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Scientists find two planets 'ripe for colonisation'

TWO "super-Earth" planets that could possibly support human life have been found by scientists orbiting our nearest Sun-like neighbour.

The worlds circle the star Tau Ceti, which is 12 light years or around 70trillion miles away, in a system of four Earth-sized planets.

The star, a popular subject in science fiction, has similar size and brightness to the Sun.

The two outermost planets lie in Tau Ceti's "Goldilocks" zone, a region around it where

temperatures are just right for surface water. British-led astronomers think they might be candidates for future interstellar colonisation.

But life there would not be peaceful, as a massive debris disc around the star, increases the chance of hits from asteroids and comets.

Scientists discovered the worlds because, as they orbit, the planets cause their parent star to wobble by a tiny amount, and this effect can be measured in the star's light. Lead researcher

Dr Fabo Feng, of Hertfordshire University said: "We're getting close to the correct limits for finding Earth-like planets.

"Our detection of weak wobbles is a milestone, and we're slowly learning to tell the difference between wobbles caused by planets and those due to the star's active surface.

"But no matter how we look at Tau Ceti, there seem to be at least four rocky planets orbiting it."



ORBIT Tau Ceti's four worlds