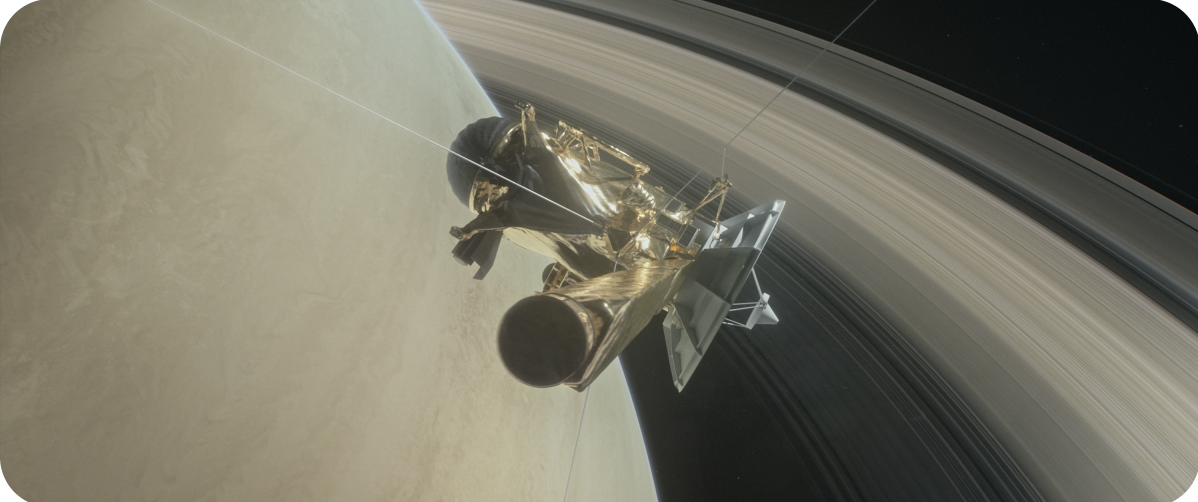


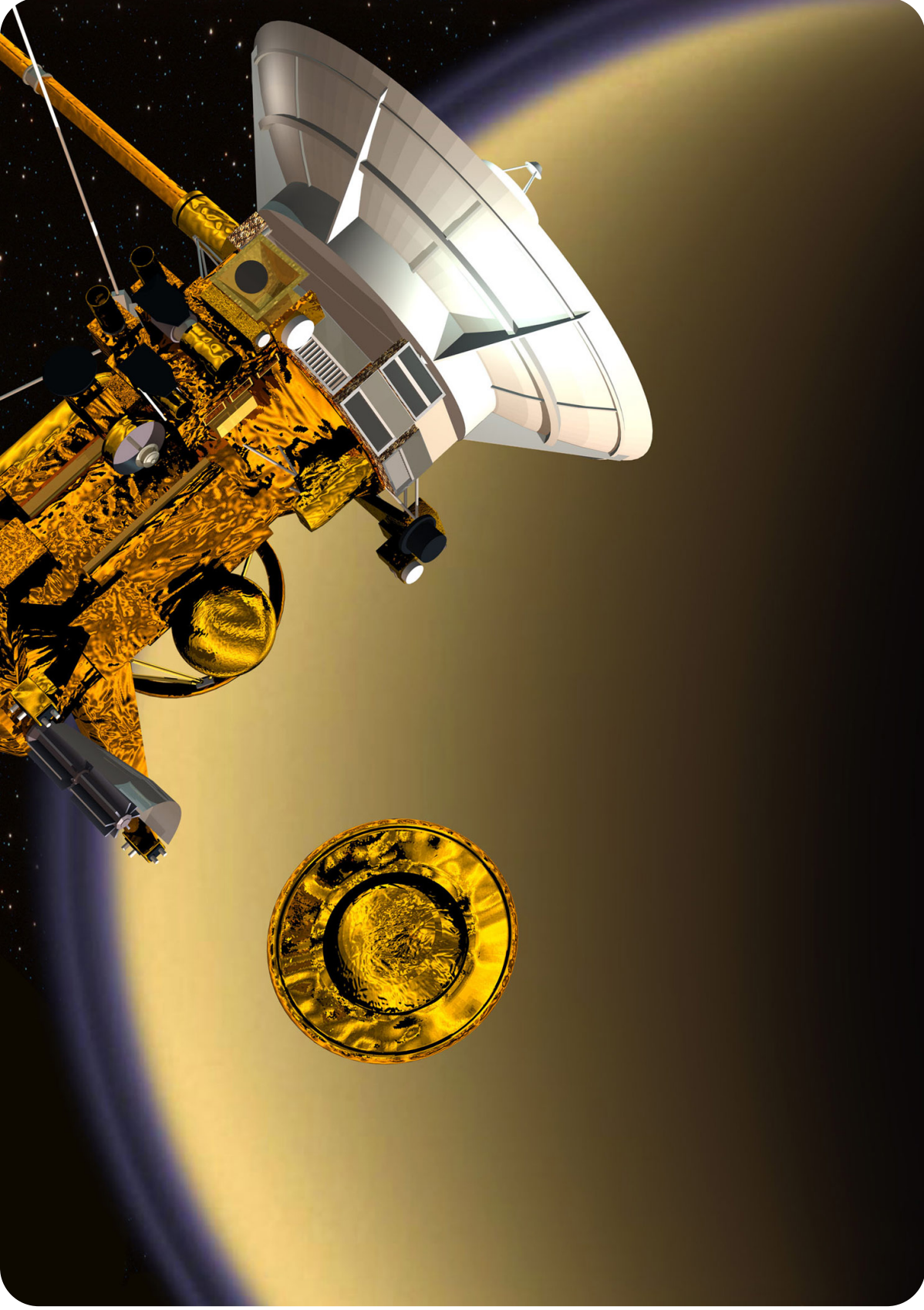
Countdown to Cassini's grand finale



Cassini will pass through unexplored areas between the planet Saturn and its rings
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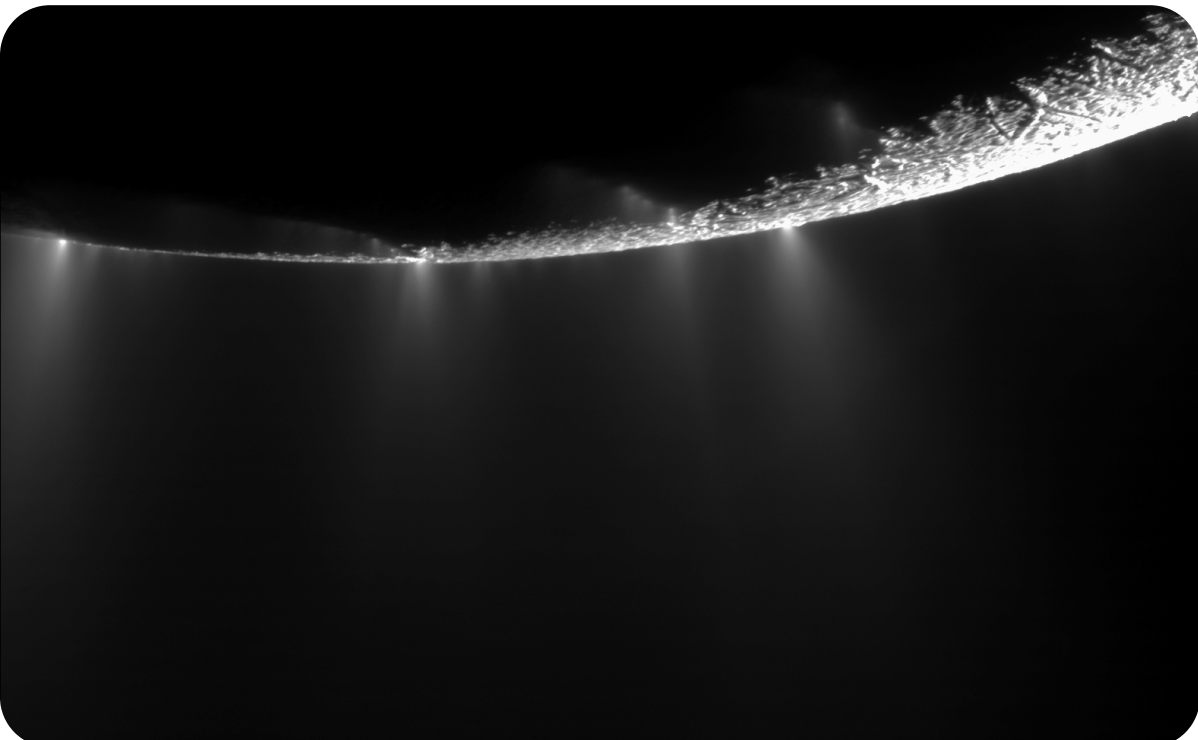
02 May 2017

After spending nearly 13 years orbiting the planet Saturn, the Cassini–Huygens mission will soon be over! The spacecraft is now performing a series of daring dives between the planet and its rings, before plunging into Saturn's atmosphere – and destroying the probe! – on 15 September.



Cassini sent the Huygens probe to land on Saturn's moon Titan
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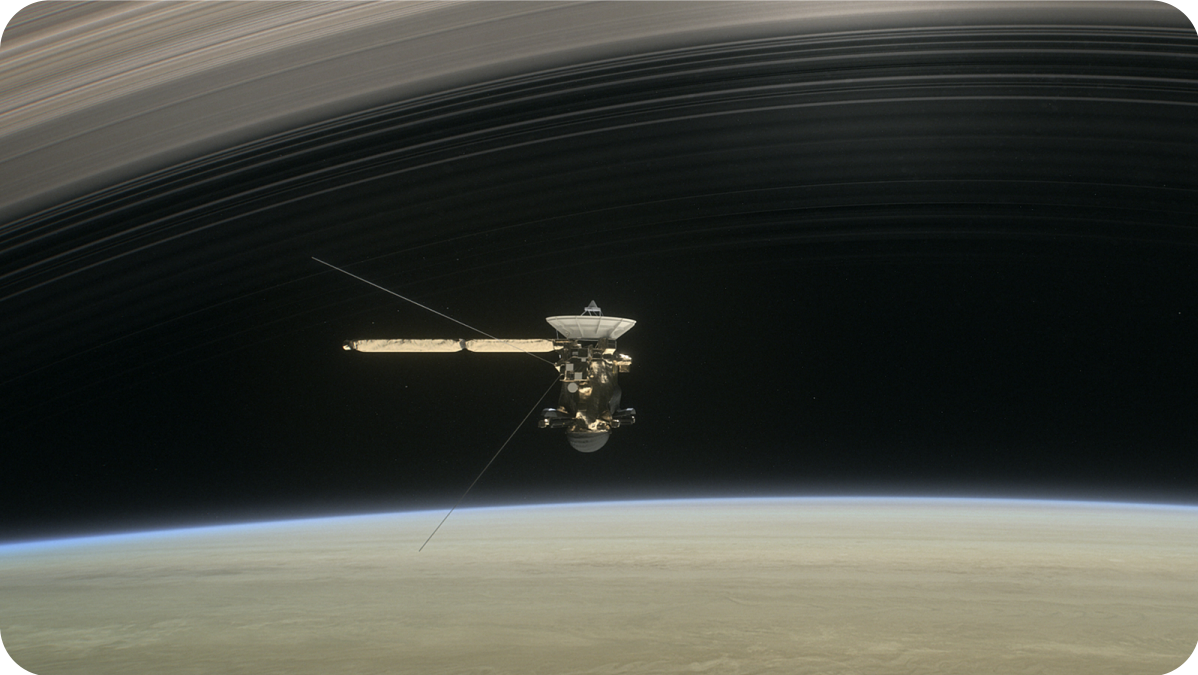
The Cassini-Huygens mission was launched from Earth in 1997. It then spent seven years travelling across the Solar System before arriving at Saturn. A few months later the Cassini “mothership” released ESA's Huygens probe, which landed on Saturn's mysterious moon Titan – the first ever landing in the outer Solar System! Huygens revealed that Titan has weather, a surface temperature of –180°C, and lakes filled with a chemical called methane. It is a very strange place indeed!



Cassini photographed jets of water blasting out from the icy moon Enceladus
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The Cassini craft then left Huygens behind on Titan, and continued to explore planet Saturn, its rings, and its family of moons. Cassini discovered water vapour spraying into space from another moon, the icy Enceladus. This is evidence of a liquid water ocean beneath the moon's frozen surface. Cassini even found hydrogen gas in the water, which is a sign that there could be chemical energy – a possible food source for simple forms of life – in this hidden ocean!

Cassini is now running low on fuel, so mission scientists have decided to end the probe's journey by plunging it into Saturn's atmosphere. This will avoid it accidentally crashing into any of Saturn's moons, keeping them untouched for future studies.



On 15 September 2017, Cassini will plunge into the atmosphere of Saturn
[Access the image](#)

Before being destroyed, Cassini is spending its final months flying through the area between Saturn and its rings. This has never been explored before! Cassini will be taking the sharpest ever photos of Saturn's inner rings and the planet's clouds. It will also measure Saturn's gravitational field, which will help scientists to work out what the inside of the planet is like. So even now the Cassini probe is still helping to make new discoveries!

Cool fact: Cassini will be using a device called the Cosmic Dust Analyzer to study tiny pieces of Saturn's rings!

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