A piercing celestial eye stares back at Hubble
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This dramatic image from the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope shows the planetary nebula NGC 3918, a brilliant cloud of colorful gas in the constellation of Centaurus, around 4,900 light-years from Earth.

In the center of the cloud of gas, and completely dwarfed by the nebula, are the dying remnants of a red giant. During the final convulsive phase in the evolution of these stars, huge clouds of gas are ejected from the surface of the star before it emerges from its cocoon as a white dwarf. The intense ultraviolet radiation from the tiny remnant star then causes the surrounding gas to glow like a fluorescent sign. These extraordinary and colorful planetary nebulas are among the most dramatic sights in the night sky, and often have strange and irregular shapes, which are not yet fully explained.