

New Scientist

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An extraordinary discovery in the atmosphere of Venus

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As the world approaches a grim milestone

THE DATA

Can we trust the numbers?

THE VIRUS

How is it mutating?

THE FUTURE

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Shiniest spiral



**Insight Investment
Astronomy Photographer
of the Year Awards 2020**
rmg.co.uk/astrophoto
Photographer Nicolas Lefadeux

RARELY has the universe looked so tantalisingly within reach as in this enchanting photo of the Andromeda galaxy, taken by French photographer and optical engineer Nicolas Lefadeux.

To get the shot, he positioned his camera at an angle to the telescope's focus, which softens the edges of the image so that the galaxy appears to be close. It won him the top prize at the Insight Investment Astronomy Photographer of the Year Awards, a competition organised by the Royal Observatory Greenwich, UK. The winners of each category were announced in an online ceremony on 10 September.

Just 2.5 million light years away from Earth, the spiral Andromeda galaxy is the nearest major neighbour of the Milky Way and is bright enough to be spotted with the naked eye as a pale blur in the night sky. The sparkle and glitter of the photo is down to the trillion or so stars that make up Andromeda. For comparison, the Milky Way contains between 100 billion and 400 billion stars.

At Andromeda's centre is a supermassive black hole surrounded by a disc of stars, dust and gas, as well as an outer gas "halo". Researchers estimate that Andromeda will collide with the Milky Way in 4.5 billion years, at which point they will merge into a single, giant galaxy that has been nicknamed "Milkomeda".

An exhibition of the competition's winning images will open at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich on 23 October. Tickets are on sale now. ■

Gege Li