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DUNE

My Night With the *Dune 2* Bucket



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Photo-Illustration: by The Cut; Photo: AMC Theatres

I had one plan for my Leap Year evening: to purchase the Dune Bucket. As soon as it was announced, the fleshlight-reminiscent popcorn container caused an uproar across the internet, and for good reason: Much like the worm it depicts, it holds a mysterious, irresistible allure. It is powerful. It is magnificent. And as soon as I saw it, I knew I needed to cradle it gently, like a baby. This receptacle would bring untold joy and delight to my life.

At the AMC 7 in the East Village, I strut toward the concession stand, where I stand behind a cool-looking couple, one half of which coyly orders nachos with extra jalapeños before leaning in for a smooch. When it’s my turn, I tell the AMC employee what I want, expecting him to snicker, or at least smile. Instead, he simply asks me if I would like the bucket to be filled with popcorn. “Do people normally do that?” I ask, wondering if perhaps other patrons are protective of their collectors’ item. He stares at me. “Yes.” I agree to have my bucket filled, and I watch as he pulls it from the shelf and removes the worm component on top.

He hands me the bucket. It is gorgeous: a sleek, black metal body with a tasteful amount of *Dune 2* branding and a hard plastic lid made up of a sandy dune with the worm protruding out of it. The worm’s body reminds me of a stone well, but instead of flattening out at the top, it extends into a wavy pucker. Inside, it’s lined with silicone strands — its teeth, apparently — that gather toward the center.



: lid. Photo: Katja Vujic; On display at the AMC 7. Photo: Katja Vujic.

Then, I am faced with the question of whether or not I actually want to watch *Dune 2*. It’s just shy of 9:30 p.m., and the movie has a run time of nearly three hours. I’m not sure I have it in me tonight, although I do plan on watching the film eventually. Having previously greatly angered *Dune* fans with an inattentive review that was mostly focused on the first film’s lack of screen time for Zendaya, I know that I’ll need to really pay attention for this one, especially since I’ve heard Z has a much larger presence in it. I would never forgive myself for falling asleep right in front of her face. I briefly consider watching *Wonka* instead. Both *Dune 2* and *Wonka* begin at 10:30 and share a star (Timmy Tim!); at least the latter is an hour shorter and, according to my colleague Danielle’s review, a delight. But it would still mean finishing the movie after midnight, and ultimately I decide that my bucket deserves to be seen, not hidden in a dark theater.

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At one point, my full bladder has me rushing to the restroom — *without* a movie ticket, which is basically illegal at a theater — and I realize I don’t want to bring my popcorn in there with me. Before I could even ask, a kindly ticket-taker offers to hold my *Dune* bucket. I could tell from the way he said “I get it” that he would protect it with his life. As I walk out of the theater, it dawns on me that I have yet to use the bucket for its intended purpose. Slowly, hesitantly, I place my fingers through the soft, welcoming silicone strands of its alluring center, which gently hug my digits as I take hold of a few kernels. My hand retreats, and a kernel becomes stuck in the veritable forest of silicone. I let it stay there. I know it’s not a good idea to resist the bucket’s will.



buckets...a power one finds difficult to fathom. Photo: Brooke LaMantia; My gorgeous bucket, filled to the brim. Photo: Katja Vujic.

Which brings me to something I'd like to address. Many have claimed, in jest and not, that due to the bucket's design — which is reminiscent of, I'll say it, a butthole — it's inevitable that theatergoers and *Dune* enthusiasts who purchase the bucket will go home and ... well ... fuck it. Excuse my language, but there is an entire SNL skit about the subject. While I don't personally possess the equipment to make this a possibility, I actually don't think the bucket is nearly as fuckable as many have suggested. It's true that the bucket's entrance is alluring; it's equally true that the bucket's entrance is well guarded by a curving, hard plastic fortress. It's my belief, and I think many would agree, that this hard plastic exterior would be uncomfortable, if not outright painful, to thrust oneself into. That's my scientific evaluation on the matter, and I won't say any more.

Now striding down Third Street, I feel powerful, thanks to the confidence that comes with carrying this bucket. Is this what it was like to be a cheerleader in a sports-focused high school? I make direct eye contact with everyone I pass. They look back. I know they're noticing the bucket. For a while, no one says a word. It's not until I'm crossing the street that a sharply dressed woman in a perfectly tailored plaid peacoat pauses mid-conversation on the crosswalk. She is looking in my direction but not directly at me, pointing subtly at my bucket. "*Dune* bucket *Dune* bucket *Dune* bucket," she says under her breath to her equally fashionable friend, an incantation that I've been hearing in my mind since the day the *Dune* bucket emerged. Later, I'm exiting Tompkins Square Park, and a group of what I can only assume are NYU freshmen gleefully exclaim the same phrase: "*DUNE BUCKEEET!!!*"

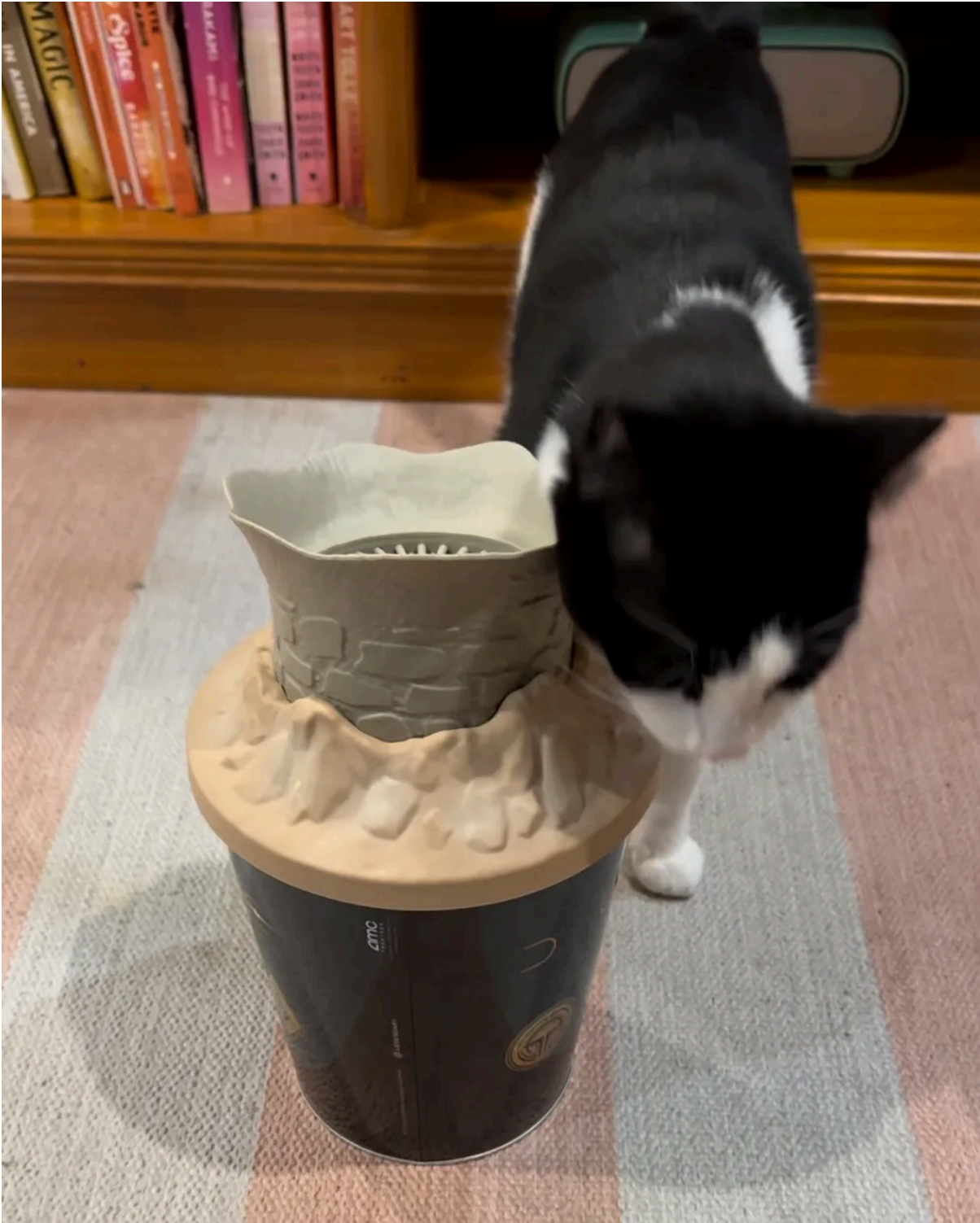
My bucket and I have strolled along for a while now, reaching the Williamsburg Bridge. I consider crossing it but decide that the Delancey-Essex JMZ train is the perfect stop at which to put my bucket on full display for my fellow subway riders. The train arrives just as I'm entering the platform, and I know it's because the bucket is bringing me luck.

A man wearing an oversize North Face puffer, glasses with clear frames, and an earring, topped off with a beanie that stops two full inches above his ears, sits down across from me. I can tell immediately it's because of the bucket. He tries not to look, but he fails repeatedly, and I meet his stolen glances with a steady gaze. He is unable to stop a small smile from blooming across his face, and he looks down, forcing it away. He looks back at the bucket, biting his lip. Is he just trying to control his facial expression, or is he ... *you know*? He keeps glancing, and I keep gazing, and eventually, he has no other option but to pull out his phone, which he fixes his gaze on until it's time for him to get off at his stop (Myrtle-Broadway, of course).

Just as he exits, a woman wearing UGGs, a red corduroy coat, and wired headphones attached to a Barbie phone case with a Sonny Angel figurine clinging to it gets on. She's on what appears to be a group FaceTime call and immediately bursts into giggles upon seeing the bucket. "I haven't seen one in real life yet," she says to her friends, and they seem to be asking her to turn the camera toward my bucket. Throughout the exchange, she never once makes eye contact with me, even though I try to connect, ready to offer her a better view. She tells her friends that if not for her total disinterest in *Dune*, she'd go to the theater just to buy the bucket. If she only knew ...

I'm not the only one who experienced visible reactions in the famously least reactive place on earth. My colleague Brooke LaMantia, who attended an advance screening of *Dune 2* on Wednesday, tried her best to conceal the bucket in her tote bag on her way home after seeing the film. It didn't work: "I watched multiple people stare deep into my bag at the *Dune* bucket, and slowly look up towards me," she says. "I could feel them begging to know where I got this. It was only Wednesday, after all, but also, 'Why?' was a question I still had for myself." For now, she plans on hiding it behind her desk monitor, having been stopped in the office by multiple co-workers asking for a picture with it.

Arriving home, I place the *Dune* bucket on the floor so my cat can make its acquaintance. He inspects it briefly before nuzzling it. I knew he would love it too. I look around my home — is there a single spot worthy of where I should place her? I eventually decide to make her the centerpiece of my dining table.



My cat nuzzling the bucket. Photo: Katja Vujic

The next day, after finishing my lunch, I have a slight hankering for popcorn and reach into the bucket, expecting it to be stale. To my surprise, it isn't! It turns out the *Dune* bucket is also excellent for keeping kernels fresh. Now *that's* the “spice” of life.

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