



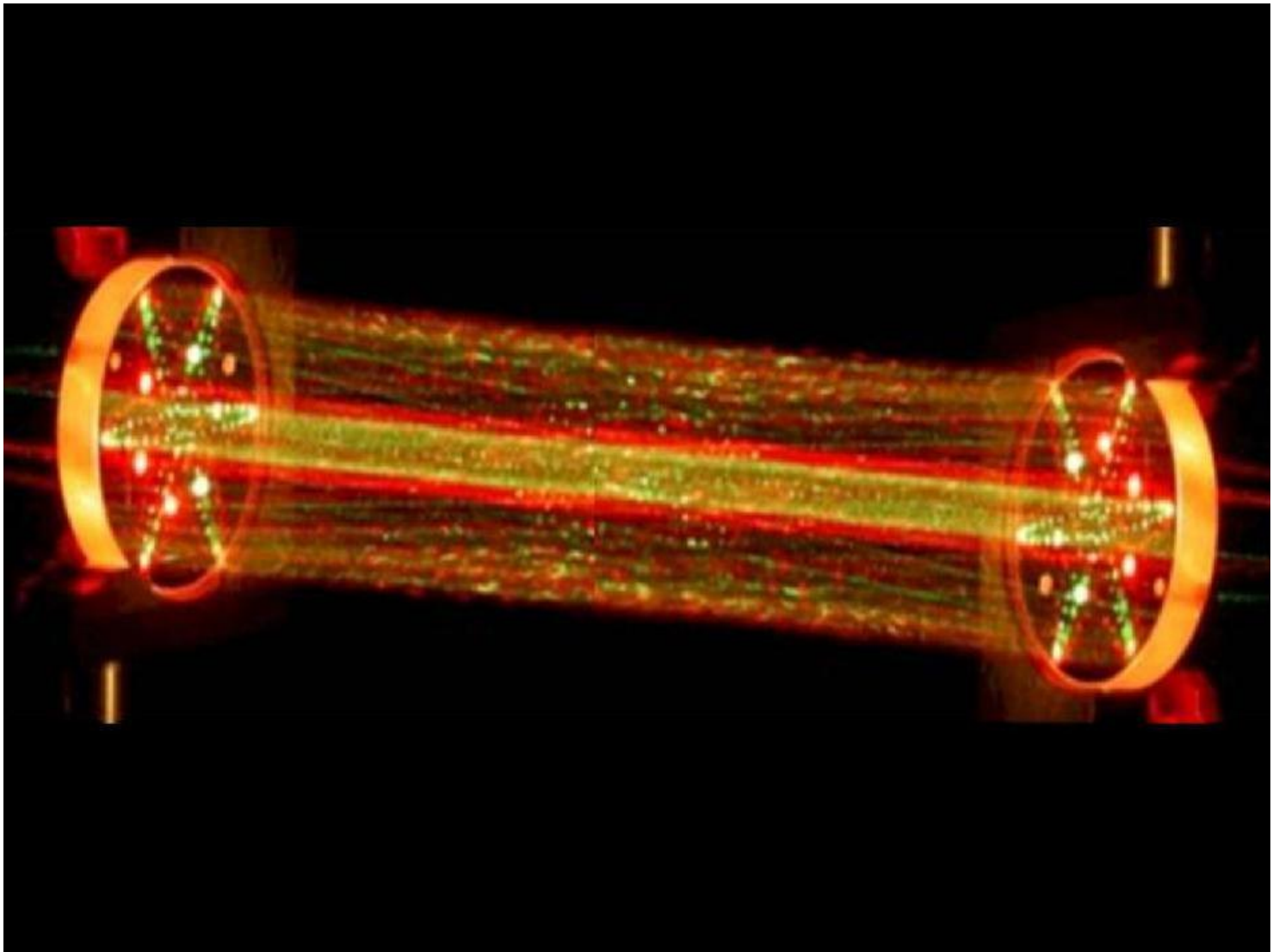
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Life On Mars? Curiosity Rover Sniffs For Methane, Comes Up Empty

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NASA/JPL-Caltech

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Today scientists working on the Mars Curiosity Rover mission made an important announcement: The rover used its lasers to "sniff" for methane. [As NASA explains](#), methane is a "precursor chemical" for life, because creatures like us produce methane.

The Rover came up empty, or rather the most sensitive measurements ever taken in the planet's atmosphere reveal "little to no methane."

The New Scientist explains that researchers have seen hints of methane using telescopes on Earth. This was an opportunity to try to verify those findings.

The New Scientist reports:

"After four attempts run on two samples, the tests came back essentially empty, or at least with such tiny traces that nothing is definitive. Still, rover scientists say they will keep looking. 'At this point we don't have a positive detection of methane on Mars. But that could change,' Sushil Atreya, a co-investigator for the SAM instrument, said during a teleconference Friday.

"Atreya said it is possible more robust levels of methane existed on Mars previously but were rapidly destroyed by other gases, such as chlorine, or by the planet's powerful dust storms. So what might have created the past hints? That's anybody's guess, and the rover team is hesitant to name a possible source for a gas they didn't find."

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