DESTINATION SPACE

BY STEPHANIE WARREN

LAVA PLANET

You open the door of your spacecraft and step out at the edge of an ocean. It's not a normal seashore. The ocean at your feet is made of lava. You're on a planet 489 light-years (the distance light travels in one year) from Earth, far outside your solar system. To explore this lava planet, named CoRoT-7b, you wear a heatproof spacesuit. It's 3,990°F here—hot enough to vaporize a human.

Like Earth, CoRoT-7b is made largely of rock. But the lava planet is much closer to its sun than Earth is, making the planet hot enough to melt rock. This liquid rock forms a red-orange lava ocean that covers almost half the planet.

The intense heat vaporizes the liquid rock, turning it into rock gas. The rock gas rises above the ocean and forms clouds, just as water does on Earth. As you stare into the sky, squinting against the bright sunlight, you see clouds gathering and moving toward you.

Suddenly you hear the *plop* of a pebble falling from the cloudy sky into the lava ocean at your feet. Then pebbles fall all around you—the gas rock condensed and now it's raining rocks! You jump inside your spacecraft. Rocks crash into your windshield. You speed away from this extreme planet—clearly it's no place for a vacation!

Destination
The planet CoRoT-7b

Location
The constellation Monoceros

Distance
489 light-years from Earth

Time to reach
13.3 million years

Weather
Sunny and 3,990°F with a chance of rock rain

Half the planet always faces its sun.

Half the planet always faces away from its sun.

Scientists have discovered three other lava planets like **CoRoT-7b.**

The lava ocean on CoRoT-7b is **28 miles deep.**

EYE ON THE SKY

April 21-22: Watch the night sky for the **Lyrids meteor shower.** Sometimes called shooting stars, meteors are space rocks that burn up in Earth's atmosphere.

April 28: Saturn will be very close to Earth. This is the best time to see **Saturn's rings and moons** through a telescope.

MONDOLITHIC (BOTH)