

Image: Hubble captures planetary nebula NGC 6326

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Credit: ESA/Hubble & NASA

The Hubble Space Telescope captured what looks like a colorful holiday ornament in space. It's actually an image of NGC 6326, a planetary nebula with glowing wisps of outpouring gas that are lit up by a central star nearing the end of its life.

When a star ages and the red giant phase of its life comes to an end, it starts to eject layers of gas from its surface leaving behind a hot and compact white dwarf. Sometimes this ejection results in elegantly symmetric patterns of [glowing gas](#), but NGC 6326 is much less structured. This object is located in the constellation of Ara, the Altar, about 11,000 light-years from Earth.

Planetary nebulae are one of the main ways in which elements heavier than hydrogen and helium are dispersed into space after their creation in the hearts of stars. Eventually some of this out-flung material may form new stars and planets.

This picture was created from images taken using the Hubble Space Telescope's Wide Field Planetary Camera 2. The vivid blue and red hues come from material including ionized oxygen and hydrogen glowing under the action of the fierce ultraviolet radiation from the still hot [central star](#).

Provided by NASA

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