

In a galaxy far, far away

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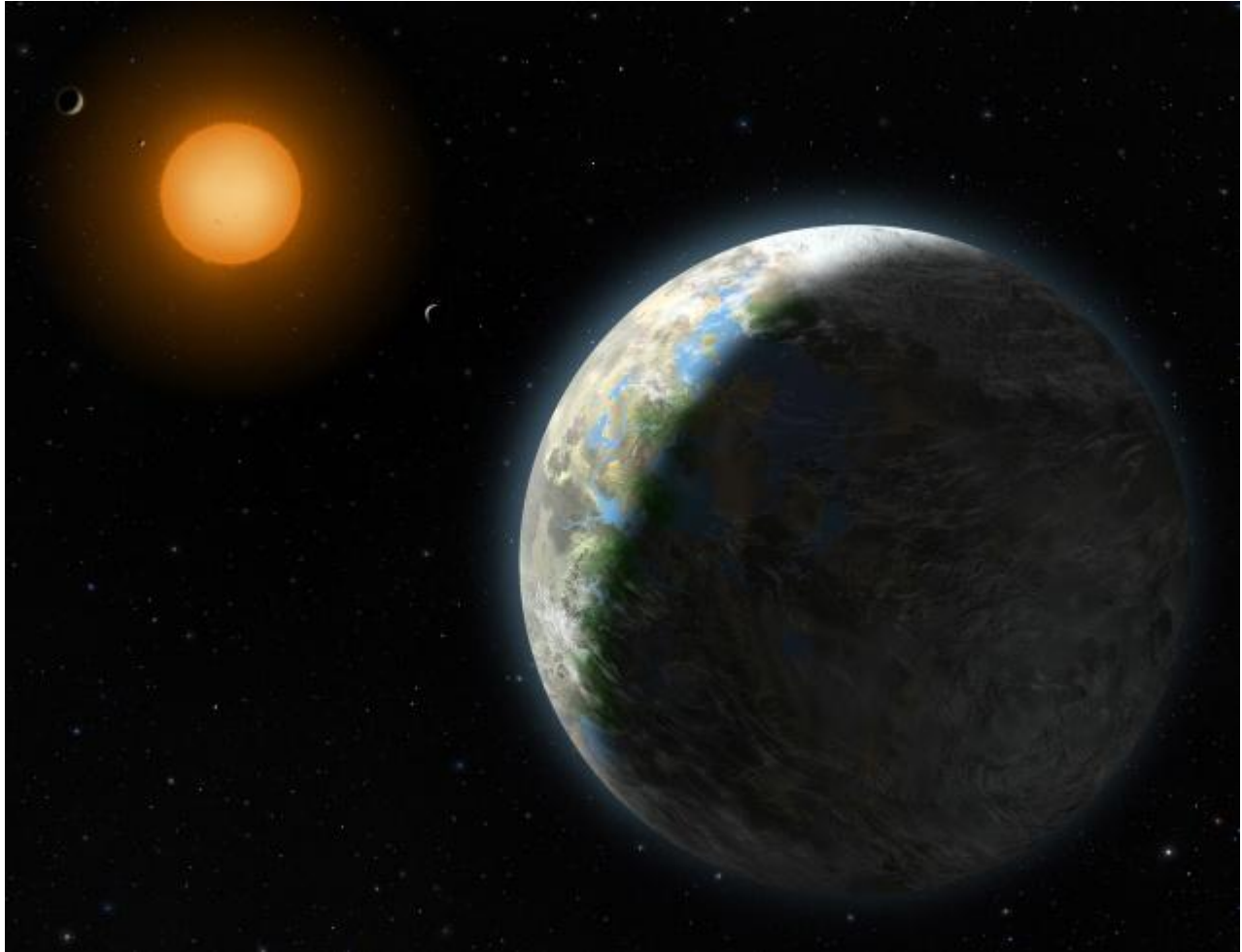


Photo: AP An artist's rendering of a new planet Gliese 581g (right) 172 trillion km from Earth that might be capable of supporting life.

Gliese 581g could be capable of supporting life.

Astronomers have discovered a planet, orbiting a star some 20 light years away, which they claim is the most Earth-like yet found and very much likely to be habitable.

A team, led by the University of California, spotted the planet, Gliese 581g, which appears to have an atmosphere, a gravity like Earth and could well be capable of life — and may contain water as well.

The new planet — a rocky world three times the size of Earth, lies in the star's “Goldilocks zone” — the region in space where conditions are neither too hot nor too cold for liquid water to form oceans, lakes and rivers.

“Our findings offer a very compelling case for a potentially habitable planet. The fact that we were able to detect this planet so quickly and so nearby tells us that planets like this must be really common,” Professor Steven Vogt, who led the team, was quoted by the media as saying. The findings are based on 11 years of observations at the WM Keck Observatory in Hawaii.

The planet orbits a small red star called Gliese 581 in the constellation of Libra. The planet is 172 trillion kms away — so far away that spaceships travelling close to the speed of light would take 20 years to make the journey. The findings have been published in the *Astrophysical Journal*.

Keywords: [astronomy](#), [new planet](#), [Gliese](#)

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