

New Scientist

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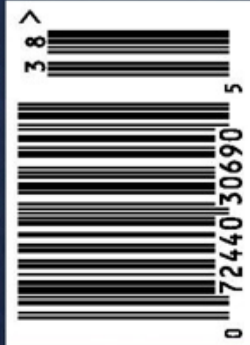
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IN THE EMBRACE OF A GREEN LADY © FILIP HREBENDA



THE NIGHT HIGHWAY © FILIP HREBENDA



STABBING INTO THE STARS © ZHIJUI HU

BAD WATER MILKY WAY © ABHIJIT PATIL



Looking up



Photographers **Filip Hrebenda, Zihui Hu, Abhijit Patil**

THESE spellbinding photos reveal what is lying in wait when we cast our gaze upwards to the vast expanse of space. The images are some of the winning and shortlisted entries for this year's Astronomy Photographer of the Year competition, organised by the Royal Observatory in London.

Filip Hrebenda won the Aurorae category with *In the Embrace of a Green Lady* (top left), showing the emerald hues of the northern lights, or aurora borealis, reflected on a frozen lake in Iceland. Green is the most common colour seen in the northern lights. It is caused when oxygen atoms in the atmosphere between 120 and 180 kilometres above Earth's surface decay to their normal energy state, after being excited by solar wind.

The remaining images are from the Skyscapes category, with Zihui Hu taking the top prize with a shot of the snow-capped Namcha Barwa mountain in Tibet (bottom left), titled *Stabbing Into the Stars* – a nod to the mountain's name, which means “spear thrusting into the sky” in Tibetan. The stars appear as trails in the sky thanks to long-exposure photography.

Death Valley in California features in runner-up Abhijit Patil's image, *Badwater Milky Way* (main image), revealing the characteristic hexagonal mud patterns in the valley's Badwater basin.

Another of Hrebenda's images, *The Night Highway* (top, centre), captures the rare sight of both the Milky Way and an aurora over the Vestrahorn mountain in Iceland and was highly commended.

The winning photos are on display at an exhibition at the National Maritime Museum in London, UK, until 13 August 2023. ■

Gege Li