

Leviathan, to the effect that “some fool has claimed to build a telescope more powerful than my brother’s 40-foot”. There is nothing new, it would seem, about aperture-envy.*

Yours faithfully,
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†The Editors were dismayed to learn that Mr. Taylor passed away on 2024 December 18

REVIEWS

Supernova, by Or Graur (MIT Press), 2024. Pp. 212, 17.5 × 12.5 cm. Price \$16.95 (about £13) (paperback: ISBN 978 0 262 54314 9).

MIT Press recently launched a set of small books in their Essential Knowledge series; their website currently lists 27 titles on a wide variety of topics, from Astronomy to Whiteness. The astronomy category comprises two quite separate volumes, although on related topics, *Galaxies* and *Supernova*, both by Or Graur. They are pocket-sized volumes, and (if the book under review is typical) avoid mathematics but have copious references (by endnotes) to more technical material, all gathered at the end by chapter.

The style makes for easy reading, but a lot of information is included, from the earliest observations by the Chinese and the Romans (that surprised me — I don’t think of the Romans as observers of the sky) to the present day. Apart from the historical introduction, the seven other chapters generally take a theme and develop it. The book is well illustrated, with a mixture of diagrams, graphs, tables, black-and-white photos, and eight colour plates. There is a useful glossary and a couple of pages of definitions. I am not an expert on supernovae, but I believe that he covers all the necessary topics at a level suitable for the layman. An unusual feature is a series of pages with a key quotation (usually a single sentence) from his text, printed in large font in white on a black background. Reading only these pages would give readers a reminder of key points and probably tempt them to read more.

The price is very reasonable, and I can recommend this book unreservedly. —
ROBERT CONNON SMITH.

*Rosse’s own 72-inch, as is well-known, came in for its own fair share of this quite apart from Caroline’s sour remark, as, for instance, the comment of a visiting French astronomer who said that he was shown something “they told me was Saturn”! Anyone familiar with the use of large reflectors at low-altitude sites knows full well how temperamental they can be and how hyper-sensitive to the effects of seeing, so it is absurd to attribute this unbelievably poor performance to the optical quality of an instrument which had easily split γ^2 Andromedae when at 0.6 arc seconds separation.