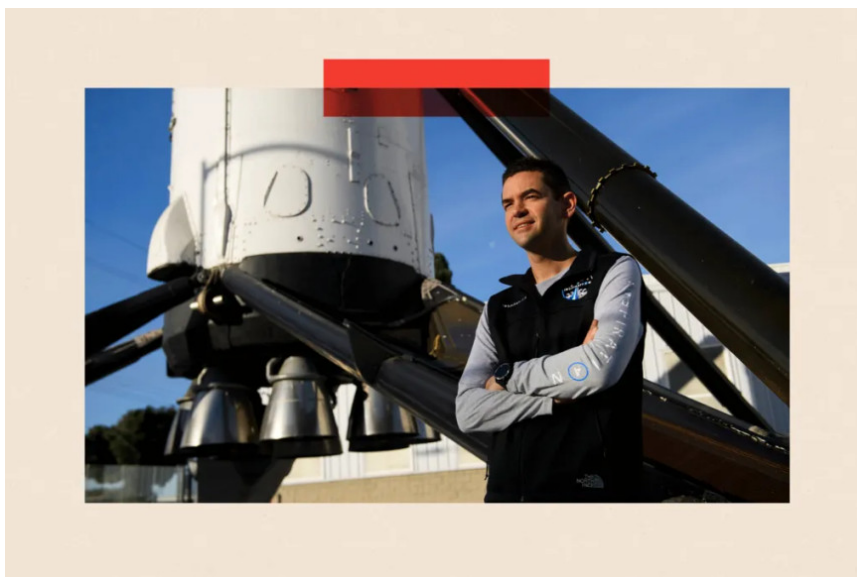




Nasa needs saving from itself – but is this billionaire right for that job?



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"We want it to be 600,000," he told reporters.

Later, he added: "I drank the Kool-Aid in terms of the grand ambitions for humankind being a multi-planet species... I think that we all want to live in a Star Wars, Star Trek world where people are jumping in their spacecraft."

Mr Isaacman, who made much of his \$1.9bn (£1.46bn) fortune from a payment processing company that he founded in 1999 aged 16, is said to have bankrolled the rest of the crew of four aboard the SpaceX craft in the 2021 mission, fuelled by a longstanding love of flying and fascination with space. –

During the mission, he tested an experimental spacesuit and a new cost-saving protocol to exit and re-enter the spacecraft without using an airlock.

The photograph of Mr Isaacman, silhouetted with the world at his feet, is now iconic – it demonstrated that this was not a playboy billionaire paying to act out Star Trek, but someone pushing the envelope of what was possible with current technology.

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Getty Images Jared Isaacman standing in front of the recovered first stage of a Falcon 9 rocket Getty Images

Jared Isaacman (pictured) has orbited the Earth twice on private spaceflights

Since then, there have been more adventures: last year he demonstrated Captain Kirk-like daring by travelling in an upgraded SpaceX capsule and performing the first commercial spacewalk.

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Shutterstock A still image taken from a video showing US entrepreneur and billionaire Jared Isaacman stepping out of the hatch at the start of the first private spacewalkShutterstock

Jared Isaacman (pictured) became the first non-professional astronaut to walk in space

The question is why Trump chose him and what has he asked him to do – especially in the context that the President has appointed SpaceX owner Elon Musk to a government role to cut \$2 trillion (£1.6 trillion) off the Federal budget.

The Nasa post is a presidential appointment, though it requires the confirmation of the US Senate. And if confirmed, Mr Isaacman's appointment will also raise broader questions about the future of humanity in space, given his vision for space travel for the masses – but also the implications for the space agency if Mr Isaacman's role leads to Nasa's greater use of the private sector.

Brink of a second space age?

In the past, the heads of Nasa have come from a variety of backgrounds: some, such as the previous incumbent Bill Nelson, have been former astronauts; others, such as Michael Griffin (in charge from 2005 to 2009) came from a government background, and before him Dan Goldin was an entrepreneur, striving to lower costs.

Despite their disparate backgrounds, those who have led Nasa have all been company people, charged with defending the space agency and its values.

And yet Mr Isaacman, along with Mr Musk and Amazon's Jeff Bezos, is among a new wave of billionaires who have been challenging the old order in space. During the mission, he tested an experimental spacesuit and a new cost-saving protocol to exit and re-enter the spacecraft without using an airlock.

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They have accelerated the pace of innovation and are aiming to dramatically reduce the cost of human space travel.

On the day of his nomination in December, Mr Isaacman posted a statement on X that gave an early glimpse into his vision. "This second space age has only just begun," he wrote.

"There will inevitably be a thriving space economy – one that will create opportuno to live and work in space... At Nasa, we will... usher in an era where humanity becomes a true spacefaring civilisation."

Many presidents have talked about sending astronauts to the Moon since the end of the Apollo lunar landings of the 1960s and 70s, but Trump was the first to turn talk into action, authorising Nasa's Artemis programme to send humans back to the Moon during his first term. His record suggests that he is a big Nasa

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