There are a few black-and-white figures scattered throughout the book, which ends with an index. All in all a very enjoyable and well written book for lay readers interested in astronomy, but also a good quick reference for those who need an executive summary of one of the space telescopes covered. — Phillip Helbig.

References

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Modular Forms and String Theory, by Eric D'Hoker & Justin Kaidi (Cambridge University Press), 2025. Pp. 480, 25 × 18 cm. Price £59·99/$79·99 (hardbound; ISBN 978 1 009 45753 8).

Modular forms are not, perhaps, a topic close to the heart of many astronomers. Sinusoidal functions are periodic on an interval; more complicated functions can be expanded in a basis of them. Modular forms — elliptic functions such as the Jacobi theta function — can be viewed as generalizations of these, to capture the periodicity properties of tori of arbitrary shape. For those who wish to do (2-dimensional) quantum field theory on a torus (something that is an essential part of the standard formulation of amplitudes in string theory), modular forms will crop up to a greater or lesser extent.

This book provides a detailed account of modular form from a physics perspective, in the context of their application to string theory. It is written by two of the experts in the subject and gives a comprehensive mathematical physics account of modular forms. Certainly, this book is an essential reference for researchers working in this field. This is not a book to dabble into for a quick summary of the topic: it is a serious book for serious scholars in this area. It must, however, be candidly admitted that this will include few, if any, astronomers: to appreciate this book, a strong side interest in mathematical physics would be necessary. — Joseph Conlon.

The Stargazers' Almanac 2026. An Illustrated Month-at-a-Glance Guide to the Night Sky, compiled by Callum Potter (Floris Books), 2025. Pp. 28, 30 × 42 cm. Price £14·99/$24·99 (stiff paper; ISBN 978 178250 945 5).

The perfect Christmas present for anyone even remotely interested in the continually-changing pageant of the night sky, this *Almanac* has been the ideal guide for laymen and beginners for many years. For an observer located at a latitude around 50° North, the calendar-like *Almanac* can be hung up to display the sky in both northerly and southerly directions for each month. The constellations are clearly marked and so are the planets visible at the time. Highlights are pointed out (*e.g.*, Orion and its nebula in January) and a panel along the lower part of the chart shows the phases of the Moon. No telescope needed — just find a dark location and enjoy the celestial show. — David Stickland.