

An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth

Chris Hadfield is a Canadian astronaut. He was the first Canadian to walk in space, and once commanded the International Space Station. Chris first went into space in 1995 on the Space Shuttle *Atlantis*. In this extract from his memoir, Chris describes his first take-off.

One morning a strange thought occurs to me shortly after waking: the socks I am about to put on are the ones I'll wear to leave Earth. That prospect feels real yet surreal, the way a particularly vivid dream does. The feeling intensifies at breakfast, when reporters jostle each other to get a good photo, as though I'm a condemned*
 5 man and this is my last meal. Similarly, a little later on, when the technicians help me into my custom-made spacesuit for pressure checks, the joviality* feels forced. It's the moment of truth. The suit needs to function perfectly — it is what will keep me alive and able to breathe if the spacecraft depressurizes in the vacuum of space — because this isn't a run-through.

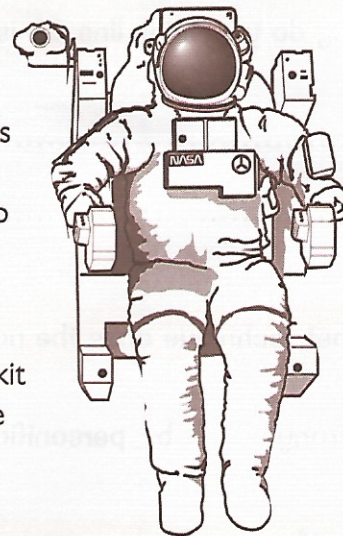
10 I am actually leaving the planet today.

[...]

At the launch pad, we ride the elevator up — this one moves at a good clip — and one by one we crawl into the vehicle on our hands and knees. Then the closeout crew helps strap me tightly into my tiny seat, and one of them hands me a
 15 note from Helene, telling me she loves me. I'm not exactly comfortable — the spacesuit is bulky and hot, the cabin is cramped, a distinctly un-cushion-like parachute and survival kit is wedged awkwardly behind my back — and I'm going to be stuck in this position for a few hours, minimum. But I can't
 20 imagine any place else I'd rather be.

[...]

Six seconds to go. The engines start to light, and we sway forward as this huge new force bends the vehicle, which lurches sideways then twangs back to vertical. And at that moment there's an enormous, violent vibration and rattle. It feels as though we're being shaken in a huge dog's jaws, then seized by its giant, unseen master and hurled
 25 straight up into the sky, away from Earth. It feels like magic, like winning, like a dream.



An abridged extract from *An Astronaut's Guide to Life on Earth* by Chris Hadfield.

Glossary

condemned — about to be punished

joviality — cheerfulness