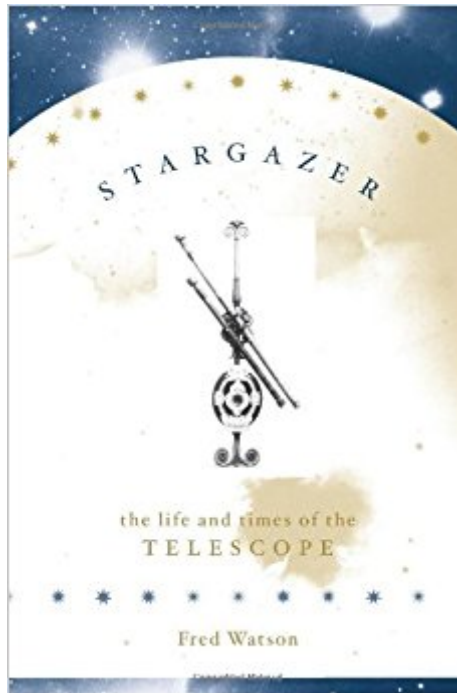


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Stargazer: The Life And Times Of The Telescope



Synopsis

The telescope is undoubtedly one of the world's most far-reaching inventions. For the past four centuries the telescope has stood at the forefront of human discovery. From its humble beginnings in seventeenth-century Holland, when a simple spectacle-maker first presented his invention to his country's military leaders, to today's colossal structures housed in space-age cathedrals, the telescope has unlocked nature's secrets. And in the past decade, the Hubble Space Telescope has brought us to the very edges of the universe, and the very beginning of time. How did the telescope—a potent mix of art, science, and engineering—reach its present level of sophistication? The history of the telescope is a rich story of human ingenuity and perseverance involving some of the most colorful figures of the scientific world—Galileo, Johann Kepler, Isaac Newton, William Herschel, George Ellery Hale, and Edwin Hubble. *Stargazer* brings to life the story of these brilliant, and sometime quirky, scientists as they turned their eyes and ideas beyond what anyone thought possible. Professor Fred Watson, one of Australia's top astronomers, writes clearly and skillfully, without technical jargon but with a dash of humor, explaining the science and technology behind the telescope, and the enormous impact that it has had for four hundred years on how we have come to understand our universe.

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Customer Reviews

It's perhaps surprising that an instrument as seemingly simple as the telescope has had a large impact on human history, from changes in warfare to helping us understand our place in the

cosmos. Watson, the astronomer in charge of Australia's largest optical telescope and a science writer, provides a fine overview of the 400-year history of this invention. He's strongest when discussing the people most responsible for moving the field of astronomy forward, controversies surrounding their inventions and the complexities of their lives. From Tycho Brahe, the brilliant early Danish astronomer, to locomotive builder Andrew Barclay, whose telescopes were so flawed that he was convinced Saturn looked "like a half-eaten apple," Watson relates intriguing stories while providing them with a rich cultural context. While still interesting, the work is less compelling when Watson provides specifics about the physics and optics of telescopes. And with so much ground to cover, he rarely delves deeply and provides little if any new information. Yet gathering all of this material in one place and presenting it in such an engaging style is a considerable accomplishment. B&w illus. (Aug. 1) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

This saga of astronomers afflicted with "aperture fever," Watson's diagnosis of the drive to construct ever-larger telescopes, is an avuncular amble through four centuries of the instrument's development. Watson illuminates famous astronomers--Newton, Cassegrain, Schmidt--along with the more obscure. The telescope's exact origin may never be known, but history tips its hat to Dutch optician Hans Lipperhey, unsuccessful applicant for a Dutch patent, and to Galileo, epochal maker of the first telescopic discoveries. The race for bigger and better telescopes was on; however, it was impeded by two fundamental technical problems: spherical and chromatic aberration. Discerning the correct shapes for lenses and mirrors was more easily done than eliminating spurious colors, and by the time William Herschel made his entrance on the astronomical stage in the 1780s, aperture fever assumed the size-matters symptoms it still exhibits today. Watson's narrative of inevitable overreaching and brilliant success is often funny, occasionally poignant, and definitely accessible--a fine reflection of this Australian astronomer's popularizing skills. Gilbert Taylor Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I am a long time amateur astronomer/telescope maker/astrophotographer. I have read a fair chunk on the history of astronomy, but never a general book about the history of the telescope. Based on an review, I ordered this book. This is a very compact, easy to read, cursory review of the history of big telescopes up to about 2000. Really, the coverage is pretty minimal beyond about 1950, although the author does spend some time at the beginning gently mocking the current pandemic of supergiant telescopes. Technical detail is very limited, this was a bit frustrating at first, but once I got

past that, I really enjoyed the book. The writing style is very smooth and was effective at holding my interest. This is what I would classify as a "transcontinental" read, perfect for a long flight across the US or to Europe from the east coast. It is also a good choice for people with minimal technical background in astronomy. Many serious amateurs will probably want more, however. Within these limitations, I definitely recommend this work. I am now reading *The History of the Telescope*, a 1955 work by Henry King. See my review of that book, in a couple of weeks. Very different animal.

This is a book I really wanted to like, and I don't regret reading it. That said, this is more a book for people interested in learning a few more details about the pre-1900 history of the telescope than a book to get someone excited about the development of the telescope. Overall the prose is serviceable, if a bit pedestrian. But it is uneven, with some excellent passages and some that are a bit of a slog. Up through the late nineteenth century the author presents all the major threads of the story, but toward the end the book becomes more a series of highlights rather than a survey of developments. My sense in reading it was that the author ran out of steam and couldn't handle the twentieth century in the depth he managed for earlier epochs. Recent developments in eight to ten meter telescopes are barely mentioned. He provides a superficial discussion of radio telescopes, but doesn't mention solar telescopes. Space telescopes are briefly mentioned, but their history is barely scratched. The epilogue, looking back from year 2108, is more cute than informative. Yes, read this book if you are interested in telescopes. But be prepared for a sense of unfulfilled promise, as this book could have been so much more ...

I was impressed with the depth of knowledge put forth in this book by Fred Watson. He traced the history of the development of the telescope without the usual diversion into the personal lives of the cast of characters who gave their contributions to the creation and improvement of what is one of the most important scientific instruments of all time. Dr. Watson has captured what is relevant and presented the information in a readable, indeed enjoyable format. I recommend this work. Francis J. O'Reilly

Very informative and absorbing.

This is a well-researched book that could use more diagrams illustrating the technical details of each advance in telescope technology. Useful as a quick reference guide.

All I can say is I found Fred Watson's book *Stargazer* a pleasure to read. I love it when you think you know everything about a subject and still manage to learn something new. Keep up the good work.

I enjoyed it immensely. Not only you learn about telescopes, but you encounter characters that usually remain in the dark.

I enjoyed the book because it is a good comprehensive history of optics, binoculars, and telescopes. Plus, the price was great.

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