



# An Acre of Glass: A History and Forecast of the Telescope

*J. B. Zirker*

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Ever since Galileo glimpsed the moons of Jupiter through his tiny telescope, astronomers have striven to understand how the universe is constructed and how it evolves. Every increase in the size and power of telescopes has led to new discoveries. Within the last century, telescopes have enabled us to learn about pulsars, quasars, gamma-ray bursters, black holes, and the acceleration of the universe's expansion.

*An Acre of Glass* describes how recent innovations in telescope technology have led to the construction of giant, ground-based observatories and to an explosive development of astronomy. Today, telescopes with mirrors 30, 50, and even 100 meters in diameter are being built. Optical interferometers that cover an acre of ground are observing every night. J. B. Zirker shows us how telescopes past, present, and future are built and describes the exciting science they reveal—from planets beyond our solar system to supermassive black holes at the core of distant galaxies.

For every striking image revealed through these enormous telescopes, technicians and scientists must overcome unique and incredible challenges. How many pack animals does it take to get a telescope to the top of a mountain? How do you make the shape of a 6-foot-wide mirror accurate to within a 1,000th the thickness of a human hair? In clear and accessible language, Zirker answers these questions and more, providing fascinating technical detail about how a telescope is made and what the next generation can hope to see.

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