

A woman with light-colored eyes is shown in profile, looking out at a vast, blue planet from space. The planet's surface is covered in swirling patterns, possibly clouds or water. In the distance, a small, dark probe or satellite is visible against the planet's surface. The overall scene is set against the blackness of space.

Dune: A Tale Born from Sisterhood

by **Jessica Freeman**

In the vast, sandy expanse of Frank Herbert's Dune universe, a new chapter unfolds. HBO's "Dune: Prophecy" takes viewers on a journey 10,000 years before the birth of Paul Atreides, delving into the origins of the enigmatic Bene Gesserit sisterhood. This prequel series, premiering on November 17, 2024, promises to be a riveting exploration of power, politics, and prescience in the aftermath of humanity's war against thinking machine.

"As the sisters pursue their goals, viewers are left to question whether the ends truly justify the means."

The Dawn of a New Era

"Dune: Prophecy" opens in a universe still reeling from the Butlerian Jihad, a crusade against artificial intelligence that reshaped human civilization. The series follows two Harkonnen sisters, Valya and Tula, as they navigate the treacherous waters of a nascent galactic empire and lay the foundations for what will become the most influential organization in the known universe.

Emily Watson, who portrays the older Valya Harkonnen, describes her character as "a visionary caught between duty and ambition." She adds, "Valya sees the potential for humanity's evolution, but the path to that future is fraught with danger and difficult choices."

The show's creators have taken great care to weave this new story seamlessly into the existing Dune lore.

While the Bene Gesserit are a well-established presence in Herbert's original novels, their origins have remained shrouded in mystery. "Dune: Prophecy" aims to lift that veil, offering fans a glimpse into the sisterhood's formative years.

A Tapestry of Intrigue

At its core, "Dune: Prophecy" is a story of political maneuvering and spiritual awakening. The fledgling Sisterhood, not yet known as the Bene Gesserit, must navigate the complex power dynamics of an empire in its infancy. The show explores themes of genetic manipulation, prescience, and the long-term planning that will become hallmarks of the Bene Gesserit order.

Olivia Williams, who plays Tula

Harkonnen, emphasizes the show's exploration of power dynamics. "It's fascinating to see how these women, who come from a disgraced house, manage to position themselves at the center of galactic politics," she notes. "The seeds of the Bene Gesserit's influence are planted in every decision they make."

The series doesn't shy away from the moral ambiguity that characterizes much of Herbert's work. As the sisters pursue their goals, viewers are left to question whether the ends truly justify the means. This nuanced approach to ethics and power adds depth to the narrative, elevating it beyond simple space opera.

Cinematic Scope on the Small Screen

One of the most striking aspects of "Dune: Prophecy" is its visual grandeur. The show's production design brings to life a universe that feels both alien and familiar, with sweeping vistas and intricate interiors that rival those seen in Denis Villeneuve's recent film adaptations.

Mark Strong, who portrays Emperor Javico Corrin, praises the show's attention to detail. "The sets are incredible," he says. "You step onto them, and you're immediately transported to another world. It makes our job as actors so much easier when the environment feels this real."



Photograph by Courtesy of HBO

Looking Ahead

As "Dune: Prophecy" unfolds its first season, it sets the stage for potentially years of storytelling. The show's creators have hinted at plans that could see the series explore multiple time periods in the millennia leading up to the events of the original Dune novel. With its high production values, strong performances, and deep engagement with the themes of Herbert's work, "Dune: Prophecy" stands as a worthy expansion of the Dune universe. It offers both longtime fans and newcomers a chance to explore the rich history of this beloved sci-fi world, promising intrigue, spectacle, and thought-provoking drama in equal measure. As the spice must flow, so too must the story of Dune continue to evolve and expand. With "Dune: Prophecy," HBO has tapped into a rich vein of narrative potential that should keep viewers enthralled for seasons to come.

The series also boasts impressive special effects, particularly in its depiction of the Sisterhood's emerging powers. The "Voice," a form of vocal control that becomes a signature Bene Gesserit ability, is rendered with subtle yet effective visual and audio cues that heighten the sense of otherworldly influence.

A New Perspective on a Familiar Universe

While "Dune: Prophecy" is set millennia before the events of the original novels, it offers plenty of connections for longtime fans. Familiar names like Atrides and Harkonnen appear, though in very different contexts than we're used to seeing them. The show also delves into the aftermath of the Butlerian Jihad, providing

context for the technophobia that permeates Herbert's future universe.

Jessica Barden, who plays the younger Valya, speaks to the challenge of portraying characters in this transitional period. "We're showing these houses and organizations in their infancy," she explains. "It's exciting to play a character who's shaping what will

become such an important part of the Dune mythology."

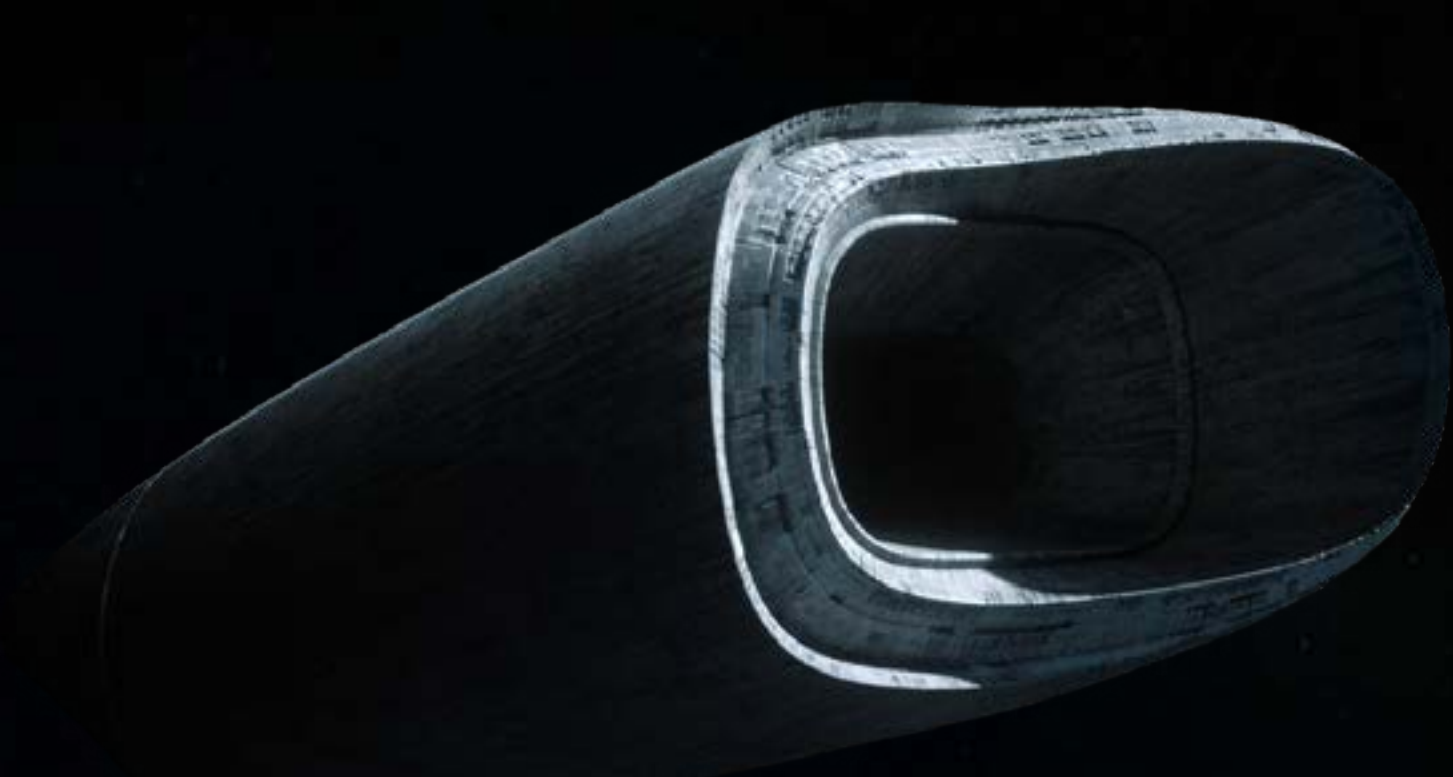
The series also explores the early days of space travel without the aid of computers, offering a fresh take on the concept of Navigators and the importance of the spice melange. These elements serve to enrich the overall Dune mythos while telling a compelling story in their own right.



Photograph by Courtesy of HBO

Photograph by Atila Szvatsky/HBO





Photograph by Courtesy of HBO

Where “Dune: Prophecy” Fits in the Dune Universe

“Dune: Prophecy” takes place approximately 20,266 years before the original “Dune” novel



WHO'S in WHO "dune: PROPHECY"

Photographs by Attila Szvacssek/HBO

Emily Watson as Valya Harkonnen (older):



The visionary leader who shapes the future of the Sisterhood

Olivia Williams as Tula Harkonnen (older):



Valya's sister and confidante, navigating the political landscape

Jessica Barden as Valya Harkonnen (younger):



The ambitious young acolyte who rises to power

Emma Canning as Tula Harkonnen (younger):



Valya's loyal sister in their formative years

Mark Strong as Emperor Javikko Corrino:



The ruler of the fledgling Imperium

Chris Mason as Atreides Ancestor:



A key player in the imperial court with ties to House Atreides

Balancing Act: Accessibility and Depth

One of the challenges facing “Dune: Prophecy” is striking a balance between satisfying hardcore fans and welcoming newcomers to the franchise. The show manages this delicate act with surprising grace, offering enough exposition to keep new viewers engaged while peppering the narrative with details that will delight Herbert aficionados.

Chris Mason, who plays an Atreides ancestor, notes the show's broad appeal. “You don't need to have read the books or seen the movies to enjoy ‘Prophecy,’” he says.

“But if you have, there are so many little details and references that add an extra layer of enjoyment.”

The series also takes some creative liberties with Herbert's established canon, particularly in its depiction of the early Sisterhood. However, these changes serve to make the story more dynamic for television while remaining true to the spirit of the source material.

A Promising Start

After viewing the first four episodes, it's clear that “Dune: Prophecy” is poised to become a worthy addition to the Dune canon. The show combines political intrigue,

philosophical depth, and sci-fi spectacle in a way that feels both fresh and faithful to Herbert's vision. The performances are uniformly strong, with Watson and Williams particularly standing out as the complex, driven Harkonnen sisters. The supporting cast brings depth to their roles, creating a rich tapestry of characters that populate this version of the Dune universe. While the pacing can be deliberate at times, mirroring the long-term thinking of its protagonists, each episode builds upon the last, creating a sense of mounting tension and scale. By the end of the fourth episode, viewers will likely find themselves fully invested in the machinations of the nascent Sisterhood and eager to see how their plans unfold.



Photograph by Courtesy of HBO