

Eta Carinae: Sovereign of the South



"Majestic, legendary, extreme, powerful, rare, enigmatic, gigantic... adjectives that describe Eta Carinae, the massive supergiant star that, surrounded by a beautiful and distinct nebula, illuminates the southern Milky Way sky. This extraordinary star is currently among the most luminous and most massive stars known to exist at about 4 million times the brightness and 120 times the mass of our sun; it is dangerously close to the theoretical limit for a star." -

AAVSO: Eta Carinae, April 2000 Variable Star of the Month

Eta Carinae underwent an incredible eruption in the 1840s, increasing in luminance until it, despite being 7500 to 10000 lightyears away, became the second brightest star in the sky, second only to Sirius, a mere 8.6 lightyears away. Somehow, Eta Carinae survived this great outburst, slowly receding into obscurity, until it began to brighten again in the 1950s. Eta Carinae has been increasing in magnitude across all wavelengths ever since; shockingly, it has brightened by a factor of two since 1997. At this rate of increase, the Hubble telescope will soon be unable to image the star without saturating. What's more, Eta Carinae is also the only known star that actually emits "laser" light!

There is every indication that Eta Carinae will soon explode in the most spectacular supernova ever witnessed by man. However, we at Tikiwiki believe that Eta Carinae will survive this eruption, as it did a century before, only to return to once again to rule the southern skies.

