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The mysteries of the physical world speak to us through equations--compact statements about the way nature works, expressed in nature's language, mathematics. In this book by the renowned Dutch physicist Sander Bais, the equations that govern our world unfold in all their formal grace--and their deeper meaning as core symbols of our civilization.

Trying to explain science without equations is like trying to explain art without illustrations. Consequently Bais has produced a book that, unlike any other aimed at nonscientists, delves into the details--historical, biographical, practical, philosophical, and mathematical--of seventeen equations that form the very basis of what we know of the universe today. A mathematical objet d'art in its own right, the book conveys the transcendent excitement and beauty of these icons of knowledge as they reveal and embody the fundamental truths of physical reality.

These are the seventeen equations that represent radical turning points in our understanding--from mechanics to electrodynamics, hydrodynamics to relativity, quantum mechanics to string theory--their meanings revealed through the careful and critical observation of patterns and motions in nature. Mercifully short on dry theoretical elaborations, the book presents these equations as they are--with the information about their variables, history, and applications that allows us to chart their critical function, and their crucial place, in the complex web of modern science.