

OUTER SPACE

Hint that we are not alone

ASTRONOMERS in California claim to have found a planet circling a nearby star — which could be the most far-reaching discovery this century.

For it could indicate that life exists elsewhere in the universe.

Dr Douglas Lin and colleagues at the University of California say they have picked up faint infra-red emissions that almost certainly come from a planet in the process of being born and still cooling off.

It is apparently circling the 'infant' star T-Tauri, which is only about one

million years old (the sun's age is over 4,000 million years) and 400 light years from Earth.

Similar claims in the past have not been confirmed. But Dr Lin is certain this is a planet, like those in our own life-supporting solar system, rather than a star.

Life in the universe, if it exists, must occupy a small, cool, solid world in which the complex strands of DNA and other life-supporting molecules can exist.

They would be destroyed instantly in the nuclear furnace of a star.

Angus Macpherson