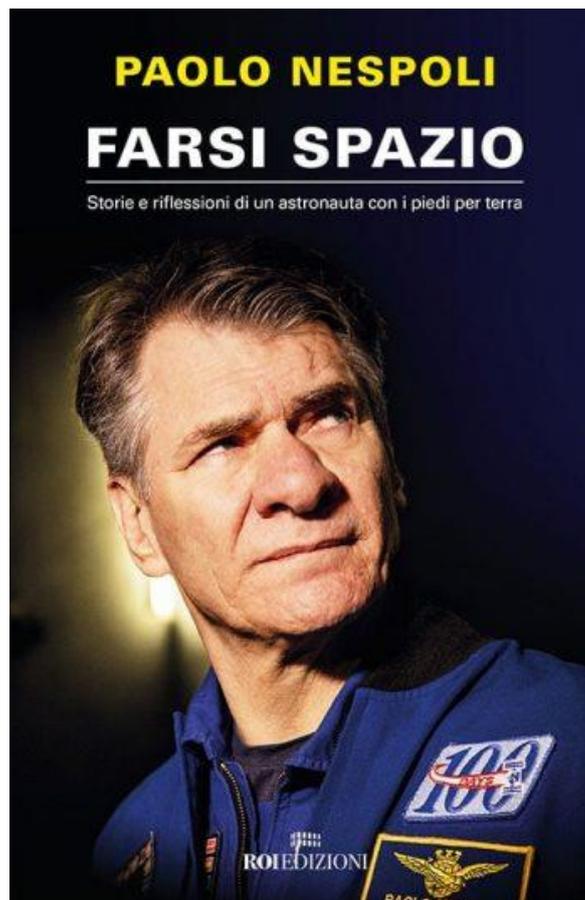


## BIBLIOTECA COMUNALE DI VERANO BRIANZA



### **REVIEW OF THE LATEST BOOK BY PAOLO NESPOLI: "FARSI SPAZIO"**

It is a great honor and pleasure to publish the review by Umberto Cavallaro of the book "Make space" written by our fellow citizen Paolo Nespoli (Ed. Roi Edizioni).

### “Making Space” - Book review <sup>1</sup>

by Umberto Cavallaro



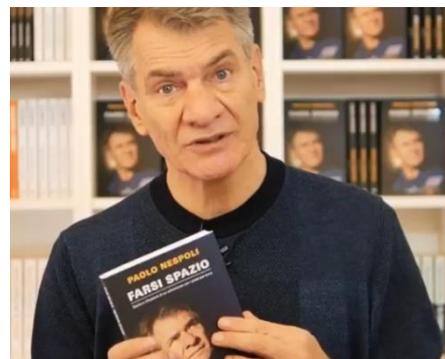
This is a book that I read all in one sitting, and that I highly recommend for the many incitements it continually offers, and not only in the "space for reflection" paragraph that ends each chapter.

"Flying in space is complicated, but flying in life with your feet on the ground is more so" says Nespoli who, in 10 chapters, tells about his long and bumpy journey that before taking the trajectory that led to what we all know today, has changed direction several times, overcoming obstacles and challenges, mainly against the tide: the mediocre grade remedied at the high school diploma after a dispute with the intransigent old-fashioned president of the examination commission, paratrooper of the Italian Folgore brigade, raider of the Italian Army, engaged in the Italian peace-keeping mission in Lebanon, the providential meeting with General Angioni and the writer Oriana Fallaci, the cumbersome resumption of his studies in New York

without knowing the language, the fortuitous connection to NASA through a course colleague, and again the very hard training at NASA and Star City.

Despite being written by an astronaut, this is not a book you read to learn about the history of space exploration. Some data, facts and names are indeed deliberately concealed.

While telling of the fulfillment of a dream – the dream of a child who wanted to become an astronaut – the goal of this autobiographical book is not to tell facts that you can now read everywhere, nor to offer monolithic recipes or certainties, but – as the author immediately clarifies – to talk about an inner experience (mental, psychological, emotional and spiritual) that eventually led him to feel like a "soul in flight" and, starting from here, to try to arouse in the reader a healthy feeling of disorientation, to stimulate him to question himself and to enter into himself, to consider things from a new perspective, to try to make the best out of himself and growth in his life.



Nespoli immediately clarifies that he does not want to appear as a mystic or a preacher. He feels, a grounded man with his feet on the ground, a "space metalworker". Trying to summarize in a few pages his torturous experience, especially the one he practised at NASA during the "astronaut course" where the candidate is "subjected to meticulous monitoring by a number of experts whose sole purpose is to take your measurements to the millimetre" ("It's like being smeared on a microscope slide for years" as he summarizes with an effective image), he helps us to start a long journey of self-knowledge: "If it is practically impossible to excel in the qualities we do not possess, luckily we are given try to do it with those we are equipped with". Because "ordinary people – he reminds us – if properly educated and trained, can do things out of the ordinary". "It is through preparation that the gap between impossible and feasible is bridged". It is important to "learn to come to terms with defeats – he suggests – which are really painful and useless only if we fail to learn from them for the future".

<sup>1</sup> Book review of **Paolo Nespoli**, *FARSI SPAZIO – Storie e riflessioni di un astronauta con i piedi per terra*. Roi Edizioni, Macerata, ottobre 2020, 235 pp. € 18,05.

But, as the book mentions several times, the important thing is to be there, to do, to decide: "Good luck seems to prefer presence vs absence". "Those who do may fail, but those who do not have already failed". What's the right way to go wrong? "There is no decision that can be considered correct a priori. All we can reasonably agree on is that not deciding is the worst decision". "The only impossible undertaking is the one that you don't have the courage to attempt".

Despite being reluctant to the hypocrisy of the system, by nature and education, despite not being what is called "a political animal", Nespoli found himself having to deal with delicate power balances that were the social equivalent of anti-personnel mines. "But – he confesses – contrary to the real ones that I had learned to defuse during the mission in Lebanon, I did not know how to neutralize these diplomatic devices". And these become other hard experiences to reflect on and learn from.

A long arduous journey has led Paolo Nespoli to enter the small circle of those who have observed the Earth from a privileged observatory. In three successive missions he lived in space for 313 days, and felt the sensation of having "the weight of an idea": "My body of Homo Sapiens, shaped by millions of years of evolution with the express purpose of responding to the stimuli of the terrestrial environment feels "out of place" here. And it is".

And from this last experience some important suggestions are drawn: if up there we astronauts, who are pragmatic technicians, with our feet on the ground, are all inevitably struck by spiritual – I would dare to say "philosophical" – illuminations, what would happen if to gaze at the Earth from above we could instead bring experts in philosophy, theology, painting, aesthetics, ethics, politics...? I am sure that together it would then be easier to break down the barriers that divide us and collectively build a better future for our species of universe explorers.



It echoes what Nespoli said to Pope Francis in the memorable audience in June 2018 in the Vatican, during which he presented the Pope an astronaut suit (as featured on the card above).

The reader does not find it difficult to identify himself with the human aspects of the author: a normal loyal man, who learns from his own mistakes, genuine but not naive, stubborn, sometimes a bit of a pain in the neck, but "talented pain in the neck" as he defines himself, and – in turn – he is progressively encouraged to reflect on his own course, to recognize his opportunities, to try to look at them from a different point of view, and to seek his own answers.

It is definitely a great book, which in many respects – including some of its contents – reminds me of what the Los Angeles Times once called "the best of all the astronaut books": the book "The All-American Boys" written by my friend Walt Cunningham – also an Honorary ASITAF Member, like Paolo Nespoli – that I had the pleasure of translating into Italian and was issued by Mursia a few years ago.

Really I hope that an English version of this book will appear soon.