

14:03 Concerning Desert Studies, Cyberwar, and the Desert Power

by Naib Manul Laphroaig⁷

Gather round, neighbors, as we close the moisture seals and relax the water discipline. Take off your face masks and breathe the sietch air freely. It is time for a story of the things that were and the things that will come.

Knowledge and water. These are the things that rule the universe. They are alike—and one truly needs to lack them to appreciate their worth. Those who have them in abundance proclaim their value—and waste them thoughtlessly, without a care. They make sure their wealth and their education degrees are on display for the world, and ever so hard to miss; they waste both time and water to put us in our place. Yet were they to see just one of our hidden caches, they would realize how silly their displays are in comparison.

For while they pour out the water and the time of their lives, and treat us as savages and dismiss us, we are working to change the face of the world.



Their scientists have imperial ranks, and their city schools teach—before and above any useful subject—respect for these ranks and for those who pose as “scientists” on the imperial TV. And yet, guess who knows more physics, biology, and planetary ecology that matters. Guess who knows how their systems actually work, from the smallest water valve in a stillsuit to the ecosystems of an entire planet. They mock Shai-hulud and dismiss us Freemen as the unwashed rabble tinkering to survive in the desert—yet their degrees don’t impress the sand.

The works of the ignorant are like sand. When yet sparse, they merely vex and irritate like loose grains; when abundant, they become like dunes that overwhelm all water, life, and knowledge. Verily, these are the dunes where knowledge goes to die. As the ignorant labor, sand multiplies, until it covers the face of the world and pervades every breath of the wind.

And then there was a Dr. Kynes. To imperial paymasters, he was just another official on the long roll getting ever longer. To the people of the city he was just another bureaucrat to avoid if they could, or to bribe if they couldn’t. To his fellow civil servants—who considered themselves scholars, yet spent more time over paperwork than most clerks—he was an odd case carrying on about things that mattered nothing to one’s career, as absolutely everybody knew; in short, they only listened to him if they felt charitable at the moment.

For all these alleged experts, the order of life was already scientifically organized about the best it could be. One would succeed by improving the standard model of a stillsuit, or just as well by selling a lot of crappy ones.

One did not succeed by talking about changing a planet. Planets were already as organized as they could be. A paper could be written, of course, but, to be published, the paper had to have both neatly tabulated results and a summary of prior work. There was no prior published work on changing planets, no journals devoted to it, and no outstanding funding solicitations. One would not even get invited to lecture about it. It was a waste of

⁷Naib Laphroaig, an early follower of Muad’dib, is sometimes incorrectly said to have composed the Litany against Cyber (“I shall not cyber. Cyber is the mind-killer that brings bullshit. I will face cyber and let it pass over me. When the bullshit has gone, only PoC of how nifty things really work will remain.”) It had, in fact, originated with early Butlerians, but the Naib carried it to neighbors far and wide over the sand wherever it needed to be heard.

time, useless for advancement in rank.

Besides, highly ranked minds must have already thought about it, and did not take it up; clearly, the problem was intractable. Indeed, weren't there already dissertations on the hundred different aspects of sand, and of desert plants, and of the native animals and birds? There were even some on the silly native myths. Getting on the bad side of the water-sellers, considering how much they were donating to the cause of higher learning, was also not a wise move.

But Kynes knew a secret: knowledge was water, and water was knowledge. The point of knowledge was to provide what was needed the most, not ranks or lectures. And he knew another secret: one *could*, in fact, figure out a thing that many superior minds hadn't bothered with, be it even the size of the planet. And he may have guessed a third secret: if someone didn't value water as life, there was no point of talking to them about water, or about knowledge. They would, at best, nod, and then go about their business. It is like spilling water on the sand.

That did not leave Kynes with a lot of options. In fact, it left him with none at all. And so he did a thing that no one else had done before: he left the city and walked out onto the sand. He went to find us, and he became Liet.

For those who live on the sand and are surrounded by it understand the true value of water, and of figuring things out, be they small or large. This Kynes sought, and this he found—with us, the Fremmen.

His manner was odd to us, but he knew things of the sand that no city folk cared to know; he spoke of water in the sand as we heard none speak before.

He must have figured it out—and there were just enough of us who knew that figuring things out was water and life. And so he became Liet.

His knowledge, rejected by bureaucrats, already turned into a water wealth no bureaucrat can yet conceive of. His peers wrote hundreds of thousands of papers since he left, and went on to higher ranks—and all of these will be blown away by the desert winds. A lot of useless technology will be sold and ground into dust on the sand—while Liet's words are changing the desert slowly but surely.

Something strange has been going of late in their sheltered cities. There is talk of a "sand-war," and of "sand warriors," and of "sand power." They are giving sand new names, and new certifications of "desert moisture security professionals" to their city plumbers. Their schools are now supposed to teach something they called SANDS, "Science, Agronomy, Nomenclature,⁸ Desert Studies," to deliver a "sand superiority." Their imperial news spread rumors of "anonymous senior imperial officials" unleashing "sand operations," the houses major building up their "sand forces" and the houses minor demanding an investigation in the Landsraat.

Little do they know where the true sand power lies, and where the actual water and knowledge are being accumulated to transform the desert.

The sand will laugh at them—and one day the one who understands the true source of power will come after Liet, the stored water will come forth, the ecology will change—and a rain will fall.

Until then, we will keep the water and the knowledge. Until then, we, the Fremmen, will train the new generations of those who know and those who figure things out!

⁸Truly, they believe that teaching and learning is repetition of words, and that their things break on the sand because they are named wrong. Change the words, and everything will work on the sand! Hear the sandstorm roaring with laughter above the dunes, and the great Shai-hulud writhing with it below!



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