

Cassini Huygens Mission: Last Phase

December 21 2004



The NASA/ESA/ASI Cassini Huygens mission to [Saturn](#), which has already delivered stunning images and data of the ringed planet following insertion into the Saturnian system on 1st July this year, is poised to enter a crucial stage in its voyage of scientific discovery. In the early hours of Christmas morning [25th December] the [Huygens](#) probe will separate from the orbiter, its home for the last seven years, and coast towards Titan where it will parachute down through the nitrogen-rich atmosphere of Saturn's largest moon.

On the 14th of January 2005, Huygens will arrive on Titan's surface some 2.5 hours after entering the atmosphere - although the exact nature of its final resting place remains a mystery. Scientists speculate that

Huygens may find lakes or even oceans of a mixture of liquid ethane, methane and nitrogen.

On Christmas Day 2004, Cassini is scheduled to release its passenger Huygens with a gentle push to start its unpowered coast to Titan.

The surface of Titan is still a mystery and scientists don't know what sort of surface Huygens will encounter. It could splash down on a sea of liquid methane, crash on frozen ice and rocks or gently squelch down in extraterrestrial slime.

Source: PPARC

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