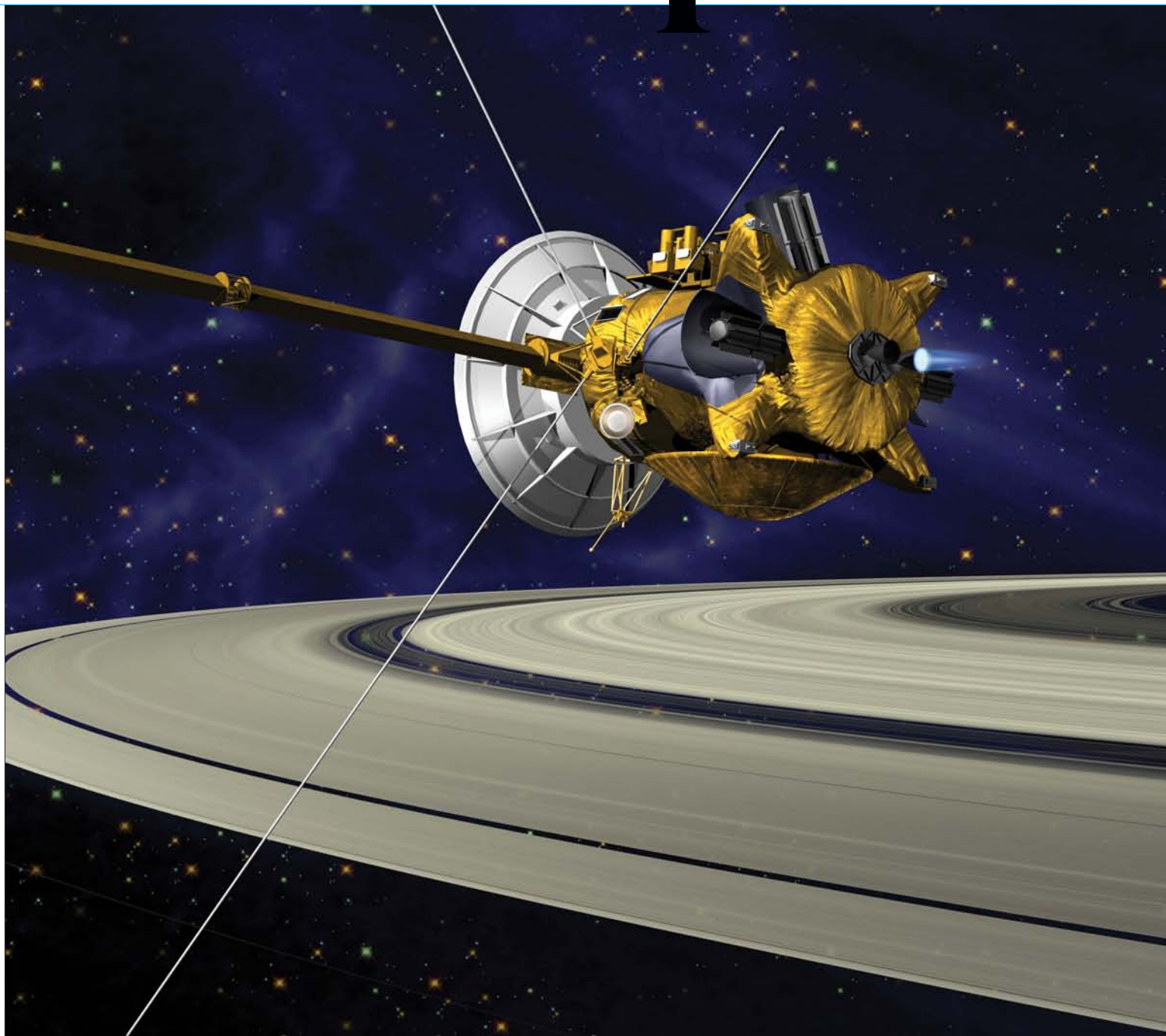


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AN ORBITER'S OBIT

NASA's *Cassini*, best known as the first spacecraft to orbit Saturn, will vaporize as planned on September 15 at 19 years old. Born to engineer and astronomer parents at NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in California, *Cassini* developed a passion for science, travel, and photography at a young age. Before the craft's launch in October 1997, it studied under a team of University of Colorado Boulder scientists who equipped the brave planetary explorer with its Ultraviolet Imaging Spectrograph—a set of telescopes that measures ultraviolet light from Saturn and its moons. The instrument, designed and built at CU's Laboratory for Atmospheric and Space Physics, provided new insight into the formation of Saturn's spellbinding rings and moons as well as geological activity on the gas giant's mysterious moon Enceladus—an icy world with an underground ocean that may be suitable for life. *Cassini*, which will disintegrate this month after plunging into Saturn's dense atmosphere, is survived by the Enceladus Life Finder, a proposed NASA venture that could launch as early as 2020. —JEFF WARANIAK

From top: Jeff Nelson; Courtesy of NASA