



## Ancient Light: a portrait of the Universe

by David Malin

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David Malin was employed as a photographic scientist at the Anglo-Australian Observatory and rapidly gained a reputation as the world's leading astrophotographer. He pioneered many techniques to improve the art and science of astrophotography. In one sense it is a great pity that photographic emulsions were superseded by CCDs. Kodak's 'T' grain emulsions, hypersensitisation, autoguiders and Malin's techniques were about to revolutionise astronomical photography.

This is essentially a book of 52 black and white photographs, taken with the 3.9m Anglo-Australian Telescope, the 4m at Kitt Peak, the UK and Palomar Schmidts and a 4x5 camera. There are also eight photographic finder charts by the well-known amateur Akira Fujii, indicating the locations of the included deep-sky objects, which predominate. A handful of other objects are included which as Malin states, '...quite intentionally reflect the earliest days of photographing the night sky'.

The opening chapter describes some of the processes involved in making the images, and a potted history of astronomical photography.



Alongside each photographic image is a concise description of the object. Although Malin is renowned for his tri-colour work, he has an artistic preference for black and white, with which I have to agree.

This book demonstrates Malin's technical skill, notably with some prints processed using unsharp masking, a very difficult process, not just the few

'mouse clicks' of today. Fine examples include M8, NGC2264 and M31. Personally, I find the common names given to objects such as 'The Witches Head nebula' and 'Fox Fur nebula', silly and infantile. Only the classical names from antiquity such as 'The Owl Nebula' should be preserved. How long will it be before we have the 'Pizza nebula' or the 'mobile phone galaxy'?

It is not an exaggeration to say that the quality of some of the images in this book

can today be reproduced by skilled amateurs using CCD techniques, so it is difficult to know for whom the book is intended. For the reader interested in state of the art 1980s photographic techniques or to fill the obvious literary gap in the history of astronomical imaging, and not too interested in colour work, I can recommend it.

### Ron Arbour

*Ron Arbour is a retired microphotographer from the Microelectronics Research Group at the University of Southampton. He is also a past Vice-President of the Association, former Director of the Deep-Sky and Astrophotography sections, and founder of the Campaign for Dark Skies. He has discovered 21 supernovae. His other interests include telescope-making.*