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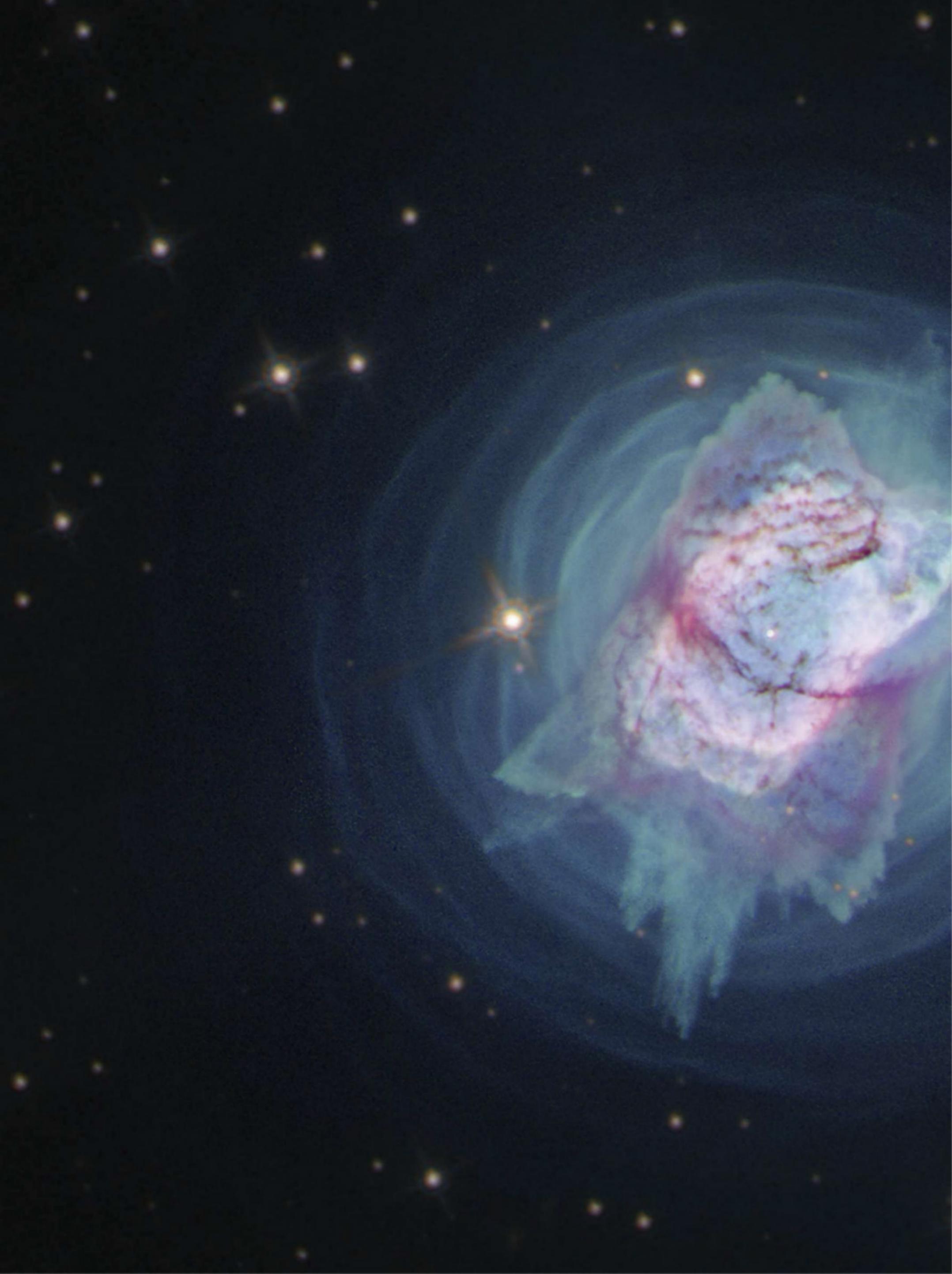
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EYE OPENER

Hubble bubble

HUBBLE SPACE TELESCOPE

This brightly coloured, glowing bubble of gas and dust is the planetary nebula, NGC 7027. It measures just 0.2 by 0.1 light-years in size, and is one of the smallest and brightest planetary nebulae. It is located some 3,000 light-years away in the Cygnus constellation.

Planetary nebulae are formed when ageing stars shed their outer layers of gas into space. New images from the Hubble Space Telescope will allow researchers to study NGC 7027 in the near-ultraviolet wavelength for the first time, which may help unlock some of the mysteries of this object.

One theory is that a closely orbiting binary star has been sloughing off material for thousands of years, seen here as blue rings, but now the nebula has entered a more violent phase. It's ejecting hot gas and dust in specific directions, creating its pointed 'corners', seen here in red.

NASA/ESA/J KASTNER (RIT)

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