

===== The Monkey Experiment =====

----- *Professor Cramulus* -----

There's a famous experiment where they keep a bunch of monkeys in a room for an indefinite amount of time. There's a big white staircase leading up out of the room. Every time a monkey climbs to the top of the staircase, he gets blasted back down the stairs with a hose. When this happens, every monkey in the room also gets blasted with water. This makes them very angry.

Soon, the monkeys have figured it out: beat the shit out of any monkey that starts to climb the stairs. That's the new rule.

At some point, they remove a monkey and send in a new one. He learns the rule quickly: don't climb the stairs. And if we're beating somebody up, join in. One by one, they replace each monkey with a new one who has to learn the rule.

At some point they can turn off the hose. The monkeys will reliably prevent escape. Policing the stairs has become a cultural norm. Eventually, they have this population of monkeys who are trained to beat up any monkey that tries to escape, but don't even understand why.

The experiment is run by interns who are paid in course credit. Occasionally, an intern finishes the semester and leaves. New interns join the team and everybody explains how to feed the monkeys and how to record the data. But at this point, none of the interns are from the original group, none of them have met the scientists leading this project. Most of the interns don't fully understand the point of the experiment.

The scientist who began the experiment left long ago. Other researchers were assigned to the project by an administrator in order to keep this valuable experiment running. None of the remaining scientists are actually authors of the paper, or even understand what it's about.

The administrator supervising the project isn't terribly involved with it. He just prolongs the experiment because it's his department's main source of funding. But he didn't begin this project, he just inherited it from his predecessor, who is on a leave of absence and hasn't been seen in some time.

The company funding the experiment has a sum of money they spend annually on scientific research, mainly for tax reasons. But the person who reads and approves grants left last year. The last time anybody saw the man, he handed a huge folder to some new kid and said "make sure these stay funded." Then he disappeared up a long staircase leading into the sky.