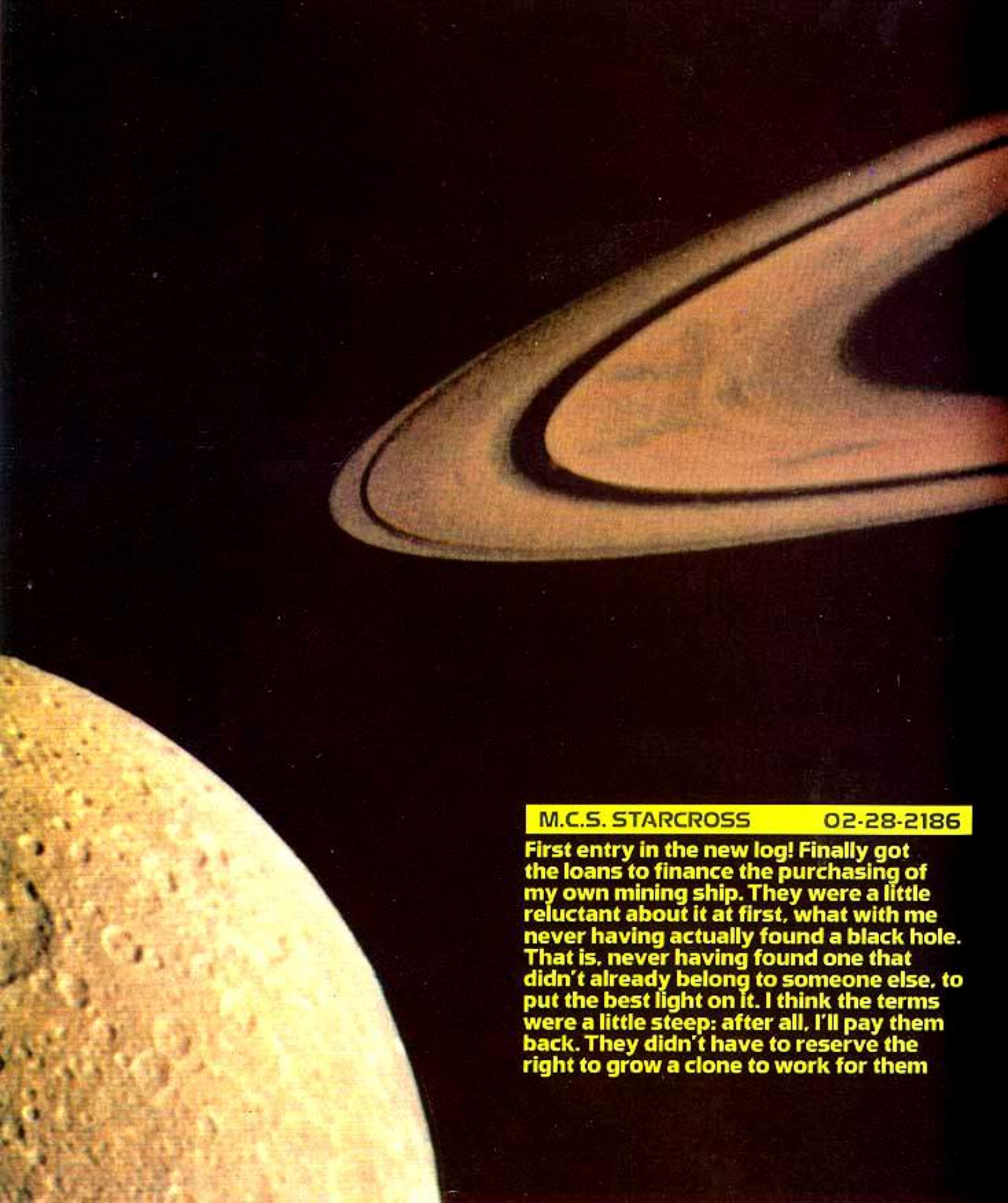


LOG OF THE M.C.S.

**STARCROSS™**

Registered out of Ceres  
Registration 47291AA-4X

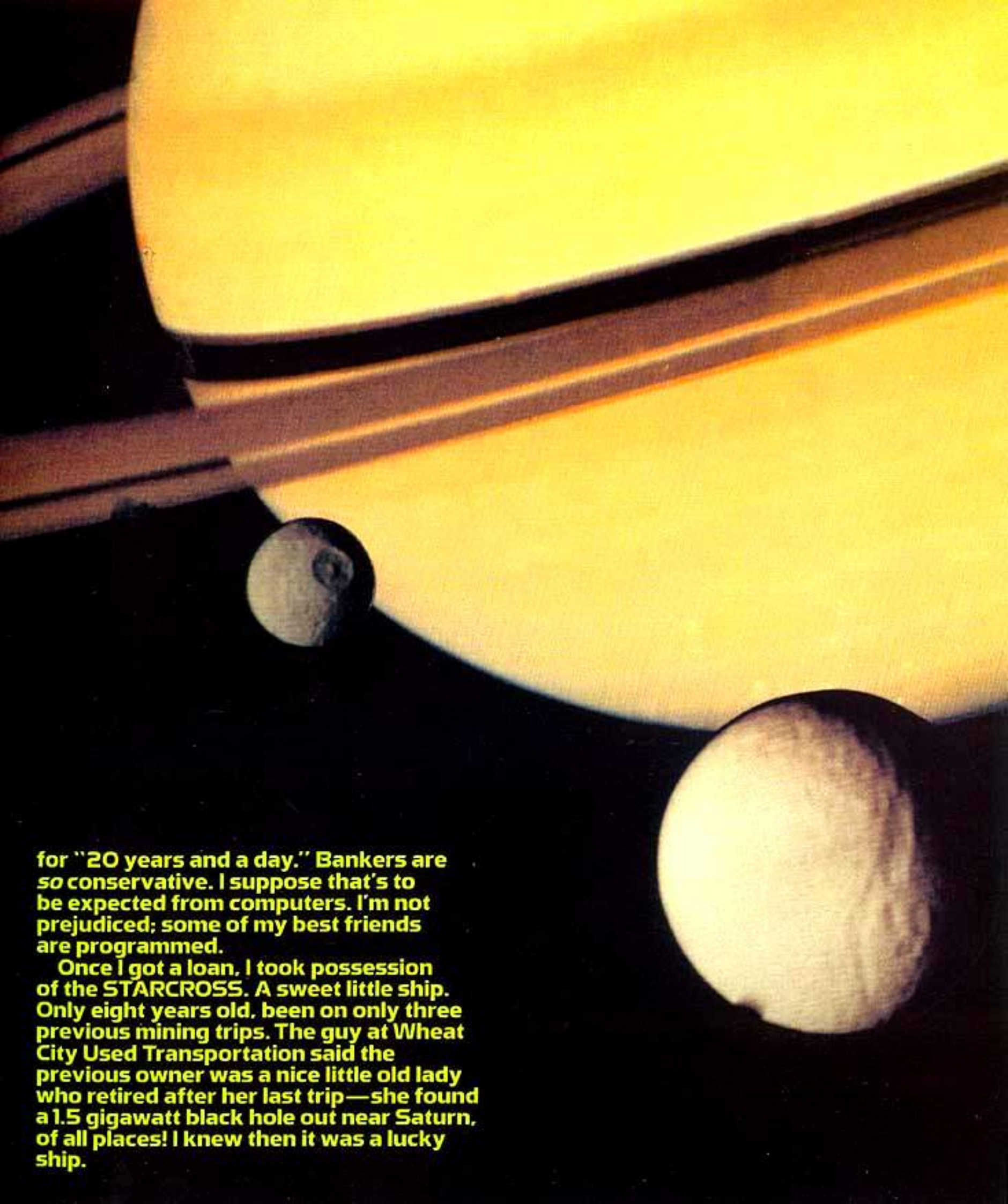
Constructed in 2178, Luna City Docks



**M.C.S. STARCROSS**

**02-28-2186**

**First entry in the new log! Finally got the loans to finance the purchasing of my own mining ship. They were a little reluctant about it at first, what with me never having actually found a black hole. That is, never having found one that didn't already belong to someone else, to put the best light on it. I think the terms were a little steep: after all, I'll pay them back. They didn't have to reserve the right to grow a clone to work for them**

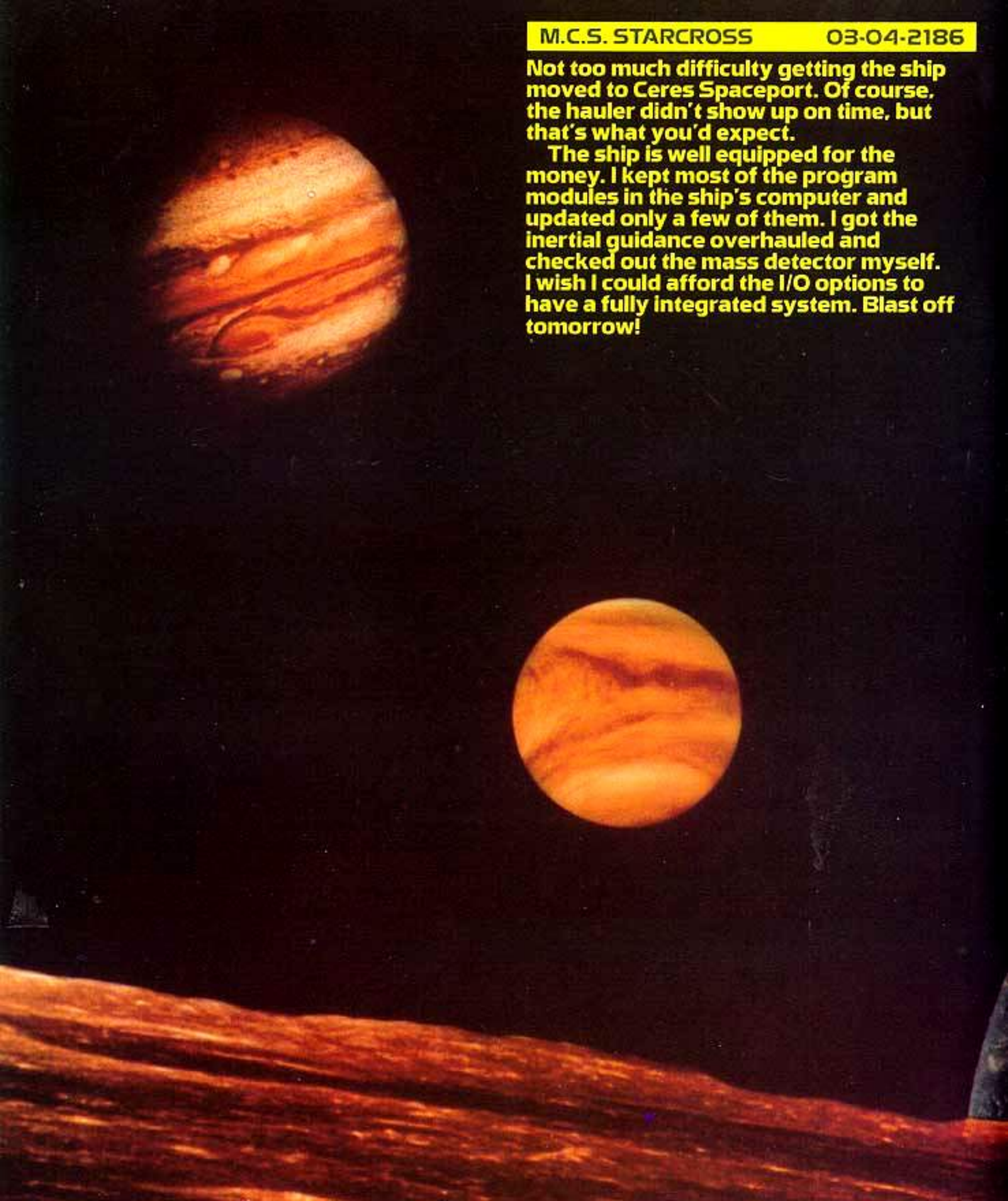


for "20 years and a day." Bankers are so conservative. I suppose that's to be expected from computers. I'm not prejudiced; some of my best friends are programmed.

Once I got a loan, I took possession of the STARCROSS. A sweet little ship. Only eight years old, been on only three previous mining trips. The guy at Wheat City Used Transportation said the previous owner was a nice little old lady who retired after her last trip—she found a 1.5 gigawatt black hole out near Saturn, of all places! I knew then it was a lucky ship.

**Not too much difficulty getting the ship moved to Ceres Spaceport. Of course, the hauler didn't show up on time, but that's what you'd expect.**

**The ship is well equipped for the money. I kept most of the program modules in the ship's computer and updated only a few of them. I got the inertial guidance overhauled and checked out the mass detector myself. I wish I could afford the I/O options to have a fully integrated system. Blast off tomorrow!**



**M.C.S. STARCROSS**

**03-05-2186**

Got underway a little late, due to a problem in the fuel tanks. I spent the time stocking up on new entertainment tapes—some really nice ones, too, but kind of expensive. So much time prospecting is spent waiting for something to happen.

**M.C.S. STARCROSS**

**03-28-2186**

Underway less than four weeks and I'm about to go crazy! First, the entertainment tapes were mislabelled. It's all highbrow stuff like operas and lectures. *Leather Goddesses of Phobos* was really something about the history of the Terran Union. What a rip-off! I suppose I can always talk to the computer.

I can't stand those tapes. I'll save them for later in the voyage when I'm really desperate. I'll play games with the computer to keep amused that way.

**M.C.S. STARCROSS**

**04-02-2186**

I'm tempted to dismantle the computer. First, instead of a smooth, chummy voice, it sounds like a uranium recycler that's dropped a critical mass on its grasping extensors. Well, maybe it's not that bad, but it's really surly. Insubordinate, too. I tried playing chess with it, but it was too good and made lots of nasty comments about my pawn structure. So I told it to play on an easier level, and it refused! It said it was boring enough playing a human without giving away the game.

**M.C.S. STARCROSS**

**04-15-2186**

Possible black hole today! The mass detector went off. The alarm is really loud and practically sent me through the bulkhead. Even the computer complained about it, but you can't turn it down.

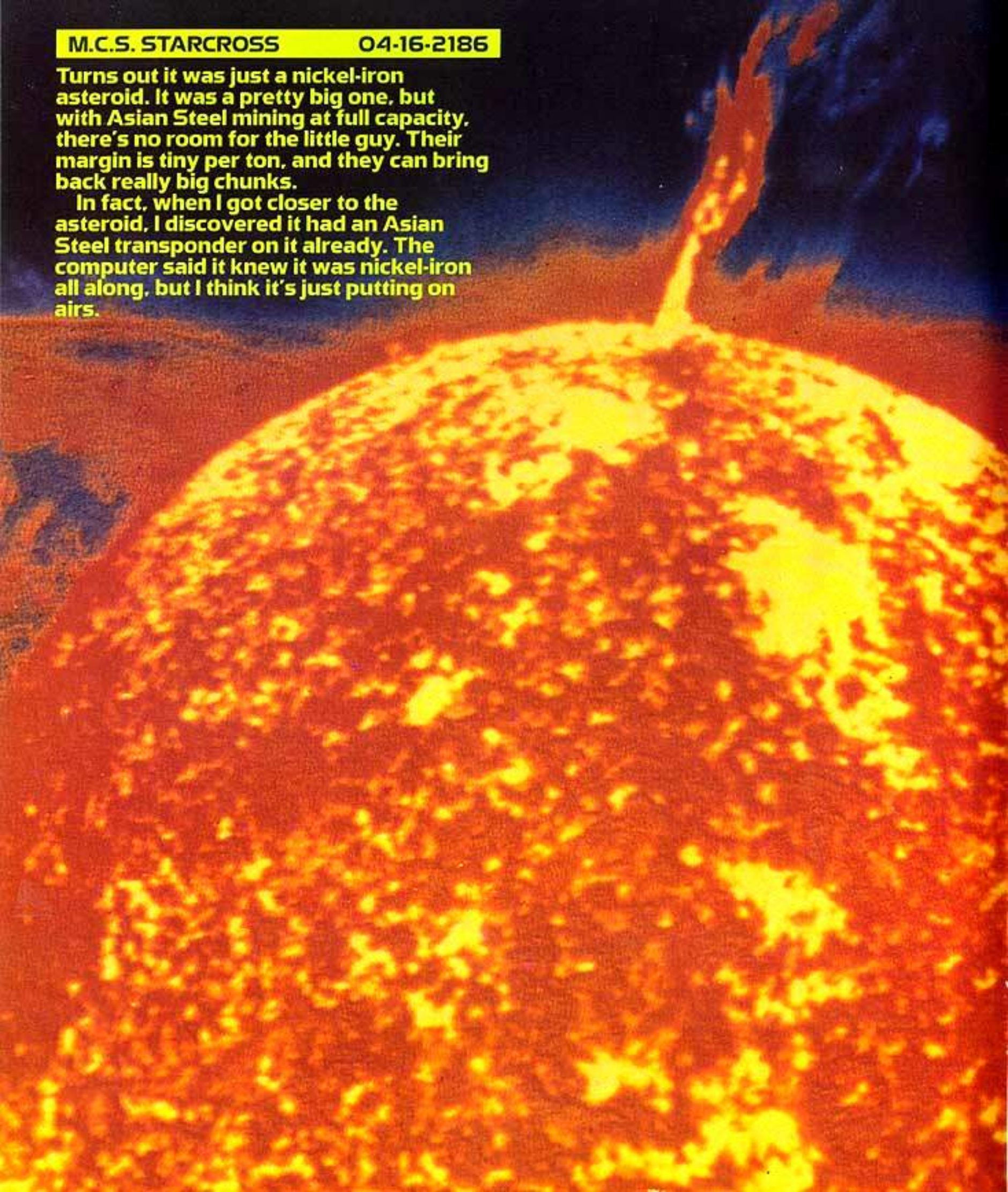
Anyway, it looks like a big mass; at a good area, too—near the trailing Trojan point of Jupiter. Hasn't been prospected out yet, and there's always something new there thanks to Jupe's big mass.

Off we go!



**Turns out it was just a nickel-iron asteroid. It was a pretty big one, but with Asian Steel mining at full capacity, there's no room for the little guy. Their margin is tiny per ton, and they can bring back really big chunks.**

**In fact, when I got closer to the asteroid, I discovered it had an Asian Steel transponder on it already. The computer said it knew it was nickel-iron all along, but I think it's just putting on airs.**



**M.C.S. STARCROSS 05-12-2186**

Another false alarm. This one was nickel-iron, too.

**M.C.S. STARCROSS 05-23-2186**

Finally beat the computer at chess! A really neat combination, too. What a poor sport! It says I cheated and won't talk to me anymore.

**M.C.S. STARCROSS 05-29-2186**

Computer still not talking to me, beyond accepting routine ship commands. Even

then it sounds particularly sullen. In the meantime, I've invented 11 new forms of five-suit solitaire. Unfortunately, I haven't won any of them yet.

**M.C.S. STARCROSS 05-30-2186**

Another asteroid. This one is mostly uranium. Gives a big blip on the mass detector, it's so heavy. Probably ought to mark it for removal. The Patrol will be pleased, even if the reward isn't commensurate. I could try smuggling it to the Ganymedean Insurgents, but the penalty for being caught with unlicensed uranium is 20 years on an organ farm. I'd prefer to have my original kidneys until they wear out, thank you.





**M.C.S. STARCROSS**

**06-11-2186**

**A micro-meteorite pierced the hull today! It was pretty exciting, but I fixed it like a pro. I had to put on my suit, get out the patch kit and patch the bulkhead. The hole was almost big enough to put my finger in! The patch looks like a big wad of chewing gum, but it gets really hard.**

**Happy to report that after I repressurized, the computer started talking to me again. Mostly insults, but better than nothing.**

**M.C.S. STARCROSS**

**06-23-2186**

**I found a black hole for real today!**

**Unfortunately, someone else's transponder started up about two hours ago, and now he's warning me off in no uncertain terms.**

**That does it. I'm going to try something really different. Too many prospectors around here. Nobody prospects in the inner system anymore, but I will, and my luck's going to change!**

**In toward Mars!**



**THERE IS SOMETHING OUT THERE.**  
You're a deep-space prospector aboard the M.C.S. Starcross, a one-person vessel outfitted for the discovery and mining of black holes. You've invested all you have and then some into a search for a dream, a dream you hold in common with every miner since the first human who panned for gold—the dream of the really big strike. And your patience and persistence are about to be paid back in aces. For in just a few moments, you're going to discover the biggest find of all time—a titanic starship from the far edge of the Galaxy. Or perhaps ...

**SOMETHING—OR SOMEONE—  
HAS JUST FOUND YOU.**

An adventure beyond any in human experience is unfolding. You must gain entry to the extraordinary spacecraft and encounter its inhabitants—a bizarre collection of life forms from every corner of the Milky Way. You must acquire what help you can from them and fend off whatever harm they send your way. But most of all, you must exert every ounce of your courage, cunning and skills to unravel the mystery the great ship poses and meet the incredible challenge it bears. And your very life is riding on your success or failure, because ...

**SOMETHING IS WATCHING  
YOUR EVERY MOVE.**

The Table of Contents for the manual is on page 11. Take a look at it to determine what you should read before you start the story.