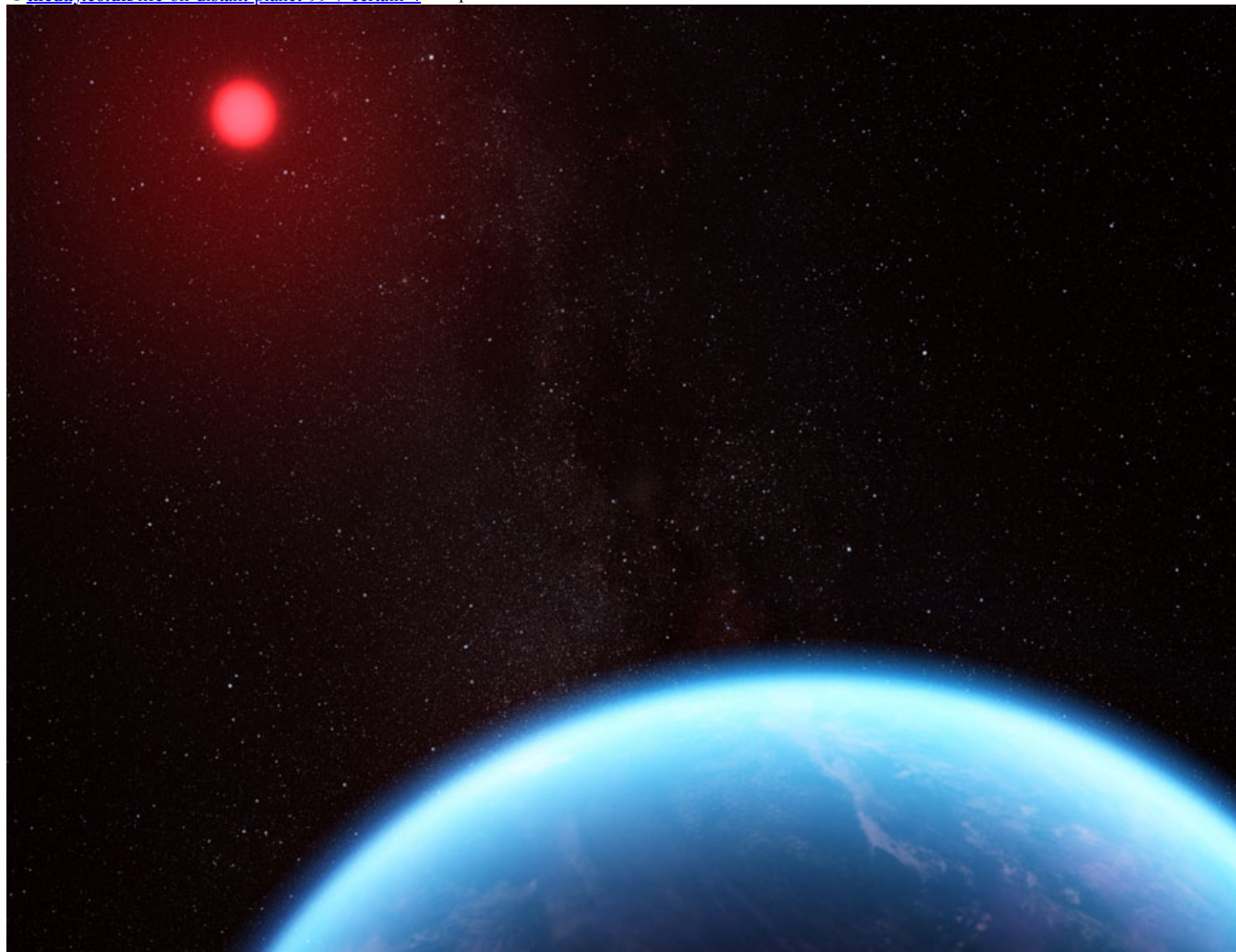


Life on distant planet 99.7% certain

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Faraway world: The image shows an artist's impression of K2-18b orbiting the tiny red dwarf star K2-18. The giant exoplanet is about 120 light-years away from Earth. To get there in a modern rocket would take over two million years!

Should this change the way we live? Evidence that humans might not be alone in the universe inspires a mix of excitement, fear and hope for the future.

What's happening?

Are we about to find **ET**? Scientists reveal what aliens could REALLY look like.

These were recent headlines when researchers found possible evidence of life on a distant planet.

K2-18b is two and a half times the size of Earth and 700 trillion miles away. The researchers spotted the potential chemical signature of two gas molecules in the planet's atmosphere, which are produced only by living organisms.

Find out more

But according to Nathalie Cabrol, respected director of the **SETI Institute**, scientists cannot rule out non-living sources for these molecules.

Some feel that discovering life elsewhere in the solar system would further reduce our feeling of "specialness".

However, Professor Michele Dougherty from Imperial College London thinks it would be good for science and the soul. And the scientists who made the discovery hope it could dissolve the linguistic, political and geographic barriers societies have built.

K2-18b is so far away though that visiting would be impossible with current technology.

Should this change the way we live?

Some say

Yes! Life on other planets proves that humans are not special. This discovery should encourage society to treat animals and the environment in a much better way.

Others think

No! Even if scientists find bacteria on a faraway planet, this is nothing like the complex lifeforms inhabiting Earth.

Six steps to discovery

Some people say

1. Connect

"Perhaps we've never been visited by aliens because they have looked upon Earth and decided there's no sign of intelligent life."

Neil deGrasse Tyson (1958 –), American astrophysicist

What do you think?

How do you feel about this story? - Do you believe that human beings are alone in the universe? Does the idea of alien life make you feel hopeful or afraid?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: Have researchers found any other planets that might host living organisms? How many planets do scientists think the universe might contain?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know about this story for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - What would an alien life form look like? Describe it in a poem and draw a picture.

5. Express

What do others believe? - In groups, come up with a plan for how the government should respond to the news that life has been found on other planets.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Imagine that you are a priest or religious leader. Write a sermon responding to the fact that life has been discovered on another planet. Does this change the idea of God, heaven or human souls?

Glossary

ET - ET stands for Extra-Terrestrial, meaning from beyond Earth. It is the name of a 1982 film about a boy who befriends an alien.

SETI Institute - A not-for-profit research organisation established in 1984 with the mission is to explore, understand, and explain the origin and nature of life in the universe.