

# Book Review

## Task

Write an essay in which you assess the cultural impact and present-day relevance of a novel.

Follow this structure. Note that this is not a paragraph plan.

- I. Introduction to the novel and essay
- II. The author and his works.
- III. The novel: outline the story
- IV. Discuss its reception and impact.
- V. Consider the wider cultural impact.
- VI. Conclusion: the significance of the novel.

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## Dune

*Dune* is the triumph of House Atreides against a corrupt Emperor and his henchmen the evil Harkonnens. Published in 1965, *Dune*, a long science fiction/fantasy novel, won the inaugural Nebula Award for Best Novel and the Hugo Award in 1966 and it is often claimed that it is the best-selling science fiction novel of all time. In this essay I will introduce you to Frank Herbert, place *Dune* in his oeuvre and examine the book's cultural impact and relevance to today.

Frank Herbert was a short story writer, novelist and essayist, and political speechwriter amongst other trades. He started publishing short fiction in 1945 and published his first science fiction story in 1952. His first novel was published in 1955, while he worked as a speechwriter. He was able to spend six years researching and writing *Dune* as his wife, an advertising copywriter, supported them. *Dune* was published in 1965 but although it was a critical success, it did not sell many copies at first. It was not until 1972 that he could become a full-time writer. The *Dune* universe eventually became a series of prequels and sequels which continued even after his death in 1986.

*Dune* tells the story of the tragedy and triumph of the House Atreides on the planet of Arrakis, set thousands of years into the future when man has colonised the galaxy. The Duke Atreides is placed in charge of the planet which is the sole source of the spice which enables interstellar travel. It is a trap and the Duke is killed in an attack by the Harkonnens and the Emperor's troops. The Duke's son, Paul, escapes into the desert with his mother Jessica and later leads a revolt of the native Fremen, and marries the Emperor's daughter before unleashing a Fremen jihad across the Empire.

In *Dune* Herbert explored many themes such as the role of leadership (e.g. through the Duke and Paul, his son), ecological ideas (the desert planet Arrakis), the relationship between religion, politics and power (the Empire, Emperor and noble houses and Bene Gesserit), and human potentialities (with the Mentats, the Bene Gesserit and the Bene Tleilax as different evolutionary ends). By deliberately suppressing the role of technology Herbert could explore a variety of other themes which have made the work more influential than other science fiction novels. Thus, the novel has inspired other epic novels with their own grandly realised universes, and such films as *Star Wars*. It has itself been made into a TV series and two films – David Lynch's 1984 commercial flop, now with a cult following, and the more recent 2021 Denis Villeneuve film of the first half of the book, to be followed by part 2 in the near future. It has also been adapted into graphic novels and board and video games.

While *Dune* has not had the apparent broad cultural impact of *The Lord of the Rings*, through the books and recent films, it has had an influence on the culture through indirect means in specific areas and genres – in science fictional and fantasy, and in the gaming subculture. With the success of the Villeneuve film, it seems clear that the reverberations through the culture that began in 1965 with *Dune* will continue to echo.