



## An opportunity to view the Ashen Light?

*From Mr Brian Manning*

I have received this message from Mark Gingrich [[grinch at rahul.net](mailto:grinch@rahul.net)] which is self explanatory. The suggestion is interesting and as there is a possible date in this coming May I thought it should be circulated as there might be someone near the right position to try the observation:

*Hello Brian*

I just today came across your letter in the June 2003 *JBAA*, 'Earthshine on Venus and the 'Ashen Light''.

And I don't disagree with your calculations. Though I can offer one suggestion as to how an earthbound observer might possibly detect faint earthshine on Venus: wait for the Moon to occult the crescent Venus. When such occurs, there's usually a favored place

on the Earth – albeit relatively small in area – where in a **night** sky the Moon's dark limb blocks the sunlit side of Venus for several seconds, which would allow the nocturnal portion of Venus to be examined without the troublesome glare.

These favorable circumstances are quite infrequent, sadly – about three times per decade. But the next instance is only a few months hence: on 21 May 2004, just after dusk, best seen in easternmost India.

*Regards, Mark*

(Mark Gingrich, San Leandro, California [[grinch at rahul.net](mailto:grinch@rahul.net)].)

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### Brian Manning

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## Extreme conversion

*From Dr Alan Welch*

The letter from Jean Meeus in the February *Journal (J. Brit. Astron. Assoc., 114(1), 11)* reminded me of a case of extreme precision, but not accuracy, given in the book *Astronomy for Amateurs*. This was an authorised translation, by Frances A. Welby, of a book by Camille Flammarion published in 1903. On page 110 the weight of the Sun is given as eighteen hundred and seventy octillions of kilograms. This was written out in full as

1,870,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000,000 kg

and the equivalent weight as

1,842,364,532,019,704,433,497,536,945 tons.

A quick calculation indicates that a conversion factor of 1015kg to one ton had been used. Three points arise. First the mass quoted is now more than 6% less than accepted values. The conversion factor is low by 0.1%. And thirdly why were the extra 16cwt 28lb and 11oz ignored?

A final point: the book by Flammarion was entitled *Astronomie des Dames*, but then chauvinism is originally a French word!!

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