

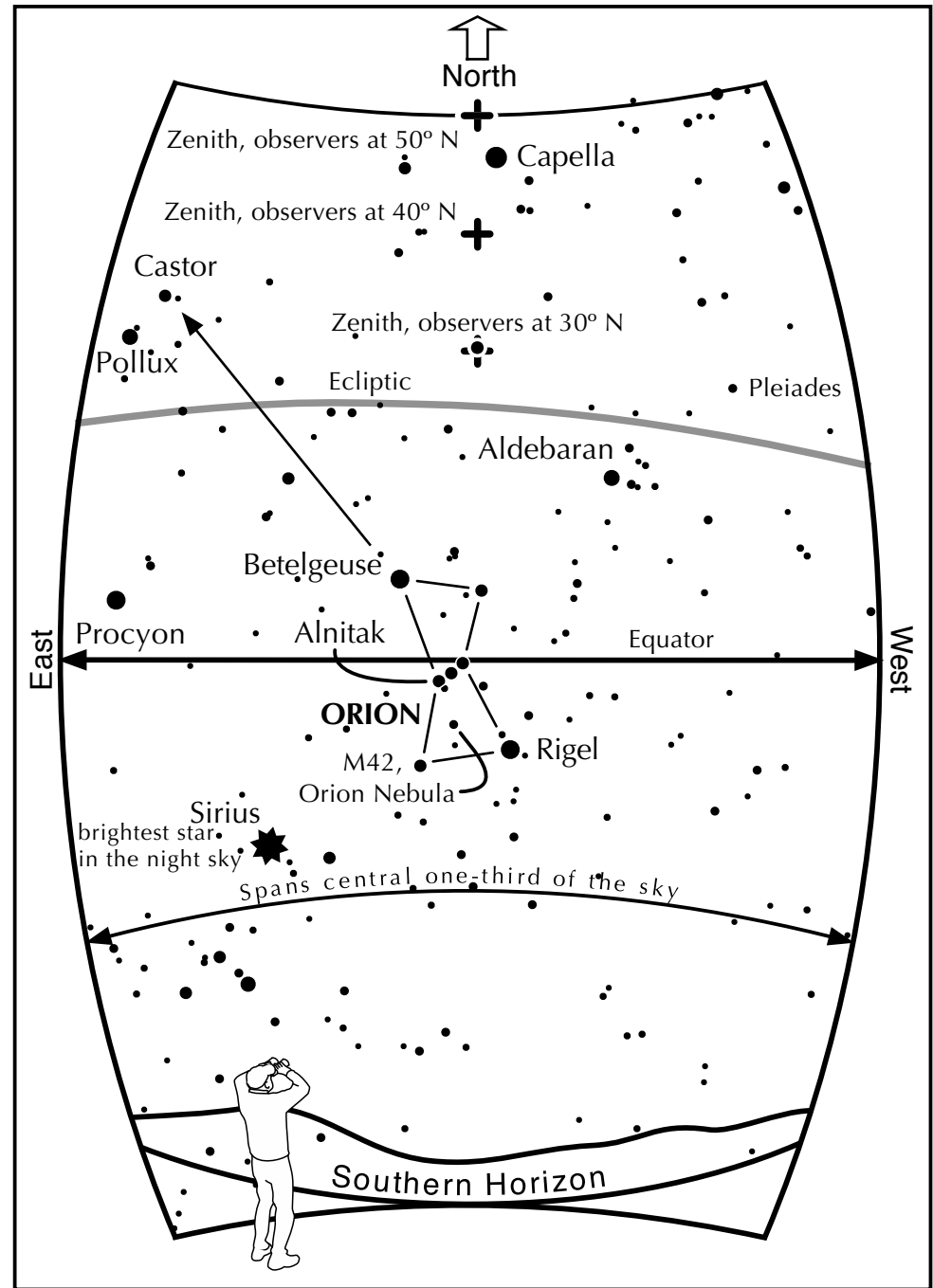
**If you can observe
only one evening celestial event this month,
consider this one:**

...The dimming of Betelgeuse...

- 90 minutes after sunset, face south and look half way between the horizon and the zenith for Orion.
- On the southwest corner of Orion shines blue Rigel, the fifth brightest star visible from mid-latitudes.
- On the constellation's opposing corner lies Betelgeuse, a semi-regular variable star that is typically either the 8th, 9th, or 10th brightest star. Generally, it is not quite as bright as Procyon shining to its east.
- Since October, Betelgeuse has been dimming reaching a historic minimum. In late January, it shone about as bright as Castor, dropping to about 23rd place!
- Try comparing the brightness of Betelgeuse with that of neighboring stars, in particular Alnitak and Castor. (Alnitak is the easternmost belt star of Orion. Castor can be found by drawing a line from Rigel through Betelgeuse and extending it 1-2/3 that distance.)
- Don't look directly at Betelgeuse, but either mid-way between it and the comparison star, or quickly glance to it, then to the comparison star.

What is your comparative brightness estimation of Betelgeuse?

So, why has it dimmed? It could be a variation on its complex brightness cycle. Or it could be that the star is close to undergoing a supernova explosion. Most astrophysicists favor the former, but hope for the latter!



Facing South on an early evening in February.