



# DUNE

a review

by

Tony Watson

In 1977, the people at Avalon Hill were very successful in adapting Robert Heinlein's popular SF novel *Starship Troopers* into a game format. The result was a pleasing and skillful blend of simulation and literature, a game both fun to play and remarkably true to its source. For the company's second SF release, AH has once again chosen a game based on a well-known book. This summer the company has published a new game on what is perhaps the most popular science fiction novel of all time, Frank Herbert's *Dune*. Once again the product is both a fine game and at the same time faithful to its namesake.

DUNE was designed by the same group which did the innovative COSMIC ENCOUNTER a few years back. The parentage shows. The two games have some strong resemblances in both their game systems and the attention paid to physical components. As in COSMIC ENCOUNTER, an effort has been made to reflect the individual natures of the various contending forces. The outcome is a dual success: a fast-paced, interactive game, and a colorful and surprisingly interpretation of Herbert's book.

Physically, DUNE is an impressive game all the way around, as well it should be; it sports a price tag of \$15. The high quality of the components does much to make the game both attractive and enhance the tie-in with the novel.

DUNE can be played by from two to six players, but we've found three is a more interesting minimum. Further, some of the characters work best when more people are playing. Each player chooses one of six factions, each represented on a colorful shield by a personage from the book (obtusely representing the player himself). The six groups are: The House Atriedes, the newly enstated rulers of the spice planet Arrakis, represented by Paul Atriedes; The House Harkonnen, depicted by the evil Baron Harkonnen, the arch rivals of the Atriedes who seek the destruction of their enemies via treachery, violence and

death; the House Corino, the imperial house of Emperor Shaddam IV, which seeks to maintain a delicate balance of power among the lower Houses; the Guild, the spacing cartel dependent on spice induced prescience for their navigation; the Bene Gesserite, the female order dedicated to shaping destiny by the manipulation of chromosomes with the Swisatz Haderach, the ultimate messiah, as the final goal; and finally the Fremmen, Dune's native desert dwellings worm riders who seek to rid their world of off planet power groups, represented by the Imperial planetologist, Liet Kynes. Each player has a full color shield, a folded cardstock box, to denote the character they are playing. Each shield features a nicely done picture of the character mentioned above. The shield also serves two more utilitarian purposes. They can be used to conceal a player's spice tokens, armies in his off planet reserve, and treachery cards. Shields also list the special powers and advantages of that group.

The playing board for DUNE will be very familiar to those who have read the book. It is taken directly from the map Herbert provided with the novel. The map is done in shades of yellow for deserts and white for rock areas. Strongholds, such as desert sieches or cities, are done in red. Despite the dominance of yellow, the map has a lot of texture. The board is divided into pie shaped wedges called sectors, used to regulate storm movement. Geographic features are named (again, after the information Herbert's book provides) and called areas. They are irregular in size and shape and used for purposes of movement, combat and spice collections.

Each side has five leaders for use in battles, and these personalities are represented on large discs bordered in that power group's color and bearing a likeness of each individual. Even though the drawings on the discs are done in black and white, I found the artwork on the leader counters to be quite good, in some ways superior to that on the shields. All of the leaders are characters mentioned in the book.

Some figured prominently, such as Gurney Halleck, Stilgar or Feyd Rautha. Others are just mentioned, such as the Bashar (actually a rank in the Imperial army). Leaders are rated for combat, with values from one to seven, most averaging around three or four. Leaders must have something to lead, and these armies are provided in the form of twenty die cut tokens per player in appropriate colors. Tokens are equal in strength save for special starred armies representing the dreaded Imperial Sardaukar and the Fremmen Feydakin death commandoes, which count double for combat purposes.

The game's components are rounded out by two decks of cards. The spice deck is used to determine where and how much spice appears on the board. Each card shows an area of the map and the amount of spice (numbered counters) to be placed there. Special Shai-hulud (worms) denote unique circumstance when turned over. The other deck is comprised of treachery cards, probably one of the most entertaining parts of the game. Herbert's novel was filled with intrigue and these cards provide much of that flavor for the game. Some represent weapons and defenses, others are special cards like truthtrances, extra moves and the like. A few are worthless.

Preparation for the game is relatively quick. Players select what factions they are going to play and consult their shields for their initial forces and where they set up on the map (if at all), as well as their beginning amount of spice. Each player also receives a beginning treachery card. Then the leaders of all the participating players are mixed together and four are dealt to each. From these, a player may choose one traitor from among the opposing leaders. If that leader is subsequently played against him in combat, he may reveal the fact that leader is a traitor and win an instant and complete victory. By way of elimination, players will know that any leaders of their own dealt to them are safe from being traitorous. Traitors are marked on a sheet

from the information pad, which is also used to keep track of certain game functions like turns and special abilities of certain groups. It also provides more special advantages for certain characters and explains the uses of individual treachery cards.

Once preparation is complete the regular turn sequence begins. Each turn consists of six, mutually participatory phases. This keeps everyone involved throughout the turn sequence, maintaining a high level of interest for all the players. Turns move quickly, and though the game is to last for fifteen turns, provided no one wins before hand, I haven't played in a game that lasted that long. Games lengthen in both time and turns in proportion to the number of players participating, though an hour seems to be an average playing time.

The first phase in the turn sequence is the Storm Round. The storm piece, a large crescent shaped marker is maneuvered from two to six hexes, as determined by two of the players each choosing a number from one to three. If the Fremmen is playing, that character handles storm movement through a somewhat altered means. The storm wipes out armies or spice tokens in any desert areas in any of the sectors it passes through. The Spice Blow then follows. A spice card is turned over and the appropriate amount of spice placed in that area. Herbert was very clear in establishing the importance of Dune's only export, the geriatric, vision-inducing melange--spice. The value of spice is incredible. As the game's introduction points out, spice is "the universal currency, the measure of all value". This round then, is key, for only by obtaining spice can players pay for treachery cards, troops, the revivication of fallen leaders, and transport onto the planet from their off world reserves. Spice collection is done during the last phase of the game after all combat. Players may collect two spice per army in the area, three if they own Carthag or Arrakeen (presumably due to the availability of desert roving spice factories). Six cards in the spice deck picture worms, the "Shai-hulud" and mark special nexus points. Nexus points are the only time players may make or break alliances, and thus gain the special advantages their ally can give under the alliance portion of their shield. Worms also destroy any remaining spice or troops in last area spice appeared. Fremmen are exempt from the catastrophe and further, may use any additional Shai-hulud cards in that phase to make an unlimited move for one group of army tokens (worm ride).

Spice blow is followed by the bid for treachery cards. These are dealt face down, one per each player participating, and the bidding begins, with the player who will move first (as determined by the proximity of the storm marker to their seat around the table). Only the Atriedes character may look at the card before bidding. The card goes to the highest bidder and the spice tokens paid go to the Emperor (if in play) or the spice bank. Each player may only hold four treachery cards at one time, save for the Harkonnen, who may hold eight and also get one free card from the deck for every one they buy, making them a formidable, and treacherous, opponent indeed.

Movement follows with the first player

making his moves and then each player in turn, to his right. There are two types of movement: off planet to Dune, and area to area. A player may make one of each type in his turn. Off planet movement onto the board must be paid for in spice (to the Guild player if in the game) at a rate of one spice per token landed in a stronghold and two per token landed elsewhere. On planet movement is from area to area, usually only one, though the Fremmen can move two spaces and anyone owning Arrakeen or Carthag can move three due to ornithopters. Players can generally only move one group by each means per turn.

After movement, there comes the inevitable combat. Strongholds are most often the site of battles, since control of three of the five on the board results in victory. On some occasions, players may venture out into the desert to battle each other over rich spice blows. Battles are conducted to the same order as movement, the first player initiating all combats he wishes and then the player to his right following suit. Each participant must compose a battle plan using a combat wheel. The wheel is a two piece affair on which the players may dial the number of tokens they wish to use in the battle, and cut out space to fit in their leader. A side's battle plan is composed of 1) a number of tokens (up to the number in the area), 2) a leader, 3) a defense card and 4) a weapon card. Certain powers available to some characters can affect this makeup, such as the Bene Gesserit power of voicing a player to choose a certain card, or the Atriedes power of seeing one element beforehand. Once composed, the two battleplans are revealed and compared. Any weapons not countered by the proper defense kill the opposing leader and any traitors played are declared. The outcome of the battle is determined by adding the value of any remaining leaders to the number of tokens dialed on the wheel. Highest total (draws

go to the attacker) wins. The loser removes all tokens, but not leaders; they can only be killed by treachery cards or being traitorous. The winner loses the number of tokens dialed; remaining tokens, if any, retain possession of the area. The battle sequence is clever, and a lot of fun as players attempt to psyche each other out concerning treachery cards and tokens dialed. Dead units and leaders are sent to the Bene Tleilaxu tanks and can be brought through revivication during the movement round. Each player gets a certain number of free revivals per turn; additional tokens can be brought back for two spice each. Revival of leaders requires payment equal to their combat value.

As mentioned previously, spice collection follows the combat.

DUNE is won by one player holding three strongholds at the end of any turn. Some players can also win by preventing anyone from achieving victory for fifteen turns. These characters, the Fremmen and Guild, profit from this state of non-control, though they can also attempt a win by the occupation of strongholds.

I liked this game quite a bit, as has everyone I've played it with (about eight people). It's colorful and exciting. Each faction is different, possessing varying powers and abilities which lead to broad array of strategies, especially when one considers how the various sides intermesh in play. Not only is DUNE a good game, it does an amazingly accurate job of conveying the feel and air of *Dune* the novel. I suspect this game will become very popular, as it is fast, easy and fun. It is also excellently suited for tournament play.

DUNE is available from the Avalon Hill Company, 4517 Harford Road, Baltimore, Maryland 21214 for \$15.00 plus \$1.00 postage.

