



Chaos Theory, Asimov's Foundations and Robots, and Herbert's Dune: The Fractal Aesthetic of Epic Science Fiction

Donald E. Palumbo

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Isaac Asimov and Frank Herbert remain two of the most popular and influential science fiction writers of the 20th century. Each is a master structuralist whose works succeed in large part through the careful mirroring of concepts at every narrative level. While the fiction of Herbert and Asimov has attracted scholarly attention, science itself is a crucial element that is almost completely ignored in critical assessments of science fiction as literature. Because the works of Asimov and Herbert are grounded in scientific premises, an appreciation of their literary structure depends on an understanding of the scientific concepts informing them. This book examines Herbert's *Dune* series and Asimov's *Foundation* trilogy and robot stories from the perspective of chaos theory to elucidate the structure of their works.

Chaos theory is the study of orderly patterns in turbulent, dynamic, or erratic systems. The order of these systems stems from the interdependence of numerous interlocking events or components. These may take the form of fractal structures, in which similar but not necessarily identical structures are replicated across the same scale and increasingly smaller scales. This book argues that in drawing upon apparently chaotic natural and scientific systems, Herbert and Asimov created fractal narrative structures in their works.

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