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**Sinopsis**

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At first, this hefty new tome from Oxford physicist Penrose (*The Emperor's NewMind*) looks suspiciously like a textbook, complete with hundreds of diagrams and pages full of mathematical notation. On a closer reading, however, one discovers that the book is something entirely different and far more remarkable. Unlike a textbook, the purpose of which is purely to impart information, this volume is written to explore the beautiful and elegant connection between mathematics and the physical world. Penrose spends the first third of his book walking us through a seminar in high-level mathematics, but only so he can present modern physics on its own terms, without resorting to analogies or simplifications (as he explains in his preface, "in modern physics, one cannot avoid facing up to the subtleties of much sophisticated mathematics"). Those who work their way through these initial chapters will find themselves rewarded with a deep and sophisticated tour of the past and present of modern physics. Penrose transcends the constraints of the popular science genre with a unique combination of respect for the complexity of the material and respect for the abilities of his readers. This book sometimes begs comparison with Stephen Hawking's *A Brief History of Time*, and while Penrose's vibrantly challenging volume deserves similar success, it will also likely lie unfinished on as many bookshelves as Hawking's.