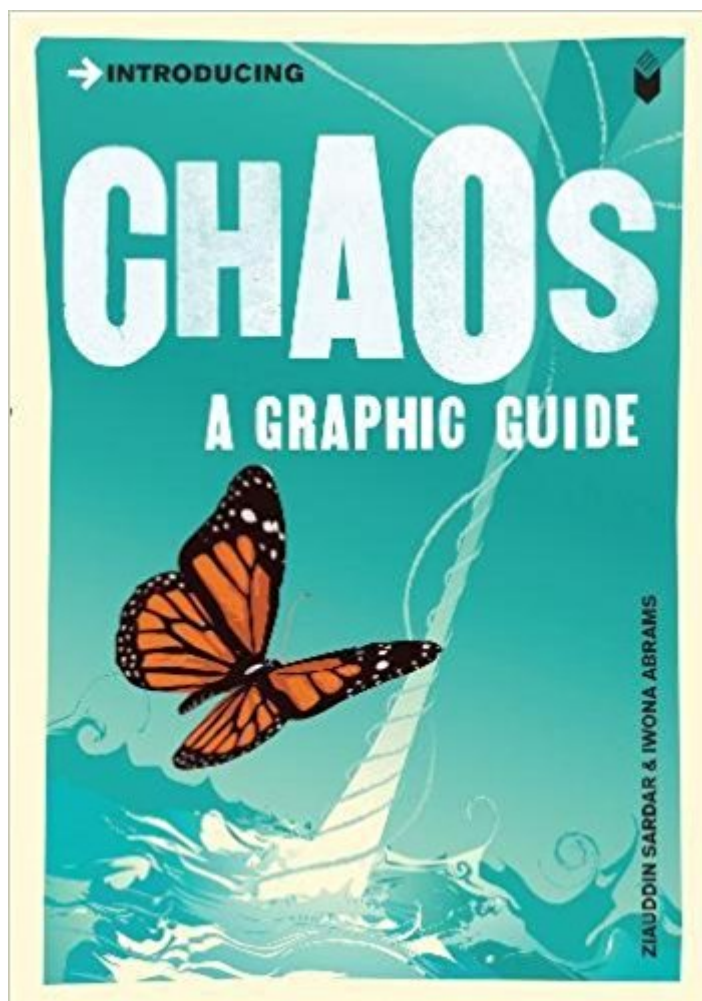


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Introducing Chaos: A Graphic Guide



Synopsis

"Introducing Chaos" explains how chaos makes its presence felt in many varieties of event, from the fluctuation of animal populations to the ups and downs of the stock market. It also examines the roots of chaos in modern mathematics and physics, and explores the relationship between chaos and complexity, the new unifying theory which suggests that all complex systems evolve from a few simple rules. This is an accessible introduction to an astonishing and controversial theory that could dramatically change our view of the natural world and our place in a turbulent universe.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A beautifully succinct primer... highly recommended' Time Out"

Ziauddin Sardar is a hugely renowned writer, broadcaster, journalist and critic. 'Britain's own Muslim polymath' (Independent) has become one of the UK's leading intellectuals and writes on a huge variety of subjects in numerous newspapers and magazines throughout the world. He is also Visiting Professor of Postcolonial Studies at the City University, London.

I was looking for an easy-to-understand book on Chaos Theory for some non-English speakers (say, some Japanese students) to read, and I personally like "Introducing Fractal Geometry", so I got my hand on this book...It was a mistake. I would not say much about this. The author did introduce Chaos, not really Chaos theory, to the readers. He tried his best, I believe, to make things

easy to understand by simplifying things... However, in doing so, he had just created Chaos. Hence, this book is probably one of the best examples of "How Simplicity creates Complexity and Chaos"... a simple scheme found in Complex systems (like complex Cellular Automata which emerged from a simple set of rules). One thing, while a lot of names (technical terms) were introduced, almost all of them are left unexplained. And I think only "introducing" is never enough. (Well, it was the name of the book after all... this book wasn't named "Explaining Chaos" :) There are other good books on Chaos for layperson. And, in fact, "Introducing Fractal Geometry" did a far better job than this one.

The main problem with the book is its emphasis on multiculturalism, not to mention that the author simply does not know his stuff. We are told that Galileo ignored friction in order to get "neat results" and somehow caused Western science to only study linear systems. He seems to think that nonlinearity and chaos are the same thing. He tells us that nonlinear problems are not solvable. He actually suggests that we have only recently seen that the three-body problem is chaotic. (Instead Poincare proved the chaotic nature of the problem around 1890.) He seems to think that Asian philosophies actually capture the mathematical substance of chaos theory. I could go on. If you want to study chaos get the volume "Chaos and Fractals: New Frontiers of Science" by Peitgen, Jurgens, and Saupe.

Well written and fairly illustrated with almost no math. A definite must for the curious mind with no time for a degree in physics .

This is a well-reasoned, carefully thought out book that allows for a good introduction of the subject of Chaos. I wish that the volume was a bit more of a "populist" volume (like Larry Gonick used to write and draw), but that might be a bit too much to ask these days.

I'm a fan of the Introducing series. I don't want to be too critical of this book, but I was a bit disappointed. I did learn a little more than I knew before I read it, but as many of the reviews say, the organization is a bit "chaotic" to the point where you feel you're never given a true overview of the subject. An introduction to any topic should at least try to leave you with some framework of organization for the topic as a whole. You can probably learn as much about Chaos theory by reading the Wikipedia article. If I'm going to buy a book, I want something more. Perhaps a deeper exploration into one practical application of Chaos theory that shows it as a real science with a purpose. One is almost left with the impression that Chaos theory is more a post-modern criticism of

western science rather than a true alternative explanation of phenomenon.

My personal exploration of the ideas of improvement and change have led along a path in which quantum physics, uncertainty, chaos and complexity have almost mysteriously become topics of growing relevance. It is fitting then that this book introduced me to one of the features of chaos, the strange attractor, a mechanism that draws a system's behaviour towards particular ways of operating. Books in this series can be read in a day. They use a mix of text and cartoon style graphics to convey the key ingredients of a subject in a concise and straightforward way. The challenge of describing chaos theory is not a trivial one. Though it may require a couple of re-reads, the book does a pretty impressive job of introducing the key figures in the development of chaos theory, its key concepts and how chaos affects our lives. I was intrigued for example to find Ray Bradbury Zen in the Art of Writing as the author of 'A Sound of Thunder' a short story which predates the development of chaos theory. At the heart of chaos is that complex systems, which meet a small number of criteria, will produce outcomes that are deterministic, but not predictable. This seems a paradox, and as Niels Bohr said "How wonderful that we have met with a paradox. Now we have some hope of making progress." What is startling is that systems don't have to be very complex to be classed as complex, and the criteria, such as non-linear feedback can be found in most systems. The result is that chaos is all around us. What is intriguing is that science, and our desire to understand has led us to simplify our models of the world in such a way that we've created an alternate chaos free world. When we try to understand we trim off the twiddly bits and treat systems as linear. So for example our geometry is based on straight lines, yet in nature everything is raggedy edged. The fractal, is a way of seeing and appreciating the raggedness of the world and this is explored further in a related title in the series, Introducing Fractal Geometry. This volume provides an easily accessible introduction to what is I believe an important element of any real understanding of effective change processes. Perhaps further evidence of a 'strange attractor' at work are the references in the final chapter to the inherent understanding of chaos within non-western cultures and belief systems such as Taoism, Buddhism Islam and Sufism. It even includes a picture of a symmetrical fractal decoration of the vestibule ceiling of the Chenar Bagh Madresseh School in Isfahan Iran. Isfahan being one of the places I visited when invited to speak recently in Iran.

This is an introduction. Introductions need to be boiled down, repeatedly. They need to be written for the average 14 year old, extremely easy to read, yet with good content. This one has too many

axes to grind, it is not as focused as it needs to be.

This is an excellent introduction to Chaos. It is aimed at the general non academic reader who may have heard about this buzzword called "Chaos" and wondered what's it all about. It is not for the academic, informed reader but a quick introduction for the intelligent layman or someone who last formally studied science many years ago. It draws heavily on James Gleick's book "Chaos" which was the first book to popularise the subject. If you are busy and want to know something about chaos to see if you then want to find out more, this book is perfect.

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