



PALGRAVE SCIENCE FICTION AND FANTASY: A NEW CANON

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# Frank Herbert's *Dune*

A Critical Companion

Kara Kennedy

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# Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy: A New Canon

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Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy: A New Canon provides short introductions to key works of science fiction and fantasy (SFF) speaking to why a text, trilogy, or series matters to SFF as a genre as well as to readers, scholars, and fans. These books aim to serve as a go-to resource for thinking on specific texts and series and for prompting further inquiry. Each book will be less than 30,000 words and structured similarly to facilitate classroom use. Focusing specifically on literature, the books will also address film and TV adaptations of the texts as relevant. Beginning with background and context on the text's place in the field, the author and how this text fits in their oeuvre, and the socio-historical reception of the text, the books will provide an understanding of how students, readers, and scholars can think dynamically about a given text. Each book will describe the major approaches to the text and how the critical engagements with the text have shaped SFF. Engaging with classic works as well as recent books that have been taken up by SFF fans and scholars, the goal of the series is not to be the arbiters of canonical importance, but to show how sustained critical analysis of these texts might bring about a new canon. In addition to their suitability for undergraduate courses, the books will appeal to fans of SFF.

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*To all those who have gladly lost themselves in another world*

## SERIES EDITOR'S PREFACE

The infinite worlds of science fiction and fantasy (SFF) dance along the borders between the possible and the impossible, the familiar and the strange, the immediate and the ever-approaching horizon. Speculative fiction in all its forms has been considered a genre, a medium, a mode, a practice, a compilation of themes or a web of assertions. With this in mind, *Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy: A New Canon* offers an expansive and dynamic approach to thinking SFF, destabilizing notions of the canon, so long associated with privilege, power, class, and hegemony. We take canon not as a singular and unchallenged authority but as shifting and thoughtful consensus among an always-growing collective of readers, scholars, and writers.

The cultural practice and production of speculation has encompassed novels, stories, plays, games, music, comics, and other media, with a lineage dating back at least to the nineteenth-century precursors through to the most recent publications. Existing scholarship has considered some of these media extensively, often with particular focus on film and TV. It is for this reason that *Palgrave Science Fiction and Fantasy* will forgo the cinematic and televisual, aspiring to direct critical attention at the other nodes of SFF expression.

Each volume in the series introduces, contextualizes, and analyzes a single work of SFF that ranges from the acknowledged “classic” to the should-be-classic, and asks two basic, but provocative questions: *Why does this text matter to SFF? and Why does (or should) this text matter to SFF readers, scholars, and fans?* Thus, the series joins into conversation with both scholars and students of the field to examine the parameters of SFF studies

and the changing valences of fundamental categories like genre, medium, and canon. By emphasizing the critical approaches and major questions each text inspires, the series aims to offer “go-to” books for thinking about, writing on, and teaching major works of SFF.

Haifa, Israel  
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# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
	<i>Place in Science Fiction</i>	3
	<i>Cultural Impact</i>	5
	<i>Herbert's Life</i>	6
	<i>Herbert's Other Works</i>	9
	<i>Historical Context</i>	11
	<i>References</i>	15
<b>2</b>	<b>Power, Politics, and Religion</b>	<b>19</b>
	<i>Feudalism</i>	20
	<i>Imperialism</i>	21
	<i>Machiavellianism</i>	24
	<i>Religion</i>	27
	<i>Political Systems</i>	31
	<i>References</i>	32
<b>3</b>	<b>Ecology and the Environment</b>	<b>35</b>
	<i>The Science of Ecology</i>	36
	<i>The Environment and People</i>	38
	<i>The Ecologist</i>	40
	<i>The Hero</i>	44
	<i>Ecological Science Fiction</i>	45
	<i>References</i>	46

<b>4</b>	<b>Mind and Consciousness</b>	49
	<i>Characterization</i>	50
	<i>Human Potential</i>	52
	<i>Soft Science Fiction</i>	60
	<i>References</i>	61
<b>5</b>	<b>Heroes and Masculinity</b>	63
	<i>Archetypal Hero</i>	64
	<i>Departure from the Archetype</i>	68
	<i>Limitations of the Hero</i>	70
	<i>Criticism of Heroes</i>	72
	<i>Complex Heroes</i>	74
	<i>References</i>	76
<b>6</b>	<b>Women's Influence and Control</b>	77
	<i>Religious Agency</i>	78
	<i>Embodied Agency</i>	81
	<i>Political Agency</i>	84
	<i>The Hero's Debt</i>	87
	<i>Feminist Speculation</i>	87
	<i>References</i>	88
<b>7</b>	<b>A Complex World</b>	89
	<i>References</i>	95
	<b>Bibliography</b>	97
	<b>Index</b>	109

## LIST OF FIGURES

Fig. 1.1	Paul and Chani in the desert with the Atrides green and black banner and Fremen followers. <i>Reproduced with permission from illustrator Arthur Whelan</i>	13
Fig. 2.1	Baron Vladimir Harkonnen fleeing from the poison released by his prisoner, Duke Leto Atrides. <i>Reproduced with permission from illustrator Arthur Whelan</i>	25
Fig. 3.1	Fremen planting grasses on dunes. <i>Reproduced with permission from illustrator Arthur Whelan</i>	42
Fig. 4.1	Fremen riding the giant sandworm using maker hooks. <i>Reproduced with permission from illustrator Arthur Whelan</i>	59
Fig. 5.1	Feyd-Rautha Harkonnen and Paul Atrides face-off in a knife fight. <i>Reproduced with permission from illustrator Arthur Whelan</i>	66
Fig. 6.1	A Bene Gesserit woman using the Voice. <i>Reproduced with permission from illustrator Arthur Whelan</i>	83



## Introduction

**Abstract** This chapter describes *Dune*'s place in science fiction as a literary work of art with classic themes, a memorable desert landscape, and messages about ecology that remain interesting and relevant. It explains how the book was part of a shift in the genre of science fiction and had a large impact due to its commercial success and its influence on many stories that followed, including *Star Wars*. The chapter also provides an overview of Herbert's influences and interests and draws comparisons between *Dune* and his other works to show that he developed similar themes before and after his masterpiece. It ends with a brief discussion of the historical context, providing a background that is helpful in unpacking the complexities in this multi-layered novel.

**Keywords** Science fiction • Frank Herbert • Fantasy • Ecology • Environment • Mid-twentieth century fiction

Frank Herbert's science fiction novel *Dune* (1965) has long been acknowledged as a literary work of art [1–3]. It marks the birth of the modern period of science fiction when stories became more sophisticated [4, p. 20]. Its density and complexity demand careful attention [4, p. 316]. It has been called a major work in league with Shakespeare's tragedies, with richness, coherence, and an imaginative vision [5, p. 340].