

I asked him, “Where is the old man?” I pointed to his hat.

He looked all around and then at me again. He was smiling.

I said, “The old man.” I pointed at his hat again. “That’s the old man’s hat.”

The guy said, “Dune,” and smiled.

I felt a bit perturbed that he couldn’t see that I was a little impatient, but I stopped myself and tried to settle down. Clearly this guy couldn’t understand me.

I whistled a series. “1. 2. 3.”

He said, “Dune.”