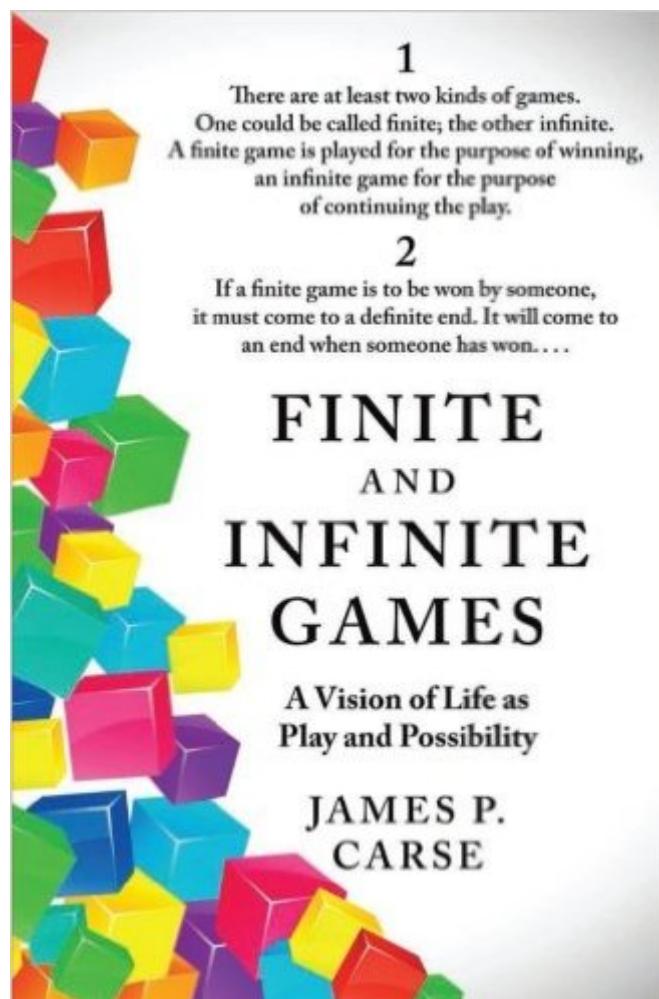


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Finite And Infinite Games



Synopsis

“There are at least two kinds of games,” states James P. Carse as he begins this extraordinary book. “One could be called finite; the other infinite.” Finite games are the familiar contests of everyday life; they are played in order to be won, which is when they end. But infinite games are more mysterious. Their object is not winning, but ensuring the continuation of play. The rules may change, the boundaries may change, even the participants may change “as long as the game is never allowed to come to an end. What are infinite games? How do they affect the ways we play our finite games? What are we doing when we play “finitely or infinitely? And how can infinite games affect the ways in which we live our lives? Carse explores these questions with stunning elegance, teasing out of his distinctions a universe of observation and insight, noting where and why and how we play, finitely and infinitely. He surveys our world “from the finite games of the playing field and playing board to the infinite games found in culture and religion” leaving all we think we know illuminated and transformed. Along the way, Carse finds new ways of understanding everything, from how an actress portrays a role to how we engage in sex, from the nature of evil to the nature of science. Finite games, he shows, may offer wealth and status, power and glory, but infinite games offer something far more subtle and far grander. Carse has written a book rich in insight and aphorism. Already an international literary event, *Finite and Infinite Games* is certain to be argued about and celebrated for years to come. Reading it is the first step in learning to play the infinite game.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The subtitle of this book is "A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility." This puts quite succinctly what this project is all about. Carse creates a number of distinctions through which he interprets life: finite and infinite games, society and culture, gardens and machines. Throughout, he comes again and again to reminders of choice and possibility. He reminds us that the games we play we choose to play, that we choose to assume our roles, that our society is a collective choice. He points to the ways that we mask these choices from ourselves and provides the insight we need to be aware of our self-veiling. This is what philosophy should be like. It is philosophical poetry. One of the most unique aspects of the book is that nowhere does Carse attack another view or provide a first principles defense of his own view. He provides a vision, helps us reinterpret the world, and then lets the insight it provides be its own defense. The following quote from the text reflects much on Carse's project: "Storytellers do not convert their listeners; they do not move them into the territory of a superior truth. Ignoring the issue of truth and falsehood altogether, they offer only vision. Storytelling is therefore not combative; it does not succeed or fail. A story cannot be obeyed. Instead of placing one body of knowledge against another, storytellers invite us to return from knowledge to thinking, from a bounding way of looking to an horizontal way of seeing." (sec 78) Perhaps Carse cannot succeed in his project, but certainly his vision is compelling. Robert Pirsig is quoted on the back cover: "Normally we add new facts to existing knowledge."

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