

Re: First Scope Advice (revised)

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Chris L Peterson <clp@alumni.caltech.edu> wrote in message news:<lfeso0pp0hh7ts4kijmbmag0or5uu3b25g@4ax.com>...

- > *Advising against buying a telescope at a department*
- > *store is certainly not "elitist". It is simply recognizing*
- > *that most telescopes sold in these stores are junk ...*

Advising people against buying a department-store scope isn't elitist, but calling them "junk" definitely is.

The connotation of "junk" is that the speaker has superior powers of discrimination, that the article in question is beneath him (or her). Just remember that Galileo would have killed to get one of those "junk" scopes! And also remember that most of those cheap 60mm refractors have quite respectable objectives -- lenses that are arguably worth the entire cost of the telescopes.

If somebody's already bought a scope at a department store, it's certainly worth seeing if it can be fixed up. But for the small minority that actually takes the trouble to ask beforehand about buying a telescope, steering them toward a department store is an injustice. It's not a matter of money at all -- on the contrary, the whole problem with department stores is that you're unlikely to find a good bargain. For Skywatch '05, I reviewed one telescope (the new Orion Space Probe 3) that cost \$100 and gave me several evenings of very enjoyable, almost trouble-free observing. I could easily spend exactly the same amount of money at a department store and get a telescope that would leave me cursing and swearing after five minutes. And as Chris Petersen says later in his message, it would be extremely hard for the average beginner, using those two scopes on the floor of a store in daylight, to discern the little details that make the difference between a scope that's very easy to use and a scope that is almost impossible to use as it comes out of the box.

Moreover, with some really good telescopes -- ones that highly experienced amateurs are glad to keep in their stables -- now available for under \$250 including mount and eyepieces, the importance of shopping carefully is greater than ever before. There's an awful lot of people who would be happy to spend \$150 or \$200 on their first scope if they really understood how much extra pleasure it would give them.

– Tony Flanders