Patterns In The Sand: Computers, Complexity, And Everyday Life (Frontiers of Science (Perseus Books))

Terry Bossomaier, David Green

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Until recently, science has made progress by breaking large systems down into smaller and simpler parts, studying and explaining how these parts operate, and putting them back together again. Although this "reductionist" approach works amazingly well when we study the atom or the function of a single gene, it hits a brick wall when it comes to vastly complex systems like the brain, or the weather, or the ecosphere. Such systems are just too complicated to yield their secrets to the reductionist approach. The new science of complexity, one of the twentieth centuries greatest contributions to our comprehension of nature, is concerned with treating vastly complicated systems, like the biosphere or the Internet, as holistic systems. *Patterns in the Sand* discusses this new scientific paradigm that treats life as a natural computation, and shows how this approach translates into ways of dealing with complexity in real life. It shows, for example, how key ideas, such as chaos, criticality, and emergent phenomena, helps us to understand how ants build their nests, how the brain works, why we enact simple routines like getting up in the morning and going to work, and why accidents happen. Using such everyday phenomena as illustrations, Bossomaier and Green take us from the most basic function of the simple Turing computer through the vast interrelationships of the earth's biota, right up to the search for life on other planets, while providing a new understanding of the complicated, *complex,* world around us.

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