

Book Review

by Nalayini Davies, 27 October 2016

Turn Left at Orion

Guy Consolmagno and Dan M. Davis

2011 Fourth Edition, 2015 6th Printing
Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, United Kingdom
243 pages, ISBN: 978-0-521-15397-3
US\$24.67 (spiral bound) from Amazon



The explanatory expansion of the title “*hundreds of night sky objects to see in a home telescope – and how to find them*” is what this book is all about. I was told by one of the authors, Guy Consolmagno, that with sales of over 140,000, it is Cambridge University Press’s largest selling book ever and the largest selling amateur astronomy book anywhere! It has been in print for 27 years (since 1989) making it a classic that many of us have copies of. This 4th edition however has new features that make it particularly appealing – a section on Southern Skies has been incorporated and an adaptation for Dobsonian telescopes (8” or 10”) has been added whilst still addressing the requirements of small refractor/reflector telescopes (2.4” to 4”) and binoculars. Further, this edition is spiral bound for ease of use and has an accompanying web resource site, www.cambridge.org.turnleft that provides additional supplementary resources that could not be fitted into the book.

‘Turn Left at Orion’ is a unique practical resource compared to the more traditional guides with more theory and co-ordinate systems. The topics covered by the book include basics on telescopes (usage, maintenance, getting to know your specific telescope, telescope maths and a list of the authors favourite accessories including eyepieces and filters); the moon (phases, eclipses, occultations, librations); the planets; seasonal skies (covering constellations, double stars, clusters, nebulae and galaxies); unique Northern and Southern Sky objects; and follow-up references. It even has a small section on finding geostationary satellites.

Here’s an example to provide a flavour of the book: How to find the *Jewel Box*, open cluster NGC 4755, given in the *Southern Skies* section under *In Crux* illustrates the process. Firstly, there is a *naked-eye chart* (showing stars down to third magnitude) with a rating system within a little box that lists the *sky conditions* (“all sky”), *eyepiece power* (“medium, high power”) and the *best months* to view them (“May < 10°”) and provides the authors own rating system as to how impressive (1 to 5 rating with 5 being the most impressive) the object is seen by each different optical system which can vary from object to object. The ratings for the Crux are: Dobsonian (“3 Dobsonian symbols”), small telescope (“3 small telescope symbols”) and binoculars (“3 binoculars symbols”). The book describes where to look; what can be seen in the finderscope (with an accompanying diagram which doubles up as a guide for binocular views); what it looks like in a small telescope and in a Dobsonian

(with separate accompanying diagrams as these two views have different orientations); provides historic and scientific details on the *Jewel Box* with a cross link to a discussion on *open clusters* elsewhere in the book); and then discusses what else can be seen in this neighbourhood with a cross link to a couple of double stars discussed elsewhere in the book. All the diagrams are true to the views through the eye piece (adjusted for the upside down and/or mirror image view through the type of telescope as applicable) and have arrows pointing to the west to show how the stars appear to drift in the view. The casual writing style conjures up the image of a friend talking to the reader.

The passion of the authors in their hunt for and sharing of interesting celestial objects shines through in their writing. This in turn engenders an enthusiasm in the reader to do the same, to enjoy what the night sky has to offer even from one's backyard with the use of small affordable telescopes. It is a great resource to learn how to navigate the sky on one's own through the book's 'star-hopping' approach. There is enough here to appeal to all amateur observers – both beginners and those with more experience.

Some words of caution - the objects selected and the rating systems are based purely on the subjective preferences and judgement of the authors. Also, the handy summary chart of what, where and when to observe is only provided for observers 30° - 50° latitude North. Since the book first appeared 27 years ago, improvements in telescope technology have resulted in telescopes with go-to capabilities which can find thousands of pre-programmed objects without the observer having to move the telescope. Further, internet resources such as *Starry Night* have replaced the use of star charts and close-up amazing views of celestial objects from space based telescopes, orbiters and landers are readily available on the internet. These far surpasses anything one can see through small telescopes which is readily acknowledged by the authors. There is nothing however quite like seeing things for yourself. The authors are of the view that "*the Dobsonian design has put 8" mirrors in the price range of everyone*" and they have incorporated Dobsonian views into their latest version. The book's audience still very much encompasses those with "*a small telescope, a few hours of spare time and a love of the night sky*". The continuing popularity of the book (the current 2011 4th edition has seen its 6th print in 2015) and the rave reviews it has attracted show that it (with its updates and additions) remains relevant and enjoyable 27 years on.

I have recently progressed from my 1989 1st edition 1st print (as confirmed by Guy Consolmagno – see AstroTalk) to the 2015 4th edition 6th print and am very impressed. 'Turn Left at Orion' is the perfect companion for beginner-observers starting off with Dobsonian telescopes (available from AstronZ) and is an ideal resource to expand the horizons of owners of small telescopes (and binoculars).