

Best of Last Week – Frozen Lake on Pluto, a portable drug making machine and impact of smoking while pregnant

April 4 2016, by Bob Yirka



This artist's concept of HD 1885 Ab, the first known planet to reside in a triple-star system, would have a similar sunset to KELT-4Ab. Both systems host a pair of stars distantly orbiting the planet-hosting single sun. Credit: NASA/JPL-Caltech

(Science X)—It was a big week for space-based research as [New Horizons imagery revealed a small, frozen lake on Pluto](#)—NASA's spacecraft took pictures of what appeared to be a former lake of liquid nitrogen. Also, a researcher [linked mass extinctions to 'Planet X'](#)—Daniel Whitmire with the University of Arkansas published a paper suggesting that periodic mass extinctions on Earth might be linked to comet showers triggered by a suspected ninth planet. And a team at the Harvard-Smithsonian Center for Astrophysics announced that [a planet in a triple-star system had been found](#)—one star serves as the planet's sun, while the other two are more distant binaries. [And a Blue Origin rocket made a third successful vertical landing](#)—the American space firm is reportedly looking to make rockets as reusable as airplanes.

In other news, a team of researchers at MIT announced the development of [a programming language for living cells](#)—it will allow for rapidly designing complex, DNA-encoded circuits that can provide new functions to living cells. A combined team of researchers from Harvard Medical School and UCLA created [a world map of Neanderthal and Denisovan ancestry in modern humans](#), and it showed that many bloodlines around the world may actually be a bit more Denisovan than thought. And in Russia, [a pair of preserved Ice Age puppies awed scientists](#) with their remarkable condition. The pair date back 12,460 years, and studying them is expected to offer new insight into the origins of dog domestication. Also, engineers at MIT announced that they had developed [a fridge-sized machine that makes prescription drugs on demand](#). The machine, they claim, can make thousands of doses of virtually any prescription medication per day. And [a study of ancient DNA showed European wipe-out of early Americans](#)—a team led by researchers with the University of Adelaide found a striking absence of the pre-Columbian genetic lineages in modern Indigenous Americans, suggesting they had gone extinct after the arrival of the Spaniards.

And finally, if you are a woman who is pregnant or about to be, you might be interested in a recent study that involved over 6,000 women and their newborn children—it was conducted by a team of international researchers who found that [Mom's smoking alters fetal DNA](#)—leading to health complications for the child after birth.

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