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In August 2029, a NASA Probe Will Arrive at a Metal Asteroid as big as Massachusetts

**A documented mission — and a
science-based scenario for what follows.**

*A Hollywood visual-effects veteran argues the asteroid economy will be real—
and then proposes a science-based scenario for humanity's ultimate encounter*

In August 2029, NASA's *Psyche* spacecraft enters orbit around *16 Psyche*, a 280-kilometer metal asteroid in the belt between Mars and Jupiter.

16 Psyche is most likely the exposed core of a destroyed protoplanet. *It is the first time any spacecraft will visit a world made of metal rather than rock or ice.*

What's inside it is not totally known until that arrival. The value of what's inside, however, is often cited by planetary geologists as equivalent to *ten quintillion dollars* — a number the project's lead scientist has since called "*meaningless*," not because it's too high, but because conventional economics stops working when the concept of *supply* becomes infinite.

Either way, the first detailed data will be beamed back to Earth in 2029, and markets historically do not wait for peer review.

Reaching *16 Psyche* is no longer hypothetical. Extraction at that distance requires three capabilities at once: heavy-lift rockets that fly often and cheaply, semi-autonomous boring and mining machines, and a robotic workforce able to operate across the round-trip communications delay. At present, one company is independently developing all three—and its most public ambition, a Mars outpost, functions clearly as the forward staging base such an operation would require.

"Mars is the gas station; the destination is the bank," says Scott Billups, a visual-effects supervisor on more than 50 feature films, software developer, and a longtime technology forecaster.

Billups has spent four decades at the leading edge of where technology meets media. He's the author of the *Digital Moviemaking* series of books used in film schools around the world and, most recently, *Post-Cinema: The Age of AI*.

Billups has dramatized the scenario in *The Belt*, a limited series and five-novel body of work that imagines the two centuries following 2029: the industrial expansion the asteroid sets off, *and what humanity finds already operating out there*.

"I'm not predicting this," Billups says *"I'm pointing at the calendar. The probe arrives in 2029. Everything after that, I just ran the numbers forward — I didn't invent it."*

About:

Scott Billups is a filmmaker and technologist with 50+ feature credits as a visual-effects supervisor (*Walking with Dinosaurs 3D*, *Mulholland Drive*). He went back to school at 40 to study AI, later serving as CTO to the game industry's leading AI supplier and developing autonomous and spatial-systems programs for Lockheed Martin, Boeing, and NASA. He is a contributing editor at *Videography* and *Digital Cinema* magazines for over a decade, and author of the *Digital Moviemaking* series used in film schools world-wide, and *Post-Cinema: The Age of AI*.

WIRED has called him one of Hollywood's "baddest pixel-packing cowboys." *The Belt* and its source novels are produced through Pixelmonger Studios.

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