

Among Muad'Dib's staunchest friends was Gurney Halleck -- troubadour-warrior, smuggler, and planetary governor. More than all his triumphs, Halleck's greatest joy was to play the baliset and sing songs. His heroic exploits provided his fellow troubadours with material for many songs.

-- Princess Irulan, A Child's History of Muad'Dib

These Fremen recruits from the deep desert had never seen such a large tank of water in their lives, and rarely one so sloppily open to the air. Back on Caladan, this would have served as no more than a village pool, and a lackluster one at that. But here, as Gurney's fledgling commandos stared at the rippling surface and smelled the raw moisture evaporating wastefully, they viewed it with superstitious awe.

"You will jump in, one by one," he said in his loud, gruff voice. "Submerge yourselves. Get your heads wet. Before you're finished here today, I want you to swim to the other side."

Swim. The very idea was foreign to them. Several muttered uneasily.

"Muad'Dib has commanded it," said one rail-thin young soldier named Enno. "Therefore, we shall do it."

Yes, Gurney thought. Paul had merely to suggest a thing, and it happened. In other circumstances it might have seemed gratifying, even amusing. These Fremen soldiers would throw themselves out of a spaceship airlock or walk barefoot into a Coriolis storm, if Muad'Dib commanded them to do so.

With his blue, glass-splinter eyes, he surveyed the lines of fresh fighters. More volunteers arrived from the desert every day; it seemed the sietches were

manufacturing recruits out in the bled. Many planets in the galaxy still did not know what would be coming at them.

These young men were far different from the disciplined Atrides soldiers he remembered so well. Their unruly fighting style was a far cry from the military precision of a Great House, but they were still damned good warriors. This “desert rabble” had overthrown Beast Rabban and ended the rule of House Harkonnen here on Dune, along with the defeat of Emperor Shaddam Corrino and his powerful Sardaukar troops.

“That water is only three meters deep, and ten across.” Gurney paced along the edge of the pool. “But on other planets, you may encounter oceans or lakes that are hundreds of meters deep. You must be ready for anything.”

“Hundreds of meters! How could we survive that?” asked a dusty young recruit.

“The trick is to swim on top of the water.”

The hard-eyed Fremen recruits did not respond to his humor.

“Does Muad’Dib not say that ‘God created Arrakis to train the faithful?’ ” Gurney quoted. “So, prepare yourselves.”

“Muad’Dib,” the men said in a reverent tone. “Muad’Dib!”

Paul had ordered the pool constructed so that his desert fighters could train for inevitable water battles on distant worlds. Not every watery planet would be as accepting of his rule as Caladan had been. Some in Arrakeen saw the training pool as a display of Muad’Dib’s largesse, while others considered it an extravagant waste of moisture. Gurney understood it as a military necessity.

“We studied the information Muad’Dib provided,” said Enno. “We took every word to heart. The words showed us how to swim.”

Gurney was sure that each of these men had pored over the instruction manual with the intensity of a priest studying a religious text. "And does reading a filmbook manual on sandworms make one a wormrider?"

The absurdity of the question finally made the intense Fremen chuckle. Both eager and hesitant, the group reached the edge of the deep pool. The very thought of being immersed in water was enough to terrify them more than facing any enemy on the battlefield.

Gurney reached into the pocket of his stillsuit and withdrew a gold coin, one of the old Imperial solaris that featured the haughty face of Shaddam IV. He held it up so that its golden hue glinted in the light. "The first one of you to retrieve this coin from the bottom of that pool will receive a special blessing from Muad'Dib."

Any other army would have competed to win an increase in pay, a promotion in rank, or an extra bit of furlough. The Fremen didn't care about such things. But they would push themselves to the limit for a blessing from Paul.

Gurney tossed the solari coin. It twinkled in the sunlight and dropped into the water near the center of the pool, where it continued to flash like a little fish as it sank to the bottom. A depth of three meters would not challenge a good swimmer, but he doubted any of these dry-desert Fremen would be able to retrieve it. He was interested in testing the mettle of the men, however; he wanted to see which ones would try the hardest.

"And God said, 'They shall show their faith by their actions,' " Gurney intoned. " 'The first in my eyes shall be first in my heart.' " He looked at them and finally barked, "What are you waiting for? This isn't a buffet line!"

He nudged the first man on the edge, and the Fremen toppled into the water with a splash, coughed, and thrashed his arms repeatedly going under and rising to the surface again.

“Swim, man! You look like you’re having a grand mal seizure.”

The fighter splashed, stroked, and struggled until he pulled away from the edge.

Gurney pushed two more Fremen in. “Your comrade is in trouble. He may be drowning -- why aren’t you helping him?”

Another pair plunged into the water; finally, Enno jumped in of his own volition. Having watched the others, he panicked less and stroked more. Gurney was pleased to see that he was the first to make it to the opposite side of the pool. Within an hour, most of the desert recruits were swimming, or at least floating. A few clung shivering to the side, refusing to let go. He would have to reassign or dismiss them. The Fremen, bred for desert warfare, had achieved incomparable victories on Dune, but as soldiers in Paul’s widening conflict, they would have to fight in many environments. He could not rely on men who would become paralyzed in an unexpected situation. Swimming might be the least of the ordeals they would have to face.

Several of the trainees bobbed underwater, trying to get to the coin that glinted tantalizingly at the bottom, three meters below, like a patch of spice out in the open sand. But no one came close to reaching it. Gurney supposed he would have to swim down there and retrieve it himself.

Then Enno stroked back across the pool, dove down, and swam deep, but not quite deep enough.

Still not there, but not bad, Gurney thought.

The man came back up, gasping, then dunked under again, refusing to give up.

Amid the din of splashing and shouting, Gurney heard the hum of ships landing in the Arrakeen spaceport: hundreds of military-grade gliders, expanded troop transports, and bumblebee-like cargo ships loaded with military supplies to feed Paul's armies. If they wanted spice for their navigators, the Spacing Guild had no choice but to supply Muad'Dib with the vessels he needed. Gurney had to crew them with fighters, and the best men came from Arrakis. Everyone in the Imperium would soon know that.

Suddenly he noted a change in the cries and splashing sounds from the pool. The Fremen were calling for help. Gurney saw a body floating face-down, bobbing in the water. Enno. "Bring him here, lads, now!"

But the Fremen could barely keep themselves afloat. One man grabbed Enno's body; another tugged at his arm, but succeeded only in ducking his head under deeper.

"Roll him over, you fools, so he can breathe!"

Seeing how clumsy they were, Gurney dove in. The warm water was a shock to his parched skin. He stroked quickly out to the knot of men and shoved them aside. He grabbed Enno by the back of his collar, pulled the young man up, flipped him over and paddled with him back to the edge of the pool.

"Call for a medic. Now!" Gurney shouted, spitting water out of his mouth.

Enno was completely limp, not breathing. His lips were pale blue, his skin clammy, his eyes closed. With a surge of adrenaline strength, Gurney hauled the dripping man over the edge of the pool and onto the sun-warmed paving tiles. Water streamed away from him, drying quickly.

Gurney knew what to do and did not wait for help to arrive. He pumped Enno's legs and used standard resuscitation procedures as familiar to anyone from Caladan as a stillsuit was to a Fremen. Seeing their comrade's mishap, the remaining recruits scrambled pell-mell out of the water.

By the time a puffy-eyed military medic arrived with his kit, Gurney's emergency measures had already brought the young man around. Enno coughed, then rolled over to vomit some of the water he had swallowed. The doctor, after nodding respectfully to Gurney, gave Enno a stimulant and wrapped him with a blanket to keep him from going into shock.

Enno eventually pushed the blanket away and forced himself to sit up. He looked around with glazed eyes. Grinning weakly, he raised a hand and opened his tightly clenched fist to reveal the water-slick gold coin in his palm. "As you ordered, Commander." He touched his dripping hair with wonder. "Am I alive?"

"You are now," Gurney said. "You've been revived."

"I died . . . from too much water. Truly, I am blessed with abundance!"

The Fremen recruits began to mutter and whisper with a clear undertone of awe. A drowned Fremen!

Their reaction made Gurney uneasy. These spiritual people were as incomprehensible as they were admirable. Many splinter groups followed Muad'Dib's religion by borrowing tenets from Fremen mysticism; others participated in water-worshipping cults. Upon learning of this drowning incident, Paul's bureaucratic priesthood, the Qizarate, could very well choose to make Enno into an inspirational figure.

The trainees stood around the training pool, dripping, as though they had

all been baptized. They seemed more determined than ever. Gurney knew he'd have no trouble loading the Guild ship with eager, inspired fighters like the best of these men.

The Fremmen were ready to set forth and shed blood in the name of Muad'Dib.