



PREVIEW

# Dune + pre-recorded Q&A with Denis Villeneuve

Set thousands of years in the future, *Dune* tells the story of Paul Atreides, a young man propelled by fate into an intergalactic power struggle. The son of beloved, embattled ruler Duke Leto and powerful warrior priestess Lady Jessica, Paul will be given the ultimate test: to conquer his fear when fate – and powerful unseen forces – pull him inexorably to the sands of the remote planet Arrakis.

Arrakis – home to an indigenous human civilization called the Fremen and known to these natives as Dune – has been fiercely contested for generations. Humanity fights for control of the Spice, a rare, highly valued, mind-expanding natural resource upon which space travel, knowledge, commerce and human existence all rely. But those seeking to harvest the Spice must survive the planet's inhospitable heat, hurricane-strength sandstorms, and monolithic sandworms that are justly feared with the kind of reverence usually reserved for gods.

Imagined for the big screen by Academy Award-nominated filmmaker Denis Villeneuve, *Dune* is based on Frank Herbert's 1965 novel – considered one of the most influential books of the 20th century and credited with inspiring many of the greatest films of all time.

'I discovered the book in my teenage years and I remember being totally fascinated by its poetry, by what it was saying about nature – the true main character of *Dune*,' Villeneuve relates. 'At the time, I was studying science, I thought I could become either a filmmaker or a biologist, so the way Frank Herbert approached ecology in the book for me was so fresh, so rich, so poetic, so powerful. His view of nature was absolutely mesmerising – all those beautiful ecosystems he created. His exploration of the impact and chaos caused by colonialism was a portrait of the 20th century that is still relevant today. And through all of this was a young man struggling with his identity, trying to find his way in the world, as I was doing myself. The way Paul discovers his identity through another culture was, for me, amazing.'

Villeneuve's big screen adaptation fully immerses the audience in this profoundly moving story of Paul's coming of age set against family rivalries, tribal clashes, social oppression and ecological disaster on the unforgiving, austere planet, creating a fantastical cinematic experience that is both epic and intimate.

Producers Mary Parent and Cale Boyter had been working to secure the rights to the novel for some time – finally finding success after arriving at Legendary themselves – when Parent came across an interview Villeneuve had given. She recalls, 'As I was reading, about the third paragraph down, Denis said that his dream was to make *Dune*. I thought, "Are you kidding me? This is fantastic!" That had never happened to me before, reading that the director you would dream of for your project wants to do it.'

Parent reached out immediately and the two met. 'It was just an incredible connection, right out of the gate,' she says. 'His vision was so clear, so

incredible. It's a challenging book so, at least from my perspective, there were only a few filmmakers that could tackle it, and Denis was at the top of that list. That was the easiest, fastest meeting I've ever had with a filmmaker!'

To capture the wealth of hidden mysteries within the story and the dichotomous vulnerabilities and strengths of Herbert's characters that make them so relatable within a tale of such grand scale would be a major undertaking. Therefore, when it came to structuring the screenplay, everyone agreed that to do the book justice would require more than one film. 'The story is massive,' Boyter says, 'so, the first thing that we thought about doing was dividing up the book. It made it a lot easier for us to figure out how to conform it into a screenplay format.'

Together, the filmmakers decided that there was one prevailing theme that would serve as the driving force behind the film. Boyter relates, 'The book transcended science fiction. There is a father-son story here that came alive for all of us, and we wanted to put a lot of focus on the emotional underpinnings of the Atreides family, to see the story from each of the family members' perspectives as they face their destiny, both emotionally and politically.'

Herbert himself had travelled the world and was a student of history who drew heavily from what was happening all around him. A master of complex storytelling for the screen, Villeneuve approached *Dune* in much the same way; his goal was to take audiences to places they've never been, just as the novel did for him as a young reader.

Acclaimed screenwriters Jon Spaihts and Eric Roth, as well as Villeneuve, tackled the daunting adaptation. Spaihts offers, 'This was a chance of a lifetime for me. I first read *Dune* at probably 12 or 13, and at that age I was struck by it almost like scripture; it felt like one of the most profound things that I had read and became one of my annual reads, like *The Lord of the Rings* and a couple other pivotal pieces of fiction. I came to know it shockingly well, and a striking experience for me, working on the screenplay, was that all I really needed to do was start a scene and my brain would just lay out the dialogue. I knew exactly where it went line by line.'

'I was a fan,' Roth states. 'It was one of those books I knew particularly well as a teenager. I thought the world-building was pretty incredible, and also the glossary – the language – that came from Herbert's imagination. And a major element for me was the societal aspect and his view of environmental change. It has all the ingredients that come together to create a wonderful alchemy of storytelling: what happens to planet Arrakis, the father-son and mother-son storylines, the fact that women are very powerful... It seems modern and all of a sudden very pressing, and he wrote it in the 60s.'

When it came to casting the many roles, Villeneuve and the producers assembled an astonishing list of actors to fill the coveted roles, including Timothée Chalamet as our hero, Paul Atreides, alongside Rebecca Ferguson, Oscar Isaac, Josh Brolin, Zendaya, Jason Momoa, Javier Bardem and many more.

Once the filmmakers had a blueprint that fully captured the breadth and depth of the story, it was up to Villeneuve and his creative team to determine how to accomplish the feat of putting it all on film. Producer Joe Caracciolo Jr. was impressed by the approach, observing, 'This film has warfare, intrigue, oppression and manipulation on a mass scale, power struggles and the boundless possibilities of human potential. And yes, massive sandworms.'

Still, Denis made it clear right away that he didn’t want to rely heavily on visual effects, except where he absolutely needed to. We have them, but his approach was to get as much in camera as possible, with real light, real reflections and shadows, and real interaction with the Earth and the sand and the dust.’

That meant shooting on location in Hungary, Jordan, Abu Dhabi and Norway, where Villeneuve and his team of artisans, including director of photography Greig Fraser and production designer Patrice Vermette created their very own remote planets. Costume designers Jacqueline West and Robert Morgan designed the look for each character the director had envisioned each time he read the book. Paul Lambert and Gerd Nefzer and their teams handled the visual and special effects, respectively, Tom Struthers saw to the action-packed script’s many stunts, and editor Joe Walker cut the film. Even composer Hans Zimmer, himself a longtime, equally passionate fan of *Dune*, would go back in the deep desert to immerse himself and dream about the score.

‘To me, *Dune* is a psychological thriller, an adventure, a war movie, a coming-of-age movie. It’s even a love story,’ remarks Villeneuve, who at last is able to fulfil his lifelong dream of bringing the landmark work with its complex mythology to life. ‘There’s a reason the book stayed on my shelf, beside my bed, all those years.’

Production notes

DUNE

Director: Denis Villeneuve  
a Legendary Pictures production  
Presented by: Warner Bros., Legendary Pictures  
Executive Producers: Tanya Lapointe, Joshua Grode, Herbert W. Gains, Jon Spaihts, Thomas Tull, Brian Herbert, Byron Merritt, Kim Herbert  
Producers: Mary Parent, Denis Villeneuve, Cale Boyter, Joe Caracciolo Jr  
Screenplay: Jon Spaihts, Denis Villeneuve, Eric Roth  
Based on the novel by: Frank Herbert  
Director of Photography: Greig Fraser  
Visual Effects Supervisor: Paul Lambert  
Special Effects Supervisor: Gerd Nefzer  
Editor: Joe Walker  
Production Designer: Patrice Vermette  
Costume Designers: Jacqueline West, Robert Morgan  
Make-up and Hair Department Head: Donald Mowat  
Music: Hans Zimmer  
Supervising Sound Editors: Mark Mangini, Theo Green  
Re-recording Mixers: Doug Hemphill, Ron Bartlett  
Stunt Co-ordinator: Tom Struthers

Cast

Timothée Chalamet (*Paul Atreides*)  
Rebecca Ferguson (*Lady Jessica*)  
Oscar Isaac (*Duke Leto Atreides*)  
Josh Brolin (*Gurney Halleck*)  
Stellan Skarsgård (*Baron Vladimir Harkonnen*)  
Dave Bautista (*Beast Rabban Harkonnen*)  
Stephen McKinley Henderson (*Thufir Hawat*)  
Zendaya (*Chani*)  
Chang Chen (*Dr Wellington Yueh*)  
David Dastmalchian (*Piter de Vries*)  
Sharon Duncan-Brewster (*Dr Liet Kynes*)  
Charlotte Rampling (*Reverend Mother Mohiam*)  
Jason Momoa (*Duncan Idaho*)  
Javier Bardem (*Stilgar*)

USA 2021  
155 mins

Courtesy of Warner Bros.

BFI SOUTHBANK

Welcome to the home of great film and TV, with three cinemas and a studio, a world-class library, regular exhibitions and a pioneering Mediatheque with 1000s of free titles for you to explore. Browse special-edition merchandise in the BFI Shop.

We’re also pleased to offer you a unique new space, the BFI Riverfront – with unrivalled riverside views of Waterloo Bridge and beyond, a delicious seasonal menu, plus a stylish balcony bar for cocktails or special events. Come and enjoy a pre-cinema dinner or a drink on the balcony as the sun goes down.

BECOME A BFI MEMBER

Enjoy a great package of film benefits including priority booking at BFI Southbank and BFI Festivals. Join today at [bfi.org.uk/join](https://bfi.org.uk/join)

BFI PLAYER

We are always open online on BFI Player where you can watch the best new, cult & classic cinema on demand. Showcasing hand-picked landmark British and independent titles, films are available to watch in three distinct ways: Subscription, Rentals & Free to view.

See something different today on [player.bfi.org.uk](https://player.bfi.org.uk)

Join the **BFI mailing list** for regular programme updates. Not yet registered? Create a new account at [www.bfi.org.uk/signup](https://www.bfi.org.uk/signup)