

## **Mining Movies**

Column #3: Dune, Voice Wands and the Spice of Life © 2005

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## **Dune, Voice Wands and the Spice of Life** © 2005 Jason Ohler

“Dune” is one of those sprawling, bloated, over-decorated epic movies that everyone saw but very few seemed to like. It opens in the year 10191 at the palace of the “Supreme Ruler of the Known Universe” (that’s really his title) who is having a meeting with a much venerated “Third Stage Navigator.” The supreme ruler looks normal enough, but the Navigator looks like a large rutabaga with age spots, apparently because he is a highly evolved time traveler.

This meeting is crucial to the entire movie, as it explains the struggle to control “melange,” the all important “spice” that extends life, expands consciousness and facilitates time travel – a kind of multivitamin on steroids. But there’s a problem. The Supreme Ruler and the Navigator are from different planets and speak different languages. Instead of the typical Hollywood fix (everyone magically speaks colloquial English), the characters use a translating device that looks like one of those large microphones from the early days of radio. They speak into the ‘voice wand’ and their translated words emerge from the other side, more or less in their own voice.

This technology is inevitable in some form. In a world that values multi-culturalism (e.g., the Los Angeles School District is committed to serving a student body that speaks 224 languages), technology that honors and facilitates both first and second languages will be welcome. The voice wand’s ability to teach foreign language is potentially miraculous, allowing students to receive instant feedback in the context of real conversations. Students traveling to foreign countries, physically or via video chat, could dispense with dog-eared translation dictionaries and clunky software and actually talk with people. A voice wand could become standard issue technology for every global citizen.

So, if the voice wand facilitates interplanetary communication, can it help Women from Venus and Men from Mars understand each other? Now, there's a product idea worthy of serious venture capital.