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The Physics Book: Big Ideas Simply Explained [book review]

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Do you want to know more about physics, but are intimidated by the subject's complexity? If so, *The Physics Book* is for you. The author, Jim Al-Khalili, explores 80 key laws and theories of physics, focusing on their historical development and the people behind the ideas, not challenging mathematical formulas. Content is organized into five themes—measurement and motion, energy and matter, electricity and magnetism, nuclear and particle physics, and relativity and the universe—with each containing 10-18 subtopics. These subtopics are discussed in one to four pages, emphasizing graphically appealing sidebars that include brief biographies, timelines, diagrams, images, or historical paintings. Overall the effective layout allows readers to take in either smaller or larger bits of information as they wish. Other features include a directory of biographies for 35 key figures not fully covered in the topical areas, and a glossary of over 100 terms. This work succeeds at making physics interesting and accessible to the layperson. Unfortunately, physics is a complex subject, and by simplifying topics you lose important details. An example is string theory, which needed probably 8-10 pages to provide a proper explanation. Still, this book is well suited to all public and school libraries.