

Best of Last Week – The Atlas humanoid robot, a nuclear fusion milestone, using AI to find COVID battling drugs

August 23 2021, by Bob Yirka

Shown here (from left) are the Eagle, Omega, Triffid, and Lagoon Nebulae, imaged by NASA's infrared Spitzer Space Telescope. These nebulae are part of a structure within the Milky Way's Sagittarius Arm that is poking out from the arm at a dramatic angle. Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech

It was another good week for space science as a team of researchers

affiliated with institutions across the U.S. [cracked a mystery of massive black holes and quasars using supercomputer simulations](#), determining how gas flows across the universe to feed them. Also, a team using data from NASA's Spitzer Space Telescope and the ESA's Gaia mission found [a "break" in the Milky Way's Sagittarius spiral arm](#) that turned out to be a mass of young stars and star-forming gas clouds sticking out of the arm like a splinter. And a pair of researchers from Northern Arizona University working with a colleague from the University of Hawai'i at Manoa and another at the Planetary Science Institute, found [evidence of solar-driven changes on the moon](#)—work that could lead to an explanation of the large amounts of tiny iron nanoparticles on its surface.

In technology news, a team at Boston Dynamics released [a video showing off its Atlas humanoid robot carrying out moves like a human gymnast](#). And in an interview last week, [Elon Musk claimed that Tesla's robots will make physical work a "choice,"](#) signaling the entrepreneur's intentions to begin using his fortune to develop robots capable of doing more of the work now done by humans. Also, a team led by a group at RMIT University announced that they had created [a wave energy converter that was twice as efficient at harvesting power as current technology](#). And in a combined effort, a group at Harvard University working with Google Research announced the development of [Air Learning, an open-source simulator and gym environment that researchers can use to train reinforcement learning algorithms for unmanned aerial vehicle navigation](#).

In other news, a team working at the National Ignition Facility at Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory announced that they had reached [a major nuclear fusion milestone](#): triggering ignition in the lab. And a team at the University of Pennsylvania found [a faster and cheaper way to test for COVID-19 using pencil lead](#).

And finally, if you or someone you care about has been infected with

COVID-19, you might want to check out the results of a combined effort by researchers at Boston University and the University of Michigan. They have been [using artificial intelligence applications to find existing drugs that can kill SARS-CoV2 in cells.](#)

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