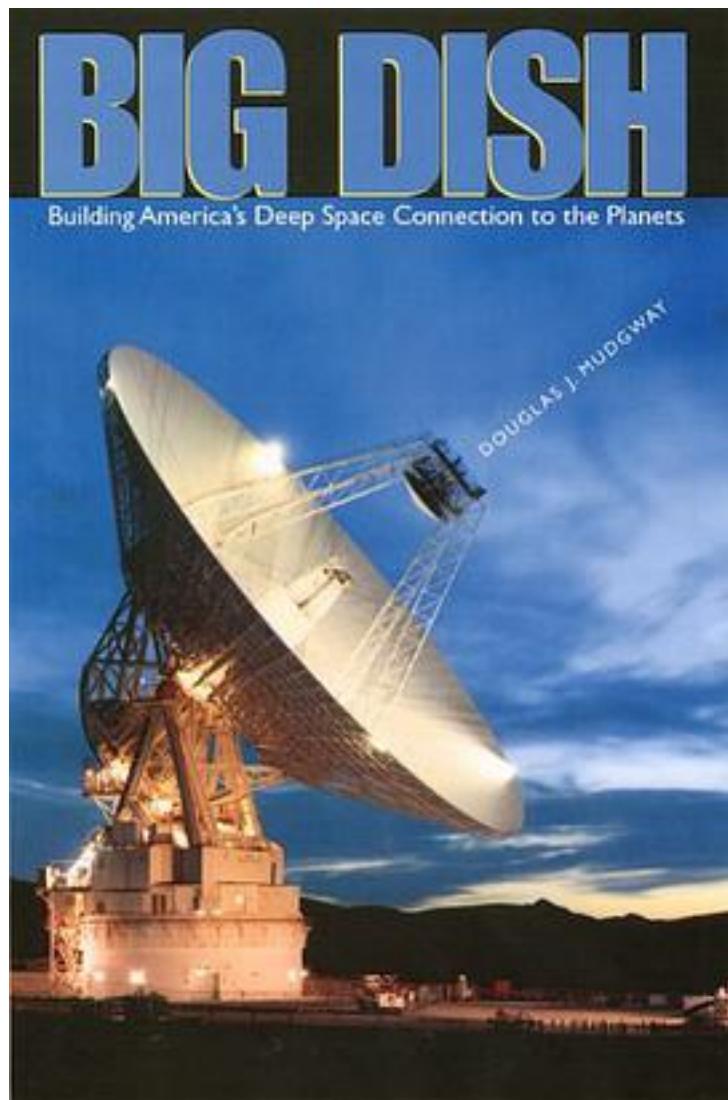


Big Dish



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International politics, intrigue, and amazing scientific feats create the story behind NASA's quest to communicate in deep space. The astonishing success of the United States' quest to explore space depends upon NASA's visionary Deep Space Network (DSN), a communications grid that provides the backbone of antennas and satellite links that track and control spacecraft launched from Earth. Douglas J. Mudgway participated in development and operation of the DSN from its infancy in the 1960s to its maturity in the 1990s, and he brings his practical experience to this story of the challenges, successes, and frequent failures that beset the dedicated engineers who turned the initial vision into reality. Set against the Cold War race for technical supremacy in space, this well-illustrated book offers an unprecedented inside view of the antennas that have been indispensable in missions to the farthest reaches of our solar system. These gigantic instruments--about one acre in surface area and weighing over 6 million pounds--are among the largest of their kind ever constructed. Located at remote sites in California, Spain, and Australia, they have provided an international community of scientists with a deep space connection to the planets that has enabled unmanned spacecraft to return a wealth of data to Earth. Radio astronomers, too, have engaged these instruments to probe the mysteries of the cosmos. "Big Dish" describes how these exquisite instruments work, how they came into being, and the problems encountered in their construction and in enhancing their performance over time to meet the demands of ever more ambitious planetary missions. It discusses the complexities of deep space communications in accessible language and introduces readers to the human story of perseverance and ingenuity that has maintained these great antennas for more than forty years. This is also a behind-the-scenes look at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California, where political challenges, personal intrigue, and feats of brilliant engineering all contributed to the United States' preeminence in deep space exploration.

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