



Heretics of Dune

Frank Herbert

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With more than ten million copies sold, **Frank Herbert's** magnificent **Dune** books stand among the major achievements of the human imagination. In this, the fifth and most spectacular **Dune** book of all, the planet Arrakis--now called Rakis--is becoming desert again. The Lost Ones are returning home from the far reaches of space. The great sandworms are dying. And the children of Dune's children awaken from empire as from a dream, wielding the new power of a heresy called love...

Heretics of Dune Details

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From Reader Review *Heretics of Dune* for online ebook

Wanda says

2.5 stars, rounded up to 3.

I do love the Dune universe, but I usually limit my re-reading to the first three books. The fourth book, *God Emperor of Dune*, is definitely the worst of the bunch, in my opinion, and yet I'm glad I read it long, long ago so that I knew what the main characters in *Heretics* were talking about! (Not enough to re-read *God Emperor*, mind you.)

Things I like in this book? Miles Teg, beloved Bashar and Atrides descendent and his interesting development in the last chapters. Yet another Duncan Idaho ghola, but this one seems to have a better grip on existence than the last several hundred of them. Plus, more insight into the world of the Bene Gesserit. Sheeana, the little minx on Arrakis/Rakis who has defied the Priesthood and has ridden the great sand worms, because really what is a Dune book without sand worm riding?

Things that make me scratch my head: The extreme weight given to sex in this book—really? I mean sex is nice and all, but it can be lived without fairly easily. Although individual people can be yanked around by their gonads, I don't think whole societies can be warped or controlled through sexuality. Except now that I say that I'm thinking about modern marketing and imagining that people's consumerist lives are definitely manipulated by sexuality in advertising. Hmmmm.... I suppose it's the opposite of most of the dystopia books, where the human sexual drive provides the cracks that start the destruction of the evil order. In the Dune universe, it is resistance to sexuality that is rebellious.

Then there's the whole issue of the Bene Gesserit and the Honored Matres being two very influential groups of women, bent on controlling the universe through sex. Mr. Herbert did not have a very flattering view of women, did he? When the men in the novel have sex, well they are just fulfilling a natural drive. When the women indulge, they are manipulating bitches. Quite a double standard. I suppose *Heretics* passes the Bechdel test, as there are lots of prominent named female characters who talk to one another (an awful lot) about issues besides men. Although most of the political issues that they talk about usually devolve at some point back to trying to figure out the (nominally male) God Emperor and how to escape from his Golden Path. So in a way, they are still talking about men—although they are focusing their lives on trying to escape from his plan, which I can fully understand.

All of the political and social machinations that made the original so interesting (to me at least) are back in *Heretics*, so that is something to be thankful for. I have only the vaguest of memories of the events of *Chapterhouse Dune*, but it is currently in my TBR pile from the public library, so I will likely continue on to the bitter end. Having read a couple of Brian Herbert's prequels, I think I will skip his efforts to finish his father's series.

Book 204 of my science fiction and fantasy reading project.

Tom says

It speaks volumes of this book that up until the last six pages I had absolutely no idea what the endgame was; yet throughout, I was riveted to the page. Herbert's ability to introduce you to a pre-existing world with all of its complexities and idiosyncrasies without telling you a damned thing is at its best in *Heretics of Dune*, which delineates the decline of the God Emperor's vast domain over which he reigned as a Tyrant for 3500 years.

Organizations at varying degrees of the grotesque, clandestine and corrupt compete for supremacy against each other as well as those returning from "the Scattering," a vast exodus of mankind after the Tyrant's fall. A young girl named Sheeana, who can control the Sandworms, comes to notice, and then power on Rakis. Duncan Idaho is reincarnated yet again. And still, the march of the Atreides family through history continues on, and the mankind continues to advance along along Leto II's "Golden Path," the enigmatic course of action by which he has safeguarded mankind from ultimate catastrophe and, thus, extinction. An excellent and worthy episode in the series.

Markus says

Buddy read with Athena!

"The surest way to keep a secret is to make someone think they already know the answer."

The tyrant God Emperor has returned to the sands of Dune. The universe that was once ruled by Houses Corrino and Atreides have fallen into chaos and is controlled by dozens of bickering factions. The Bene Gesserit and the Tleilaxu struggle for power, but their ambitions are contested by billions of humans returning from the Scattering. But on the surface of Dune, a small girl might be able to break the balance when she finds that she is able to control the mighty sandworms themselves.

Heretics of Dune is a giant improvement from the last book in the series, *God Emperor of Dune*. There are more characters, more hidden motives and overall a more interesting storyline. Still, there is much separating even this book from the three brilliant masterpieces of the Great Dune Trilogy. The epic feel is still gone, old boring characters are recycled, and even Frank Herbert's impressive pieces of social criticism are fewer and far between than they once were.

While I enjoyed reading this book, I demand more from this series. What it needs is a breath of fresh air, and I don't know if Herbert was capable of providing that. But Dune is still one of my favourite series of all time, and my aim to read everything still stands.

Bradley says

I have to admit that I put this one on the backburner for years and years and years, even though I attempted to re-read the series several times over the decades, I always got stuck right at the end of *God Emperor of Dune* and something in me just didn't want to pick up the two novels afterward.

This is strange to me! I thought the fifth and sixth books were rather awesome, frankly!

And that's why I'm skipping books 2, 3, and 4 altogether and jumping right back in to the books that I have only read once. And then I'll be picking up the series carried on by Anderson and Frank's son following the events of Chapterhouse.

So how did I think this book held up after all these years?

Pretty good! There were a few slow parts, but the one thing that Heretics does very well is the worldbuilding. The Great God Leto II has been dead for 1.5k years after taking a dip in the aquaduct, turning into sandtrout that have now become full sandworms. That means that poor Paul's son has a trapped consciousness inside these gigantic monstrosities after having lived for 5k years. (Since birth+as a sandworm+trapped consciousness.) Freaky cool. And of course religion has a bit part to play in these books as they always have.

What's most interesting is Miles Teg and the new Duncan Idaho. The similarities between Teg and the original Leto is pretty suggestive and the spice trance doubly so. His little transformation blew me away both times I read it. But Duncan Idaho? The obsessively resurrected clone of the original that has come back nearly countless times over 5k years? It staggers the imagination. Leto II really put him through the ringer, but even after the old god had died, the Bene Gesserit and the Bene Tlailax have turned him into the stage of their own conflict.

And it's these two that really own the stage in this side of the universe.... until the great spreading of humanity came back. :) Enter conflict. :) So good.

This is one of those series that take a lot of dedication and understanding to really enjoy. You really have to get deep into them, but they're very, very enjoyable, and this one is very complex and deep in a very similar way to the original classic.

Tons of politics and machinations, and if you love that, you'll love this. :)

Michael Finocchiaro says

I know, you are like, wait, 5 stars? Really? And I am, like, I really enjoyed this book. I mean, I learned about much of the Dune universe that was never mentioned in the first four books (sex, Ix, the Tleilaxu, the Bene Gesserit proscription of love...) and I really liked Teg and Odrade and even Lucille and the new ghola. The action was great especially at the end (even if Teg's capture of the Honored Matre's no-ship was frustratingly fast-forwarded. Philosophically, there was a LOT to chew on and the tech was probably the most diverse and interesting of all the Dune series since the first one. On to Chapterhouse!

Eric Allen says

Heretics of Dune

Book 5 of the Dune Chronicles

A Dune Retrospective by Eric Allen

Heretics of Dune is a bit of an odd book in my experience. The first time I read God Emperor of Dune I was so put off the series by it that I refused to pick Heretics up for almost an entire decade. When finally I did pick it up, reading through the entire series again with the hope that age had given me new perspective on life to keep God Emperor from sucking so hard, it was probably my second favorite book in the series. It had characters I liked, things actually happened in it, and the story was pretty enjoyable with a huge OMFG DID THAT REALLY HAPPEN moment at the end. In comparison to God Emperor, Heretics is a friggen masterpiece. Of course, just about anything is a friggen masterpiece next to that abomination.

I have read this book several times since, and I remember enjoying it each time. However, this time, I made a bit of a mistake. I read Fragments by Dan Wells immediately before picking up Heretics, and that was so much better written, with so much more interesting characters, in a much more interesting setting, with a better story that is told better in every way than Heretics of Dune. And so, this time around, all I could think of was how mediocre it was, how it wasn't as well written as Fragments, how the characters weren't as interesting as the creations of Dan Wells, how the story was so distractingly vague and didn't seem to be going anywhere.

And after this experience, I have come to the conclusion that Heretics of Dune can either be a very good book, or a soul-crushingly mediocre one depending on what you read immediately before picking it up.

We begin after another 1500 year jump into the future. After the fall of the God Emperor due to his own stupidity, arrogance, and lack of any enjoyment factor for anyone reading the books in which he appears, humanity scattered to the nine corners of the universe, multiplying and finding new planets to call home. Why this could only happen AFTER the death of the God Emperor is anyone's guess, but whatever, I'm sure it made sense to Herbert as he was writing the book and who am I to tell Herbert what is stupid in his own universe?

After the Scattering people are beginning to return to Arrakis, called Rakis now, and the surrounding part of the universe, bringing with them the Honored Matres. These women are a perversion of the Bene Gesserit, ruling their people through the power of sex. No, I'm not kidding. In fact, the book goes into extensive and graphic detail on this point, and let me tell you... Herbert ain't no sex writer, that much is for sure.

The Bene Gesserit see them as a threat because ... and some girl is born on Rakis with the ability to ride the worms and this is important because ... and the Bene Gesserit have cloned Duncan Idaho yet again to do ... and they make an alliance with the Tlelaxu where they are clearly the underdogs because ... Do you see what I keep saying about Herbert leaving WAY too much of what would make his books make more sense vague and up to the reader's own imagination instead of giving us clear character motivations and explanations on the import of certain people and events that bring us into the story?

The Good? In a story that literally spans across thousands of years, Herbert bridges these books together with a common character, Duncan Idaho. It's not the same Duncan in every book, but he's got the same memories and personality so it works to hold the series together. Though he's more of a minor character in the first three books, he becomes a more central figure as the series progresses and all other bridges to the earlier volumes are washed away. He works pretty well in this role and is probably one of the more entertaining characters in the series for his penchant for saying the exact thing that will most piss people off in any given conversation.

The scope of the story, spanning across thousands of years shows Herbert's true visionary powers. That he was able to conceive of a story spanning so great a time, and account for the passage of time, like the names of planets changing, and show the long term effects of decisions made in the distant past by long dead

characters, speaks to his prowess as a storyteller.

At last, after three books of nothing but plots, within plots, within plots, wrapped in layers upon layers of intrigues, Herbert brings some much needed action back to the series. It's not that I don't like the political intrigues. Herbert is excellent at writing them. It's just that when that was ALL that there was to the story, it started to get a little stale. When characters do nothing but plot, and plot, and plot, and NEVER DO ANYTHING ELSE, it gets boring. People stop caring if anything is going to happen next, because they've seen that it isn't going to. When I first read this book, I loved the ending, because the last 25% of it is basically just non-stop action, which was something I was craving from this series since the first book ended, being a teenaged boy at the time and all.

The Bad? Although Herbert's sexism is not as pronounced in this book as it was in the previous one, it still comes out. Nearly every female character in this book is described by the size of her breasts, or by the attractiveness of her figure. The whole women perfecting the art of sex to enslave their followers thing is just a little too far over the top for my taste, and shows, once again, that Herbert thinks women are the scum of the universe. His mommy must never have held him as a child or something... There's thinking you're better than women because you happen to have been born with a dick, and then there's the complete and utter hatred that Herbert seems to have. He's in a class all of his own.

This book is not very well written. In fact, it's almost downright terribly written. Herbert used to be able to tell a coherent story, but as his career meandered on, he became less and less able to do so. The plot of this book, frankly makes no sense, it goes through several reversals, keeps the readers completely in the dark on the motivation and reasons behind generally everything going on, and skips over several key scenes without even referencing them or what went on during them. This book needed a lot more editorial influence than it got. Herbert really needed to sit down with a good and experienced editor and work through the plot for a few months before setting to work on the final drafts. These are things that could easily have been fixed, and I'm completely baffled that they weren't.

Characters do things that make no sense, because their motivations are never made clear to the reader. As such, their actions have no context. When we don't know what drives a character to do what they do, anything that they DO end up doing is confusing and pointless. Emphasis and importance are prescribed to certain people or places for no apparent reason because the author never saw the need to explain his own story to us or elaborate on all of the vagueness. Being vague is not bad in and of itself, you can build up mysteries in your stories to ratchet up the suspense and keep the readers interested. That's NOT the problem here. It's that NOTHING--N O T H I N G--is explained. Not who characters are, why they are important, why they do the things they do, why those things are important, what is going on, why any of that is important, why I should care about any of it, and so on. There's building up mysteries and plot twists, and then there's leaving the readers in the dark to the point that they begin to wonder if even YOU know what you're talking about. Characters start doing wildly irrational things and I can't even tell if it's in their character to do so or not, because they're not developed well enough as people for me to know anything about their personalities.

Nothing that happens in this book feels as though it was part of a flowing narrative where events move seamlessly and flawlessly along until it all comes crashing down at the end. Instead it feels like a whole lot of different scenes that have nothing to do with each other being tied together by the fact that they just happen to occur around the same characters. This book is a monumental failure to tell a story right from the foundation on up, and the worst thing about it is that it could have been fixed with just a little editorial influence. It didn't HAVE to be this bad. But Herbert had to come down with that whole George Lucas Syndrome thing and well, here we are, with a book that desperately needed an editor in the worst way, and

never got one.

During almost every single scene in this book I was constantly asking one of the following questions. Why is this important? What does this have to do with anything? Why is this scene even in the book at all? What is going on, and how does it relate to anything else? These are questions that I should never find myself asking during a story. A narrative should be cohesive, with every single scene serving a purpose to the whole, flowing seamlessly from one event to the next and culminating in an epic climax. The entire story of this book is so disjointed and nonsensical that I was constantly trying to figure out how any given scene was supposed to relate to any of the others. And on top of that, several key scenes seem to have been cut near the end. On one page, Teg is plotting a bloody revolution to escape whatever planet he was on. And on the VERY NEXT PAGE, he's on Rakis waiting for a sandworm to arrive with some little girl whose importance STILL has not been touched upon by ANYONE at the very end of the book. I can make GUESSES at her importance to the plot, but Herbert holds her up as a golden child to be worshiped by all, but never tells us WHY. There was CLEARLY a deleted sequence here and the lack of it had me flipping back to see if my book was missing pages. Do you see what I mean when I say this book is disjointed and none of the scenes lead into any of the others? A good 30 pages seems to be completely missing from the published draft of the book.

The Ugly? Duncan Idaho: Teenaged Sex God... Need I say more? Okay, people, I've likely said it before, and I'll say it again, as many times as I need to for the point to sink in. Pedophilia of ANY sort is NOT COOL. Now, imagine if you will, that Duncan Idaho is not a fourteen year old boy, but a fourteen year old girl, and the sex temptress forcing herself on him is a man rather than a woman. Does this scene start to feel a little more uncomfortable to you? It should. It should have been just as uncomfortable to anyone as it is. Pedophilia is pedophilia, whether the victim is male or female. It is just as wrong either way, SO WHY IN THE HELL IS AN UNDERAGE BOY BEING RAPED BY AN OLDER WOMAN SO ACCEPTED IN FICTION IN OUR SOCIETY!?!?! It is just as bad when it happens to a boy as it is when it happens to a girl, and nothing that you can say will justify it. Pedophilia is pedophilia. It's the same damn thing, and I shouldn't have to explain why it is to anyone. This is a double standard that has both baffled and angered me for just about as long as I can remember. A young girl has an older man force himself on her and it's horrible and unthinkable, the same thing happens to a boy with an older woman and everyone is like, "good for him." NO!!! NOT GOOD FOR HIM!!! That's called pedophilia, AND IT IS WRONG!!! Just because a woman is far less likely to sexually assault a teenaged boy than a man might be to assault a teenaged girl doesn't mean that it doesn't happen, and that it's not just as wrong when it does. Sexual abuse toward ANY child, male or female, is still sexual abuse, and guess what, having sex with a fourteen year old, no matter how many lifetimes of memory he might have, qualifies as sexual abuse.

This book has no protagonist. A Protagonist is the hero of the story, the one around whom the events of the story unfold. A Protagonist is a surrogate for the reader, a character that we can project ourselves onto and imagine having all those fantastical adventures as. They will be faced with some sort of conflict, and be tried and tested, coming to the very brink of ruin before finally learning and growing as a person and overcoming all opposition. Not every story is the same, I will grant you that, and not every story has to follow that exact pattern, but typically, there's at least a central figure in the story around whom events are woven. There's a main character that is vital to the plot, and without whom there is no story. Not so with *Heretics of Dune*. There are characters in this book. Some of them do things, though the vast majority of them only take up space, but the book isn't really ABOUT any of them. Without a strong central figure to identify with, we're left with the fragmented plot and the terrible writing to draw us into the book, and as they were both awful, what are we left with? Is it so much to ask that a fictional story I'm reading actually BE ABOUT SOMEONE? This is a concept as old as stories themselves, so why do so many authors these days have trouble identifying to the readers who their book is about and why we should care about them? Say what you

will about Stephenie Meyer, but she at least knows who her books are about, and how to tell a cohesive story surrounding them. I mean... they SUCK, but at least they're put together better than this crap.

Anyway, despite liking this book in my younger years, I found it terribly written, convoluted, and far too vague for comfort. None of the narrative seems to flow along, and it feels something like a shattered stainedglass window rather than a clear picture of a story. None of the character motivations are clear, and far too many plot points are left entirely to the reader's imagination. There is far too much pedophilia going on for comfort here, and the fact that I never see anyone bring that point up about this book has me feeling a little nervous over where society is going. Despite bringing some much needed action back to the series, this book fails to entertain because it is written so poorly, and the plot reads like a map for a roadtrip planned out by a crack addict. Compared to God Emperor of Dune, it was a masterpiece. Compared to anything else, it's pretty much crap.

Check out my other reviews.

Athena Shardbearer says

Buddy Read with Markus

Hey old worm, was this your design?

Soooooooo much better than the last book.

Terry says

I'm one of those weirdos that actually likes the entirety of Frank Herbert's Dune series even after you get past the first three volumes and the direct history of Muad'Dib and his family and start wading into some seriously weird stuff (and saying that the later volumes of the series are weird when you compare them to the earlier ones is saying something). Don't worry though, I'm not crazy enough to have anything but contempt for that cash grab series of prequels and sequels floated by Herbert's son and his ghost writer pal...blech! Part of the interest for me in the later volumes is seeing how the prescience of Muad'Dib (and even more so of his son the god-emperor Leto II) affected the human race and noting how humanity responded in an attempt to free themselves from the 'Golden Path' that it brought about. The other reason, I must admit, is that I find the character of Duncan Idaho, or more precisely the Duncan Idaho gholas which populate these books, fascinating. Be warned: there are some spoilerific details for previous volumes of the original Dune series below.

In the previous volume God Emperor of Dune we got a close-up view of the tyranny of the man-worm himself, the god-emperor Leto II (all done for humanity's own good of course) and also saw his fascination with bringing back his family's old retainer, the inimitable sword master Duncan Idaho again and again in gholas form over a period of centuries. Why Duncan Idaho? What's so special about him? And why did Leto keep bringing him back (and ultimately killing him) over and over again? Was he expecting some result other than companionship and ultimately betrayal? It appears to have been a question the sisters of the Bene Gesserit started asking themselves as well and once they were free from the direct yoke of the god-emperor (though not of his pre-destined plan for humanity), they decided to keep up the tradition for themselves and

see what the result might be.

And so we begin this volume of the series at a Bene Gesserit fortress located on the planet Gammu (formerly Geidi Prime, home of both the Harkonnens and the original Duncan Idaho) watching as a young ghola is being trained for purposes that even his teachers and protectors aren't fully aware of. Of course this ghola is merely the last in a long line of Duncan Idahos, not yet aware of his previous existence, and just as uncertain of his purpose as those who watch over him. Despite the fact that this book takes place thousands of years after the time of Muad'Dib some familiar features survive: as noted the Bene Gesserit are still controlling bloodlines (though with the express purpose to perfect human breeding while at the same time to explicitly avoid the appearance of another Kwitsatz Haderach) and holding a precarious, though powerful, position in the political hegemony of human culture in the former precincts of the Padishah Empire; the Bene Tleilax still tinker with the genetic code of humanity in a much more direct way (including supplying the Bene Gesserit with their desired Duncan Idaho gholas) and hope to supersede all political rivals through plans and machinations of their own; and the Spacing Guild and industrialists of Ix still survive albeit in much weakened forms. Two of the most drastic changes are that the Bene Tleilax have finally discovered a way to artificially produce the spice melange and thus break the stranglehold previously held by those who controlled the Worms of Arrakis (or Rakis as it is now called); not to mention the fact that a multitude of peoples who had left the Empire after the fall of the god-emperor in an event called the Scattering to populate the vast reaches of space are now returning and want to conquer all of the supposed secrets of the humans they left behind in the regions of the old empire.

The overarching tale is one of political intrigue as the Bene Gesserit face off against the mysterious Bene Tleilax and each hopes to outplay the other in a bid to control the former empire; of course in addition to this they both face the threat of the nearly overwhelming forces of the Scattering and their mysterious and deadly leaders, the Honored Matres. At a much more human level it is the personal story of several key players against this wider backdrop: the Duncan Idaho ghola as he comes into his own and must decide how to live in this new world separated from all he knew by thousands of years; his teacher and mentor Miles Teg, an Atrides scion and mentat-warrior of great ability who has served the Bene Gesserit all of his life; Sheanna, a young native of Rakis apparently born with the power to control the sand worms into which the god-emperor transformed himself; and Darwe Odrade a sister of the Bene Gesserit who must navigate difficult waters and test her loyalty to the sisterhood that made her and the many plans within plans that have formed the basis of her society.

I enjoyed this volume, though I think on this re-read I didn't find it quite as captivating as I remember my first reading to have been. This also is very much the first half of one story as it ends nearly in mid-crisis and leaves much to be resolved in the next volume (which I remember being the weirdest of the bunch and which itself unfortunately left many unanswered questions). If you want to keep following Frank Herbert on the ride through his crazy Dune universe and see the impact of the Atrides on the human race then this is a required volume; on the other hand if you were happy to leave things where they were at the end of Children of Dune, or found the politics and world of God Emperor of Dune confounding then perhaps you should leave this one on the shelf.

Sandeep says

Finally! I have been dreading reading this book for ever so long, and now the alarm bells seem to have been superfluous. Lulled into a false sense of doom and with jangling nerves fostered by the utter metaphysical

crap that were the second, third and fourth books of the Dune series, and God Emperor of Dune was singularly mind-numbing, this gave my jangling nerves rest.

What's different? Well, there's still a lot of obscure talk, but some of it finally is relieved with some actual ACTION! Things HAPPEN, people DO things, there's a lot of running around, shouting, shooting laser beams and wild martial arts contests at superhuman speed. There are also a sect of women who have achieved the highest amplification of orgasm and use sex as a weapon. There are still the Bene Gesserit sisters strutting around like they're the cat's whiskers. And we actually get to get OFF Dune the Planet for a change. Good fun!

Bob R Bogle says

[*Nota Bene*: As Frank Herbert's last two published novels in the *Dune* series, *Heretics of Dune* and *Chapterhouse: Dune*, along with the unwritten *Dune 7*, in fact comprise a single story that happened to be divided into three parts, I'll post the same review for both of the two published volumes. This review contains no spoilers.]

During the first half of his literary career, Frank Herbert focused most on coming to terms with what it meant to be conscious. The evolution of his thinking on the subject can be traced from real-world events which happened to him in his youth, through his earliest published science fiction stories, crude as they were, and on into novels like *The Dragon in the Sea* and the stories that would coalesce into *The Godmakers*, and certainly *The Santaroga Barrier* and *Destination: Void*. This line of thinking reached its fruition in the novels *Dune* and *Dune Messiah*.

Having expanded his understanding of the full spectrum of consciousness about as far as it could go (although admittedly he never stopped tinkering with the subject), in the second half of his career Herbert refocused his attention on how the limitations imposed upon individual consciousness – or perhaps it might be better to say the limited perspective encompassing a single human lifetime – leaves humanity ill-equipped to confront an infinite and ever-changing universe. In effect we end up in a continuous crisis mode, always vainly insisting that the world of tomorrow conform to the expectations of yesterday. We're persistently and comically always shocked to discover our assumptions are wrong. Elsewhere I have described this aspect of Herbert's thinking, the human failure to deal with, or even to recognize, the implications of an unbounded universe, as an *absolute-infinity breach*. This theme begins to emerge in *Children of Dune* and is especially prominent in *God Emperor of Dune*, for a final surmounting of the absolute-infinity breach is the primary target of Leto II's Golden Path. But we also encounter the concern in Herbert's final trilogy: *Heretics of Dune*, *Chapterhouse: Dune*, and (by implication) in the unwritten *Dune 7*.

It is a hallmark of Herbert's imagination that he pursues an ever-elaborating expanse of concerns, always tracing a spectral pathway across a continuum of broadening bandwidth, chasing after considerations of widening implications across grander and grander scales of magnitude. An original interest in a fleeting moment of hyperconsciousness ultimately led Herbert into defining consciousness, hyperconsciousness and subconsciousness in all their aspects and dramatizing what he had learned and concluded in his stories; likewise his contemplations of the diverse implications of the absolute-infinity breach. And it might be added that he pushed his spectral analytical approach through time as well, so the *Dune* saga becomes probably the most temporally discontinuous series ever written. The first three novels take place roughly around the year

21,200 AD. The drama of *God Emperor of Dune* unfolds 3,500 years later, and that of the last three books (*Heretics of Dune* and *Chapterhouse: Dune* are difficult novels, and attempting to distinguish them as separate novels, or independent from the unwritten *Dune 7*, is an artificial and arbitrary exercise) takes place an additional 1,500 years after that, placing us circa 26,200 AD.

As the primary goal of *Children of Dune* and *God Emperor of Dune* was to shatter the innate mythmaking in humanity that compels us to conservative convergence, these last three books are intended to unveil the consequences of living in a multiverse that has become irreparably divergent. This divergence followed in the wake of the downfall of the God Emperor and the subsequent Scattering of humanity not throughout multiple star systems or galaxies, but across multiple universes which are discontinuous with one another. Any threat can now come upon our heroes and heroines from any direction, but with all the eggs no longer in one basket, no matter what catastrophe might befall locally, the whole story can never come to a final end.

In *Heretics of Dune* (1984) and *Chapterhouse: Dune* (1985), the Bene Gesserit has recovered substantially from the tribulation of the era of the God Emperor, and now we're allowed a far more intensive view of the inner workings of the Sisterhood than ever before. But the Bene Gesserit and the remnants of the old Imperium, as ever, are confronted by a host of power-hungry enemies, new and old, in the usual style of Herbert's Machiavellian plotting. It is these plots-within-plots that seemingly all other reviewers have focused on, and I'll forego doing the same here.

Herbert said it wasn't until he was writing *Children of Dune* that he came to understand that an important role of an author was to entertain his readership. That will come as surprising news to some of you who like Herbert, and not to some of you who don't. But it's important to note that the word "entertainment" carries different connotations for readers than it does for hacks or more seriously-aspiring authors. Entertainment is something that is doled out to the action-adventure-thriller crowd, to those who love reading or going to the movies in no small part for the sheer escapism of the thing. Now I'm not overly bigoted about this. There's nothing more boring than a book that's, well, boring. But I think what Herbert was getting at was that as he matured as a writer he came to see, as many writers do, that plot *per se* is less interesting than character, no matter how many car chases or lasgun exchanges are involved.

I for one can't separate a reading of the last books of the *Dune* series from knowledge of what was going on in Herbert's life as he wrote them, which he did, by that way, at an absolutely furious pace. This happened to be during the most stressful part of his entire life. His wife, Beverly, had been dying for ten years, and the last two years of her life were especially painful for her and for her husband, both physically and emotionally. I believe that, had he lived, Frank Herbert would have easily written the *Dune 7* novel to complete the series. I am less sanguine that he could ever have written another coherent novel after that one.

By the time *God Emperor of Dune* was published in 1981, and with the signed contracts for the later *Dune* novels in hand, Herbert was financially secure but, as I've suggested, he was suffering from increasing emotional instability. Furthermore, I can't help believing he was struck by a supreme irony, which is that, like Paul Maud'Dib, he now found himself hemmed in by the conservative mythology of his own image which he himself had created. To this day you can still see this in reviews of his later books, wherein readers who were born after Herbert's death still bemoan the fact that his later books are not like *Dune* in style. Everyone wanted, and continues to want, Frank Herbert to write books that seem like quote-unquote Frank Herbert books: everyone wanted, and wants, Herbert to remain frozen unchanging in 1965. But in his later years Herbert, with his financial security, felt free to try to break out of that myth regardless of the demands and expectations of his fans, and for this I applaud him. I'm sure he did have basic plot elements in mind for the last three books of the series – call this the "entertainment" necessary to bring the masses along – but it's quite obvious that he had already grown more interested in character development than in weaving such

masterful webs of palace intrigue anymore.

Herbert wanted to change course, but he had not yet found a new direction. I see hints of this in *Children of Dune*, in which Duncan Idaho tells Alia about the practice of setting out blocks of marble in the desert to be etched by the blowing sand of a Coriolis storm. Idaho argues that the sculpted pieces produced are beautiful but they are not art, as they are not carved according to human volition. But in the latter books it is Sheeana who creates an abstract sculpture she calls "The Void," which is art. How might these two kinds of sculpture compare? What is the symbolic significance of Sheeana's abstract work? The question is particularly relevant, it seems to me, when Sheeana's piece is recognized as a symbol set in tension with a Van Gogh which, at the end of *Chapterhouse: Dune* is carted off into a new, uncharted universe. Clearly, I think, the matter can be read as a form of self-psychoanalysis undertaken by the author. "The Void" is the primitive and unformed new expression welling up inside him; the old and familiar, even conventional Van Gogh has been let slip away with a fond farewell.

A kind of quantum uncertainty pervades *Heretics of Dune* and *Chapterhouse: Dune* which are, after all, a single story occupying multiple volumes. We do not have enough pieces to interpret this story or to fairly critique its parts, which must therefore remain finally unadjudicated and unjudgeable. This is because the unwritten *Dune 7* was also to have comprised a full third of the complete tale. We can see that Herbert was bending writing to a new direction, and we can hazard some educated guesses about (entertaining) plot elements that would have informed the third book, but we can never know. The best we can do is ponder any written records or notes that Herbert may have left behind as poles in the sand to mark the path he intended to follow. Anyone who possesses any such notes, it seems to me, can be a good steward to the memory of Frank Herbert only by publishing them in unexpurgated form: lacking that, Herbert's career accomplishments can never be properly assessed. And that is an injustice to an important 20th century American writer.

Stephen says

4.5 to 5.0 stars. Another superb installment in one of the best science fiction series of all time. The universe that Herbert created for the Dune series is as good as it gets and his writing and story telling are amazing. HIGHEST POSSIBLE RECOMMENDATION!!!!

Evgeny says

Not much time has passed since the events in the end of the previous book – measly 1500 years. Considering the fact that God Emperor was an undisputed ruler of the known Universe for exactly 3 times as long as that, this time period is nothing. As such not much has changed – believe it or not. For comparison take modern state of humanity and that of 1500 years ago and think whether it is possible at all for humans to stagnate for this long. I honestly do not believe it.

Anyhow, with the God Emperor finally out of the picture the power-grab games are in full swing with everybody trying to out-power everybody else, the consequences and such minor annoyances as countless lives of insignificant people be damned. To add to the fun, a new and a very dangerous faction came into being – completely out of the blue and unexpected I might add. Their bid for power shapes the majority of the book. As Leto II never bothered to explain (or even to hint) what the Golden Path is, it is not clear

whether these new people are part of the plan, or whether they were as unexpected by the guy as by us readers.

Let me start by saying this book is miles ahead of the previous one in terms of quality and excitement. The main reason for this is that it takes a special kind of talent to write something worse than God Emperor of Dune. That one consisted of pointless philosophical rumblings for about three fourths and teen angst (of the worst kind) in the last quarter – coming from a creature who lived 35 centuries, no less.

This tale starts with cloning of Duncan Idaho. Let me put some things in the perspective. He was initially cloned in book 2 which was kind of cheap trick to bring a dead guy back, but it least that action served a very well explained purpose. In book 4 Leto II kept cloning the guy non-stop during his endless reign (3500 years – in case you forgot). At that point this particular trope has overstayed its welcome. You can imagine that this same act in the beginning of this book felt like a really bad joke – I hoped the madness would stop after Leto II was out of the picture.

To add an insult to the injury, nobody bothers to explain what was so outstanding about the guy to begin with: he was loyal and heroic, but he did not possess any qualities making his presence necessary for literally everybody and their brother in the Universe. Every single action was revolved around his brand new sparkling clone and nobody seems to have any clue why he is so goddamn important.

On the positive side nobody makes long speeches anymore; this is a major improvement. As the book is slightly under 500 pages this means stuff actually happens unlike in the previous book. In fact there were some really fast-paced moments. If only somebody bothered to explain why people did what they did, I would have appreciated them so much more.

On the negative side I could not care less about a single character. Often I found myself wishing all of them would perish at the end. Please do not get me wrong: I did not wish for all of them to die horribly; a gentle kind death would suffice. On one hand we have people returning from unknown parts of the Universe; they are pissed off at everybody and we do not have their POVs which makes it hard to learn their motivations. On the other hand we have the Bene Gesserit who are heartless by definition: killing all of their emotions – love first and foremost - is a part of their training. All of the power players are perfectly fine with completely wiping out the whole planets that had a misfortune of being in their way.

So tell me, which side to root for? Another relevant question: why would I care about anybody?

At least some of Bene Gesserit members have POVs. They face a mortal threat, but it does not stop them any from their own inside power struggle; business as usual. I already said this before, but it is worth repeating again: all of the problems of Bene Gesserit could be easily solved by having them work a regular soul-sucking work we all do from 9 to 5. The real life showed this to be true over and over again.

At this point if you stop and think about it, the story took a completely different turn from the original classic book; the only things in common between them are some of the names. Everybody who is somehow significant is a descendent of Atreides line. Poor Duncan Idaho clone is the only exception. To my complete surprise the story has quite a big sexual themes with at least one very explicit description of a sex act. I am not a prude by any definition, but this looks completely out of place. By the way, do not expect that description I mentioned to be a good piece of erotic literature.

So in conclusion this is light years ahead of the previous book. This one has exciting action scenes, intrigues, and double-crossings. I only wish somebody would bother explaining to me why all of these things were necessary. I give it 3 stars and leave it at this.

Lyn says

I often complain about series and deride their success but here I am reading a series and I think I understand the attraction: escapism, pure and simple. As the pages turned I smiled, recognizing Bene Gesserit (now with more fully described superhuman powers – like Jedi), Duncan Idaho, and yes even the great worms. I surrounded myself, wrapped up like a great cozy blanket, in the familiarity of the world building and closed the door to this reality. I think maybe that is why series are so popular, it is a chance to shut the door, close the windows and embrace another world.

As *Heretics of Dune* begins, the reign of “the Tyrant” Leto II, the God-Emperor has been over for 1,500 years and has replaced the Butlerian Jihad as a back-story myth and Paul Muab dib and the Lady Jessica have taken the roles of a far distant savior and holy mother. The void left by the death of God-Emperor and the collapse of his empire resulted in the Scattering, a universal diaspora of humanity that provides Herbert an opportunity to re-tool his already complex world building and now various groups vie for power: Bene Gesserit, Bene Thleilaxu, Ix, Guild, Rakis priests and the emergence of a new and ruthless power, the Honored Matres. *Heretics* also contains a reference to ancient Vincent van Gogh paintings and frequent references to Christian text and old Earth allusions. *Heretics* also introduces one of the more charismatic and interesting characters in the series: Miles Teg, a mentat military genius trained by the Bene Gesserit.

Herbert was a market adaptive best-selling author and a long-range visionary genius. *Heretics* is a throwback to the mysterious, espionage, court intrigue and machinations of the original *Dune*. While the series had lagged somewhat under the great worm God Emperor Leto II, *Heretics* revives the complexity that made *Dune* so attractive to readers. Herbert uses a very entertaining science fiction story as a vehicle to examine and explore politics, religion, economics, sociology, myth and military science.

There were three years between the time I put down *God Emperor of Dune* and when I finally came back around to finish the series. *Heretics of Dune* has revitalized my interest in Herbert’s fine work with *Dune*.

Kevin says

Compared to the questionable *God Emperor of Dune*, this regains some of the original *Dune* novels taste for plots, counter-plots, espionage, conspiracies and so on. *God Emperor of Dune* was too heavy with little action to break it up, and besides, it was so hard to visualise Leto II as the hybrid creature he became. *Heretics of Dune* however is a big return to form, with lots of action and different character focus, combined with the mysticism, religion and philosophical discourse that characterises this whole series of novels. This is why I gave this top marks, as it is a page turner and, like the other four books, makes you think about things.

The setting this time is one thousand years after Leto II's death which would be nearly five thousand years after the original trilogy- I mean, Frank Herbert was certainly not conservative with dating his fiction was

he? This time, the Bene Gesserit are the books main focus, with their wheeling and dealings, their breeding program all playing a major role. Also, there is actually some *sex* in this book, which was pretty erotic to say the least. About time too. Leto II's Golden Path is reaching its culmination as well, and yes, Duncan Idaho is still reincarnated as a Gholah yet again.

Dune, I am slowly realising, is a classic set of novels - well written and philosophical, dealing with religion, mysticism, martial arts, feminism and a whole spectrum of contemporary issues, despite the fact that these books were written from the mid 1960's to the mid 1980's - and still deal with modern subjects that are as important today as they were back then. Also, well apart from God Emperor of Dune, they are not dry to read, or bogged down with descriptions of future tech, which is a good thing. Recommended.

Manny says

The guards ushered Frank into the office. As usual, the Reverend Publisher was seated at her desk, writing.

So many lives touched by her decisions, he thought.

"Well?"

She looked up. He had promised himself that he would not flinch before the fire of her gaze, and once more he broke his promise.

"It is... almost finished."

"Almost." Her irony was palpable, a force. "Almost is not enough. You know that, Frank. When will it be done?"

"I think... a month. At most two. I am working as hard as I can, Reverend Publisher. I am... not well."

He hated himself for his servility.

"So, why then did you found a dynasty? Your son can assist you. He will continue when you are gone. There are many books left to write."

His throat was suddenly dry. But of course there was no pitcher of water. It would have been unthinkable.

"I am... preparing him. He will be ready in time."

She glanced at him again, and again he flinched.

"There is a transcriber on that desk. Write a page now. I want to see how you work."

He sat down, and fed a sheet of paper into the machine. His lips moved soundlessly. She knew what he was saying. By now, the Litany was stamped deep into his psyche, impossible to eradicate. She smiled secretly to herself. The training was brutal, but it was effective. She watched his mouth, as it formed the words it had spoken so many times before:

I have no taste.

*Taste is the sales-killer, the hesitation that brings total profit meltdown.
I will conquer my taste.
When I have stamped it out, I will look at what I have written.
I will read through it from start to finish.
There will be nothing left of a great series.
Only crap will remain.*
