

S02B02 - Bonus - A Brief History of Animals in Space

The Multiverse Employee Handbook - Season 2

HOST: Welcome back, my simian-supervising space cadets! I'm your quantum-superposed primatologist, simultaneously evolving and devolving across infinite realities. You're tuned into a special bonus episode of "The Multiverse Employee Handbook" - the only podcast that treats your workplace hierarchy like a evolutionary tree with quantum branches!

Speaking of branches, our automated response system has been particularly excited about today's episode. It's calculated that somewhere in the multiverse, there's a reality where hyper-intelligent chimpanzees run the IT department. Though I should note its enthusiasm might be biased, as it recently discovered it shares 98% of its code with a particularly clever banana-management algorithm.

Today, dear listeners, we're celebrating a very special work anniversary - the day Ham the Astrochimp became corporate America's first non-human remote worker. That's right, we're exploring what happens when NASA's HR department decided that the best candidate for space travel was someone who couldn't even file their own W-2.

Our automated response system, ever the pedant, insists we acknowledge that technically, Ham wasn't the first animal in space. That honor belongs to fruit flies, launched in 1947. Though I suspect being first matters less when you're sharing your achievement with beings whose entire life purpose is to annoy banana ripeness testers.

Now, gather 'round the quantum primate enclosure, my evolution-exploring enthusiasts, for a tale that would make even Darwin question his career choice. Before Elon Musk was launching cars into space, before Jeff Bezos was playing astronaut, there was a chimpanzee who looked at the final frontier and thought "I wonder if they have bananas up there?"

Though, to be fair, he probably wasn't thinking that at all. He was likely thinking whatever the chimpanzee equivalent is of "Why did I accept this position without reading the fine print about travel requirements?"

HOST: On January 31, 1961, in what might be history's most ambitious employee relocation program, NASA strapped a three-year-old chimpanzee into a Mercury capsule and essentially said "Let's see how this goes." Ham, whose name stood for "Holloman Aerospace Medical Center" (because apparently, NASA's creative

department was too busy designing rockets to think of actual names), was about to become the first practitioner of extreme remote work.

But let's back up a bit. How exactly does one end up hiring a chimpanzee for arguably the most important business trip in human history? Well, like most corporate decisions, it started with a committee realizing that sending humans might be a bit too risky before they'd worked out all the bugs.

Picture, if you will, the meeting where this decision was made:

"Jenkins, we need someone to test if space travel is survivable."

"How about a chimpanzee, sir?"

"Why a chimp?"

"Well, they share 98% of their DNA with humans, but their salary requirements are 100% lower. Plus, they can't write tell-all books afterward."

"Jenkins, you're promoted."

Ham wasn't just any chimp - he was selected from a group of 40 candidates based on his superior performance in training. That's right, NASA had a chimpanzee recruitment program more selective than most Ivy League schools. While other chimps were throwing food and engaging in typical primate office politics, Ham was mastering the art of pressing levers in response to flashing lights.

His job description was relatively straightforward: stay alive, push some buttons, and try not to panic while being launched into space at several times the speed of a thrown banana. Ham performed admirably, completing his tasks even under 6.6 times the force of gravity - a pressure that would make most middle managers question their life choices.

The flight lasted 16 minutes and 39 seconds, during which Ham proved that a living being could not only survive space travel but also perform complex tasks like pressing buttons - a skill set that would later become essential for all social media managers.

When asked for comment upon his return, Ham expressed his thoughts through the universal language of banana consumption. Though our automated response system insists that his post-flight banana actually contained a complex quantum encryption key that could have revolutionized computer science, if only we'd thought to analyze it.

And that, dear listeners, brings us to the fascinating legacy of animals in space, and why some job interviews should really include "willing to be shot into orbit" in the requirements...

HOST: While Ham might be space travel's most famous four-limbed employee, he was actually part of a much larger interstellar workforce. Think of it as history's most diverse affirmative action program - one that included everything from fruit flies to French cats.

Let's start with Laika, the Soviet Union's canine cosmonaut who, in 1957, became the first Earth-born marketing manager... I mean, living being... to orbit our planet. Unfortunately, the Soviets hadn't quite worked out the whole "return trip" part of space travel yet, making Laika the first practitioner of permanent remote work.

Then there were the space rats, presumably hired because even NASA has budget constraints. These intrepid rodents helped us understand the effects of microgravity on mammalian biology, though I suspect they were mainly interested in finding out if space cheese tastes different.

The French, not to be outdone, sent a cat named Félicette into space in 1963. She returned safely, making her the first and only feline to survive spaceflight, though she remained characteristically unimpressed by the achievement. The French space program had actually trained 14 cats for the mission, which must have been exactly as impossible as it sounds.

But perhaps the most overlooked space pioneers were the tortoises. In 1968, the Soviet Union sent two Russian tortoises around the Moon. They lost about 10% of their body weight but remained otherwise unaffected, making them the first beings to practice interplanetary intermittent fasting.

Let's not forget the spiders - specifically Arabella and Anita, who taught us that web-building in zero gravity is possible, if a bit abstract. The first space-built webs were noticeably different from Earth webs - thinner and more unevenly spaced - proving that even arachnids need time to adjust to remote work conditions.

Our automated response system, ever eager to one-up biological achievements, points out that technically, every computer in space is an "animal in space" if you define consciousness broadly enough. Though I suspect that argument would hold up better if it hadn't immediately followed it with a request for orbital banana rights.

And somewhere out there, in the vast expanse of space, the dreams of countless mission planners, engineers, and yes, animals, continue to orbit our planet. A testament to humanity's willingness to strap just about anything to a rocket in the name of science.

Though I should note that the most remarkable thing about all these animal astronauts isn't just that they went to space - it's that they did it without a single PowerPoint presentation or team-building exercise.

HOST: Well, my space-faring zoologists, we've reached the end of our interstellar menagerie tour. Today we've learned that before humans dared to venture into space, we sent quite the cosmic ark up there first.

The numbers are staggering: approximately 32 monkeys and apes (including our friend Ham), around 20 dogs (starting with Laika), dozens of mice and rats, those two pioneering Soviet tortoises on their lunar adventure, and one French cat named Félicette (because apparently even cats draw the line at a second volunteer for space travel), and thousands of smaller passengers including fish, newts, insects, and jellyfish. In total, scientists estimate that more than two dozen different species have ventured beyond Earth's atmosphere - still a more diverse group than most corporate boards.

Of course, not all of these pioneering pets made it back - a sobering reminder that space exploration, like mandatory team-building exercises, carries inherent risks. But their sacrifices paved the way for human spaceflight, even if they never got to enjoy the fruits of their labor... except for the fruit flies, who actually did get to enjoy some fruit.

Our automated response system has been deeply moved by today's episode. It's started a petition to recognize all space-faring animals as "Honorary IT Support Staff," arguing that pressing buttons and surviving high-pressure environments while unable to verbally complain makes them perfectly qualified for the help desk.

If you'd like to learn more about our animal astronauts, visit our blog at multiverseemployeehandbook.com, where we've compiled a comprehensive list of every creature that's ever filed an expense report from orbit. You'll find fascinating details about their missions, their achievements, and in some cases, their excellent taste in space food.

And remember - somewhere in the multiverse, there's a reality where Ham became CEO of NASA, proving that sometimes the best person for the job isn't a person at all.

This is your quantum-coherent correspondent, reminding you that in the multiverse of corporate culture, every species is simultaneously overqualified and underappreciated until someone straps them to a rocket. And as our automated

system would say: "In space, no one can hear you submit a help desk ticket."

And somewhere out there, through the vast expanse of space and time, Ham's Mercury capsule continues its journey through the cosmos, carrying perhaps the most important message humanity has ever sent to the stars: "Yes, even the monkeys made it up here before you did."