



Figure 18.3: Multiple stars θ^1 and θ^2 Orionis at the center of the Orion Nebula, as seen through a telescope with a diagonal.

9.2-magnitude star 2' to the east.

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Orion Nebula

$\theta^{1,2}$ Orionis

M42

EMISSION NEBULA IN ORION

$5^{\text{h}}35.3^{\text{m}} - 5^{\circ}23'$

Magnitude 3

Size (central portion) 1°

Extremely prominent object. M42 is the finest deep-sky object visible from the United States, and a lifetime can be spent contemplating its intricate structure.

The two brightest stars in the nebula are Theta-1 and Theta-2 Orionis; they form a wide double. Theta-1, in turn, is the brightest element of the **Trapezium**, a roughly square quadruple-star system (Fig. 18.3).

Many observers can see a fifth star (E) accompanying the Trapezium; some can see a sixth (F). The system is actually more than sextuple, since the double star θ^2 Orionis is also involved, as are other stars in the nebula.