

Discovery's Test Comes Tonight

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PEJ News - C. L. Cook - The not usually press-shy NASA has been markedly cautious surrounding the Discovery Shuttle flight. Damage eerily reminiscent to that experienced by the doomed Columbia in 2003 has marred what was to be a rejigged NASA's flawless return to the Shuttle program.

[update] Discovery Landing delayed. [Read more...](#)

[update II] Weather Cited in Delay. [Read More...](#)

[update III] Discovery Home 'Free. [Read more...](#)

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Tonight, a [confident-sounding NASA](#) plans to bring the Discovery home. The approach will begin in the wee pacific time hours overnight. The landing, and dilemma of Discovery's crew has received media coverage, but smacks of a detached concern more apt for a terrestrial power outage, as: "Sh*t happens, but I'm sure the authorities are on top of it." But this is no ordinary re-entry.

The Discovery flight has already seen firsts: Practicing NASA contingencies drawn up after the [Columbia disaster](#); astronauts conducted hull repairs to damaged heat tiles on the belly of the Discovery. Of particular concern, the paring of extended pieces of tile grouting. The great speed of the shuttle's re-entry generates massive heat, the concentration of which destroyed the Columbia.

[The shuttle is expected to land early on Monday](#) morning at Kennedy Space Center near Cape Canaveral. The touchdown time, weather permitting, has been set for 0446 EDT (0946 BST; 0846 GMT).