

# Space Voyager



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Before sunrise, Adrianna stood in the space centre's dressing room while technicians checked every buckle, glove, and shining silver clasp. For months, Adrianna had studied star charts, practised emergency drills, and dreamed about this morning, but today there would be no simulator and no pretend countdown. Beyond the thick window waited the Starling, tall and bright beneath the launch-pad lights. Commander Vega touched the mission patch on Adrianna's sleeve and said that every astronaut feels nervous before something important. With one slow breath and one enormous smile, Adrianna picked up the helmet and walked towards the stars.



Inside the Starling, Adrianna settled into a padded seat and pulled the safety harness snug while the final numbers echoed through the cabin. Ten, nine, eight—the engines woke with a rumble that travelled right through Adrianna's boots. At three, a flutter of doubt rose again, but Adrianna remembered the breathing drills and counted each calm breath alongside the clock. Then the rocket leapt upwards, clouds streamed past the tiny window, and the blue sky deepened to violet and finally black. When the engines softened and Earth curved into view, Adrianna whispered, "We really did it."



The first surprise arrived when Commander Vega released the seat belts and everything began to float. Adrianna pushed away too eagerly, sailed across the cabin, and landed with a harmless bump against a padded wall while a pencil drifted past like a tiny silver fish. Moving in space, it turned out, was less like walking and more like swimming without water. With gentle fingertip pushes, Adrianna learnt to glide from handhold to handhold, catch the wandering pencil, and fasten the mission checklist with a blue strap. Before long, even Commander Vega was laughing at Adrianna's slow-motion somersault.



At the observation window, Adrianna saw a sight no photograph or training screen could ever have explained. Earth filled the glass, wrapped in a thin blue glow, with white clouds curling over oceans and mountains rising beneath the morning sun. There were no lines between countries from up here, only one bright home turning quietly in the darkness. Adrianna pressed a gloved hand to the window and searched for familiar places, imagining everyone below beginning an ordinary day. The view made Adrianna feel wonderfully tiny, yet deeply connected to every river, rooftop, tree, and person on the beautiful planet below.



Next came the first space experiment: giving water to a tray of tiny seedlings without gravity pulling the droplets down. Adrianna squeezed the bottle carefully, but one sparkling water sphere escaped and bobbed above the plants. When Adrianna reached for it, the sphere split into a dozen smaller bubbles that caught the sunlight and scattered miniature rainbows across the laboratory. Instead of panicking, Adrianna fetched an absorbent pad, gathered every drop, and tried again with a steadier hand. Soon the roots glistened with exactly enough water, and the mission log held a new note: surprises can teach as much as perfect plans.



Halfway through the next orbit, the debris sensor chimed as a cloud of dust-sized micrometeoroids crossed the Starling's path. Most were too small to see, but an exterior camera showed a few sunlit specks darting through the darkness. The ship was built to protect the crew, yet one speck struck the communications antenna and left voices from Earth crackly and faint. Commander Vega checked the ship while Adrianna secured the experiment boxes and read each instrument aloud, exactly as the drills had taught. The old knot of nerves returned, but courage helped Adrianna keep breathing, keep working, and choose the next careful step.



The camera showed that the tiny impact had bent a latch across the antenna's turning hinge, leaving the dish stuck, and the crew would need the robotic arm mounted outside the ship. Adrianna took the controls while Commander Vega watched every movement, ready to help. On the screen, the metal claw looked no bigger than a toy, but each careful nudge moved it closer to the bent latch. Adrianna slowed down, lined up the claw, and lifted the latch away from the hinge without touching the delicate dish. At once, Mission Control's voice returned, and the cheers in the cabin made Adrianna's proud grin almost as bright as Earth.



That evening, the repaired radio carried a message from Mission Control: look towards the night side of Earth. Adrianna dimmed the cabin lights, and great ribbons of green and violet appeared below, folding and flowing across the planet's dark curve. The aurora seemed close enough to touch, while distant lightning blinked inside clouds like lanterns beneath a blanket. Nobody spoke for a long moment. Adrianna had expected space to be silent and empty, but it was filled with colour, motion, and wonders far beyond any dream. In the mission log, Adrianna drew one bright green ribbon and wrote, "The universe is always surprising."



On the final orbit, families and classmates appeared on the Mission Control screen for a live call with the crew. Voices burst through the cabin with questions about floating, stars, and whether Adrianna had ever felt afraid. Adrianna looked at the secured seedlings, the repaired antenna, and the blue planet beyond the glass before answering honestly: yes, especially during launch and the alert. Being brave, Adrianna explained, meant listening, asking for help, and taking the next careful step even while nerves were stirring. The reply from Earth was a roar of applause, and suddenly home felt both impossibly far away and right inside the cabin.



At last, the Starling turned towards home. Adrianna fastened the harness and watched orange light dance beyond the window as the capsule passed safely through the atmosphere, then felt the parachutes open with a mighty tug. When the spacecraft touched down and the hatch opened beneath a wide blue sky, fresh air had never smelled so wonderful. Adrianna stepped out carrying a mission log full of discoveries and wearing a patch that now felt truly earned. The first voyage was over, but every star above seemed to promise another question, another challenge, and another astonishing journey waiting somewhere beyond imagination.



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