



Springer

1st
edition

2010, XV, 222 p.

Printed book

Softcover

Printed book

Softcover

ISBN 978-1-4419-5816-7

£ 22,99 | CHF 29,50 | 24,99 € |

27,49 € (A) | 26,74 € (D)

Available

Discount group

Springer Trade (T)

Product category

Popular science

Physics : Astronomy, Astrophysics and Cosmology

Ringwood, Steve

Astronomers Anonymous

Getting Help with the Puzzles and Pitfalls of Practical Astronomy

- A humorous collection of questions and answers about astronomy which entertains as well as informs and offers practical advice to amateur astronomers. Includes many stories on the history of astronomy and examines myths in light of current knowledge. Illustrated with cartoons.

During more than four decades of involvement in amateur astronomy, I have enjoyed the privilege of rubbing shoulders with numberless amateur and professional astronomers. In so doing I have encountered at first, second, and third hand many of the joys and pitfalls that sky watchers can experience in pursuit of the universe's wonders. I have often howled at tall tales that would not disgrace a pirate's tavern. Many of these astounding stories have become the kernels of my Dear Steve column items. Learning how to operate the technology for observing and imaging the universe is work enough for any aspiring astronomer; however, many have problems of their own making. Not only do they share these troubles with other astronomers, they are on the receiving end of colleagues and friends doing the same. With all these agonized communications flying about, it is hard to understand how anyone gets any real work done! For the amusement of my peers I have long fondly parodied these imagined literary exchanges. These fantasy "Agony Aunt" questions began appearing in the pages of the Loughton Astronomical Society's monthly (and Christmas Special) journals about 30 years ago, in the guise of The astronomer's problem page. This was by the kind indulgence of the then editor, namely myself. Happily, even when the magazine of the LAS evolved into something much better, under the tender and loving care of those who came after me, these problem letters were still in demand and even now occasionally appear.

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ISBN 978-1-4419-5816-7 / BIC: PG / SPRINGER NATURE: SCP22006

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