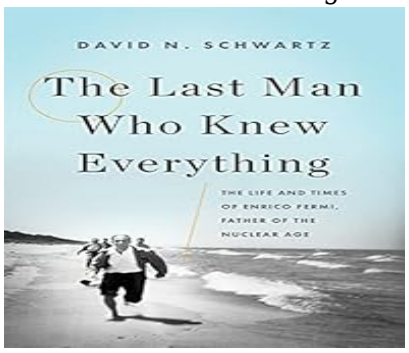
The Last Man Who Knew Everything: The Life and Times of Enrico Fermi, Father of the Nuclear Age By David N. Schwartz

The definitive biography of the brilliant charismatic and very human physicist and innovator Enrico Fermi In 1942 a team at the University of Chicago achieved what no one had before: a nuclear chain reaction. But he was also a complex figure who was a part of both the Italian Fascist Party and the Manhattan Project and a less than ideal father and husband who nevertheless remained one of history's greatest mentors. The Last Man Who Knew Everything: The Life and Times of Enrico Fermi Father of the Nuclear Age



One of Enrico Fermi’s colleagues once referred to the eminent nuclear physicist and Nobel Prize winner by using the words of the book’s title. Don’t let all these items deter you from reading this book; you don’t have to have a degree in physics because the author makes sure that he gives you a basic understanding and relevance to the point he’s making. Fermi's unique genius was contrasted to that of other famous physicists and so encourages the reader to find out about those amazing minds who developed the promise and the danger of the energy in the atom. His (at times reluctant) key role in the Manhattan project depicted as the most critical together with the praises the physics community bestowed upon him was revealing and inspirational especially his zeal for teaching. 480 pages This is an extensive and detailed biography tracing Fermi's life his associations with other scientists and why Fermi was considered one of the giants of 20th century physics. Why not? Who would be reading about Enrico Fermi other than people who want to know why his science was so groundbreaking? Yes it's fun to learn about his likes and dislikes his relationship with his wife his ski trips in New Mexico I'd never have know any of this had I not read the book. To do that might require diving into the science and reviewing the papers and notes that he and his colleagues left behind including the dreaded M word! (math) But I doubt anyone can truly understand Fermi until they understand Beta decay (and why it's so amazing! Hint: in beta decay a neutron almost magically turns into a proton and even magically an electron pops out of nowhere for the sole reason of conserving charge). The frequency of redundant phrases and repeated words coupled with the occasional pithy and unnecessary chapter ending afterthought ('it is difficult to argue with him') serve to annoy and frustrate. Schwartz with his biography of Enrico Fermi has certainly the merit of shedding some light on the life and contributions to modern physics by one of the greatest scientists of the first part of the last century. My father born in Rome eleven years later than Fermi used to recount me about these intellectual circles’ meetings taking place every Saturday afternoon which he used to attend on special occasions and where he among others personally met with Enrico Fermi. What impressed me of Fermi’s life period in USA is his acceptance of various subordinate roles and personal sacrifices by putting science development and teaching activity above everything else in life. Overall Schwartz has performed an extraordinary job finding the delicate balance between accurate historical representation of the unique succession of scientific break throughs which happened during Fermi’s lifetime and the clear explanation of related atomic physics phenomena. You have the impression that the author has been particularly taken by this huge project driven and inspired by the mission to tribute honors to the memory of his father one of Fermi’s scholars and Nobel prize winner. You don't have to be interested in science or engineering to enjoy this! 480 pages This was a fascinating account of Fermi's life ! It revealed aspects of his life

which I knew nothing about: his early work whilst in Italy the fact that he and his group had without realising it induced artificial fission of Uranium for which he was later awarded the Nobel prize: Straddling the ages of classical physics and quantum mechanics equally at ease with theory and experiment Fermi truly was the last man who knew everything at least about physics. Based on new archival material and exclusive interviews The Last Man Who Knew Everything lays bare the enigmatic life of a colossus of twentieth century physics. Fermi grew up in Rome in the early 1900s and showed brilliance as a child prodigy: Just prior to the start of WWII he escaped Italy's Mussolini with his family for America and soon found himself working on the Manhattan Project. He played a key role in the development of the atomic bomb which hastened the end of the war in 1945, He was also a brilliant teacher and nurtured the scientific education of his younger associates many of whom would go on to win Nobel Prizes themselves. Author David Schwartz's father was also a Nobel Prize winner a coincidence which surely helped him write this book: There are many references to scientific subjects including atomic fission Schrodinger Waves the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principal and Fermi Dirac statistics, 480 pages The author admits to a lack of personal documentation from Fermi himself and so there are numerous passages of speculation about Fermi's views and beliefs: But given that the book clearly describes Fermi's contribution to the development of nuclear fission, The description of the politics of atomic energy during that time (WW2) was informative as well. 480 pages Very thorough biography covering both Fermi's personal and professional life: I found it fascinating and eye opening although the physics even dumbed down for the reader was still pretty far over my head. The author kept me engaged throughout although I admit I lost some enthusiasm after the culmination of the Manhattan project. However I always cringe when biographies start off with 'there won't be any equations or math or complex scientific concepts in this book'. But I do know something about the weak force and about beta decay and it's fascinating stuff (if told well), What I'd hope to learn was how Fermi came to the amazing insights that he did, 480 pages This long overdue well researched biography of Enrico Fermi suffers from poor editing that distracts from an otherwise good read, I am also of a mind that photos of the author should be confined to the dust jacket and not find their way into the main body of another man's life story. Personally I loved reading this book: it has awakened my desire of deepening my knowledge and understanding of atomic and particle physics: I particularly liked the description of Fermi's academic life in Rome during the period between the two world wars. I think the author's narration of what happened in those years is particularly accurate and evocative. 480 pages An interesting biography of an amazing man working during difficult times. Well written with humour and full of information about Enrico Fermi's life and work, His enormous number of students colleagues and friends whom he taught mentored and helped during his extraordinary life. This he was able to do because he was very talented both as a theoretical and an experimental physicist. As the Americans would say the go to guy* if you had a problem in Physics. The father of the atom bomb as well as Nobel prize winnner. Only difficulty he did not spend as much time with his family as he could have. At the forefront of this breakthrough stood Enrico Fermi. I recommend this book. For this I'm thankful and the book deserves 4 stars. Ugh. 480 pages David N. These are made understandable even to non scientists. 480 pages Fabulous book. 480 pages A really close look at Mr. Fermi one of the genii of the 20th century. It was wonderful to accompany him and feel his brilliance. 480 pages.