

Science Focus

How AI could help
THE PARALYSED WALK AGAIN

The truth about
TARGETING BELLY FAT

The science behind
THE THREE-BODY PROBLEM

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STRUGGLES WITH HUMAN INTERACTION

PLUS Simple strategies to break the cycle



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IN THIS ISSUE

Physics

The measurement that could change what we know about gravity

Health

What we're getting wrong about prostate cancer

Ecology

Why 'no-dig' gardening really works



EYE OPENER

Lunar lodging

TIGNES, FRANCE

Generally, you're more likely to see people wearing skis and goggles than spacesuits in this part of the French Alps. But, for one week this January, the frozen lake of Tignes effectively became the Moon. The scientists here simulated a lunar surface exercise to test the EUROHAB space dwelling.

That's the unit you see here. It has been designed by French start-up Spartan Space to act as a remote outpost for permanent lunar habitation, and extend the range of potential exploration during Moon missions. Able to host two astronauts for up to two weeks, EUROHAB could be a refuge in unexpected circumstances and a station for scientific experiments, since remote control allows for sample analysis even when no astronauts are present.

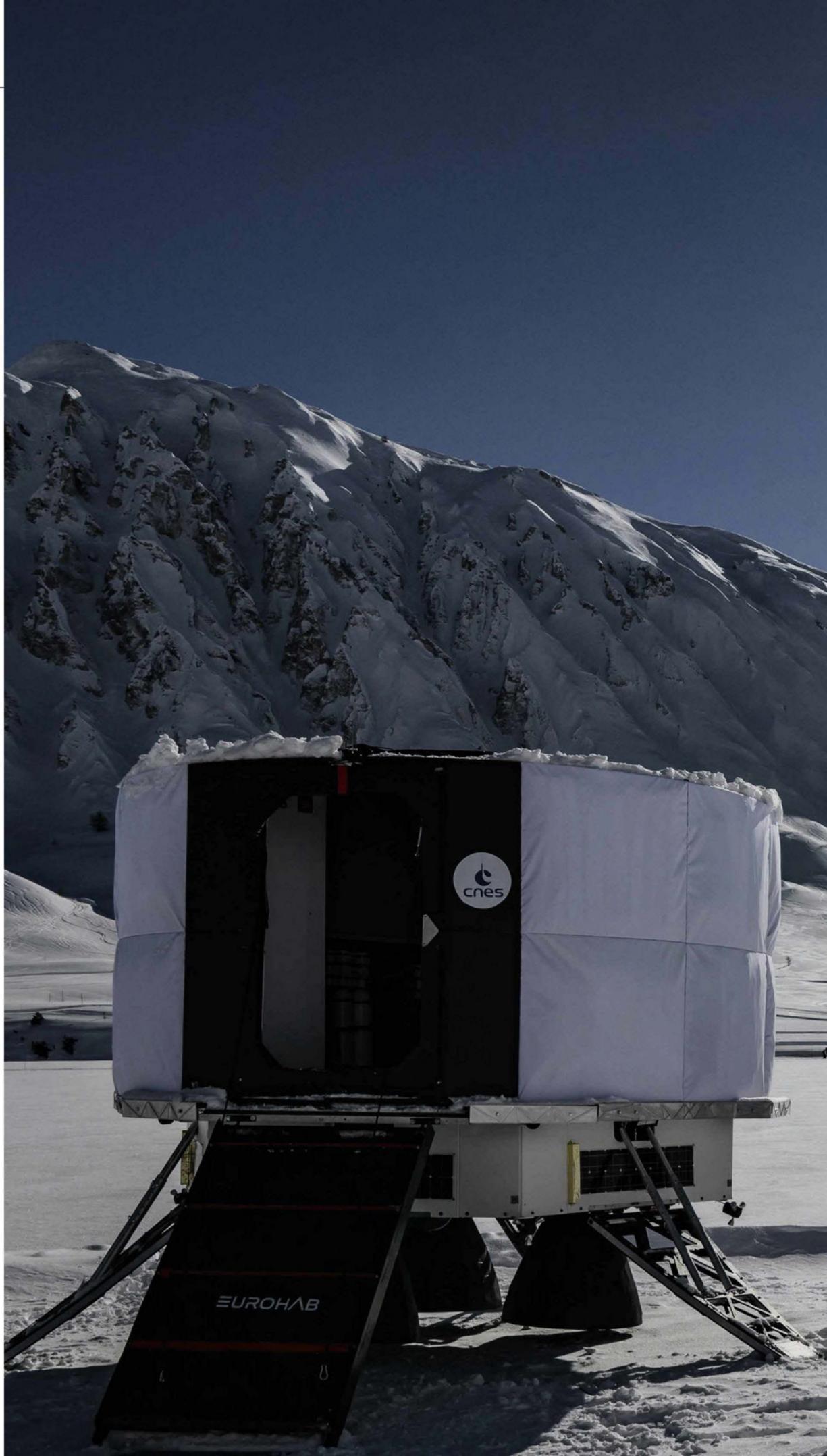
Space agencies, including the French National Centre for Space Studies (CNES) and European Space Agency (ESA), hope to send it to the Moon's south pole. Its presence in the Alps caught some by surprise, however. "The site was close to the skiing sites and people stopped to ask what we were doing," said Peter Weiss, CEO of Spartan Space. Next, the start-up plans to test the EUROHAB in an Arctic setting.

GETTY IMAGES

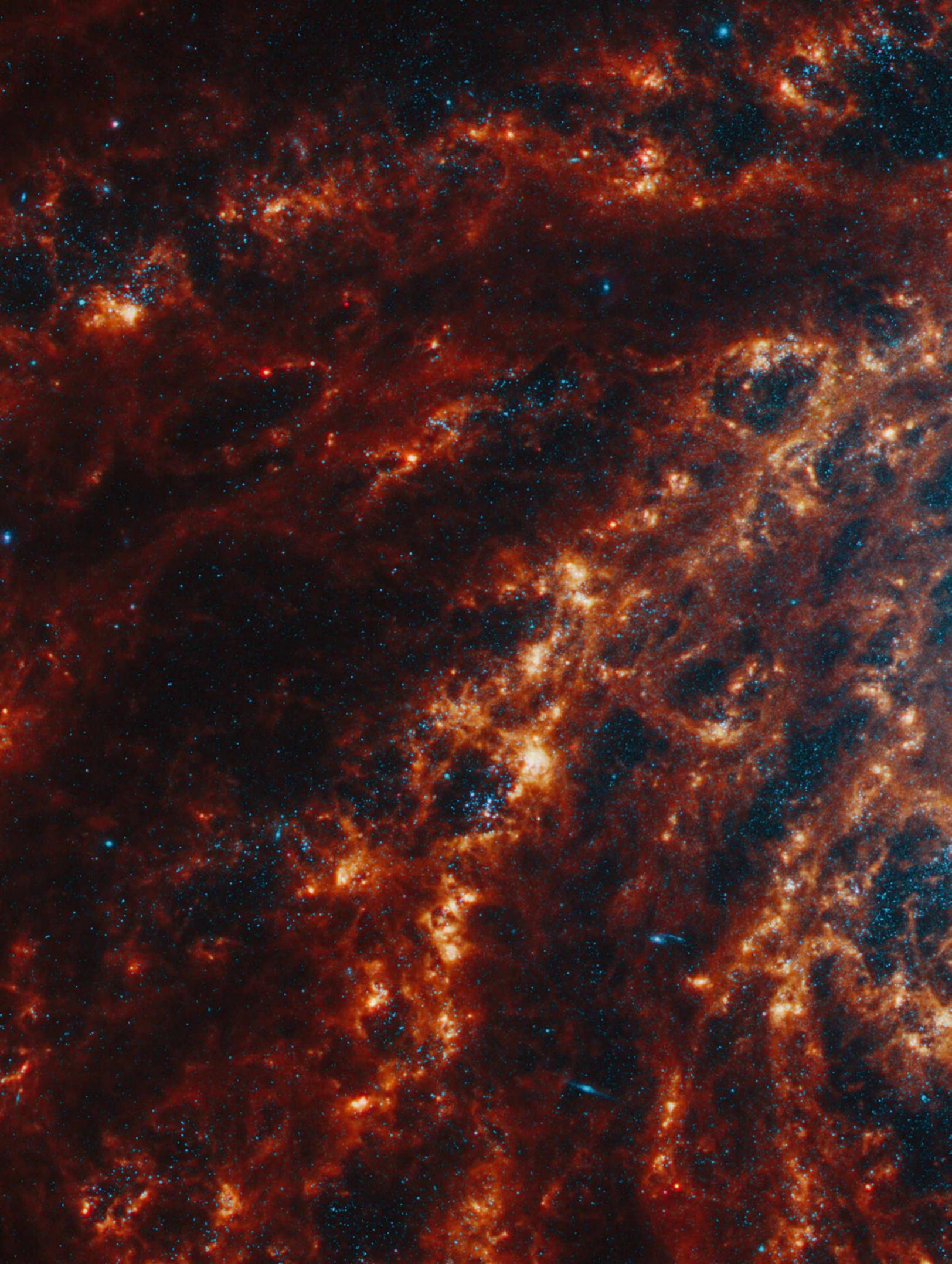
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EYE OPENER

A sprawling population

NGC 4254

In the two years since the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) was launched into space, it has dazzled us with high-quality images of exploding stars, distant planets, massive nebulae and more. In one of its more recent collections, the JWST has captured images of 19 relatively nearby spiral galaxies, such as this one: the catchy-sounding NGC 4254, looking spectacular with its orange arms and anchored by its blue central region.

In this image, it's possible to see clearly how densely populated the galaxy is. Within the blue light are clusters of older stars, noticeable as tiny dots. The orange arms – made of stars, gas and dust – circle out counterclockwise from the centre and appear darker in more populated areas.

Captured using both near- and mid-infrared light, this image, and those of the other 19 spiral galaxies, is part of the Physics at High Angular resolution in Nearby Galaxies (PHANGS) programme, which aims to understand the small-scale physics of gas and star formation.

Of the four main types of galaxy, spiral galaxies are most common and hold the majority of stars in the Universe.

NASA/ESA/CSA

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