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These are things that do not affect the physics. After all, I felt a little foolish trying to learn quantum mechanics and relativity without knowing very much about the basics. College textbooks are typically nightmarishly expensive. If I threw a gorilla at you, its color and mood would not matter. Thankfully this book is free of both sins: This book preserves some of the flavor of the lectures; it is broken up into digestible chapters, which can be read, with some effort, in an hour or so. It is fast paced; considering its relatively small size, it covers a remarkable amount of material. Partly, this is because the diagrams are all in black and white; and all of the exercises are online, not in the book. Shankar himself is an amiable fellow. He likes to pepper his lessons with jokes. I suspect that many will find the jokes a bit corny; I personally like corny humor, so I appreciated it. As a teacher, he is basically quite good. He is unpretentious, focused, and enthusiastic. I must admit that I struggled during some parts of this book. It was simply the amount of material. To achieve mastery of the contents of each lecture would require that I seriously drill myself; I would have to force myself to take detailed notes, make flashcards, dutifully solve exercises—in short, to replicate the experience of a real college class. Still, I managed to follow along, and, in spite of myself, to learn a great deal. My favorite chapters were the ones on Special Relativity, Waves, and Thermodynamics. The problem with learning physics, I found, was that fully understanding the sexy stuff requires mastery of the boring and tedious stuff. In fact, I would like to formalize my dilemma with an equation. Let S be the sexiness; D the difficulty; E the effort; M the level of mastery achieved; and t the time. Mastery is the product of the level of effort and the time spent studying: As a result, the effort level remains fairly constant throughout. Shankar is, as I said, an unpretentious fellow; he never uses a difficult word where an easy one will do; he is not trying to intimidate or show off, but is doing his best to communicate with the students. Consider the following example. The force of friction is called f ; and the spring constant the strength of the spring is called k . Here it is with an added gloss from me: That is, the final point now lies at positive x : Still, I think this is a fairly minor complaint, as his explanations are generally clear and engaging. Nevertheless, this book could use some editing and organizing. As a parting thought, reading this book made me think about science education in general. The basic tension, as I see it, is between teaching students the body of knowledge, and instilling the students with the spirit of scientific discovery. On the other hand, science is not itself a body of knowledge, but a procedure and a mentality, a way of investigating the world. As soon as a body of knowledge calcifies into a dogma, it is no longer science. So for future physicists, it seems more important to encourage them to think creatively about problems, to design and interpret experiments, to come up with new theories. Still, something about the existence of mass-produced textbooks, filled with the same standard equations, taught to equivalent classes all around the country, makes me feel uneasy. After all, the bored student, who figures out how to take apart and modify his pencil sharpener, is doing something much closer to real science than the student sitting next to him, dutifully taking notes, right?

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