

FINDING LIFE BEYOND EARTH

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There is a revolution going on in planetary science. Scientists are discovering the raw ingredients for life in the far reaches of the solar system, and discovering that life can thrive in environments more extreme than we ever anticipated. Does this mean we are finally on the verge of answering one of humanity's most enduring questions: Are we alone? NOVA takes viewers on an awe-inspiring journey to the far-flung reaches of our solar system to look for evidence of *Finding Life Beyond Earth*.

Combining the latest telescope images with dazzling CGI, *Finding Life Beyond Earth* immerses audiences in the sights and sounds of alien worlds, while top astrobiologists explain how these places are changing how we think about the potential for life in our solar system. We used to think our neighboring planets and moons were fairly boring—mostly cold, dead rocks where life could never take hold. Today, however, the solar system looks wilder than we ever imagined.

Powerful telescopes and unmanned space missions have revealed a wide range of dynamic environments—atmospheres thick with organic molecules, active volcanoes, and vast saltwater oceans. This ongoing revolution is forcing scientists to expand their ideas about what kinds of worlds could support life. And if we do find primitive life forms elsewhere in the solar system, it may well be that life is common in the universe—the rule, and not the exception.

Space exploration is driving the revolution, using advanced robot explorers as our eyes and ears in the universe. NASA's *Cassini* spacecraft sends back images that take us below the orange clouds of Saturn's largest moon, exposing Titan's many lakes for the first time in history. The Stardust Probe meets up with a speeding comet and brings back a breakthrough discovery with the ancient rock's comet dust: an amino acid that is a fundamental building block of life. A car-sized rover named *Curiosity* is a geologist, astrobiologist, and a science lab rolled into one—sent to Mars in search of organic molecules vital to sustain life. These are just a few of the missions yielding incredible data that are pushing the boundaries of our understanding further than ever before.

This two-hour documentary features interviews and commentary from pioneering experts in space exploration and those involved in the scientific discoveries. Among them are astrobiologist Chris McKay, who studies some of the most inhospitable places on earth to understand how life flourishes in harsh environments; Harvard professor and planetary scientist Sarah Stewart; and NASA's Chief Planetary Scientist Jim Green, who is at the forefront of the global effort to find answers to the question: is there life beyond Earth?

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NOVA

credits

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