

Scientists Unveil Unique Planet Unlike Any in Our Solar System

Description

An astronomical object once presumed to epitomize one of the galaxy's most prevalent categories of planets has instead unveiled itself as an entirely unprecedented phenomenon.

The exoplanet <u>Enaiposha</u>, also designated as GJ 1214 b, orbits a red dwarf star situated approximately 47 light-years from our home planet. Initially categorized as a mini-Neptune, comprehensive observations conducted using the James Webb Space Telescope (JWST) now indicate that this exoplanet bears a closer resemblance to Venus—albeit on an immense scale.

This revelation has given rise to a novel classification that astronomers have termed 'Super-Venus'.

Enaiposha ranks among the most extensively scrutinized exoplanets known to humanity. Discovered in 2009, its mass and radius suggest a position between Earth and Neptune, further confirmed by observations revealing a significantly substantial atmosphere.

Comparison of Enaiposha with Earth and Neptune
A scale comparison illustrating the dimensions of Earth (left), Enaiposha (middle), and Neptune (right). (Aldaron/Wikimedia Commons, CC BY-SA 3.0)

Within this particular mass regime, exoplanets predominantly fall into two categories. Super-Earths are theorized to be terrestrial planets larger than Earth, typically possessing hydrogen-rich atmospheres, if any. In contrast, mini-Neptunes, which may exhibit similar dimensions, are characterized by their significantly denser atmospheres, abundant in hydrogen and helium, potentially enveloping liquid oceans.

This lack of analogous examples in our own Solar System renders mini-Neptunes particularly intriguing, even as over 5,800 have been confirmed thus far.

While super-Earths and mini-Neptunes tantalize scientists with their potential for habitability under optimal conditions, Enaiposha, with a staggering 2.7 times the radius and 8.2 times the mass of Earth, presents a convoluted scenario. Its perilous proximity to its host star, Orkaria, renders it too inhospitable to sustain life as we know it, yet its accessibility enables us to glean insights applicable to understanding analogous worlds in the broader cosmos.

Artist's impression of Enaiposha

A conceptual depiction of Enaiposha, shrouded in thick steam clouds. (NASA/JPL-Caltech/R. Hurt)

Notwithstanding its intriguing characteristics, Enaiposha is fraught with challenges. Its dense atmosphere obscures comprehensive analysis, yet recent research, leveraging JWST and Hubble observations, suggests a water-rich atmosphere interspersed with vaporized metals.

A groundbreaking study helmed by astronomers Everett Schlawin of the University of Arizona and Kazumasa Ohno from the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan has unearthed unexpected findings from transit data. As Enaiposha traversed its 1.6-day orbital path, starlight passing through its atmosphere appeared to be modified by carbon dioxide in concentrations eerily akin to the more than 96 percent present in Venus's



atmosphere.

However, the detected signal was faint.

Enaiposha orbiting Orkaria



Image not found or type unknown

An artistic interpretation of Enaiposha in orbit around Orkaria. (ESO/L. Calçada)

Ohno remarked, "The detected ${\rm CO}_2$ signal is minimal, necessitating meticulous statistical analysis to substantiate its authenticity. Simultaneously, we require in-depth physical and chemical insights to decipher the true nature of GJ 1214 b's atmosphere."

In a subsequent publication, the researchers endeavored to develop theoretical frameworks to elucidate the observing data. Their findings suggested that if Enaiposha possessed an atmosphere dominated by metals at lower altitudes, accompanied by relatively minor hydrogen concentrations, their model would appropriately correspond to the observations.

At elevated altitudes, the atmosphere appears laden with aerosols and CO₂, culminating in the conception of the super-Venus—a world reminiscent of Venus: exceedingly hot, enveloped by a carbon-rich atmosphere that obscures visibility.



Nevertheless, confirming these intriguing results presents its own set of challenges. The observed signatures are so diminutive that extensive, precision-focused follow-up observations are imperative tovalidate the research team's conclusions, especially given the novelty of the findings.

The researchers assert the crucial nature of high-precision follow-up observations to affirm the presence of a metal-dominated atmosphere, as this could fundamentally challenge prevailing paradigms concerning the internal structures and evolutionary trajectories of sub-Neptunes.

The research has yielded two significant papers published in *The Astrophysical Journal Letters*, accessible here and here.

Vocabulary List:

- 1. **Epitomize** /ɪˈpɪtəˌmaɪz/ (verb): To be a perfect example of a particular quality or type.
- 2. Unprecedented /nn'presi,dentid/ (adjective): Never done or known before; without previous example.
- 3. Scrutinized /'skru:tənaɪzd/ (verb): Examined or inspected closely and thoroughly.
- 4. Convoluted /'kpnvə,lu:tɪd/ (adjective): Extremely complex and difficult to follow.
- 5. Signatures /'sɪgnət[ərz/ (noun): Distinctive patterns or characteristics indicative of something.
- 6. Paradigms /'pærə,daɪmz/ (noun): Typical examples or patterns of something; models.

Vocabulary quizzes

Multiple Choice (Select the Correct answer for each question.)

1. Which term is related to mental processes like learning and memory?

Option: Cognitive Option: Olfactory

Option: Immunostimulatory

Option: Misalignment

2. Which word means to make something less severe serious or painful?

Option: Mitigate
Option: Proliferation
Option: Engender
Option: Scrutiny

3. What term is associated with rules or regulations set by an authority?

Option: Regulatory Option: Modulation



Option: Corroborate
Option: Discourse

4. Which word means never done or known before?

Option: Indispensable

Option: Exigent

Option: Unprecedented Option: Ephemeral

5. What term refers to critical observation or examination?

Option: Exigent
Option: Provenance
Option: Scrutiny
Option: Dismantle

6. Which term means lasting for a very short time?

Option: Olfactory
Option: Ephemeral
Option: Phenomena
Option: Proliferation

7. What term describes typical examples or patterns of something?

Option: Engender
Option: Paradigms
Option: Moderation
Option: Misinformation

8. Which term refers to written or spoken communication or debate?

Option: Neurodegenerative

Option: Discourse
Option: Ameliorate
Option: Corroborate

9. What word means absolutely necessary or essential?

Option: Misalignment Option: Regulatory Option: Indispensable

Option: Exigent

10. Which term means to make something better or improve a situation?

Option: Ameliorate Option: Convoluted Option: Signatures



Option: Mitigate

$\mbox{\sc Gap-Fill}$ ($\mbox{\sc Fill}$ in the blanks with the correct word from the vocabulary list.)



- 29. Effective communication is an skill in any professional environment.
- 30. The emergency response team operates in situations to save lives.

Answer

Multiple Choice: 1. Cognitive 2. Mitigate 3. Regulatory 4. Unprecedented 5. Scrutiny 6. Ephemeral 7.

Paradigms 8. Discourse 9. Indispensable 10. Ameliorate

Gap-Fill: 11. immunostimulatory 12. neurodegenerative 13. engender 14. moderation 15. misalignment

16. corroborate 17. dismantle 18. phenomena 19. instability 20. epitomize

Matching sentence: 1. proliferation 2. authenticity 3. scrutinized 4. consortium 5. discerned 6. convoluted

7. signatures 8. misinformation 9. indispensable 10. exigent

CATEGORY

1. Health - LEVEL6

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