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Einstein's Brainchild: Relativity Made Relatively Easy!

Barry Parker
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In 1919, the results of two expeditions observing an eclipse were presented at a joint meeting of the Royal Society and the Royal Astronomical Society. These results verified Albert Einstein's General Theory of Relativity, and the chairman of the Royal Society announced that it was "the most important result obtained in connection with the theory of gravity since Newton's day." Ironically, the new theory was so mathematically complex that it was rumored only three people in the entire world truly understood it.

In this book, Parker, physicist and award-winning science writer, attempts to explain to the layperson Einstein's Special Theory of Relativity and General Theory of Relativity. These theories are extremely counter-intuitive, and Parker does a good job of presenting them in as straightforward a manner as possible. Parker uses Einsteinian cartoons to explain concepts like the space-time continuum and the curvature of space due to mass. He uses simple analogies to show that at the speed of light, clocks stop and objects disappear; he explains that the speed of light is unattainable, but that beyond the speed of light, the General Theory of Relativity may not apply. Einstein knew his theory was incomplete—it did not include atoms and elementary particles. Toward the end of his life, Einstein worked at expanding his theories to include quantum mechanics, but he was never able to achieve his goal.

Included throughout this book are short quotes and anecdotes, which give the reader a glimpse into Einstein's personal life. Einstein hated publicity, and "had a dislike for fame and fortune." A streetcar conductor once accused him of not knowing "how to figure." Also included at the end is a brief glossary of related terms. This is an immense amount of complex material, and Parker does an admirable job of condensing and summarizing the information.

Jill Blue Lin