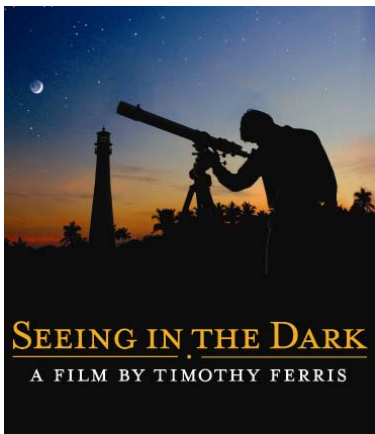


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## ***SEEING IN THE DARK***

*A film by Timothy Ferris*

*America's Writer Laureate of astronomy invites millions of viewers to enjoy the wonders of the night sky in a spectacular HDTV special on PBS*

Stargazing is the subject of *Seeing in the Dark*, a 60-minute, state-of-the-art, high-definition (HDTV) documentary by Timothy Ferris that premieres September 19, 2007 at 8:00 p.m. on PBS (check local listings). The film, Ferris' third, is based on his book, *Seeing in the Dark* (2002), named by *The New York Times* as one of the ten best books of the year.

"*Seeing in the Dark* is meant to alter, inspire and illuminate the lives of millions," said Ferris. "It introduces viewers to the rewards of first-person, hands-on astronomy — from kids learning the constellations to amateur astronomers doing professional-grade research in discovering planets and exploding stars. I hope it will encourage many viewers to make stargazing part of their lives, and a few to get into serious amateur astronomy."

To capture the beauty and wonder of the night sky, Ferris assembled a world-class team including Hollywood cinematographer Francis Kenny, veteran BBC natural history director Nigel Ashcroft, the celebrated astronomical special-effects artist Don Davis, sound designer Kate Hopkins (*Planet Earth*), and three-time Academy Award® winner Walter Murch, who did the digital surround-sound mix. The film features memorable deep-space images by some of the world's most respected astrophotographers, among them Robert Gendler, Jack Newton and Akira Fujii, and an original musical score by Mark Knopfler and Guy Fletcher of Dire Straits fame.

Like the book, the film is in part a personal account of Ferris' life-long devotion to stargazing, beginning with his introduction to the night sky as teenager in Florida in the '50s. "Back then we had big skies and small telescopes," Ferris says in the film. "We couldn't observe much beyond the Moon, the planets, and a few bright star clusters, but we had a lot of fun, and we came to cherish the telescope as an instrument of deliverance, the keys to a vast and spectacular kingdom."

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The film interweaves themes of music, the stars, and the stark contrast between the brief span of human lifetimes and the vastness of the cosmos, where a backyard stargazer equipped with nothing more than binoculars can see light older than the human species. Ferris describes it as “in part an ongoing dialog, down through the generations, about discovering the beauty of nature of the largest scale and learning more about our place in it all.”

On location at the annual Stellafane telescope-makers gathering in Vermont, where parents for generations have been teaching their children the stars, Ferris notes that “Stellafane retains an egalitarian quality of seemingly ordinary people making extraordinary things to put themselves and their neighbors in touch with the great beyond.”

The film features amateur astronomers ranging from casual stargazers to those who have made important scientific discoveries. Among them:

- Former Minnesota Vikings star running back Robert Smith, who today shows the wonders of the night sky to high school students in Miami, Florida. “I like looking at the galaxies, imagining something or someone being in those galaxies, hundreds of millions of years from now, seeing you... millions of years after you’re gone,” says Smith. “Things like that just kind of blow my mind.”
- Barbara Wilson, a onetime Houston housewife who got a telescope after her children were born and turned out to be one of the most sharp-eyed visual observers on Earth. In the film she remarks on “the absolute grandeur of getting out under a dark sky and seeing the Milky Way arch from one horizon to the other. I can’t imagine anybody not being totally awed by that kind of a sight.”
- Steven James O’Meara, who taught himself astronomy as a boy and was given keys to Harvard College Observatory when he was 14 years old. There he observed spokes on Saturn’s rings, a finding deemed impossible by many astronomers before the spokes were photographed by the Voyager space probe.
- Ron Bissinger, who co-discovered a planet orbiting a star 150 light years from Earth — from a backyard observatory he built himself.
- Rob Gendler, who took deep-space photographs from the driveway of his home in suburban Connecticut that rival and sometimes surpass the work of professional astronomers on the ground and the Hubble Space Telescope in orbit. Says Gendler, “From an ordinary place you can image distant worlds 30, 40, 50 million light years away in really a matter of a few minutes. That’s what keeps me going in astrophotography, the anticipation of that fresh sense of discovery that comes with every image.”

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The film reports that three technological innovations — inexpensive telescopes, sensitive digital cameras, and the Internet — have put amateur astronomers in command of more light-gathering power than that of the legendary 200-inch Hale telescope at Palomar when it opened the universe to human eyes a half century ago. Says Ferris, “Hundreds of thousands of casual stargazers are getting in touch with the night sky by using inexpensive computer-controlled telescopes, downloading star charts from the Internet, and having observations made for them on professional telescopes through Internet time-sharing programs and educational projects.”

The *Seeing in the Dark* Web site ([pbs.org/seeinginthedark](http://pbs.org/seeinginthedark), to go online this August) will enable viewers to print star charts for their time and location, view video tips on how to get the most out of stargazing, learn more about the people and concepts in the film, and find local star parties where they can look through amateur astronomers’ telescopes free of charge. A *Seeing in the Dark* robotic telescope, located at a high-altitude site in New Mexico, is planned and will enable students to image star clusters, nebulae, and galaxies for themselves.

Ferris sees his film as both a cinematic experience and an incitement to learn. “Astronomy, with its spectacular visual qualities and its relevance to enduring questions about the origin and evolution of the universe, has long been a gateway to science,” he says. “Our film is meant to be a timeless introduction to stargazing.”

*Seeing in the Dark* was produced, written and narrated by Timothy Ferris. The senior production team includes Director Nigel Ashcroft; Director of Photography Francis Kenny, A.S.C.; Editor Lisa Day, A.C.E.; Production Designer Cal Zecca; Special Effects, Don Davis; Sound Design, Kate Hopkins; Sound Mix, Walter Murch, C.A.S.; Music and Original Score, Mark Knopfler and Guy Fletcher; and Executive Producers Timothy Ferris and Cal Zecca.

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