



Space Dogs: The Story of the Celebrated Canine Cosmonauts

Martin Parr

Laurence King (Jun 11, 2019)

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Martin Parr's *Space Dogs* features a collection of Soviet memorabilia alongside a brief overview of the program that led to the eventual entry of humans into space. What began as a mere scientific experiment soon erupted into a celebrity phenomenon—ironically, blossoming in the heart of collectivist-minded Soviet Russia.

The Russian space dogs program was a vital precursor to human spaceflight; from a state standpoint, it was also an excellent source of propaganda to be aimed squarely at the United States, where NASA, too, was making attempts to reach the stars.

The Bolshevik Revolution left thousands of stray dogs on the streets of Russia, and scientists seized the opportunity for free test subjects. Far from thrusting them into a cruel laboratory, Russian scientists ensured the dogs' well-being. Some even formed deep attachments to the canines.

The first of the dogs to go into space was Laika. She ended up dying during the expedition, but the Soviet government covered up that fact. Laika became an icon. Her heroic image graced clocks, cigarette cases, and even her own brand of cigarettes. It wasn't until Belka and Strelka, a pair of pups who did survive their mission into orbit, that the space dogs merchandise craze exploded.

The book suggests that one of Strelka's puppies, who took up residence in the White House after Jackie Kennedy playfully suggested to Khrushchev that he should send her one, may have helped keep the tensions between the two countries manageable enough to avoid a third world war.

The majority of the book contains pictures of Parr's collection. Captured in vibrant color, the vintage items open a window onto this odd anomaly within a society that eschewed individualistic achievements. Complementing the items are black-and-white photos of the space dogs and scientists themselves.

Space Dogs is a short but charming look at the space race from a different, and fluffier, angle.

MEAGAN LOGSDON (May/June 2019)

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