Introduction: Welcome

Forward by Brian Herbert

Little did I know when I was growing up in the household of my father, Frank Herbert, how his writings would so touch the hearts of millions of people. In those days we lived in small houses in working class neighborhoods, and sometimes even in shacks with inadequate heating. He was always writing. He wasn't always selling, but he was always writing. It was a passion for him, even an obsession, and he literally had to do it. Nothing could interfere.

The result is the fantastic, unparalleled Dune universe, so right and complex that it seems impossible for one man to have created it. In fact, he didn't do so alone by any means. While he was the creative genius behind the series and the person with the tremendous energy required to complete it, my mother, Beverly Herbert, acted as his editor, confidante, and advisor on all six books that he wrote. The first novel, Dune, was written while I lived with my parents, and well do I remember Dad reading passages to her aloud and obtaining feedback from her. I listened as he described the youthful Paul Atreides facing the gom jabbar challenge, and I heard my mother's insightful, invaluable suggestions. Even Frank Herbert, with all of his brilliance, could not write in a vacuum. He needed input, especially from her. They were a great writing team. In fact, my mother gave up her own creative writing career early in their marriage in order to work as an advertising writer so that he could write. He had the vision, while she helped to harness and direct his genius, so that it could be understood and enjoyed by others.

Frank Herbert was one of a kind, with a mind that went fifty directions at once, absorbing possibilities, seeing things, predicting large scale world events. He had a unique talent—a way of looking at things—that enabled him to meld history, the present, and the future into a rich tapestry. I've written a comprehensive biography of him—Dreamer of Dune—which describes this remarkable man. Here's the short version: Frank Herbert was every bit as complex and intriguing as the Dune universe he created.

With my co-author, Kevin J. Anderson, I'm writing new Dune stories. This year our novel, Dune: Houses Atreides, will be published, along with our short story, "A Whisper of Caladan Seas." When we create these stories, Kevin and I engage in roleplaying games, because we dip into the dune tool box and use the fascinating elements developed by my father, but in new ways… ways in which our imaginations are linked to the brilliant mind of Frank Herbert. Now you can do that, too, as you play Dune: Chronicles of the Imperium. It's an immensely rewarding experience.

—Brian Herbert, Seattle, Washington, June 29, 1999

to Dune

Welcome to an Imperial fete! If you're reading this introduction, you probably fall into one of two categories—either you're a *Dune* fan who's curious about this whole "roleplaying" thing, or you're a game fan who's been waiting years for a roleplaying game (RPG) set in the *Dune* universe. Either way, the game you now hold in your hands is what you've been looking for. The phoenix has risen from the flames!

If you're a *Dune* fan who's new to roleplaying games, prepare to experience your favorite universe in new and exciting ways. Ever wonder what it would be like to command your own noble family? To lead cohorts of assassins or make computations as a Mentat? Using the guidelines found in this game, you'll be able to experience all these things and more.

If you're a game fan who's been patiently awaiting a *Dune* RPG, we hope this game (and those supplements to follow) answers your previously unheeded prayers. In the pages of this volume, you'll find rules for creating Imperial characters and adventuring in one of the most vivid science fiction universes ever created. As an experienced player, you can probably skip the remainder of this introduction and get right to business. Turn to the *Character Creation* chapter, pick a character archetype and prepare to fold-space. The myriad homeworlds of the *Dune* Imperium are yours to tame and conquer!

What Are Roleplaying Games?

The *Dune: Chronicles of the Imperium Roleplaying Game* plays a little differently than the games you're probably used to. The game includes no board, no playing pieces, no computer or video screen. But the game is as rich and engaging as you care to make it; after all, everything you "see" and experience while playing comes from your own imagination, and the imaginations of your friends. All you need is an open mind, a handful of six-sided dice, and the desire to contribute to an interactive story.

Roleplaying games resemble novels and dramas in many ways. In the *Dune RPG*, each player creates a *character* — an alter ego they play in the game. Characters resemble the main protagonists of a novel or play; they appear in every scene, and their actions and exploits form the basis of the chapter or chronicle. In the *Dune RPG*, your characters become the Paul Atreides, Thufir Hawats and Duncan Idahos of your own adventure stories. Over the course of many stories, you'll come to your know favorite characters as well as you know yourself.

Roleplaying games differ from novels because they are interactive. In a good RPG adventure, the story is not linear. Your characters are not "locked" into a specific plot. Rather, the choices you make help to shape the story and change it. Stories in the *Dune RPG* are organic and interactive; their eventual outcomes depend almost exclusively on the actions of your characters and the decisions you make as a player. A few simple rules help you determine the consequences of your actions; does your slow pellet stunner penetrate your rival's activated body shield? Do you evade the hunter-seeker controlled by the assassin lurking in the wings? Does the Bene Gesserit Sisterhood agree to your request for sanctuary? The answers to these questions, and countless others like them, result from the rules which tell you when to roll dice and how to interpret their results.

If you are using only this volume, most player characters will serve one of the noble families of the Imperium. Future books and supplements will show players how to create all manners of characters, including Smugglers, Truthsayers, Spice Miners, Water Merchants, Imperial Planetologists, Spies and even Sandriders.

Players

Who are the players in the *Dune RPG*? Unless you've decided to take on the role of Narrator, you are! Using the simple guidelines presented in the *Character Creation* chapter, you and your friends can create any household agents you want, from Atreides nobles to Moritani assassins. When you're finished, you'll be ready to embark on your first exciting adventure in the *Dune* universe.

When playing the *Dune RPG*, all of the characters are collectively known as the House Entourage or Entourage for short. In some roleplaying games, it can be difficult to bring characters together at the beginning of a new chronicle or adventure. In the *Dune RPG*, the House

makes this easy. Normally, each character will be a member of a noble House Minor, assigned various roles and duties according to his vocational conditioning. As you and your group become more experienced, House Entourages prosper, bringing power and wealth to their

patron House who aspires to rising among the ranks of the Great Houses of the Landsraad.

This is your chance to explore the wonders of the *Dune* universe on your own, in your own way. Although it can occasionally be fun to re-create favorite chapters or characters from the novels, true entertainment results from creating your own adventures, going beyond what you've read in the series of Dune novels. Think of the *Dune* universe as a grand stage, with you and your friends as the actors. You're playing original characters, having adventures of your own. And you can tell the story you want.

Narrator

So you've assembled an Entourage and you're ready to play your first game of *Dune*. First, you'll need to choose one player to be the Narrator. Think of the Narrator as the author, of the games your group will play. It's his job to describe and pace the action in an chapter, recounting the story to the players as events unfold. In a sense, the Narrator "becomes" the universe, telling the players what their characters see, hear and feel.

It's also the Narrator's job to interpret the rules and use them wisely. Players don't want to spend all night rolling dice or arguing over rules. They want to have fun! Using the rules properly is a balancing act; while the game hinges on adventure and storytelling, interpreting the rules too loosely can lead to abuse. You need to

retain some structure in order to maintain drama. Games where the characters are invincible lack any sort of tension or danger.

Finally, it's the Narrator's job to create engaging stories and adventures, and to "play" the roles of any supporting cast characters with whom the players interact. While challenging at times, it can be a lot of fun to play a roguish swordmaster one minute and an Imperial Suk doctor the next. So practice those knaveries and rehearse your philosophies; you've got some dramatic acting ahead of you!

In many ways, the Narrator has the most demanding job in the game. He needs to be able to wear several hats at once, and keep each element of an chapter—story, supporting cast, rules, descriptions—in constant motion. It's a big job, but once you get the hang of it, it can also be the most rewarding role in the game. We give Narrators plenty of advice in Chapters 6, 7 and 8 in addition to a sample setting, cast and adventure in Chapter's 9and 10. So there's nothing to worry about. In no time at all you'll be narrating your own tales as if you were an Imperial historian.

The Rules

There are no winners or losers in a roleplaying game. Although the *Dune RPG* may be unusual compared to the games you're used to (like chess or backgammon, for example), it does have something in common with these decidedly more traditional past-times: it has rules that govern what you can and cannot do. But unlike traditional games that are often shaped entirely by their rules, the *Dune RPG* is shaped by the stories players tell. The rules exist to enhance a chapter or chronicle and allow it to flow more smoothly. And hopefully, rules will prevent any misunderstandings that might crop up among players during the game.

The *Dune RPG* uses the Icon System, a basic rules system that attempts to explain and account for the random occurrences your characters will face during the course of a narrative. The Icon System was designed to be simple, elegant and easy-to-use. It was also designed to be open-ended and flexible; we know players enjoy tailoring systems to their own tastes and the tastes of their group, and the *Dune RPG* encourages such customization.

The guidelines presented here are yours to use or modify as you see fit. If you don't like something, change it. If you think we forgot something, make it up. This is your game now and the story, never the rules, should always remain your primary focus.

How to Use this Game

This game is divided into three distinct sections—*Imperium Familia*, *Dune Oracle* and *Imperial Archives*. Players should familiarize themselves with the chapters found in the "Imperium Familia" section of the game. These chapters show you how to create and play characters; they also describe Imperial civilization and introduce the rules of the game. While you don't need to familiarize yourself with all of the material in the "Dune Oracle" and "Imperial Archives" sections of the game, you may find some of these chapters highly informative, especially if you're new to the *Dune* milieu. Feel free to read it at your leisure, but be warned that "Chapter 10" contains a sample adventure your narrator may want to lead you through. Reading this chapter before you play will spoil the surprises and much of the fun you'll experience if you skip this chapter for the time being.

Narrators need to become familiar with all three sections of the game. The chapters found in the "Dune Oracle" section are of particular interest to the Narrator, since these deal with the intricacies of telling good *Dune RPG* stories. The "Dune Oracle" section contains information about creating and narrating *Dune* chapters and chronicles, Entourage interactions and House evolution. In short, the heart of any good *Dune* story probably originates in one of the "Dune Oracle" chapters.

If the chapters presented by the "Dune Oracle" give you the pages for your own Dune chronicles, the "Imperial Archives" provide the narrative details that give it life. Chapters in the "Imperial Archives" detail many of the wonders and anomalies found throughout the *Dune* universe, from the formal dueling rituals of Kanly to the marvels of fold-space navigation. If you need new homeworlds or exotic poisons for your existing game, be sure to review the "Imperial Homeworlds" and "Technology of the Imperium" chapters. Legendary peoples reside in their own chapter, as do space travel and religious customs.

Tools of the Trade

In addition to pencil and paper, you'll need some six-sided dice to play the *Dune Roleplaying Game*. You can find dice in any good book or hobby store, or you can simply steal a few from a couple of those dusty old board games lost in the back of your closet. But make sure that one die is a different color or size than the others, that's an important aspect of the dice rolling system.

It's a Vast Imperium...

If you like what you see in this game, guess what? There's plenty more on the way! Although this volume contains everything you need to play and enjoy the *Dune RPG* for years to come, Last Unicorn also produces many other *Dune RPG* products. These include adventures, sourcebooks, miniatures and boxed supplements. While none of these products are required to play the game, each of them is designed to expand and enhance your *Dune* gaming experience. Look for them at a book, game or comic store near you.

The Icon Link

The graphic you see floating behind this text is Last Unicorn Games' proprietary Icon Link. Keyed to particular topics, the icon means you can find bonus material at the Last Unicorn Games website (www.lastunicorngames.com). The Icon Link and related material has been instituted as an added value for our readers. Examples of additional source materials might include supplemental archetypes, expanded histories, sidebar commentaries, further examples, untested materials or experimental rules variants. See you on the web!

GLOSSARY

The following game terms appear throughout the *Dune RPG*. Each of the terms is described more completely in the appropriate section of the game; they are collected here for ease of reference.

Advantage: Trait benefits; conferring advantages that a character possesses. Examples include having a Ally in a Great House, possessing Machine Logic, or having Imperial Conditioning. Advantages cost a number of Development Points equal to their value; for example, a +2 Advantage costs 2 Development Points.

Allegiance: an oath of fealty sworn to a House Minor or Great House by a subject or vassal; Allegiance imparts familiarity with household customs and protocol.

Allegiance Template: A character creation tool representing the character's fealty to their patron House, such as Atreides or Harkonnen. Each Template includes the basic attributes and other abilities common to an average member of the household.

Attribute: A character's innate capabilities, such as his agility or intelligence. There are five attributes: Physique, Coordination, Intellect, Charisma and Prescience. attributes range in value from 1 to 5 (and, rarely, reach level 6 through special advantages).

Attribute Test: A Test (*q.v.*) made using only an attribute (no skill is involved).

Combined Test: A Test made by several characters working together. The best Test Result acts as a base, and each additional successful result adds +1 to it; failures may subtract from the total or delay completion of the task.

Conditioning Overlay: A character creation tool representing the character's vocational Conditioning and house profession, such as Noble, Mentat or Swordmaster. Each Overlay includes the basic Skills and other abilities needed to perform the profession.

d6: A six-sided die. Six-sided dice are used to make all Tests in the *Dune RPG*.

Development Points: Points characters use to buy attributes, edges and advantageous Traits. Characters receive a certain number of Development Points at each stage of their Background History, and receive additional Development points for selecting disadvantageous Traits.

Difficulty: How easy or hard it is to accomplish a task. Each task is given a Difficulty (or Difficulty Number) indicating how hard it is æ the higher the number, the harder the task. Difficulty Numbers are organized into *categories* (from lowest to highest, Routine [3-5], Moderate [6-8], Challenging [9-11], Difficult [12-14], and Nearly Impossible [15+]). When trying to accomplish a task, a character rolls a Test (*q.v.*); if his Test Result equals or exceeds the Difficulty, he succeeds.

Disadvantage: Trait limitations: hindrances or other problems which afflict a character. Examples include having a Sworn Enemy, being Physically Impaired (for example, blind) or hiding one's emotions.

Drama Die: When a player rolls a Test, one of the dice he rolls is a different color or size. This die is called the Drama Die. If the Drama Die rolls a 6, it indicates a great degree of success; if it rolls a 1, it may indicate a great failure.

Dramatic Failure: A failed Test measuring six or more below the Difficulty Number (for example, a Test Result of 5 when the Difficulty is 12). This indicates a grievous failure which may have terrible consequences for the character.

Dramatic Success: A successful Test measuring six or more above the Difficulty Number (for example, a Test Result of 12 when the Difficulty is 5). This indicates an amazing success that may have especially beneficial results for the character.

Edge: Aspects of attributes representing a character's particular level of talent (or lack of talent) with some functions of an attribute. For example, the edges associated with Intellect are *Perception* and *Logic*. Edges range in value from +2 to -2, and act as modifiers to related Tests.

Extended Test: A Test that requires an extensive amount of time, or which is broken up into segments so that the Narrator can gauge the character's progress by requiring multiple Skill Tests.

House Minor: A lesser House or subfamily of a Great House, governing planetary subfiefs and holding titles of minor nobility.

Great House: One of the ruling clans of the Imperium distinguished by their governance of an entire planetary fief (siridar fief) and membership in the Federated Houses of the Landsraad.

Household: any noble family

Initiative: Determines who goes first in combat or similar situations. Characters must make Initiative Tests based on the Skill they are about to use, modified by their *Reaction* edge.

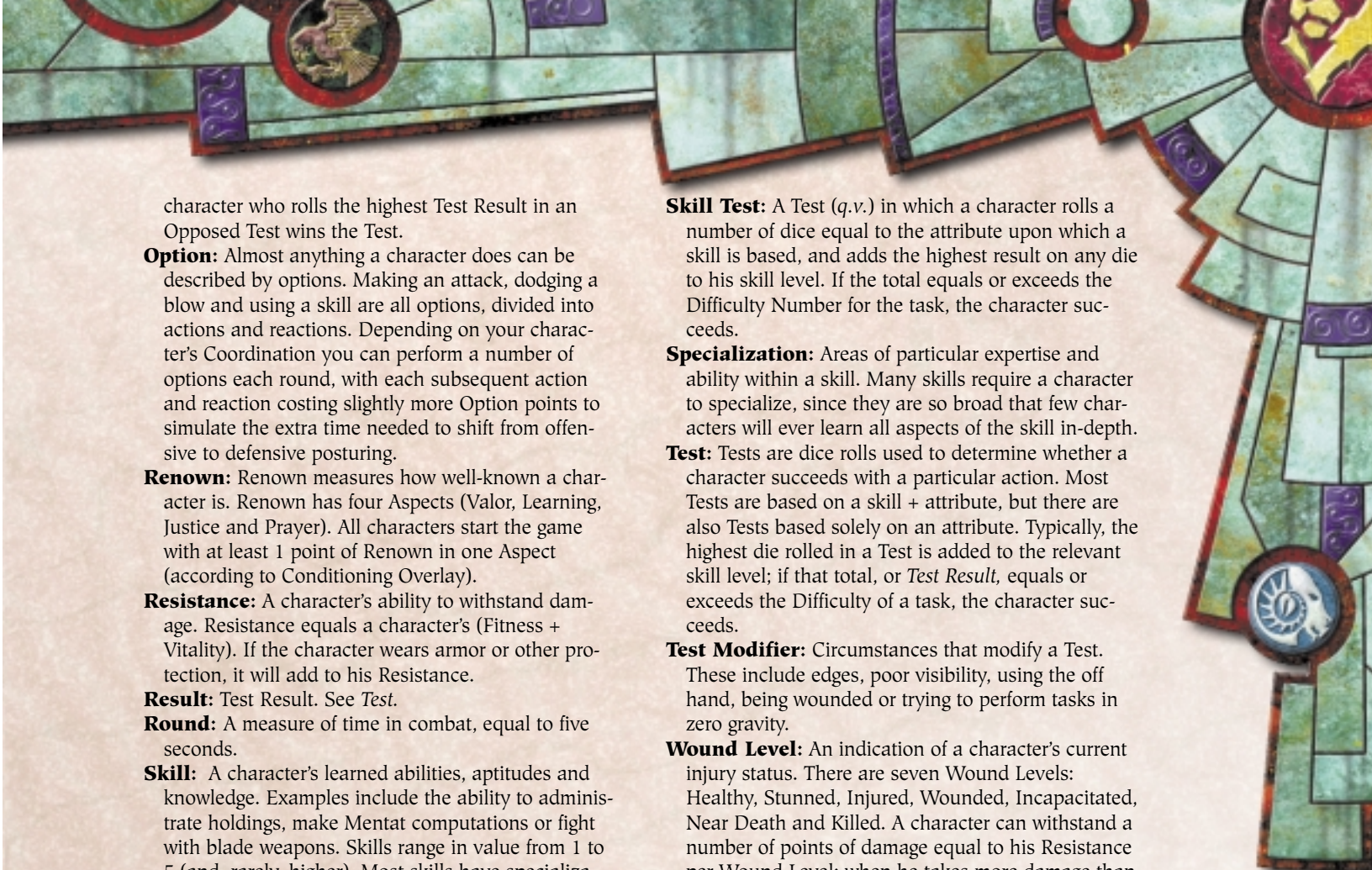**Karama Points:** Karama represents a character's divine luck and cosmic destiny, resulting from miraculous intervention of the spirit world. Characters use Karama points to improve rolls and increase Test Results. A character's overall Karama point total is sometimes referred to as his Karma Pool.

Level: A character's level of ability in a skill or attribute. For example, a character who buys a skill has a level of 1 in that skill; as his ability improves, the level increases to 2, 3, 4 and so on.

Narrative: A segment or body of a story, ranging from individual scenes to episodic chronicles.

Opposed Test: A Test (*q.v.*) which is opposed or resisted by another character; for example, a character who uses his Stealth skill to sneak past a guard will engage in an Opposed Test with the guard, who uses his Search skill in an attempt to locate the character. The

character who rolls the highest Test Result in an Opposed Test wins the Test.

Option: Almost anything a character does can be described by options. Making an attack, dodging a blow and using a skill are all options, divided into actions and reactions. Depending on your character's Coordination you can perform a number of options each round, with each subsequent action and reaction costing slightly more Option points to simulate the extra time needed to shift from offensive to defensive posturing.

Renown: Renown measures how well-known a character is. Renown has four Aspects (Valor, Learning, Justice and Prayer). All characters start the game with at least 1 point of Renown in one Aspect (according to Conditioning Overlay).

Resistance: A character's ability to withstand damage. Resistance equals a character's (Fitness + Vitality). If the character wears armor or other protection, it will add to his Resistance.

Result: Test Result. See *Test*.

Round: A measure of time in combat, equal to five seconds.

Skill: A character's learned abilities, aptitudes and knowledge. Examples include the ability to administrate holdings, make Mentat computations or fight with blade weapons. Skills range in value from 1 to 5 (and, rarely, higher). Most skills have specializations (*q.v.*).

Skill Test: A Test (*q.v.*) in which a character rolls a number of dice equal to the attribute upon which a skill is based, and adds the highest result on any die to his skill level. If the total equals or exceeds the Difficulty Number for the task, the character succeeds.

Specialization: Areas of particular expertise and ability within a skill. Many skills require a character to specialize, since they are so broad that few characters will ever learn all aspects of the skill in-depth.

Test: Tests are dice rolls used to determine whether a character succeeds with a particular action. Most Tests are based on a skill + attribute, but there are also Tests based solely on an attribute. Typically, the highest die rolled in a Test is added to the relevant skill level; if that total, or *Test Result,* equals or exceeds the Difficulty of a task, the character succeeds.

Test Modifier: Circumstances that modify a Test. These include edges, poor visibility, using the off hand, being wounded or trying to perform tasks in zero gravity.

Wound Level: An indication of a character's current injury status. There are seven Wound Levels: Healthy, Stunned, Injured, Wounded, Incapacitated, Near Death and Killed. A character can withstand a number of points of damage equal to his Resistance per Wound Level; when he takes more damage than that, he drops to the next level.