



Mentats of Dune (Schools of Dune series Book 2)

By Brian Herbert, Kevin J. Anderson

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In Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson's *Mentats of Dune*, the thinking machines have been defeated but the struggle for humanity's future continues.

Gilbertus Albans has founded the Mentat School, a place where humans can learn the efficient techniques of thinking machines. But Gilbertus walks an uneasy line between his own convictions and compromises in order to survive the Butlerian fanatics, led by the madman Manford Torondo and his Swordmaster Anari Idaho. Mother Superior Raquella attempts to rebuild her Sisterhood School on Wallach IX, with her most talented and ambitious student, Valya Harkonnen, who also has another goal—to exact revenge on Vorian Atreides, the legendary hero of the Jihad, whom she blames for her family's downfall.

Meanwhile, Josef Venport conducts his own war against the Butlerians. VenHold Spacing Fleet controls nearly all commerce thanks to the superior mutated Navigators that Venport has created, and he places a ruthless embargo on any planet that accepts Manford Torondo's anti-technology pledge, hoping to starve them into submission. But fanatics rarely surrender easily . . .

The Mentats, the Navigators, and the Sisterhood all strive to improve the human race, but each group knows that as Butlerian fanaticism grows stronger, the battle will be to choose the path of humanity's future—whether to embrace civilization, or to plunge into an endless dark age.

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Mentats of Dune (Schools of Dune series Book 2) By Brian Herbert, Kevin J. Anderson Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #53829 in eBooks
- Published on: 2014-03-11
- Released on: 2014-03-11
- Format: Kindle eBook

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Editorial Review

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The collaborative expansion of the Dune universe continues its intelligent exploration of the era of the Butlerian jihad against computers. The focus here is on Gilbertus Albans and his Mentat School, intended to create a group of humans whose minds will function as the equivalent of computers. The Navigators' Guild and the Sisterhood are already working along the same lines and attracting every form of opposition from the Butlerian fanatics, from harassment up to interstellar invasions. Thrown in for good measure is one Valya Harkonnen, who has sworn to bring down Albans and all his works in revenge for the damage he caused to her family. (The Harkonnens don't seem to forgive easily.) The saga continues to embroider the original works with intelligence and imagination and also a stronger role for women, although with each successive volume, it runs into the problem of new readers who don't know the backstory. Good for any collection where the saga has a readership. --Roland Green

About the Author

BRIAN HERBERT, the son of Frank Herbert, is the author of multiple *New York Times* bestsellers. In 2003, he published *Dreamer of Dune*, a moving biography of his father that was nominated for the Hugo Award. His other novels include *Man of Two Worlds* (written with Frank Herbert), *Sudanna Sudanna*, and *The Little Green Book of Chairman Rahma*.

KEVIN J. ANDERSON has written dozens of national bestsellers and has been nominated for the Nebula Award, the Bram Stoker Award, and the SFX Readers' Choice Award. His critically acclaimed original novels include the ambitious space opera series *The Saga of Seven Suns*, including *The Dark Between the Stars*, as well as the Terra Incognita fantasy epic with its two accompanying rock CDs. He also set the Guinness-certified world record for the largest single-author book signing.

SCOTT BRICK first began narrating audiobooks in 2000, and after recording almost 400 titles in five years, *AudioFile* magazine named Brick a Golden Voice and "one of the fastest-rising stars in the audiobook galaxy." He has read a number of titles in Frank Herbert's bestselling *Dune* series, and he won the 2003 Science Fiction Audie Award for *Dune: The Butlerian Jihad*. Brick has narrated for many popular authors, including Michael Pollan, Joseph Finder, Tom Clancy, and Ayn Rand. He has also won over 40 *AudioFile* Earphones Awards and the *AudioFile* award for Best Voice in Mystery and Suspense 2011. In 2007, Brick was named *Publishers Weekly's* Narrator of the Year.

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What do all our accomplishments matter, if they do not last beyond our lifetimes?

—HEADMASTER GILBERTUS ALBANS, Mentat School Archives

The great Mentat School was *his*—from the initial concept seven decades ago, to choosing this location in the remote marshes on Lampadas, to the many graduates he had trained over the years. With quiet efficiency and determination, Gilbertus Albans was changing the course of human civilization. And he would not let Emperor Salvador Corrino or the fanatical antitechnology Butlerians take it away from him.

In the nearly two centuries of his artificially extended life, Gilbertus had learned how to survive. Realizing that controversial and charismatic figures tended not to remain alive for long, he played his public role with great care—remaining quiet and unobtrusive, even consenting to distasteful alliances that, according to his projections, helped the overall goals of his Mentat School.

Mentats: humans with minds so organized they could function as computers in a reactionary society that reviled any hint of thinking machines. Not even his own trainees knew that Gilbertus secretly drew upon the unique background, wisdom, and experiences of his mentor, the notorious robot Erasmus. He feared that even his most supportive students would balk at that. Nevertheless, after years of consistently reliable performance, his Mentat graduates were becoming indispensable to the noble houses of the Imperium. In such dangerous times, though, any question or mere suspicion could bring down the school. He knew what had happened to the Sisterhood on Rossak. If he made the slightest mistake and revealed his true identity ...

Inside his office in the main academy building, he glanced at the chronometer. The Emperor's brother, Roderick Corrino, was due to arrive on a sanctioned military transport, to confirm that their sister was safe in the care of the Mentat School. Some time ago, Gilbertus had promised the Corrinos that his rigorous teaching methods could help the mentally damaged girl to improve, if not thrive. But the human mind was a tricky thing, and the damage done to her brain by the Rossak poison was not quantifiable, nor could the young woman be cured in any obvious way. Gilbertus hoped Roderick Corrino understood that.

Before emerging into the school commons, he donned his distinguished carmine-red Headmaster robe. He had already attended to his makeup for the day—dusting false gray into his hair, roughening his skin—in order to hide his youthful appearance. Now he hurried, knowing that the Imperial military shuttle would arrive on time. He had to make sure Anna was ready to put on a good show for her brother.

Gilbertus left the academy building and shaded his eyes. The bright air was sopping with humidity; each suspended droplet seemed to hang in front of his eyes like a magnifying glass. Wooden walkways connected the school structures that floated on the edge of a murky marsh lake. Originally the school had been anchored farther out in the water, but after problems with aggressive aquatic creatures, the entire complex had been moved to a more protected position on the shore.

Now the school included a mixture of the original structures and new ones that looked more elegant, with domes and elevated observation decks. Bridges at varying levels linked the dormitories, study halls, laboratories, meditation buildings, and libraries. High defensive walls surrounded the entire complex, augmented by a hidden shield grid, sophisticated underwater electronics, and watchtowers.

While portions of Lampadas were bucolic and pleasant, this lake and the bordering swamps were the planet's razor edge, fraught with hazards and predators. As the Headmaster made his way to the observatory, swamp sounds burbled into the air, and a hum of biting flies swirled around him. This was no serene environment where students could develop their mental skills through hours of uninterrupted meditation. Gilbertus had chosen this inhospitable area with a specific purpose in mind. He believed the danger and isolation would help focus the minds of his elite candidates.

Even with the school's defenses against natural hazards, Gilbertus was actually more concerned about what the increasingly unpredictable Butlerians might do. A sophisticated military force could easily destroy the school with an aerial or space bombardment, but the antitechnology fanatics would use no high-tech weaponry; nevertheless, their overwhelming numbers could cause great havoc, as they had already proved with mob uprisings on several worlds in the Imperium. Gilbertus had to walk a fine line.

At face value, the Butlerians applauded the basic underpinnings of Mentat training—that humans could do anything that thinking machines could, and more. Their leader, legless Manford Torondo, often made use of Mentat calculations or strategies to achieve his ends, but he was also suspicious of any open exchange of ideas during lively discussions among the students. In an earlier semester, Gilbertus had exposed the school to great danger when he suggested during a hypothetical intellectual debate that thinking machines might not be as terrible as Butlerian propaganda made them out to be. The school, and Gilbertus himself, had barely survived their backlash. He had learned his lesson. Since then he'd remained quiet and conciliatory to avoid

inflaming anyone again.

As he walked toward the outbuildings, one of the minor administrators transmitted an alert that the Imperial shuttle was on descent. Gilbertus touched his earadio. "Thank you. I will bring Anna Corrino to the landing zone." He hoped she was having one of her lucid days, so she could interact with her brother, rather than remaining lost in a mental maze.

The school's tallest building served as a naked-eye observatory, where Mentat students could study the universe, count the stars at night, and memorize the infinite patterns as a recall exercise. During the day, the high open deck would be empty—except for Anna Corrino, staring at her surroundings.

The young woman was fixated on the local landscape, where a labyrinth of sangrove trees created an impassable barrier to the east, and soupy marshes, quicksand, and tangled stagnant waterways made travel difficult to the south; the large, shallow marsh lake bounded the school to the north and west.

Gilbertus stepped up next to Anna. "Your brother is coming. He will be glad to see you."

She did not acknowledge the Headmaster, but a small twitch in her cheek and a flicker of her eyelids told him she was aware of his presence. She turned to stare at a drained section of swamp that served as a landing field for shuttles and local flyers. Dangerous lake beasts had damaged the previous raft airfield, making it impractical to keep under repair.

His primary aide, Zendur, and a crew of Mentat trainees used blunt-nozzle devices to spray fire streams across the marsh grasses, clearing an area for Roderick Corrino's shuttle. Because vegetation grew so rapidly here, the landing zone had to be groomed for each expected arrival; Gilbertus did not have trainees maintain the site otherwise, since he didn't want to encourage unexpected visitors—Manford Torondo in particular. Anna did not take her eyes from the clearing crew as she spoke. "How many flies do you think they're killing?"

"Or how many blades of grass?" Gilbertus said, knowing it was a game for her.

Anna considered the problem. "If I knew the acreage of swampland for the landing field, I could calculate a probable distribution of grass blades. Given a certain amount of swamp grass, I could estimate how many flies are likely to inhabit it."

"And how many spiders to eat them," Gilbertus suggested, trying to keep her thoughts nimble.

"I can make a cascade projection following the food chain." Anna's narrow shoulders twitched, and she formed a small smile, turning to focus on him for the first time that day. "But it doesn't really matter, does it? Because the grass will grow back, the flies will return, the spiders will eat them, and the swamp will reclaim its territory—until the next time we clear it."

"I am going to meet your brother's shuttle now. Would you join me?"

Anna considered. "I prefer to wait here and watch."

"Prince Roderick is anxious to see you."

"He is a good brother. I'll talk with him ... but I need time to arrange my thoughts first. I'll be ready when you bring him here. I don't want to disappoint him."

Neither do I, Gilbertus thought.

* * *

AFTER CLEARING THE landing zone, trainees smothered the brush fires, then raked the area clear of charred vegetation. Although the air retained an odor of damp ashes, Gilbertus found it more pleasant than the swamp's usual miasma.

As the Imperial shuttle landed, the Headmaster crossed a series of temporary boardwalks to meet Prince Roderick. The small diplomatic vessel bore the golden-lion insignia of House Corrino, but it was not a gaudy craft. It had been ferried to Lampadas aboard an Imperial military spacefolder. Only two people emerged and stepped down the ramp, with no entourage.

The tall, erect man was Prince Roderick, blond and handsome, with patrician Corrino features. In a flicker of Mentat recall, Gilbertus reviewed the nobleman's file: the Emperor's younger brother had a wife (Haditha), a son (Javicco), and three daughters (Tikya, Wissoma, Nantha). Known for his calm disposition and sharp mind, Roderick advised the Emperor in most things, and Salvador generally listened to him. By all

indications, he was content to be an adviser rather than a ruler.

The old woman who accompanied the Prince was a surprise: Lady Orenna, called the “Virgin Empress” because she had been wife to Emperor Jules Corrino, but she had borne him no children (and supposedly never shared his bed). Instead, the children of Emperor Jules—Salvador, Roderick, and Anna—had three different mothers, all concubines.

Gilbertus’s thorough Mentat review was so swift that the visitors did not notice the pause. He stepped forward. “My Lord Roderick and Lady Orenna, welcome to the Mentat School. I just spoke with Anna. She is preparing herself to receive you.”

Roderick gave a quick nod. “I look forward to observing her progress.” He looked disappointed that his sister hadn’t come to greet them in person.

“She is safe, stable, content,” Gilbertus said. “The routine of the Mentat School helps her. I caution you not to expect miracles, though.”

Lady Orenna maintained a bright smile. “I miss the poor girl, but I want what’s best for her. I’ll sleep better on Salusa if I can see with my own eyes that she is happy here.”

As he tried to process why the old woman had come here, data clicked into place in Gilbertus’s mind.

Though Orenna was not Anna’s mother, the Virgin Empress had taken the young woman under her wing, and the two had a special relationship. Anna had always been a flighty girl, easily distracted, with a swinging pendulum of emotions and an utter lack of common sense. Disappointed in the unruly girl, Salvador had banished her to the Sisterhood school on Rossak, but there her mind had been damaged rather than improved. And now she was here.

“You will find that she is healthy,” Gilbertus said. “Mentat techniques offer the best possible chance for recovery.”

Roderick was efficient, all business. “Our visit will be quite brief. We’re at the mercy of our transportation—this shuttle was a special dispensation, at the request of Emperor Salvador, since VenHold ships refuse to service Lampadas. The military spacefolder is finishing a grand patrol and needs to return to Salusa Secundus.”

The feud between the antitechnology Butlerians and the commercial empire of Venport Holdings had grown more bitter over time, with mutual antipathy spiraling into outright conflict. And the Imperial throne was caught up in the dispute. Instead of traveling aboard a safe VenHold spacefolder, guided by mysterious and infallible Navigators, Roderick had been forced to come here on a less reliable military transport.

Lady Orenna was clearly displeased that they would have to depart so quickly. “We traveled a long way to visit Anna. I don’t like to be rushed. We are the girl’s family—the Imperial Armed Forces should alter their schedules for *our* convenience.”

Roderick shook his head, lowered his voice. “I’m also disappointed, but I don’t want to disrupt the workings of the military, because they have to appear strong and reliable. We can’t simply commandeer a VenHold commercial ship and force Directeur Venport to do our bidding.”

The older woman said with a sniff, “And why not? A loyal citizen should do as the Emperor requests, not the other way around. Your father would have crushed such insubordination.”

“Yes,” Roderick said, “he probably would have.”

Gilbertus said, “My school is a place where Anna can be sheltered from the stress of political tensions.” He knew that Roderick’s brother was weak, indecisive, and easily intimidated. Emperor Salvador did not have the power to force his will on either the shipping magnate or the legless Butlerian leader.

In these days of perilous politics, though, Gilbertus had learned to keep his thoughts to himself and to maintain neutrality. He had impressed that caution on his students as well: The ideal Mentat should never be a commentator or an advocate, but a tool, an analytical device to offer guidance and projections.

“You have no political tensions here?” Roderick muttered. “Your school is too close to the Butlerian headquarters for my liking.”

“Manford Torondo is on the other side of the continent, my Lord, and he has no dispute with the Mentat School. In fact, several of my trainees follow the movement.” *Though not my best students.* “We teach

humans mental skills that are the equal of any thinking machine. Every Mentat graduate who goes out to serve in the Imperium demonstrates that computers are unnecessary, and so Manford applauds us. Why should we worry about the Butlerians?"

"Indeed, why?" Roderick asked, but didn't answer his own question.

Anna was waiting for them on the observatory deck, still gazing across the landscape. Out in the tangled mangrove swamps, a group of Mentat candidates worked their way through winding channels of brownish water and unseen pits by making use of stepping-stones hidden just beneath the surface. Any Mentat who had memorized exactly where to walk could find the safe stones. Now, as the practicing candidates worked their way through, some of them slipped off the path.

As far as Gilbertus could tell, Anna hadn't moved since he'd left her, but her demeanor was different. Her expression was more animated than the affectless, fixated stare that indicated she was hyperfocused on some detail or calculation. She brightened upon seeing her brother and Lady Orenna.

Orenna embraced the girl. "You look well, Anna! Much stronger."

Roderick looked relieved, even proud. He whispered to Gilbertus, "Thank you."

Anna said, "I am having a good day. I wanted to have a good day for your visit."

"And I'm glad you're safe," Roderick said. "The Mentat School has many hazards."

Gilbertus said, "We have installed additional defenses. We can protect your sister—and all our students."

As if to challenge his assertion, a commotion occurred out in the swamp. A spine-backed reptile lunged out of the brownish water where the Mentat students were picking their way across the submerged stepping-stones. The creature snatched the nearest student in its long jaws and dragged her into the deeper channel.

Both predator and prey vanished as swiftly as a glimmer of sunlight on rippled water.

The Mentat students sprang together, ready to defend themselves, but the swamp dragon already had its meal and was gone.

Wide-eyed, Orenna shouted, "How can you protect Anna? You weren't able to protect that young girl!"

Gilbertus did not let himself show emotion at the loss of the student. "Anna is not allowed outside the walls or on the lake. You have my personal guarantee of her safety."

"And what about an outside attack?" Roderick said. "Anna would make a valuable hostage."

Gilbertus said, "We are a small school for the development and improvement of the human mind. Mentats pose no threat to anyone."

Roderick gave him a skeptical look. "You're being coy, Headmaster."

"I am stating a fact. We have run many projections and developed defenses against all likely scenarios. It is what a Mentat is trained to do, my Lord."

Orenna stroked the young woman's arm. "Protect your school at all costs. You have an incalculably precious treasure in Anna."

Gilbertus nodded, but he was thinking instead of the priceless Erasmus memory core, which he kept hidden in the school. Protecting the last independent robot was an ongoing risk more dangerous than anything he'd been discussing with the Imperial visitors. "Yes, many treasures."

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Users Review

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