



An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth

The Astronaut book 2.0!

After having read a couple of astronaut books over the years, starting with Sigmund Jähn's book (Erlebnis im Weltraum, 1983) and Ulf Merbold's book (Flug ins All, 1986) and others I have to say that Chris Hadfield's book provides an excellent update and captures today's state of the art with respect to human spaceflight.

Being myself in the "mission control" business for over 30 years, I have to confess that I was delighted to read up on past Shuttle and MIR missions as well as on the multicultural relations on the International Space Station (ISS).

Besides the usual career descriptions on how to become an Astronaut ("*square astronaut, round hole*") Chris Hadfield embarks on not so much covered subjects like "pecking order" behavior ("*be a 0 rather than a -1 or +1, sweat the small stuff and know the bold printing*"), family considerations and sharing his own personal emotions, his health hazards as well as career "re-entry" problems after a successful flight.

In addition I could glean a lot of insider information about how things are done in Houston and Star City with respect to astronaut training.

In other words Col. Chris Hadfield is not the "*real hard-ass*" astronaut but the "*considerate type with an expeditional spirit*" according to "*how can I help us to get where we need to go*" and "*promoting your colleagues interests helps you to stay competitive*".

Chris Hadfield's achievements over his long astronaut career are impressive: 1991 top US test pilot and candidate for becoming a Canadian astronaut being selected out of 5329 competitors, 1995 first Shuttle flight (STS 74) delivering and installing the shuttle docking adapter to the Russian MIR station, next flight in 2001 delivering and installing Candarm-2 to the ISS and in 2012 his 3rd and final flight to the ISS (Expedition 34/35, 146 days duration) as ISS station commander, this time flying the Russian Soyuz system. So, his career covers a significant portion of human spaceflight history: Columbia accident, Russian-American cooperation on MIR, de-orbiting of MIR, construction of the ISS and the permanent establishment of a multinational crew on the ISS as well as the final retirement of the shuttle system.

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Always a touchy matter is an astronaut's assessment of scientific experiments – but Chris Hadfield does not shy away from this subject either. His assessment: 50% of the onboard science is human experiments to learn more about how to conduct long term human spaceflights ("*peeing for science*"), his favorite science experiment was the alpha magnetic spectrometer trying to solve the mystery about dark matter.

The managerial insights and work ethics offered are of common sense and very useful in the described "astronaut" environment. They would be very worthwhile to be applied in other projects as well – however, will often fail because of the particularities of the involved people and their personal visions and goals. His final advice "*to be prepared to climb down the ladder – but this should not prevent to climb up another one*" is universally true.

Of course Chris Hadfield's ultimate achievement is lifting public relations to a new standard i.e., convincing the tax payer that human spaceflight is very meaningful and is contributing to make life easier on Earth. Unforgotten are his many educational youtube recordings and his beautiful pictures of the Earth with an eye for the exotic. His "Space Oddity" recording onboard the ISS was an instantaneous hit (current clicks: over 25 million and counting). What impressed me most was his idea to record the sounds of the ISS ([link](#)): If you ask me – it is a tough environment which really requires dedication and a dream – Chris Hadfield had both!

If you think human spaceflight is a "waste of money" you have to read this book – if you are an engineer or in the space business, this book must be added to your standard-collection.

I enjoyed the book as audiobook which I highly recommend because it adds another dimension to your "head-movie": The book is read by Chris himself and he reflects his emotions in his reading in a way you have the illusion a very good friend is telling his adventures in your living-room.