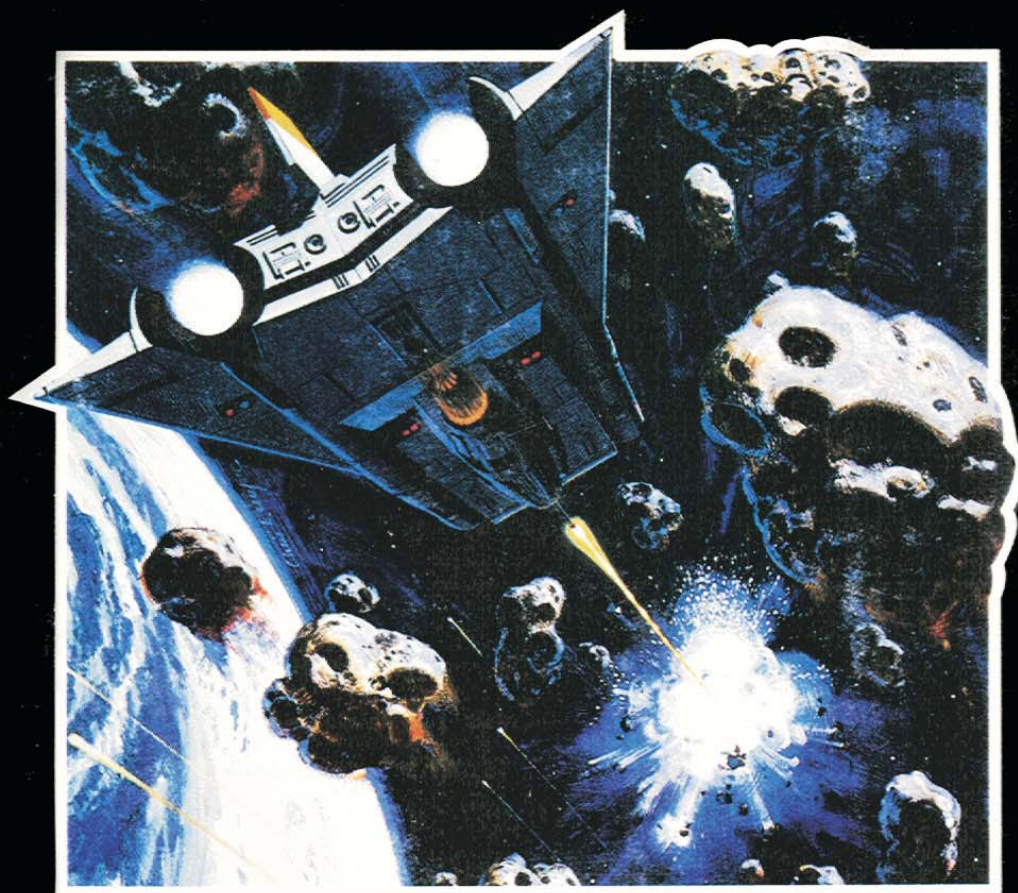


STORY OF

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story of ASTEROIDS

This is your ATARI ASTEROIDS Read-Along Book. Every time you hear this sound . . . , it means it's time to turn the page. Now we are ready to begin. Open your book and we will start our story and remember, when you hear the sound, turn the page.



“Recon Base, this is Strohmeyer. I entered Nexus-A Galaxy T plus 30 and I’m getting a stronger signal from the UFM carrier, now. Cynthia is still in a down mode and I can’t seem to get her back. Any ideas? Out”

For the record, the name’s Strohmeyer—Captain John Strohmeyer of Outer Quadrant Recon Patrol.



“Base, you’re still breaking up. I’m receiving zero. Try your high gain, next transmission. Out.”

The signal was coming from an unmanned robot ore-carrier. It was on its way from United Federated Mining Operation 6 to a mid-galaxies processing dump, when it dropped off the screen in the company home office. Then something triggered its secret, emergency code transmitter.

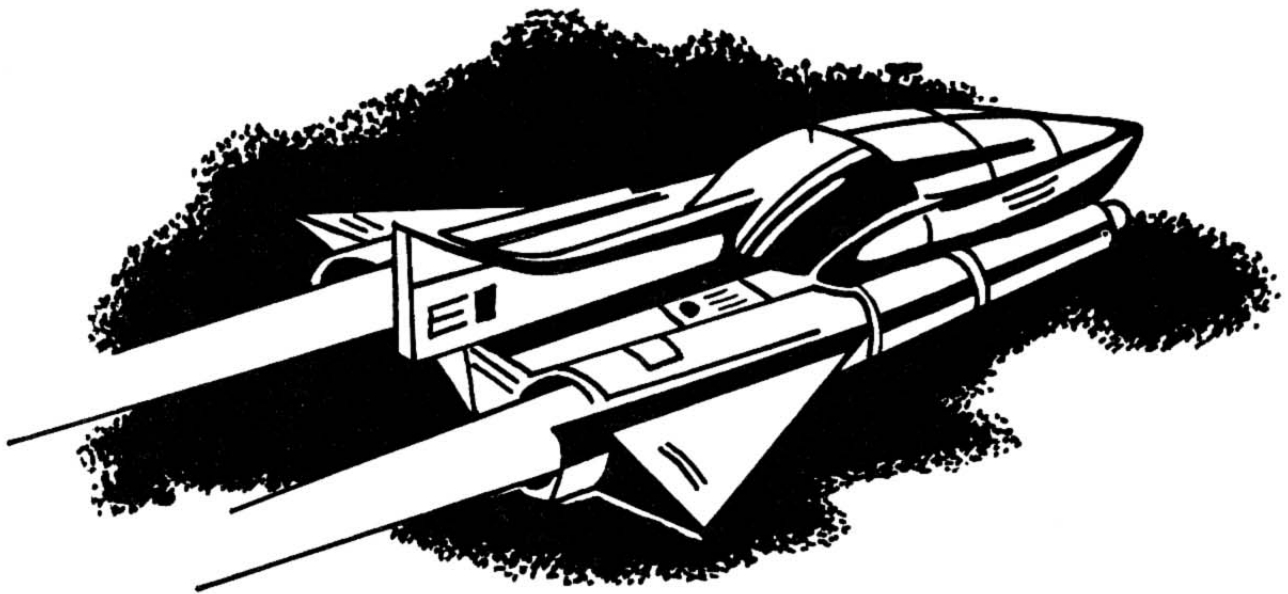


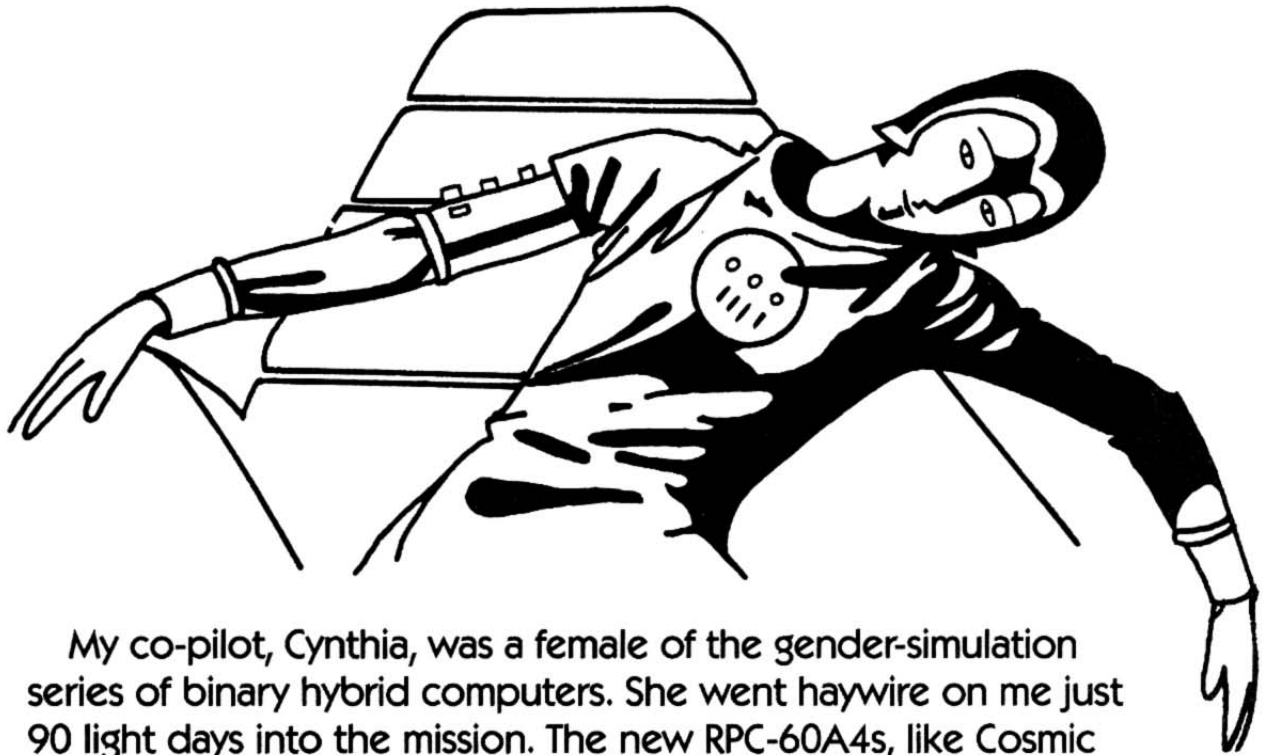
Recon Patrol only has sub-galactic responsibilities. Cosmic Space Patrol handles all the really hot stuff, even in our quadrant. So piloting a piece of junk, checking up on somebody's lost load of rocks didn't exactly give me cause to break out in a sweat.

"Base, this is Strohmeyer. Firing forward retros at this time."

You wouldn't send your mother-in-law up in an RPC-60. It's an outdated scout ship of 2050 vintage, powered by two old ion rocket engines. Gas decay boosters were added later on, just in case, but they'd probably tear the ship apart if you used them full throttle.

"Base, retro firing completed. I'm now at operational velocity and closing target area. Signal still strong. Out."





My co-pilot, Cynthia, was a female of the gender-simulation series of binary hybrid computers. She went haywire on me just 90 light days into the mission. The new RPC-60A4s, like Cosmic Space Patrol flies, have computers with magnetic bubble memories. You can take them home to mother. The RPC-60A4s also have hyperspace shields and carry photon torpedoes. I was armed with a single multi-phase laser cannon!

I gave it one more try with Cynthia and managed to kick off her 60 second burnout alarm and couldn't get her off line in time, so she went out for good. She was only a computer, but I felt lonely and scared. I had started wondering what set off that signal on the ore-carrier. I began hoping there was a Cosmic Space Patrol ship in the area for backup.

I watched Lydian 31, a dying dwarf star, glowing dull red and ringed by a vast asteroid belt, draw closer. It almost filled the window in front of me.

“Recon Base, this is Strohmeyer. Attempting to activate UFM carrier’s transponder for final fix at this time.”

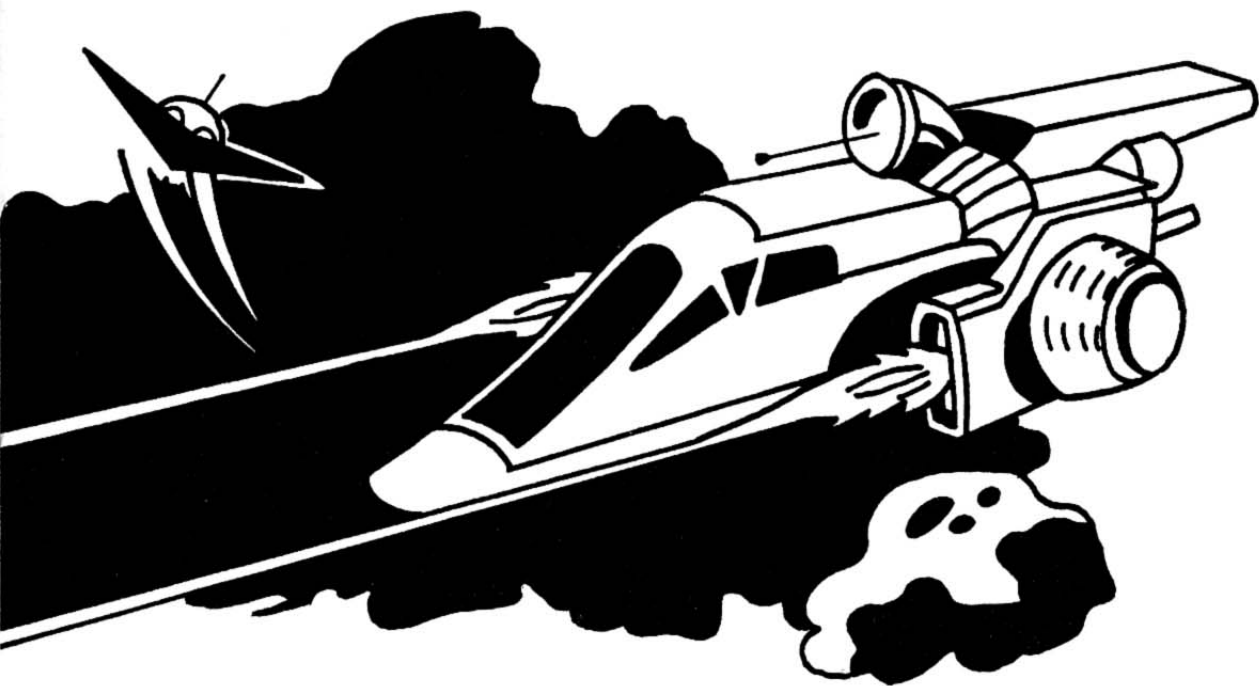
There was nothing but garbage coming back from base. I punched in the sequencing for transmission to the transponder on board the ore-carrier.

“Base, sending now.”

The transponder’s return was immediate and powerful, almost knocking me out of my seat. It pulsated insistently in the cabin, joining the emergency signal.



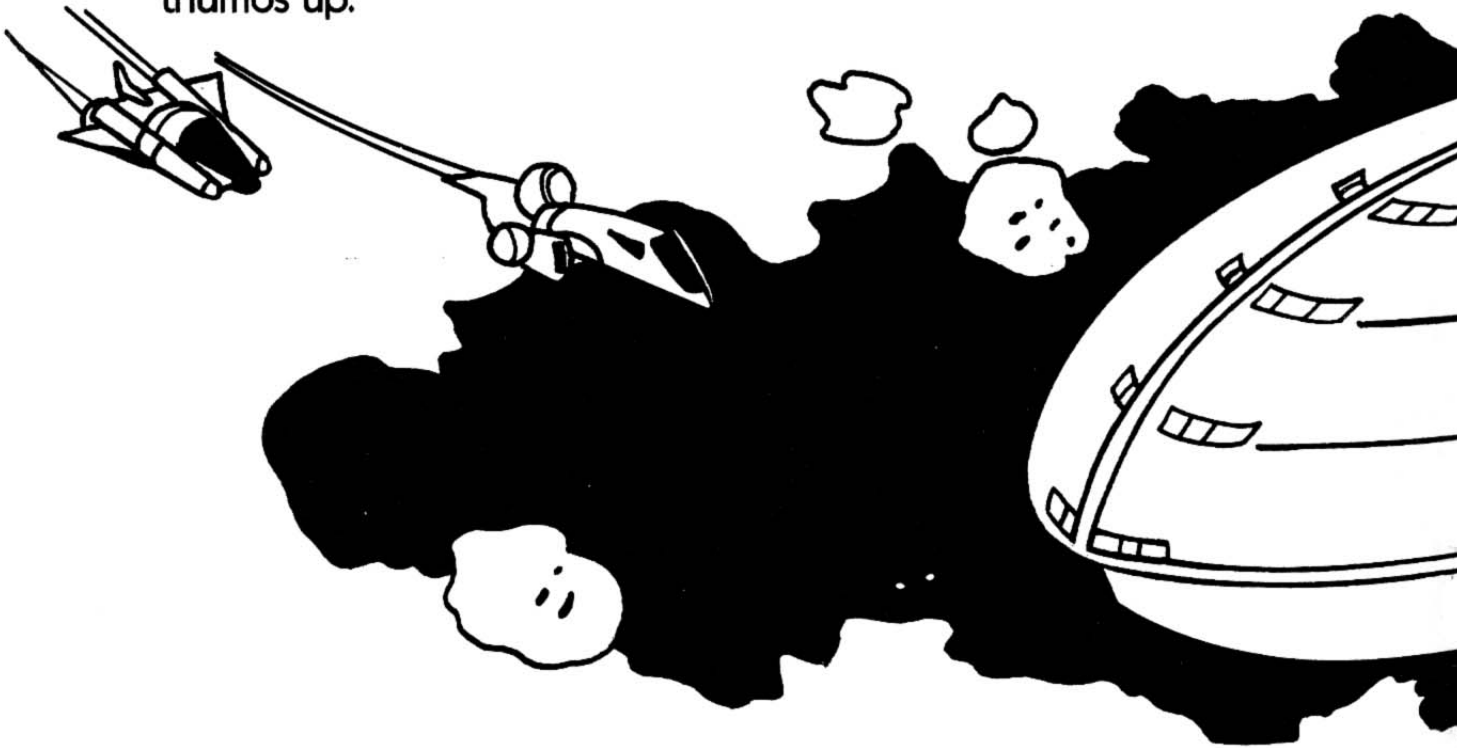
As I entered the plane of the asteroid belt, I switched on the asteroid detection scanner and locked in the pre-set on the warning responder. Whenever an asteroid is on collision approach, the ship's internal navigation computer automatically alters course, making the asteroid a go-by. That's if everything is routine, which it was, until the responder klaxon ripped through my nerves. An asteroid shower, dead ahead! I grabbed the controls and kicked in partial booster, taking evasive action. But the asteroids went with me! Something was controlling them! Then, zap! They were vaporized in a searing, blinding flash by a photon torpedo! I jerked my head around and there, 90 degrees off my port side, was Cosmic Space Patrol!

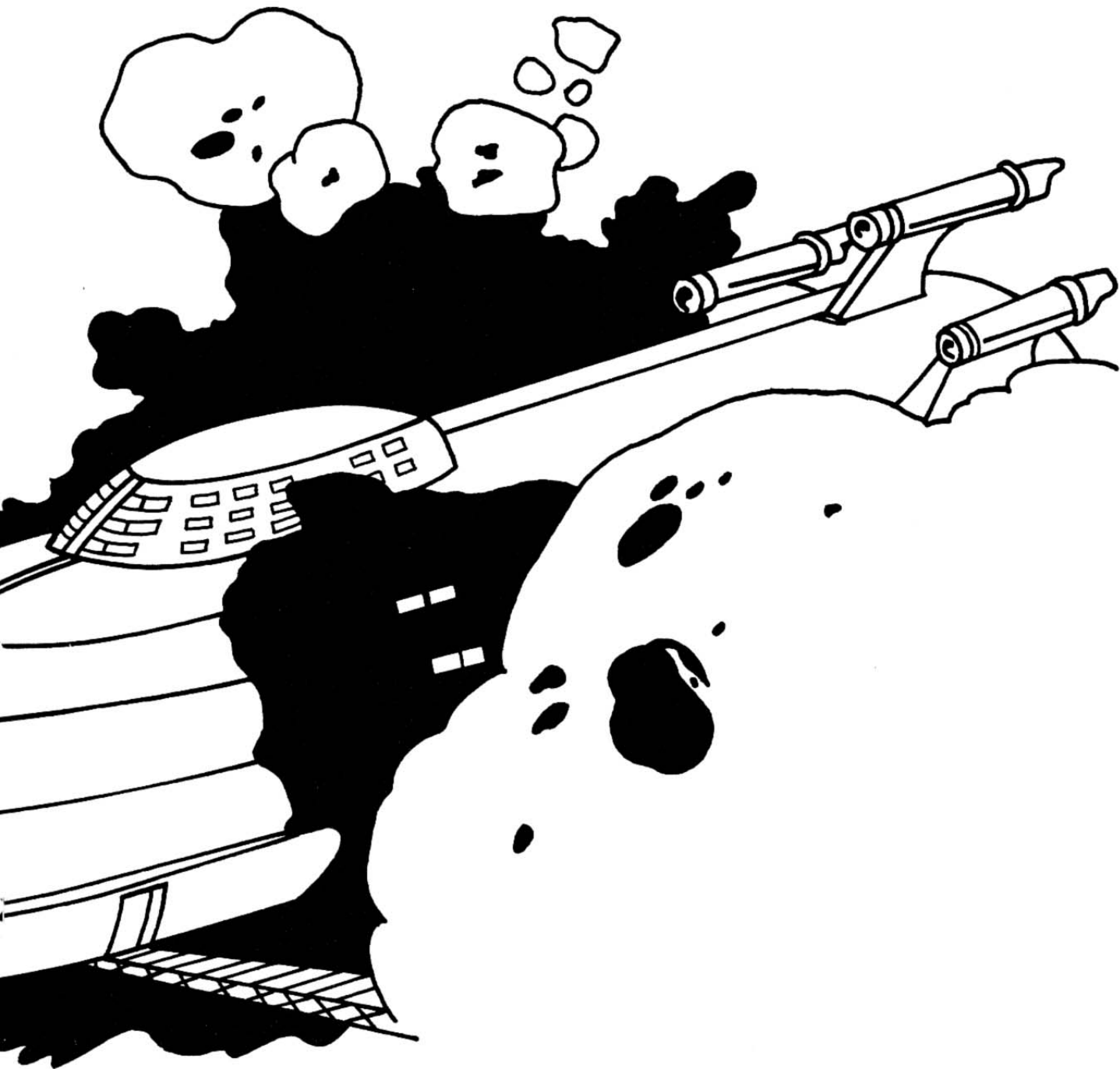


That RPC-60A4 sure looked good. She slipped in beside me and I gave the pilot a grateful thumbs up. He pointed to something in the distance. The transponder signal had increased, faster and stronger, indicating the ore-carrier wasn't too far off. Then I saw her, too. The red glow from the star reflected for a moment off the bow of her alloy skin. She was half hidden in the shadow of a large asteroid, moving right along with it.

"Recon Base, this is Strohmeyer. I have CPS backup at this time. Visual contact with UFM ore-carrier established. Locking vector and closing. Out."

I pointed, indicating the ore carrier, and CPS pilot gave me a thumbs up.





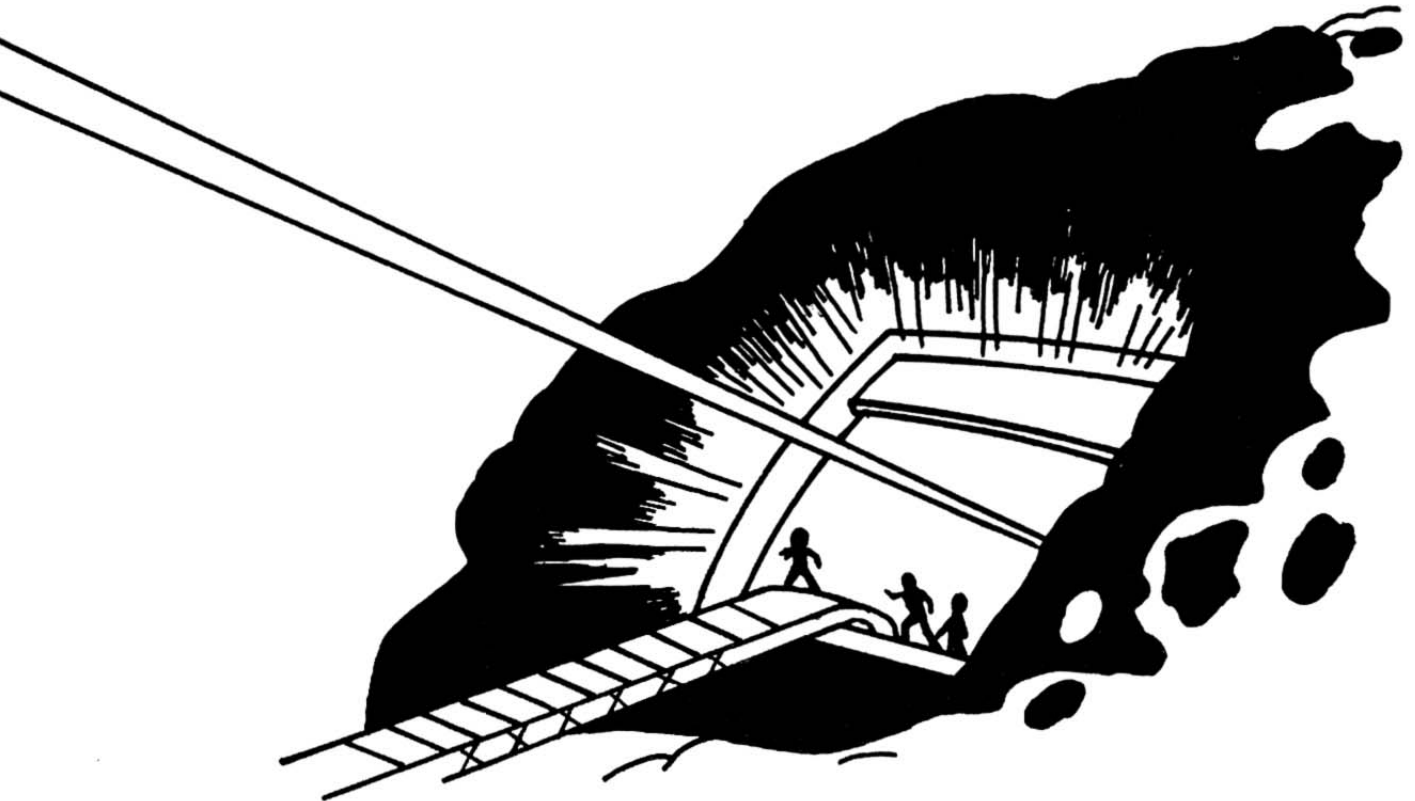


As we got closer, I could see that the UFM ore-carrier was moored to a docking arm extending from the asteroid. Cut in the side of the asteroid, a large bay door was open on an enormous ore-holding pit. The bay was on blue light, which is why the opening couldn't be spotted from a distance. Conveyors ran from the carrier into the interior of the asteroid. Men wearing ELS suits were working inside. Suddenly, there was a flash of light from inside the door of the asteroid and my ship was rocked by the concussion from a nuron-ray blast, off the starboard side.

I changed vector quickly, evading two more blasts, and returned fire with my multi-phase laser cannon. The CPS ship deflected a blast with its hyperspace shield.

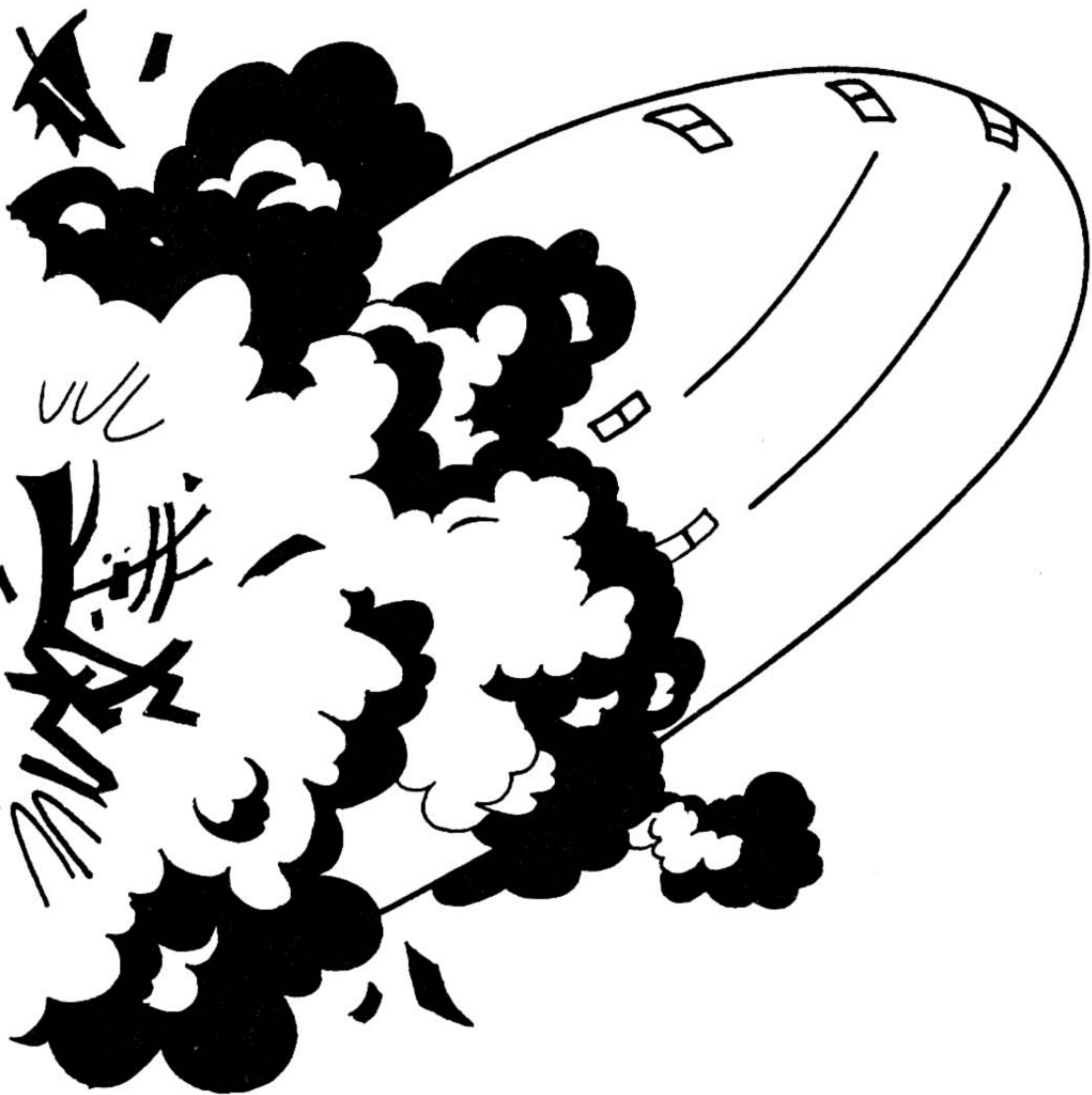
“Recon Base, this is Strohmeyer. We have engaged asteroid pirating operation in a firefight! Will apprise! Out!”

That’s when I took a direct hit on the stern quarter of my ship. Pow! I rolled the old RPC-60 over and headed down toward the underside of the asteroid, trying to put the ore-carrier between me and the bay door, and that nuron-ray blaster. At least I was still operational. The CPS ship unloaded covering fire.

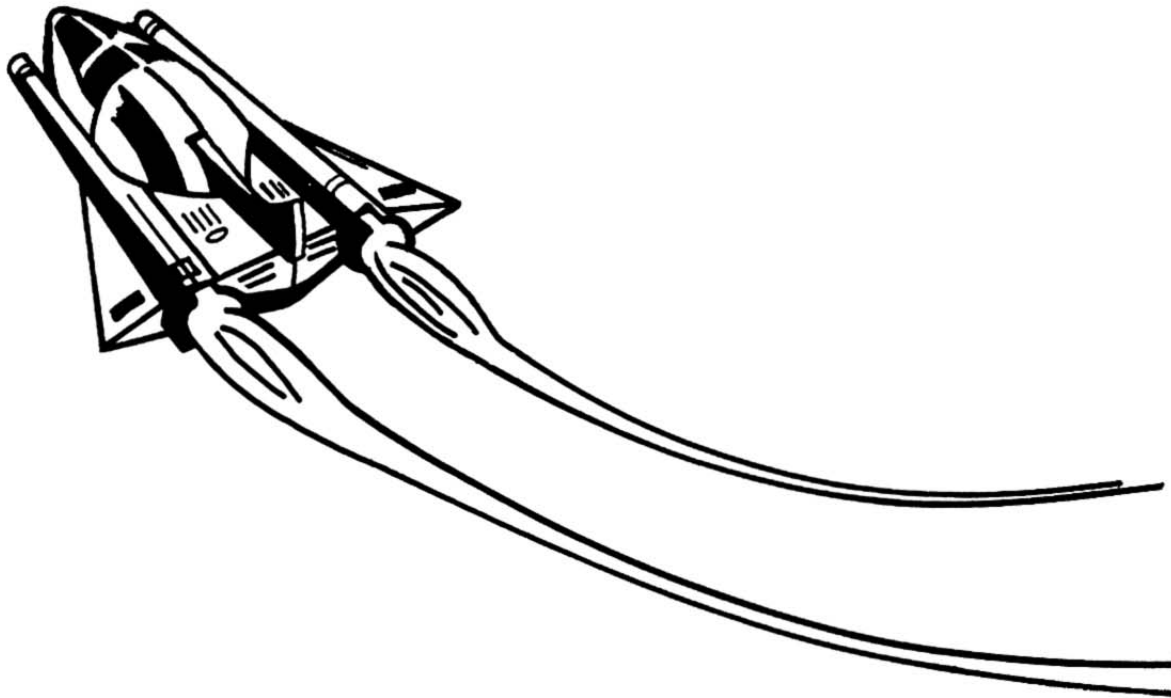


Another nuron-ray blast was wide of the mark, far above me. I could see the bay doors on the asteroid starting to close. The blue lights inside the bay were flashing now, and the men were scurrying about as the conveyors withdrew into the interior. The CPS ship scored a hit on the inside of the bay just before the door closed. I edged my ship closer. The bay door was shut and the ore-carrier had been released from its docking arm and was floating free. Then the carrier exploded, suddenly and violently, in a brilliant ball of orange flame and debris.

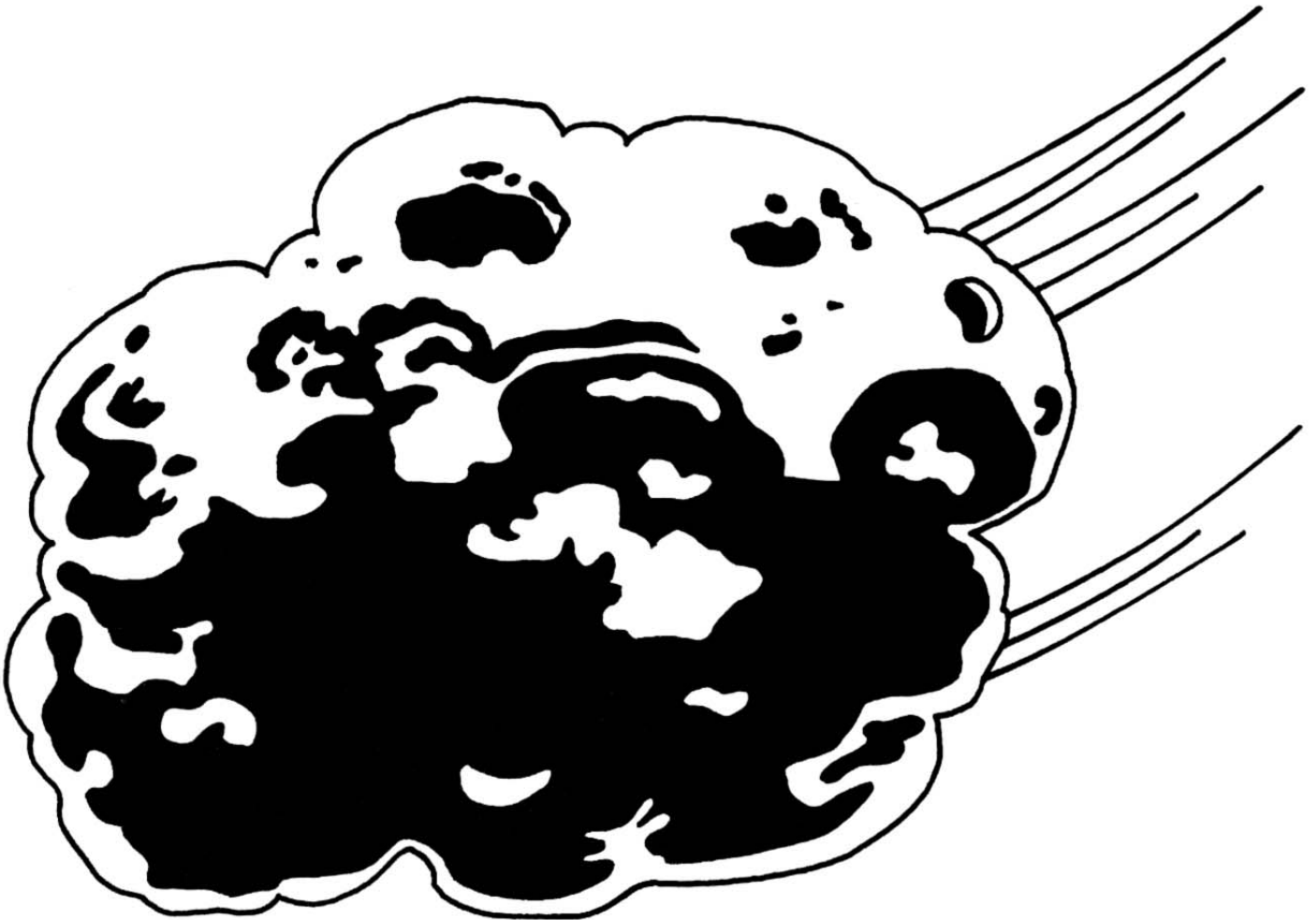




Because I was so close, the compression field from the explosion bowled the RPC-60 over a couple of times and really shook me up. I thought about what it might have done to the ship, that and taking a hit before, and decided to forget about it. I looked around for the CPS ship, but I didn't see it.



I was just managing to get things together again, when the responder klaxon ruined me for good. The asteroid that had been holding the carrier was on a direct approach vector with me! I altered course and the asteroid moved with me. Asteroids weren't supposed to do that!



I swung the ship around toward the onrushing asteroid and let go with the laser cannon for all it was worth, and that wasn't much. It just shifted some gravel around. And by this time, the asteroid was right on top of me. So I shoved the boosters over to full throttle, held on, and prayed everything would hold together. Nothing happened! I was helpless, drifting without power! Was it the explosion, the hit, or both? Then, one, two, three, baroom! The CPS ship laid in a series of rapid fire photon torpedoes and that asteroid started to open up like a ripe melon. There was a whole ore-refining complex and pirate command center inside of it! Then another series of torpedoes hit it and VAROOOM! That asteroid came apart in a thousand pieces.



This time, I put up two thumbs when the Cosmic Space Patrol ship parked beside me. The pilot just grinned and gave me a tow.

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