

Mission Swift

The Story of the Swift

By Sarah Hancock

Lifting off his space helmet and glaring up at the sky, the astronaut is relieved to feel soil beneath his feet. For two years he has spent his days, floating through the padded interior of Starfire Twelve. As the summer sun beats down, reflecting off his bright, white suit, he places his hand above his eyes to shield them from the glare.

“Any sign of it landing yet?” he asks his nearby colleague.

The space commander shakes her head.

For three years, Swift Thirteen has been orbiting planet Earth. Unlike most space crafts, this unique and smaller vessel has focused on exploring just two miles above land. Its compact and agile frame, allows for sharper twists and turns, making any change in direction an easy feat.

As the astronaut watches it twist and spiral against the orange skies, he recalls his recent discoveries. Sent to space to monitor the cloud patterns, he accidentally came across the other vessel. Watching it from the small, rounded window of his ship Starfire Twelve, he became mesmerized by its movements. Never in all his astronaut days had he seen another vessel move so beautifully, especially one so close to Earth. Each day, he would note his cloudy findings, count the glimmering stars and then return to his window spot to watch the spiralling craft.

“What’s it been doing this whole time?” he questions.

“We’re not sure,” the commander replies. “We don’t have any communication with it.”

“Is it one of ours?” he questions.

Once again, she shakes her head.

Most space crafts keep in contact with a team on the ground, for clear instructions or help with navigation, but Swift Thirteen has no need. Its built in system gently guides it to where it needs to be, no need for contact with humans.

“Have you ever seen it refuel?” the astronaut asks.

Another shake of the head.

In the two years spent watching the mysterious vessel, the astronaut had never seen it pause. In continuous flight mode, he discovered that it seemed to gain energy from somewhere or something. Perhaps it used the wind for fuel or more interestingly, an object found in the sky. At times he would see it skim its bottom side down low, like a dragonfly skating across the water, before returning to its spiraling up high.

“It seems to have a sleep mode function,” his colleague explains. “I’ve been watching it too for some time. From what I can make out, it seems to shut half of its power down to allow refueling, but still remain alert enough to avoid any danger.”

“Fascinating,” the astronaut mumbles. “And how many miles do you think it has travelled?”

“We can’t be completely sure,” replies the space commander “but we think it has flown around two hundred and fifty thousand, this year alone.”

Every astronaut knows that two hundred and fifty thousand miles can take you just past the moon. The shiny, shimmering, silver ball has seen many visits in its time, from humans to robots. As the vessel soars and spirals, the astronaut can’t help but question if Swift Thirteen has ever ventured that far. From his days observing through the tiny spacecraft window, he recalls the vessel moving. Being able to see the world like a picture on a starry canvas, it was clear it had travelled across the Earth’s skies from one continent to another. It was also clear it could move rather rapidly, making the journey in what the astronaut calculated, as less than six days.

“What I can’t seem to figure out, is if it can fly for long distances and has the ability to refuel itself, why is it staying in one place,” questions the commander.

For those who chose to travel, whether it be inside or out of the Earth’s gentle grasp, there is always one thing in common.

“It’s trying to land,” replies the astronaut, gazing up at the sky. “It’s trying to get back home.”

He was right. For three years Swift Thirteen had been flying, refueling and repeating, but like most crafts who travel through the air, it needed to land. For the astronaut, exploring a place most only dream of going was an experience unlike any other, but as time ticked by, he could not help but feel a desire to head back home.

“I thought the same,” the commander replies, “but it seems it doesn’t want to land here.”

What those on the ground did not know, is that Swift Thirteen had been carrying cargo for quite some time. Soon, it would need to return to the safety of Earth, depositing the load and remaining close by. It circles a sign of searching and its spirals a sign of waiting.

“What about the others?,” questioned the astronaut.

She looks confused.

“This is Swift Thirteen,” he explains, “like our spacecraft is Starfire Twelve, there must have been others before.”

Nodding her head, the commander gets to work, hastily tapping her fingers along the computer keyboard, eyes darting from one side of the screen to the other. Swift Thirteen continues to spiral, dip and soar in the dusky sky above.

“Bricks,” she suddenly cries. “Eaves, rooves, small gaps is where they like to land.”

The astronaut looks around. Vast, open spaces and modern shiny buildings replace where houses used to sit. Rocket launching pads and lofty radio towers alter the once village landscape. Just over two years ago, this new state of the art headquarters was opened and the astronaut, the first to be launched.

“According to records, similar vessels have landed here in the past,” informs the commander, “maybe the new design has confused them?”

“Or stopped them,” softly replies the astronaut.

“I can try to send a message,” she offers.

He shakes his head. Watching the world pass by through the rounded space craft window has taught the astronaut many things. Clouds change their shape on a daily basis, the oceans are both vast and blue, the Earth is round and spherical and humans are almost everywhere.

“It can’t land,” the astronaut sighs, “it’s all changed.”

He looks up at the soaring vessel, twisting and turning through the darkening sky. Swift Thirteen searches and scans, studies, surveys and patiently waits for a familiar spot to land.