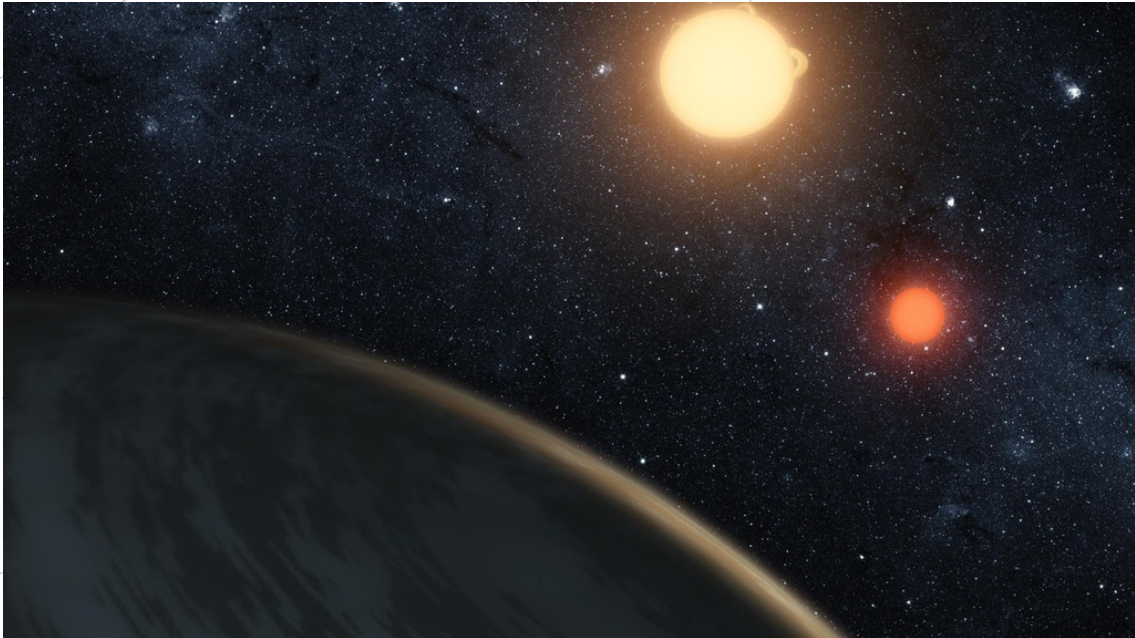


SPACE SCOOP
NEWS FROM ACROSS THE UNIVERSE



Droids Join the Search for Alien Life

April 27, 2018

Over 40 years since 'Star Wars' was first released and the sci-fi movies are as popular as ever. We're all dreaming of the day that real life catches up to the series. We want intelligent robots at our beck and call, faster-than-light space travel and exotic alien for friends.

25 years ago we took the first step towards a future in space, with the discovery of the first exo-planets. Today, intelligent robots, or rather intelligent computer programmes are helping us find out whether these distant planets are fit for life.

Artificial intelligence (AI) has been helping scientists study so-called 'Tatooines' (pronounced "tat-oo-eeen"). These are planets that orbit two stars instead of one, just like the planet Tatooine in Star Wars. Working out whether these planets could support life is especially tricky.

Planets need to survive for billions of years in order for life to evolve. So, finding out whether a planet's orbit is stable is important, but it's much more complicated when an extra star thrown into the mix.

Moving around two stars instead of just one can lead to big changes in a planet's orbit. These planets can be thrown into space or crash violently into one of their twin stars.

The AI looked at ten million computer simulations of planets, each with a slightly different path to find out which were stable. Within just a few hours, the AI was able to outsmart scientists, discovering that planets they thought were stable are not and vice versa.

▲ COOL FACT!

Dozens of planets have already been found orbiting two stars. One planet has been discovered in a triple star system!