

Search: All Categories

Home page	News	Science Features	Recruitment	Catalogues	Labc
MedLabNews	Media pack	Events	Contact us	Subscribe	Com

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Product Categories

Biochemistry [\[24\]](#)

Biotechnology [\[6\]](#)

Chemistry [\[34\]](#)

Consumables [\[48\]](#)

Engineering [\[67\]](#)

Environment [\[6\]](#)

Haematology [\[2\]](#)

Health [\[10\]](#)

Health & Safety [\[35\]](#)

Imaging [\[18\]](#)

Lab Design & Storage

[\[47\]](#)

Lab Services [\[28\]](#)

Microbiology [\[18\]](#)

Pharma [\[13\]](#)

Recruitment [\[1\]](#)

Sample Preparation [\[42\]](#)

Separation Techniques

[\[17\]](#)

Software [\[43\]](#)

Spectroscopy [\[12\]](#)

Test Equipment [\[11\]](#)

||

OTHER CATEGORIES

Associations [\[68\]](#)

Laboratory News

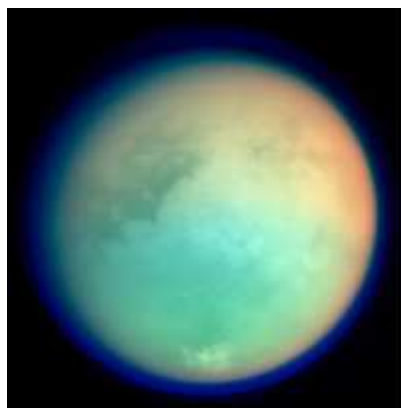
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Stormy Titan could host life

Astrophysicists have discovered that Titan's atmosphere is stormy – a key discovery as scientists generally believe that electrical activity in an atmosphere increases the probability of life.



Titan's electrical storms could of kick-started life on the moon

Titan, Saturn's largest moon, is unique amongst moons in having an atmosphere and now physicists from the Universities of Granada and Valencia have revealed that its atmosphere is stormy.

The Spanish researchers based their findings on the theory of Alexander Oprin and the experiment of Stanley Miller who managed to synthesise organic compounds from inorganic using electrical discharges.

Juan Antonio Morente, from the Department of Applied Physics at the University of Granada detected peaks extremely low frequency (ELF) in the signal from the Huygens probe from Titan. These peaks imply that electromagnetic fields are confined between the ionosphere and the surfaces of a huge resonant cavity giving Titan and natural electric field.

However, untangling the data was not as simple as they had hoped as the Huygens signal was flat and no so called "Schumann resonances" were apparent. The Spanish researchers developed a clever method using time signal separation to reveal the hidden peaks and achieve "irrefutable proof" that Titan has a natural electrically active atmosphere.

Morente said: "This is why Titan has been one of the main objectives of the Cassini-Huygens joint mission of NASA and the European Space Agency."

By Leila Sattery



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