



Deep sky companions: Hidden Treasures

by Stephen James O'Meara

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This is the third volume in the *Deep Sky Companions* series that Stephen O'Meara has written for Cambridge, and perhaps the best. This volume is larger than the others in the series, *The Messier Objects* and *The Caldwell Objects*. It is a large, heavy volume (584 pages), packed with detailed information and written in a most approachable style by a highly experienced and skilled visual observer.

O'Meara adds a further 109 objects to the 109 in each of the previous *Deep Sky Companions* and as a bonus, lists another 20 objects although they are not described. His choice of objects is personal and explained in detail in the preface, but clearly excluded the Messier and Caldwell catalogues. All should be observable from above 40° north, so holidaymakers in southern Europe can join in the exploration, and all are said to be visual targets with a small telescope from pristine skies. A large percentage will be straightforward even from average British locations.

O'Meara presents a varied list to explore, with 38 open clusters, 35 galaxies and 14 planetary nebulae supported by an assortment of other deep sky challenges. Each of the 109 objects has a substantial entry, on average covering five pages, with a chart, photographs (usually one from the *Digitised Sky Survey*) and a drawing by the author. These are generally well reproduced. All illustrations are monochrome.

The *Hidden Treasure* theme and accompanying pirate analogy permeates the text. It generates a motley crew of nicknames attached to many of the objects (Jolly Roger cluster, Pirate Moon cluster, Mermaid's Purse nebula, 13th Pearl nebula, Golden Earring cluster, Blade and Pearl galaxy and so forth), which some readers could find excessive. In fact a large percentage of the catalogue have been assigned nicknames, some original, many attached by the author. This may give rise to confusion in the future. While Kemble's Cascade, the Hockey Stick galaxy and Christmas Tree cluster, for example, are well known,

Hagrid's Dragon, Vinyl LP galaxy and Shopping Cart cluster are not. And some have several nicknames, surely potentially confusing. For example, NGC 2024 (best known as the Flame nebula) has no less than six of these listed (Lips, Burning Bush, Tank Tracks, Ghost of Alnitak and One Piece). This is too fanciful for many tastes, but may appeal to others.

A very useful feature is that this list is in Right Ascension order, unlike the Messier and Caldwell catalogues. This makes the *Companion* a seasonal one. A British observer could attempt a serial observation of entries during an evening session, and the experience will be considerably enriched by O'Meara's en-

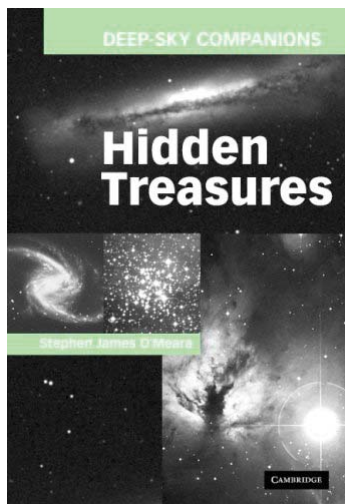
thusiastic description of the target, with its historical background and relevant astrophysical details.

One or two of the objects have an expanded entry, such as *Hidden Treasure 75* (NGC 5866) where the story of 'missing Messier galaxy' M.102 is told; HT 62 (the Coma Berenices star cluster Melotte 111) has a detailed mythology and history as well as description; and HT 34 (NGC 2024) has a discussion of the nearby triple star Alnitak (Zeta Orionis), the astrophysics of the emission nebula as well as copious observational notes. In addition there is a bonus in Appendix A of a fine short illustrated biographical essay about Caroline Herschel by Barbara Wilson.

I thoroughly enjoyed this volume, and shall refer to it often. I shall not use the *Hidden Treasures* as a separate catalogue, and will resist most of the new nicknames, but will recognise that the valuable and enthusiastically told entries for these deep sky marvels will enhance my observing and give additional character to old and new friends.

Nick Hewitt

Dr Nick Hewitt is a former Director of the Deep Sky Section and remains an enthusiastic observer from his newly resited observatory in suburban Northampton.



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