

In review

"Dune: House Abreides," by Brian Herbert and Kevin J. Anderson, Bantam Spectra, 608 pages, \$27.50.

By MICHAEL GILTZ

Hollywood has nothing on science fiction when it comes to sequels. Sci-fi scribes spend so much time concocting strange new worlds that when they hit pay dirt, it's hardly surprising they return to those worlds in book after book.

Just like the movies, those sequels usually drain the original of freshness and surprise. That's exactly what happened with

"Dune," Frank Herbert's clever masterpiece about a desert planet that is the only source of a valuable spice crucial to interstellar travel.

A rip-roaring tale with intrigue and assassinations to spare, it blossomed into a massive best-seller in the '70s, when the book's eco-friendly message and vaguely spiritual undertones found an eager audience. Herbert returned to this universe in five more novels, each more ponderous and weighted down with muddled philosophical musings than the last.

Now Herbert's son Brian and sci-fi writer Kevin J. Anderson have delivered this prequel, a rousing story that picks up the plot

lines with ease. At the center is the fate of young Leto, who must take control of his empire — House Atreides — and struggle for survival after the murder of his beloved father. He's unexpectedly aided by the Bene Gesserit, a powerful clan of women who force or trick rulers into complying with their

breeding program, a centuries-long project to produce a new messiah.

The first of a trilogy, the book is written so those who've never read "Dune" can start right here with this prequel. It's better to begin with "Dune:



House Atreides" and lead up to the classic rather than start at the top and face the slow decline of the original's sequels.