constellation, the deep sky objects visible in each season of the year. Harrington’s descriptions are concise yet nothing of importance is missing. The four chapters describing the heavens could equally well be used as a systematic observing program or as a valuable reference source. Large appendices and useful charts are also supplied. There are many books on the market that deal with this material in numerous ways but Harrington’s book is surely one of the most useful and accessible. Every amateur observer will find some benefit in its pages.

THE MESSIER OBJECTS
Deep Sky Companions Series
S. J. O’Meara
H/b xiv + 304pp. ISBN 0521 55332 6 US$ 34.95

The story of Messier’s serendipitous catalogue of nebulae and clusters has been told and retold in the annals of astronomy. But it remains a fascinating and important part of our astronomical heritage. Messier could not have known, more than two centuries ago, what a timeless resource he was providing for his like-minded inheritors. So many of us have begun our astronomical labours with Messier’s list, a reddened torch beam and a small telescope. The objects he catalogued, some of them mere blemishes in the sky, continue to draw crowds of novices and experienced observers alike. Their sheer diversity of appearance and breadth of interest will never fade.

Once in a while a volume appears that pays homage to this list and sets a whole new possé of observers off on the Messier trail. This publication in the Deep Sky Companions series is one such volume. Although based on O’Meara’s own careful observations, this book follows the traditional ‘M’ recipe. A short history of Messier’s work is given and advice on observing techniques presented followed by a description of terms and object types. Each of the 110 objects are then described in detail accompanied by photographs, drawings and finder charts. Some useful appendices are also included. This book is definitely not for the arm-chair astronomer. Its full potential can only be realised when used as an observing guide. And that purpose is well served. It is to be recommended to any serious backyard astronomer.

TOTAL ECLIPSES
Science, Observations, Myths & Legends
P. Guillermic & S. Koutchmy
Springer 1999
Springer-Praxis Series in Astronomy
S/b xxvii + 247pp. ISBN 1 85233 160 7 £19.00 (US$ 29.95)

Whether the reader is interested in solar surges, fibrils and plasmoids, or how amateur astronomers have photographed solar eclipses from aircraft, or the path of the solar eclipse which might have preceded a crucifixion, there is something for everybody here. Guillermic and Koutchmy’s fascinating book was possibly to be timed for the 11 August 1999 total solar eclipse. The reviewer received his copy on 22 July 1999. However, the nine pages devoted to that event are still of historical value. Photographs of the sun and details thereon are difficult to reproduce but it is a pity the publishers did not pay a little more attention to them. The travel agents listed may be disappointed unless they are banking on the 21 June 2001 totality in Angola and Mozambique. The book is excellent apart from the illustrations and anyone interested in the sun or solar and lunar eclipses will enjoy it.

TRANSIT: WHEN PLANETS CROSS THE SUN
Second Edition
Practical Astronomy Series, Ed. P. Moore
M. Maunier & P. Moore
Springer-Verlag 1999
S/b viii + 164pp. ISBN 1 85233 621 8 £19.00 (US$ 39.95)

Although well-written, and reasonably well-produced, this small volume from Springer has limited use to the amateur astronomer. It is concerned with the methodology of observing planetary transits and offers advice on image projection and photographic techniques. But almost all of this information is much more comprehensively covered in the standard or broader-based observing manuals. The scant amount of information provided probably does not warrant a separate volume, particularly at such a high price.

Having said that, the first part of this book makes intriguing reading. If you’re interested in the history of astronomy then the story of the transit method of determining the astronomical unit, and in particularly the events and personalities surrounding the 1761 and 1769 transits of Venus, then you will avidly digest this section of the book. The historical discussion on planetary transits takes up over half of the volume and represents a well-written and fairly comprehensive essay. Overall, the book may find a niche with the dedicated transit observer but is unlikely to become a valuable addition to the observatory shelves.

THE ART AND SCIENCE OF CCD ASTRONOMY
Ed. D. Ratledge
Springer 1997
S/b xiv + 178pp. ISBN 3 540 76103 9 £16.95 (US$ 29.95)

When the CCD revolution hit amateur astrophotography it was almost immediately a success story. A dozen authors have collaborated with David Ratledge in this excellent Practical Astronomy series to tell us how it is all done. However, this is not a book for absolute beginners unless there are friends around with experience, preferably an astronomical society. Fortunately, today there are astronomy clubs in most cities and large towns, and there is the Internet to find them. There are no hints as to the expense involved in CCD imaging although the editor went to some trouble to select a cross-section of contributors, with large (20-inch reflectors) and small (4-inch refractors) telescopes, good observing sites and bad ones. In such a slim book it is clearly not possible to satisfy everyone, and the reviewer doubts whether the book will do more than inspire the reader to look for more information. The bewildering amount of astronomy software offered might deter anyone from embarking on CCD imaging but friendly advice can soon put this right as long as they are not millionaires. This book is attractively produced with lots of encouraging statements and is good reading.

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