

Snake River Skies

Magic Valley Astronomical Society

Next MVAS Meeting: Saturday January 10, 2003, 7pm Herrett Center, College of Southern Idaho

The Magic Valley Astronomical Society will present a telescope workshop during our regular meeting Saturday, January 10, at the Herrett Center starting at 7pm.

We will be demonstrating telescope techniques, how they are made, how to shop for one, how to maintenance your telescope, and answer questions you may have about telescopes, perhaps assist you with the one you got for Christmas. Join us afterwards for the monthly Herrett Center Star Party (weather permitting).



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MVAS Officers 2003

- *Phil Hafer, President 734-8719 phafer@pmt.org*
- *Cheri Lowman, Vice President, 736-7293, clrc1@rmci.net*
- *Rick Widmer, Secretary/Webmaster, 539-5162, rwidmer@developersdesk.com*
- *Matt Holmquist, Treasurer, 735-5085, mholmquist@coopernorman.com*
- *Write to MVAS P.O. Box 5101, Twin Falls, ID 83303*

If you would like to write an article or otherwise make an entry for the club newsletter, contact Jay Sneddon, 736-2447, jaysneddon@yahoo.com.

Yearly membership is \$20 per person, \$20 per family \$10 per student, Sponsor \$100

Message from the President: Phil Hafer

Our December fun night was a success and those who attended had a great time. Thanks to Deb Hartwell there was an abundance of prizes for the raffle, and everyone who attended took home more than one prize. Chris Anderson did a great job with the quiz and promised a new Jeopardy game for next year.

Elections were held for our officers for 2004.

The results are:

- President- Phil Hafer
- Vice President- Cheri Lowman
- Secretary- Rick Widmer

Treasurer- Matt Holmquist

We want to thank Ken Thomason, and John Dean for their service as Vice President and Treasurer for the past year.

We have an exciting year planned, good programs, star parties, dark sky nights telescope maintenance sessions and more. But the most important thing we need for the new year is the participation of each member of MVAS. We need your feedback and input to make the club grow and make it informative for each member.

Ring World comes to the Faulkner Planetarium (courtesy www.csi.edu)

The Faulkner Planetarium will kick off the new year with a new program. "Ring World" details NASA's Cassini/Huygens mission to Saturn and its moon, Titan.

The show was produced by veteran planetarium program producers, formerly from New York's Hayden Planetarium, and was adapted to the Faulkner's equipment by Rick Greenawald and Chris Anderson. The show is voiced

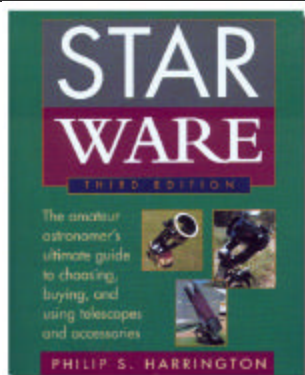
by John Billingsly who plays the chief medical officer, Dr. Phlox on the new Star Trek program, Enterprise.

Faulkner manager Rick Greenawald says Ring World differs from all the other programs that have been featured at



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Star Ware: The Ultimate Astronomy Equipment Guide?



"If the pure and elevated pleasure to be derived from the possession and use of a good telescope...were generally known, I am certain that no instrument of science would be more commonly found in the homes of intelligent people."

So wrote Garrett Serviss in his book *PLEASURES OF THE TELESCOPE* nearly 100 years ago. The telescope market is radically different than it was in the days of Serviss. Back then, amateur astronomy was an activity of the wealthy. By contrast, we live in an age that thrives on choice. Amateur astronomers must now wade through an ocean of literature and propaganda before being able to select a telescope intelligently. For many a budding astronomer, this chore appears overwhelming.

Star Ware examines today's astronomical marketplace is dissected and explored. Where is the best place to buy a telescope? Is there one tele-

scope that does everything well?

Noted Astronomy writer, Philip Harrington, analyzes today's astronomy market with point-by-point product comparisons. Included are:

- Reviews of leading models and accessories, including new products.
- A purchasing guide ranging from telescopes and binoculars to filters, mounts, lenses, cameras, film, star charts, guides and references.
- Eleven do-it-yourself projects for making unique astronomical equipment at home.
- Maintenance, photography, and star-mapping tips to help you get the most out of your telescope.

Star Ware is perhaps the best astronomical equipment buyers guide available. The book is well written, easy to understand. It is highly recommended for those interested in learning about equipment used in Astronomy.

(Contributions for this article came from Philip Harrington and Amazon.com)

Ring World comes to the Faulkner Planetarium (courtesy www.csi.edu)

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the planetarium since it deals with an important space mission that's currently under way. Cassini/Huygens was launched on its two billion mile odyssey in October of 1997.

"Since Cassini/Huygens is expected to arrive at Saturn in July, this program will have a rather short shelf life," says Greenawald, "but it's going to be an exciting way for the public and area students to become familiar with one of NASA's most sophisticated missions and feel like they're a part of it."

Greenawald is impressed with the production of the program, as well, pointing out that the viewer almost feels an attachment as he or she seems to fly along with the spacecraft, which is expected to reveal new details about Saturn that still mystify

scientists.

Ring World will be shown at 7 p.m. Tuesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays beginning Friday, Jan. 2. There will also be a matinee showing at 2 p.m. on Saturdays.

Admission to the planetarium is \$4 for adults, \$3 for seniors, \$2 for students, and \$9 for families of up to two adults and five children.



Artist rendering of Cassini's approach to Saturn. The Cassini spacecraft is scheduled to arrive at the ringed planet in the summer of 2004. *Courtesy saturn.jpl.nasa.gov*

The Heretic's Guide to Choosing and Buying Your First Telescope

Copyright 2000-2003 [Michael J Edelman](#)



The basic rules:
Never buy a telescope in a department store. I used to qualify this rule, but I've decided to make it absolute. Similarly, don't buy telescopes from "close-out" catalogs, stores that specialize in high-tech toys, catalog showrooms, etc. Don't buy from

anyplace that doesn't do a major business in astronomy related tools.

Magnification by itself is meaningless. Don't choose a telescope by its advertised magnification. The way to compare similar telescope is by aperture; that is, the size of the objective lens or mirror. As a rule of thumb, few scopes can deliver more than 50x per inch of aperture under the best conditions; That means that the 2.5" (60mm) telescope advertised as a "625x telescope!" is really a 125x scope at best! A lot of the really interesting objects out there are very large, but very dim. The Great Galaxy in Andromeda - one of the most majestic sights in the sky- is eight times the size of the full moon, but a lot dimmer. A magnification of 20-40x is all you'd ever want to view it. This leads to...

There's no substitute for aperture. All things being equal, size counts. Larger is better. But there's a caution that goes with this:

There's no substitute for optical quality. A small scope with excellent optics can see more than a large scope with mediocre optics. I stood in line at a star party a while ago to look at M31, the Great Galaxy in Andromeda, through a 21" telescope.



M31: The Great Andromeda

I imagined I'd see dust lanes, structure... what I saw was a fuzzy blob of cotton, with less structure than I'd seen in my 3.5" Questar! The owner was as proud as can be of this white elephant. He'd never looked though a good scope.

There's no substitute for darkness. What does this mean? It means if you have to choose between a huge scope that sits in your light polluted city back yard, and a small scope that you can carry out to remote, dark areas, go small and transportable. I can see more with my 2.7" scope under a really dark country sky than I could with my 10" scope in my suburban back yard.

The smaller the scope, the more often it gets used. My 8x56 binoculars get used just about every clear night. The 2.7" Pronto comes out a lot too; it only takes a minute to set up. The 4" TeleVue Genesis comes out a number of times every week in warm weather, and occasionally in cold weather. The 10" Newtonian that I spent 6 months restoring and improving spent most of its life in my garage. Loading it into the car- a five-foot long tube, and a huge mount made of steel and cast iron that weighed well over 100 pounds- was a major undertaking.

The mount is as important as the scope. Without a solid, steady mounting, you can't even focus properly, let alone view or do things like photography. Those scientific looking mounts on cheap telescopes may look good, but they're absolutely worthless. They shake like crazy and make focusing impossible. That's why those simple-looking Dobsonian reflectors are so good. They're as stable as a rock.



Dobsonian Reflector

Before You Buy...

A telescope is a useful tool- but only if you know what to do with it. Before you decide to get a telescope, you should spend a little time reading about telescopes to get a better idea of what they can do, and to better understand your own needs. If at all possible, find an astronomy society or club you can visit to get some personal experience using different telescopes. Too many people spend a lot of money on a scope with unrealistic expectations of what they'll be able to see. Others get discouraged when they find they can't just point the scope heavenwards and see amazing sights.

If you're already set on observing the moon and the planets, then by all means, go ahead and buy a telescope. If you are more interested in deep sky objects like galaxies and nebulas, you would do well to spend time learning the sky with the aid of a simple star atlas and a pair of binoculars.



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Astronomical Society

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P.O. Box 5101
Twin Falls, ID 83303

Planet Roundup courtesy skyandtelescope.com

Mercury is emerging into view low in the glow of dawn. Late in the week, look above the southeast horizon about 45 to 60 minutes before sunrise. Don't confuse Mercury with Antares, which is to its upper right by nearly two fist-widths at arm's length.

Venus (magnitude -4.0) shines brightly in the southwest during twilight and early evening. Every week it's getting a little higher and brighter.

Mars (magnitude $+0.3$, in Pisces) shines orange high in the south at dusk and lower in the southwest later in the evening. It sets around midnight. Mars continues to fade and shrink; it's now just 8 arcseconds in diameter.

Jupiter (a brilliant magnitude -2.2 in the hind feet of Leo) rises in the east around 10 p.m. If you're out at dawn, look for Jupiter high in the southwest.

Saturn (magnitude -0.4 , in Gemini) is just past opposition this week. During evening it shines in the east, between Orion to its right and Castor and Pollux closer to its left or lower left. This month is a fine time to view Saturn with a telescope; it's as close to Earth as it gets. The sharpest views will be had when Saturn is very high in steady air — quite late these evenings.

Uranus (magnitude 6, in Aquarius to the upper left of Venus) is getting quite low in the southwest right after dark. **Neptune** is disappearing into the sunset. **Pluto** is hidden in the glow of dawn.



Club Calendar

Saturday January 10th, Club Meeting 7pm,
Herrett Center.

The Magic Valley Astronomical Society meets the second Saturday of each month at the College of Southern Idaho, Herrett Center at 7pm. Star Party at the Herrett Center follows.