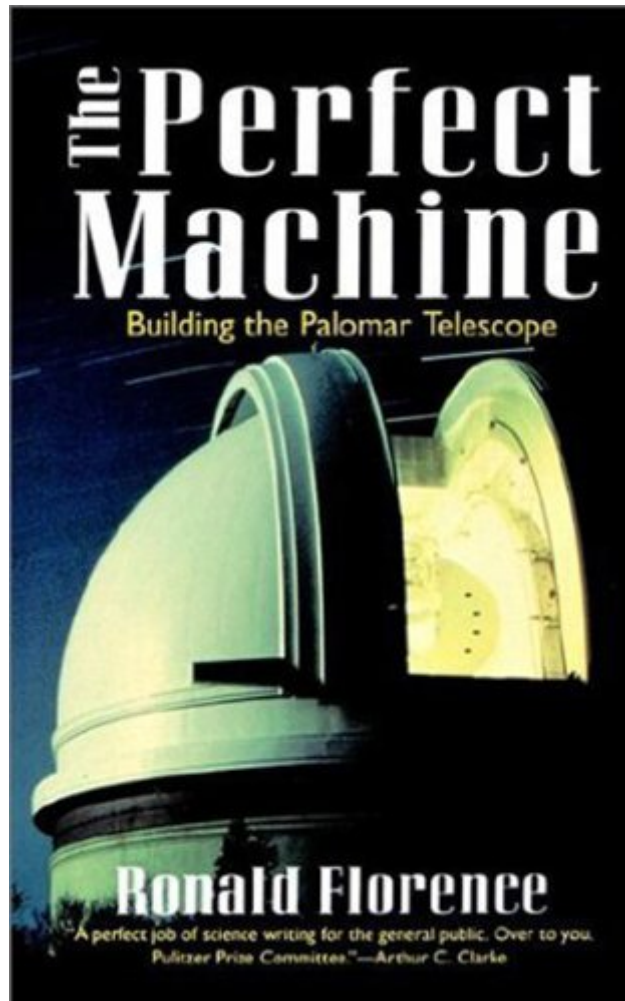


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The Perfect Machine: Building The Palomar Telescope



Synopsis

Almost a half-century after its completion, the 200-inch Palomar telescope remains an unparalleled combination of vast scale and microscope detail. As huge as the Pantheon of Rome and as heavy as the Statue of Liberty, this magnificent instrument is so precisely built that its seventeen-foot mirror was hand-polished to a tolerance of 2/1,000,000 of an inch. The telescope's construction drove some to the brink of madness, made others fearful that mortals might glimpse heaven, and transfixed an entire nation. Ronald Florence weaves into his account of the creation of "the perfect machine" a stirring chronicle of the birth of Big Science and a poignant rendering of an America mired in the depression yet reaching for the stars.

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Customer Reviews

Those fortunate enough to have visited or worked at Palomar Observatory are well aware of the grandeur of this structure and enterprise. When I first visited, I was struck by the temple-like beauty of this structure, a stunning white hemispheric dome atop a columnar and monolithic base, framed by the stunning clear blue sky atop Palomar Mountain. This is one of those places that lowers voices and stops speech altogether. It is also one of those rare places of great scientific

achievement accessible to the public. I sat inside and looked at the telescope (with liquid nitrogen cooled CCD cameras and spectroscopes at the various focal points), the incredible horseshoe mount and the stunning dome for 2 h, transfixed by all that I saw. I wanted to know more, but did not know where to look. This book, *The Perfect Machine*, is the definitive resource on the greatest publicly accessible visible light telescope observatory in the world, Mount Palomar Observatory. The context in which the observatory was conceived by the brilliant and underappreciated genius George Ellery Hale, the manner in which funding was obtained and maintained, the many innovators that gave their best and what this entailed..., the fascinating and, of course, occasionally quirky/antagonistic scientific and administrative personalities involved..., all are described in illuminating and engaging detail by Ronald Florence. This is one of the best descriptions of scientific and technical innovation "on the ground" ever written. This project was conceived in general terms nearly 40 years before "first light" the time at which the first images of objects in the night sky are obtained. That it reached completion is a testament to all of those involved as well as to the momentum to accomplish provided by ongoing financial support.

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