

Beyond Visual Spectacle: Interpreting The Sublime Experience and Power Symbolism in The *Dune* Series

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Abstract

The *Dune* film series, adapted from Frank Herbert's novel of the same name from 1965, tells a science fiction story. In the distant future, mankind has travelled across the galaxies of the universe to establish a feudal empire, ruled by an emperor and assigned to nobles loyal to the royal family. The emperor suddenly orders the Atreides to take over the desert planet Arrakis, which has been ruled by the Harkonnen family for decades; however, there is a huge conspiracy behind it. However, there is a huge conspiracy behind it. As the Atreides have built up their power over the years, they can rival that of the Imperial family. Through this family distribution of Arrakis, the Harkonnen family will be able to inflict great losses on the Atreides. The heir, Paul, loses his family and status to fate, thus joining the Fremen. Under the Fremen, Paul's powers awaken and he leads the Fremen in a challenge to the royal family's rule. By the end of 2024, the *Dune* film franchise had accumulated over \$877 million at the worldwide box office. Meanwhile, *Dune II* has a rating of 8.9 on IMDb, showing its high reputation. In recent years, the literature on science fiction films has become progressively richer. Especially in terms of visual effects, narrative themes and innovations in film technology, there has been a proliferation of academic discussions on science fiction films. The release of the film *Dune* in 2021 has triggered detailed analyses of its cinematographic techniques, musical aesthetics, lighting effects, and other aspects. For example, some literature points out that the low-key lighting and blurred shadow effects in *Dune* create an emotional atmosphere of solemnity and awe, enhancing the moral tension in the film (Barsam & Monahan, 2016). In addition, the visual impact and realism of science fiction films serve as a profound emotional response to the audience's immersive experience

(Pence, 2004). However, most studies still focus on the direct impact of special effects, graphics, and narrative content on viewers'senses. This study hopes to break through this limitation by taking the aesthetic concept of the sublime as a lens to explore how the film series Dune constructs a sense of the sublime that transcends the everyday experience through visuals and narrative. In Dune, the sense of the sublime is not only reflected in the surface effect of visual shock, but also triggers the audience's ultimate reflection on human existence, destiny and the nature of the universe through symbolic symbols and plot design. Through textual analysis of the films Dune and Dune II, this study hopes to reveal their unique techniques in creating a sense of the sublime, and to analyse how the two works construct this emotional experience, so as to deepen the understanding of the aesthetics of the sublime in sci-fi films.

Keywords: Visual effects, Aesthetics of the sublime, Emotional experience, Dune