

Resources and Partial Solutions in F. Herbert's Dune

The unravelling of the conflict situation, the process through which the Baron gains a victory and the Atreides are defeated, uses up the initial **resources** (the economic and military force of the Harkonnens and their treacherous infiltration in the person of Yueh; the potential of Arrakis for the Atreides and their perfect, though small military nucleus) and offers a **partial solution** to the conflict, apparently in favour of the Harkonnens. The initial specific situation and the resources have been modified through the process. But this opens the way for a new specific situation and new contradictions.

Once catastrophe has struck, Jessica has a glimpse of the future and her soul is prepared:

"So here we live out our lives, she thought, on this hell-planet. The place is prepared for us, if we can evade the Harkonnens. And there's no doubt of my course: a broodmare preserving an important bloodline for the Bene Gesserit Plan [I.222].

Young Paul Atreides, born on Caladan and brought up to be a Duke, has his own version of his father's defeat:

We came from Caladan – a paradise world for our form of life. There existed no need on Caladan to build a physical paradise or a paradise of the mind – we could see the actuality all around us. And the price we paid was the price men have always paid for achieving a paradise in this life—we went soft, we lost our edge [I.283].

When accepting the reversal of his family's situation, Paul is thinking of the first thing to be done, "running like cowards," but, in that very moment, he has already built an image of the **ideal result** he wants to reach, that of becoming Emperor of the Known Universe: "But how else can I live to avenge my father? [I.251]. Is such an early description of the most desirable result utopian? Maybe, but not to Paul who analyses the **core of the problem** in terms of a contradiction between the objective situation and his wish to avenge his father. What could he do in order to turn the situation in his favour? One solution would be to flee danger, to retire to the

edge of the universe; the other, which seems an **impossible solution** coming from a fifteen-year-old, is to evaluate the situation, and his resources, just as Leto did when arriving on the planet.

On that first occasion Leto sensed the source of possible danger: "But the important thing is to consider all the Houses that depend on the CHOAM profits. And think of the enormous proportion of those profits dependent on a single product – the spice. ...Think of the Landsraad Houses that look to me for a certain amount of leadership." He could also appreciate his son's penetrative thinking and "truly *educated*" observation: "Whoever had stockpiled melange could make a killing. Others would be out in the cold" [I.52]. During the following days Leto continued to inspect his resources: he could not use the shields, he could not eradicate the dangerous worms because that would destroy the spice, rescue services could not be set up because static electricity from the sandworms would block out the signals. What remained was the local resource, the people, the Fremen of whom Duncan Idaho, the warmaster, had such a high opinion. In this case the situation itself became the resource. And as Hawat put it: "the Fremen appear more and more to be the allies we need. They're waiting now to see if they can trust us, but they appear to be dealing openly." They have sent gifts, stillsuits, maps of the desert, jewellery, they have helped the Atrides in their dealings with the Judge of the Change, their reports have proved to be reliable and on the whole "there appears to be no trickery" [I.96].

Paul has inherited the force of his father's character. Like a real leader, Leto knew men and knew how to deal with men. The people his son comes into contact with acknowledge the superiority of his presence and are surprised to find it in a child. Paul is superior to his father because of his mother's Bene Gesserit teachings, among them his heightened perception. Both Kynes and Stilgar are won over by the maturity of Paul's judgements and by the trustworthiness of his character. Kynes offers his loyalty after having first disliked Paul, while Stilgar shows his respect after their first confrontation by saying : "And I shall not call you lad the more" [II.26]. Kynes assesses what Paul is worth before helping them to flee. He purposefully dismisses Paul's promises as "words," his resort to the legend as "superstition," but finally he admits: "You have a plan. This much is obvious...*Sire*" [I.248]. Paul, in his turn, identifies and appreciates Kynes' qualities. When Jessica wonders why they were left alone, Paul answers: "He did what any good

guerrilla leader would. He separated us into two parties and arranged that he couldn't reveal where we are if he's captured. He won't really know" [I.252].

Once on the run, Paul appraises the situation: "We will depend upon ourselves," and takes quick decisions: "Our immediate concern is our family atomics. We must get them before the Harkonnens can search them out." The fifteen-year old boy has no time to mourn his father: "*I'll mourn my father later... when there's time*" [I.214]. He has to suddenly grow up and Jessica is sometimes amazed at the speed of his train of thought. She has become slow in comparison to her son.

Paul sensed the hyperalertness of his mind reading her reactions, computing on minutiae. "You see it now," he said. "Satellites watch the terrain below. There are things in the deep desert that will not bear frequent inspection."

"You're suggesting the Guild itself controls this planet?"

She was so slow.

"No!" he said. "The Fremen! They're paying the Guild for privacy, paying in a coin that's freely available to anyone with desert power – spice. This is more than a second-approximation answer; it's the straight-line computation. Depend on it."

"Paul." Jessica said, "you're not a Mentat yet; you can't know for sure how – "

"I'll never be a Mentat," he said. "I'm something else . . . a freak" [I.216-217].

And this is a situation he will have to live with from that moment on.

Paul's decision to avenge his father will lead him to a **network of sub-problems** which he proceeds to solve, one by one, and which help him to build his future ideal solution. Annex 13 illustrates the way a diagram of the network of sub-problems in *Dune* would look. Paul has inherited his mother's teachings as well as combat and close fight strategies, subtleties and trickeries, codes for situations of danger. These are his first two resources. His father's ducal signet is his third. Of the latter he says: "I swore never to wear it again until I was ready to lead my troops over all of Arrakis and claim it as my rightful fief" [III.155]. But he was a duke without a dukedom. He needed to become a leader and he needed a population to lead. "We'll find a home among the Fremen, where your Missionaria Protectiva has bought us a bolt hole" he decides. And Jessica thinks "*They've prepared a way for us in the desert*" [I.222]. And once

again she's amazed at Paul's strangeness, at his knowing what he could not have known. Looking back to that period, Princess Irulan says:

On that first day when Muad'Dib rode through the streets of Arrakeen with his family, some of the people along the way recalled the legends and the prophecy and they ventured to shout: "Mahdi!" But their shout was more a question than a statement, for as yet they could only hope he was the one foretold as the Lisan al-Gaib, the Voice from the Outer World. Their attention was focused, too, on the mother, because they had heard she was a Bene Gesserit and it was obvious to them that she was like the other Lisan al-Gaib. —
from "Manual of Muad'Dib" by the Princess Irulan [I.110].

The Fremen, who "had lived under the Harkonnens for eighty years" [I.251] being "a deep thorn in the Harkonnen side," a population of "deep strength and healthy vitality" [I.59], were prepared for Muad'Dib both spiritually and as fine guerrilla warriors. The legend planted by the Bene Gesserit, that of "a leader, child of a Bene Gesserit" coming to "lead them to true freedom" [I.112] becomes Paul's next resource. It was so strong that even Kynes, when meeting Paul for their first incursion into the desert and observing that he was the only one of the newcomers who instinctively knew how to adjust his stillsuit, is struck by the possibility of his being "the one." "*He shall know your ways as though born to them*" [I.126], he remembers. The Fremen, the survivors in the desert, "perfectionists" [II.39] out of necessity, the only population adapted to live in such a harsh world, welcome him, apply the *test of reason* to him, give him a new name. He is no longer Paul Atreides but Mahdi, Paul Muad'Dib, and becomes the leader of a perfectly disciplined, population who have wished to be led. Jessica, just as aware as her son of the necessity of his ascendancy, thinks "*All of them an entire culture trained to military order. What a priceless thing is here for an outcast Duke!*" [I.318]. And what a perfect resource since the Fremen were people with a goal: they would have willingly died not only for a legend but also for the dream implanted by Kynes, "a dream to capture men's souls," as Jessica admits while prefiguring Paul's future: "Such people would be easy to imbue with fervor and fanaticism. They could be wielded like a sword to win back Paul's place for him" [II.41].

Paul needs to take decisions. The first **partial solution** he adopts as a way to consolidate his resource – the Fremen – and which in its turn involves decision making on several levels, is to

increase his credibility and win their trust. His first step is again a copy of the Duke's actions. His father had had a short hesitation before letting Kynes, the "Judge of the Change," who is "accepted in both sietch and village" [I.122], inside his personal shield in order to adjust his stillsuit: "*How delicate a moment! If I refuse, it may offend him*" [I.124]. Therefore he does not, thereby initiating a process that will be continued by his son. At the beginning of their conversation, Kynes stiffens when Paul wants to buy his loyalty. But Paul, realizing his mistake, apologizes and offers loyalty for loyalty. Kynes is taken by surprise: "No Harkonnen ever admitted error. Perhaps you're not like them, Atrides," He could feel the sincerity and commitment behind Paul's words. Paul has won him over: "*In this moment he'd give his life for Paul*, Jessica thought. *How do the Atrides accomplish this thing so quickly, so easily*" [I.249-50].

Paul proceeds with the Fremen. The importance of the specific situation for finding a solution to a problem is shown by the fact that both Paul and Jessica have first to offer a demonstration of their physical force to the Fremen before being rewarded with their trust. There is no choice, Jessica thinks, "we must move swiftly if we're to secure our place among these Fremen" [II.72]. In a wonderful example of a situational contradiction, Paul has to kill Jamis in order to be accepted by Jamis's sietch. He would readily refuse Jamis' wife, coffee set and water, but Jessica, who sees the importance of the moment uses the Voice: "You will accept the water" [II.32]. In other words, Paul must accept the Fremen's habits and their way of life, together with the shelter they offer. However, just like Duke Leto, he sets his own limits depending on his goals which he clearly states in front of the tribe and makes their own, while at the same time breaking their stereotypes. He helps himself with the Voice but Jessica is aware that "*that's not enough with these people. They've good insulation against vocal control. He must catch them also with logic*" [III.155] – one more laudatory statement regarding the Fremen. In killing Jamis, Paul has created another problem for himself. He will have to assert and reassert his physical superiority all the time. He solves the problem by refusing to challenge Stilgar to a fight whose ending was accepted as obvious by everyone, including Stilgar. "It's the way!" the Fremen cry and accuse him of cowardice. "Ways change," Muad'Dib decides. He needs the strong hand and loyalty of Stilgar for his planned future and is not willing to sacrifice him: "When I am Duke in Arrakeen

with Chani by my side, do you think I'll have time to concern myself with every detail of governing Tabr sietch?" ... "Do you concern yourself with the internal problems of every family?" ... "Do you think I wish to cut off my right arm?" ... "Do you think I wish to deprive myself or the tribe of your wisdom and strength?" [III.151]. Paul has already won the battle. Stilgar says: "The voice of any Fremen may be heard in Council. Paul-Muad'Dib is a Fremen" [III.155]. The Fremen have learnt that the time for killing off their best men is over; the time has come for killing the real enemies – the Harkonnens.

At this point in the story, Paul has covered a whole path in the network of his problems. He has learned the laws of the desert: to "sandwalk" in the Fremen's noiseless way, to avoid the drum sands where a single mistaken step would launch a call to the sandworm, he has learned to stay away from the dust basins which would have swallowed him. In a final symbolic gesture of acceptance and communion he becomes a sandrider and rides the sandworm. Once he passes this Fremen manhood test, he knows he will be accepted in the southland where the women and the children are hidden, and where he can rest before the final victory. He has already accepted Chani, Kynes' daughter, for illegitimate wife and she has given him a boy, Leto. He has now become a duke with a people; all that is left is to win his dukedom from his enemies.

With this purpose in mind, Paul makes another evaluation of his possible resources. Of the two men his father had most relied on, one was with the Baron and the other with the smugglers. In an attempt to solve his own problems, the Baron has conditioned the Atrides' former Mentat, Thufir Hawat. Later on, on becoming aware of the great mistake he has made in suspecting Jessica of treason, Thufir will kill himself using the poisoned needle with which he was supposed to kill Paul. Gurney Halleck, Paul's former swordmaster, who was the source of continual amazement for Duke Leto: "a head full of songs, quotations, and flowery phrases... and the heart of an assassin" [I.92], believing Paul to be dead, has fled to the smugglers. But the smugglers have close contacts with the Fremen and they are selling information, too. This is the reason why they were prevented from investigating the secrets of the deep desert but this also means that Paul can use them by controlling the information that reaches the Emperor. And Paul eventually retrieves Gurney during one of the smugglers exploratory incursions into the south and classifies

the event as "a good omen, a sign that he was on the course of the future where all was well. *With Gurney at my side...*" [III.140].

The Guild is not on his side but he is determined to "pull their fangs" [III.205] and to keep their fleet in space, and he knows he has just the weapon needed for that: "They have no choice. We can destroy the spice. The Guild dares not risk that" [III.181]. Paul is ready to blackmail them as he will do with the Emperor Padishah later on.

To his surprise, he finds the Sardaukar playing into his hands. Their abominable deeds in the ergs have raised the hatred of an otherwise indifferent population who would have considered "the coming battle as no more than a great inconvenience ... and the possibility of exchanging one set of masters for another. The Sardaukar recruit for us, Stilgar," Paul remarks [III.182]. The Sardaukar are not used to submitting and Paul spares the life of Captain Aramsham and sets him free, seemingly out of gratitude (the captain has killed one of his own Sardaukar who has attacked Paul while they were already prisoners) but in reality as part of a strategy for informing the Emperor that he is still alive and he has come to fight for his due.

Paul knows he can without question rely on Stilgar's men and on the Fedaykin, these Fremmen death commandos having pledged to give their lives to "right a wrong" [III.266]. He knows they will fight with him "until no Harkonnen breathes Arrakeen air" [III.131]. This is not only because of ancestral hatred but also because one of the solutions the Baron is considering is to turn Arrakis into a "pool of recruits already conditioned to the bitterest survival training" [III.99]. Paul also knows he doesn't have full control of the air and since fuel is scarce, he plans his strategy carefully: fuel and craft are saved for the crowning effort.

His last resource is his own vision before the final conflagration, not of the future but of the Now:

"The Space above Arrakis is filled with the ships of the Guild ... The Padishah Emperor himself is there ... With his favorite Truthsayer and five legions of Sardaukar. The old Baron Vladimir Harkonnen is there with Thufir Hawat beside him and seven ships jammed

with every conscript he could muster. Every Great House has its raiders above us . . . waiting" [III.175-76].

A shrewd military technique is needed beside bravery and Paul builds up solutions to a rapid victory. He is quick to understand the situation when he hears the news about Rabban's forces being inside fully fortified defences and expecting him to wear out his fighters in futile attack. He applies Gurney's teachings: this means they are immobilized while he himself can go where he wants. The enemy is exactly where Paul wants it to be: "They've lost the initiative, which means they've lost the war" [III.143].

When the Harkonnen forts and towns in the shielded inhabited area are all, except one, in the hands of the Fremens, Paul still has two cards to play. He is going to ask the Emperor to accept his claim to his father's dukedom. If the Emperor gives a signal by flying the Atreides' flag, he needs to deal with the old enemy only, the Harkonnens. But there are too many observers around the Emperor. In a gesture revealing both of cowardice and indifference, the Emperor raises neither the Atreides' nor the Harkonnens' banner: he flies the CHOAM "rag" for all to see that his interests are in the profit, whether he gets it through an Atreides or a Harkonnen governor. Paul is forced to resort to a stratagem. He knows that none of the forces deployed against him will dare use atomics because the Great Convention has made it clear as far as this is concerned: the use of atomics against people can cause planetary obliteration. Therefore he decides that blasting the Shield Wall is different from blasting the humans behind it. In these critical moments Arrakian weather is on his side: "a great-great-*great* grandmother of a storm" [III:185] is approaching which will blind the enemy and hide the gunners.

When everything is over, Paul has one more personal battle to fight, one that could be a catastrophe for the Bene Gesserit plans, because it could cost the lives of two end products of their breeding scheme. Paul has to face the last of the Harkonnens, Feyd-Rautha, a na-baron now that his uncle has died of a poisoned needle, thrust by Alia, Paul's little sister: "The Atreides gom jabbar" [III.195] as she called it. Once more Muad'Dib will prove his worth. He has now reached the end of the line, but once more he turns his victory into a partial solution. All the power of the universe is in his hand so he dictates the law now just as once, a long time ago, he

promised: "'Law is the ultimate science.' Thus it reads above the Emperor's door. I propose to show him law." Jessica guessed his aims then ("You'd aim for the throne?") while Kynes qualified them as "a desperate gamble" [I.248-49]. But Muad'Dib can now achieve both "kanly" (revenge) and a much higher goal than his father's dukedom. So the final solution for him is to become Emperor of the known Universe. This would crown his efforts. He finds the key to the Empire in the person of Irulan, the Bene Gesserit-trained Princess Royal and he asks for the Emperor's entire CHOAM Company holdings as dowry. As to the Emperor, he bans him to a Salusa Secundus where he promises to ease the harshness. The last words of the novel belong to Jessica trying to calm a distraught Chani: "Think on it, Chani: that princess will have the name, yet she'll live as less than a concubine – never to know a moment of tenderness from the man to whom she's bound. While we, Chani, we who carry the name of concubine – history will call us wives" [III .223].

Arrakis goes through a complete cycle in the Dune series. From a desert it becomes the garden state envisaged by Kynes and Paul. But some fifteen centuries later, by the death of Leto II, the sandtrout is returned to the planet and it becomes a desert planet again in *Heretics of the Dune* (1984), only to face its destruction in *Chapterhouse* (1985). Palumbo remarks: "Echoing the planets own repeated transformations into its opposite, many things become their opposites on Dune." On each of the many levels of the novel there are several other examples of contradictions and opposing concepts, development of characters into "foils, shadows and doubles" all part of the great theme of "metamorphosis into the Other." While the "fair, fleshy, reckless and grossly sensualistic Harkonnens are meticulously presented as foils to the dark, lean, restrained and perceptive Atrides" in a desire to create a clear antithesis between the leaders of the two Greatest Houses of the Landsraad, there is a more subtle change in Paul's becoming his opposite when he finds out that he is a Harkonnen and interestingly enough it is the "Harkonnen-like ruthlessness" and the loss of "one of his father's defining traits," the concern for his men, that finally lead him through warfare and final victory over both his enemies and Dune [2002:154]. At the end of the novel a mature Paul has separated good from evil, and in the process, his life has been shaped by a host of experiences.

Herbert's theory of the superheroes is quoted in O'Reilly's book on the writer:

I had this theory that superheroes were disastrous for humans, that even if you postulated an infallible hero, the things this hero set in motion fell eventually into the hands of fallible mortals. What better way to destroy a civilization, society or a race than to set people into the wild oscillations which follow their turning over their judgment and decision-making faculties to a superhero? [1981: Ch.5]

Taking that into account, Herbert magnificently succeeds in demolishing his own theory and turning Paul into a moving, perfectly accomplished superhero. The incompleteness of this first message is proved only by the reading of his next Dune books. In *Dune Messiah* (1969), although Paul's character still retains something of its majesty, Herbert starts demolishing the mystique surrounding his figure. Paul loses his eyesight but his prescient powers have become so strong that he can see without it. As a blind Prophet he preaches against the religion he himself has established. He witnesses the mistake Leto II makes, in *Children of Dune*, by taking the one path that he himself feared to take and becoming an absolute tyrant. From now on, in three more volumes, Herbert builds up the demolition of the idea of messianic leadership.

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ANNEX 13

Starting point for building a network of problems in F.Herbert's *Dune*

