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Scientists rank most habitable alien planets by Ritika Sharma

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An international team of astrobiologists have ranked the planets and moons that they feel can support alien life.

Before you get exotic ideas and pictures in your mind about alien life forms, consider that even bacteria can be grouped under alien life if they are found on other planets.

Aliens need not be those strange-looking, wide-eyed creatures you get to see in Hollywood movies. They can be humble, single-cell organisms quietly surviving somewhere other than planet Earth.

Saturnâ€™s moon called Titan, and an exoplanet called Gliese 581g, which is over 20 light years away in the constellation Libra are among the most habitable alien worlds, according to scientists. The PHI system evaluates if other planets and moons fulfill certain conditions required for life. Gliese 581g is the planet most similar to the Earth, and gets a rating of 0.89, closely followed by Gliese 581d at 0.74. Aliens can be humble, single-cell organisms quietly surviving somewhere other than planet Earth. It considers if the planet or moon has a rocky surface, an atmosphere, or a magnetic field to shield against solar flares.

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The findings have been published in the journal 'Astrobiology.'

Two ratings to rank planets:- The scientists have come up with two rating systems to rank the planets: the Earth Similarity Index (ESI) and the Planetary Habitability Index (PHI). As the name suggests, the ESI system ranks planet and moons on the basis of how similar they are to planet Earth. Quite naturally, Earth gets a perfect score of 1.0 on this index, with other planets falling in line.

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Mars, once believed to be the most life-friendly planet, has a score 0.70. Aliens need not be those strange-looking, wide-eyed creatures you get to see in Hollywood movies.

The ESI system considers many factors to judge similarity to planet Earth, including size of the planet and its distance from its home star.

On the other hand, the PHI system evaluates if other planets and moons fulfill certain conditions required for life. It considers if the planet or moon has a rocky surface, an atmosphere, or a magnetic field to shield against solar flares.

The system checks if the planet or moon has a sustained energy source. It also looks for presence of carbon compounds or liquid solvents which might sustain the chemical reactions indispensable for life.

On the PHI scale, Titan ranks the highest with a score of 0.64, closely followed by planet Mars getting a score of 0.64.

The search for life outside Earth is still on.

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