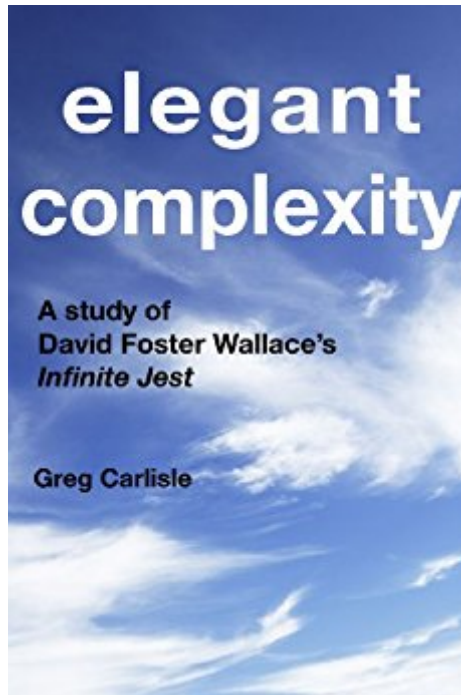


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Elegant Complexity: A Study Of David Foster Wallace's Infinite Jest



Synopsis

Elegant Complexity is the first critical work to provide detailed and thorough commentary on each of the 192 sections of David Foster Wallace's masterful Infinite Jest. No other commentary on Infinite Jest recognizes that Wallace clearly divided the book into 28 chapters that are thematically unified. A chronology at the end of the study reorders each section of the novel into a sequential timeline that orients the reader and that could be used to support a chronological reading of the novel. Other helpful reference materials include a thematic outline, more chronologies, a map of one the novel's settings, lists of characters grouped by association, and an indexed list of references. Elegant Complexity orients the reader at the beginning of each section and keeps commentary separate for those readers who only want orientation. The researcher looking for specific characters or themes is provided a key at the beginning of each commentary. Carlisle explains the novel's complex plot threads (and discrepancies) with expert insight and clear commentary. The book is 99% spoiler-free for first-time readers of Infinite Jest.

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Customer Reviews

Mr. Carlisle's *Elegant Complexity* is a helpful scaffolding system for an understanding of the late David Foster Wallace's *Magnum opus*. *Elegant Complexity* structures the chapters, sections, and subsections of Wallace's *Infinite Jest* into an organized whole. However, it is bland. But this is a good thing. It does not force an interpretation down your throat, it merely states what is what, and offers the minimalist of hints as to further exploration of meaning and interpretation. In this regard *Elegant Complexity* is a success.

I ordered this book on the strength of the reviews and an overestimation of the complexity of *Infinite Jest*. The fact that *Elegant Complexity* is promoted as "spoiler free" indicates more of a companion piece than a study of the novel itself. I do not want to take anything away from the reviewers as I can see value in this type of book if, for example, *Infinite Jest* was required reading and not your cup of tea. This could make it easier to comprehend, but it would certainly appear to me to take the joy out of reading *Infinite Jest* (and it was a joy). I read the Introduction and first chapter review and realized that *Elegant Complexity* was not going to enhance my comprehension of the book, but would certainly take away my enjoyment of it. Needless to say, I put the book down and spent the next several weeks thoroughly enjoying *Infinite Jest*. After I finished the novel, I went back and looked over *Elegant Complexity* to see if perhaps it could be utilized as a review and I found that it did not include much of anything I missed and failed to discuss items I would have considered relevant in a companion work like this. I found myself referring to the novel to fill the gaps left in some of the summary information in an early chapter review in *Elegant Complexity*, which seemed odd to me and compelled me to share my thoughts. If you are dedicated to reading *Infinite Jest* for pleasure, I would suggest taking your time and reading the book and skipping the "spoiler-free" guide. *Infinite Jest* can be complex when compared to much of today's popular novels, but it is worth the effort. I applaud the effort to make David Foster Wallace more accessible to the average reader, but I just do not see this achieving that objective and I personally expected much more.

The surest way to ruin a joke is to explain it. It seems that elegance functions similarly. This book - exhaustive on its chosen subject - lacks any praiseworthy style in writing. To call it a study is misleading. It is only a guide, though it is a commendable guide. What it comes down to is a very explicit and formulaic cliffnotes: summarize a passage, extract the themes, explain them ad. naus. While I don't think most of the people who read "Jest" in its entirety in the first place will need guidance with everything "complexity" offers, I think it does offer points "Jest" scholars will enjoy exploring further. "*Elegant Complexity*" is neither, but this only serves to provide a little insight in less

than a few thousand pages. It's good for what it is - an explicit guide. Make sure that it's what you want.

Having made the commitment to tackle this opus, I found myself scouring the Internet after every chapter, hoping others had left a trail of breadcrumbs through the woods. At about pg. 200 (and completely hooked), I knew it was time for a serious road map. Carlisle's chapter summaries are wonderful; he doesn't tell you what to think but rather highlights intriguing lines and phrases that you might have missed the first or fifth time through. His chronology is indispensable. No spoilers, but he brings recurring motifs and themes to the forefront so you're more likely to remember when you see them again. And let's be honest: the greatest challenge (and fun) of reading IJ is remembering all the whats and whos. I had already assumed I'd have to read the book a second time to catch all the clues and references. Thanks to this guide, I know where to look.

Honestly, I feel like this book misses the point. It serves basically an extended summary that makes explicit the more implicit connections to be found in the story, not as any sort of "answer" to the questions of plot raised by Infinite Jest (like I had kinda foolishly expected it to be). Also, it tends to ignore the wonderfully human aspect of the novel, which is both absolutely horrible and entirely necessary for the study to work. It's cause of the lack of the human thing that I say this book misses the point, but it's also something required for this study to work. With that in mind, *Elegant Complexity* is almost perfect at what it does, making numerous implications stated. The only real issue I had with the book was that occasionally the author would make a connection between IJ and another work of art without describing the connection enough, leading to either a connection that seems thin or a bit of me wanting to delve deeper into the connection out of my own interest. So yeah, basically the study works well at both extending your understanding of the complex plot and as an argument that DFW knew damn well what he was doing with *Infinite Jest*, but it still just feels like an inessential extra to the novel and should only be sought out if it's something you really want to read as opposed to something any bit necessary or excessively helpful.

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