NEBULAE.GALAXIES.IM

A name that stuck

Planetary nebulae keep a historical name, and have nothing to do with planets.

"Some of the fuzzy objects resembled planets, and these earned the name "planetary nebulae."" Today, NASA writes, "these nebulae keep the name, but we know they have nothing to do with planets."

Official point	Official wording
How they form	"Planetary nebulae form during the death of low-mass to medium-mass stars. When such stars die, they expel their outer layers into space."
Shapes	The shells form "a huge variety of unique shapes – rings, hourglasses, rectangles, and more."
The Helix	It "looks like a bubble or eye from Earth's point of view," but "is actually a trillion-mile-long tunnel of glowing gases. In its center lies a white dwarf star."
A nickname	This sheet describes that official appearance. It does not treat the popular nickname "Eye of God" as a fact.

A short quiz

1. Why were these clouds called planetary nebulae?
2. What is the Helix, according to the official Hubble nebulae page?
3. What sits at the centre of the Helix?

Answers. 1. Some fuzzy objects resembled planets. 2. A trillion-mile-long tunnel of glowing gases. 3. A white dwarf star.

Wording from NASA Science, Hubble's Nebulae. Checked 17 November 2026.
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