





Constellation Orion Illustration
Johan Bayer, Uranometria, 1603
Image from copperplate print of 1661 Edition
United States Naval Observatory Library

Stars Names

- Betelgeuse – from Ibt al Jauzah, the Armpit of the Central One. This star is a red giant so big that, if it were placed where the Sun is, would extend past the orbit of Mars! Most stars look like pin-points, even in giant telescopes; but Betelgeuse doesn't. Telescopes have been able to detect surface features on this star. Betelgeuse is 427 light-years away and has a companion which is itself a double star. Betelgeuse is the closest star to Earth likely to go nova or supernova. It could happen anytime in the next few million years. Trivia: in the original **book** *Planet of the Apes* (Pierre Boulle, 1968) the crew from Earth traveled to a planet around Betelgeuse. At the time the book was written, Betelgeuse was believed to be about 350 light-years away.
- Rigel – “The Foot” is a blue giant star which is slightly brighter than Betelgeuse. This star is about 1,000 light years away meaning it is really *much* brighter. Rigel is a double star but the companion is much fainter and very close. Both are receding from us at about 17 km/sec.
- Bellatrix – “Female Warrior,” derived from a loose (bad) medieval translation of Al Najid which means “The Conqueror.” It is about 243 light-years away and receding from us at about 9 km/sec.
- Mintaka – from “Al Mintakah” means simply the belt. This is the first of the belt stars to rise above the horizon. This star is a double and the two components are fairly easy to separate even in binoculars; they are about 1/3° apart (for comparison, the Moon is about 1/2° wide). Mintaka is about 917 light-years away.
- Alnilam – from “Al Nathm,” The String of Pearls that were supposed to have been set in the middle of Orion's belt. It is about 1,342 light-years away and receding from us at about 26 km/sec.
- Alnitak – from “Al Nitak,” The Girdle. This star is actually a triple although the two companions are too faint to close to be seen in small telescopes. It is about 817 light-years away receding from us at about 14 km/sec.
- Nair al Saif – the Bright One in the Sword is a triple star although the companions require a modest telescope to see and are fairly close. It is about 1,326 light-years away. Visually, it is surrounded by nebulosity from the Great Orion Nebula but the nebula is about 500 light-years further behind it.
- Saiph – from Al Saif, the Sword, was originally Rijl Jauzah al Yamna, the Right Leg of the Jauzah, but got renamed somehow even though it is quite far from the sword. It is 722 light-years away.
- Meissa – from Al Maisan, the Proudly Marching One, originally the name of a star in Gemini but it got “misapplied” to this star. This was once known as Ras al Jauzah, the Head of the Jauzah. Meissa is about 1,055 light-years away. The two nearby stars were called Al Hakah “a white spot” which got changed into Heka (985 light-years) and Hika (117 light-years). Hika is not even white, it's more reddish.
- Algiebba – possibly from Saif al Jabbar, the Sword of the Giant, has sometimes been called Saiph. Algiebba is about 900 light-years away.

Nebula Names

- Great Orion Nebula
- Witchhead Nebula (Eridanus)
- Horsehead Nebula
- Flame Nebula
- Crab Nebula (Taurus)
- Supernova Remnant?