

Library - Book Review

Star Clusters

Reviewed by: David Allan

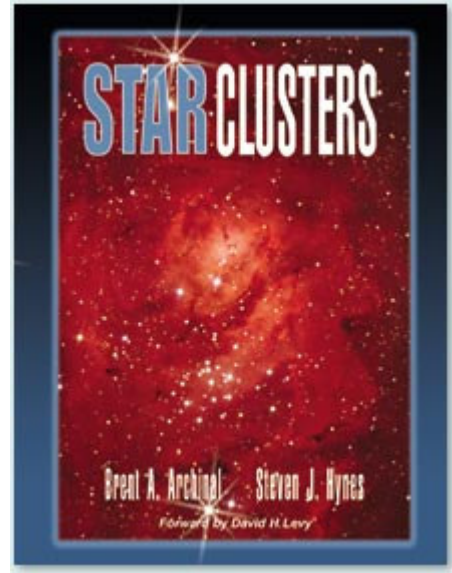
by Brent A. Archinal & Steven J. Hynes

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For the urban deep sky observer, the study of star clusters is one area where he need not feel significantly disadvantaged. In fact the visual impact of some brighter clusters can be enhanced when rich but distracting backgrounds are eliminated by light pollution. In the community of star clusters there may also be considerable diversity. There is often a prominent star (the lucida) and stars of different colours and spectral classes, frequently double stars and sometimes variables.

Star Clusters, is a comprehensive (over 450 pages) reference guide for students of star clusters and the more casual observer alike. The early chapters are an informative description of the discovery and early classification of open star clusters.



The authors display a detective like interest in hunting down missing star clusters from various catalogues and frequently return to the original discoverer such as John Herschel for the secret clue.

The globular clusters are treated separately to open clusters in the book. Finally, there is a section on observational projects which includes sketching hints and advice on seeking out variables, multiple stars and nebulosity within these associations. Some of the better known instances are tabulated in relation to their parent cluster. Astrophotography is barely mentioned, held as too large a subject to cover in this volume. The book itself contains many black and white photos, generally of good quality allowing for their mostly small size, due no doubt to space constraints.

The central core of this book however, is a series of detailed catalogues listing the star clusters, globular clusters and also such objects from the Magellan Clouds and the Andromeda galaxy. In these catalogues and the accompanying notes, looser or more obscure star gatherings identified by Trumpler, Collinder and others are also listed and given equal billing to their NGC or Messier cousins. This is commendable; as these star associations are somewhat neglected in the general literature. Yet they are often worth hunting down; Trumpler 24, for example, in the tail of Scorpius, is as impressive to my eyes as its showpiece neighbour NGC 6231 (Caldwell 76).

To use the catalogues one needs to study the abbreviations used by the author to describe the cluster's characteristics. These are somewhat akin to those used in the New General Catalogue as NGC descriptive. This is where the extended notes following the catalogue play their part in providing more background. The reader may be somewhat surprised here that some of the more iconic objects are missing; however the authors do state at the outset that their objective is to clarify uncertain identifications and nomenclature as well as providing descriptive material.

An example is that the lesser known NGC 2669 next to the O Velorum cluster is extensively annotated, with a photograph. This is due to a complex, but interesting, history of misidentification and an enigmatic central star condensation Harvard 3; while the spectacular nearby clusters NGC 2516 and NGC 3293 in Carina do not

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feature in the extended notes. However, the Jewel Box cluster NGC 4755 in Crux and the Southern Pleiades, IC 2602 do meet the selection criteria and are described in some detail. It would have assisted me in browsing these notes if the constellations had been prominently displayed as well as their object identifier.

All in all, the authors of Star Clusters are to be congratulated in accomplishing a mammoth task by assembling such a volume of interesting data about star clusters and presenting it coherently. The book fills a definite void for lovers and students alike of these celestial masterpieces. This particular writer intends to add the book to his own library at the first available occasion.