

Awards for unconventional acts of inverted genius people

Recognising the extraordinary acts of ordinary people, who miss to rub their shoulders with winners of coveted awards.

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All of us interact with people day-in and day-out. Most of them, most of the time behave like normal human-beings. However, few of them, at times display additional intelligence, while an odd one does so more occasionally and goes on to win some prize or award.

There are in fact quite a few, though a minuscule of the total population on the globe, who are really gifted and create something novel and worthwhile for which they are duly recognised on a much bigger platform. Various national and international awards in different fields are a testimony to their intelligence and genius.

There are, however, few individuals who are no doubt 'extra-intelligent' but they do not think in the conventional domain. They use their intelligence in a different direction. Their efforts and outputs are not directed towards the benefit of the masses, but are generally towards their personal satisfaction and glory. Such individuals no doubt produce wonderful results and thus can rightly be termed as "inverted-geniuses."

To recognise such talent there is a plethora of awards on the global front, the most prestigious being Ig Nobel Prize, of which the 25th annual awards ceremony was held on 17 September at Harvard's Sander's Theatre at Cambridge. England. The other equally interesting awards are Golden Fleece awards. Golden Raspberry awards, Pigasus awards and Darwin awards. Each one of them is given to a unique person who has done or achieved something that amounts to something quite against the norms.

Ig Nobel Prize

The Ig Nobel Prize is a parody of the Nobel prizes. These are awarded each year generally during mid-September, before the recipients of the genuine Nobel Prizes are announced. Ten prizes are awarded for achievements in unusual or trivia areas of research The stated aim of the prize is to "honour achievements that first make people laugh, and then make them think'. It is further stated that 'the prizes are intended to celebrate the unusual, honour the imaginative, and spur people's interest in science, medicine and technology.' All prizes are awarded for real and actual achievements.

Interesting sidelights The prizes are presented by genuine Nobel laureates. During the ceremony, a little girl repeatedly cries out 'please stop: I am bored' in a high-pitched voice when speakers carry on speaking for too long. The awards ceremony is traditionally closed with the words: "If you didn't win a prize, and especially if you did, better luck next year!'

Throwing paper-planes onto the stage is another tradition at the awards ceremony. Quite often, the delegates from the "Museum of Bad Arts" display some pieces from their collection too. But what takes the cake is perhaps the fact that physics professor Roy J Glauber swept the stage clean of the airplanes as the official "Keeper of the Broom' for years. He could not attend the 2005 awards because he was travelling to Stockholm to claim a genuine Nobel Prize in Physics!



Ig Nobel Prize Winner Dr. Elena Bodnar demonstrates her invention (a brassiere that can quickly convert into a pair of protective face masks) assisted by Nobel laureates in 2009.

The Wide Range Though ten prizes are awarded, the areas are not fixed. While there are almost annual prizes for certain field such as biology, chemistry, economics, literature, medicine, peace and physics, the prizes have been awarded in many other areas such as engineering, mathematics, nutrition, neuro-science, physiology, probability, safety engineering, transportation planning and veterinary medicine as well. It would be really interesting to go through the 'works' that bagged these prizes in different fields over different years, rather than knowing the names of the individuals who were behind these 'bone-ticking' and at times "funny and bizarre discoveries' if these can be so called!



A live frog is magnetically levitated, an experiment that earned Sir Andre Geim from the University of Nijmegen and Sir Michael Berry from University of Bristol the 2000 Ig Nobel Prize in physics.

Biology

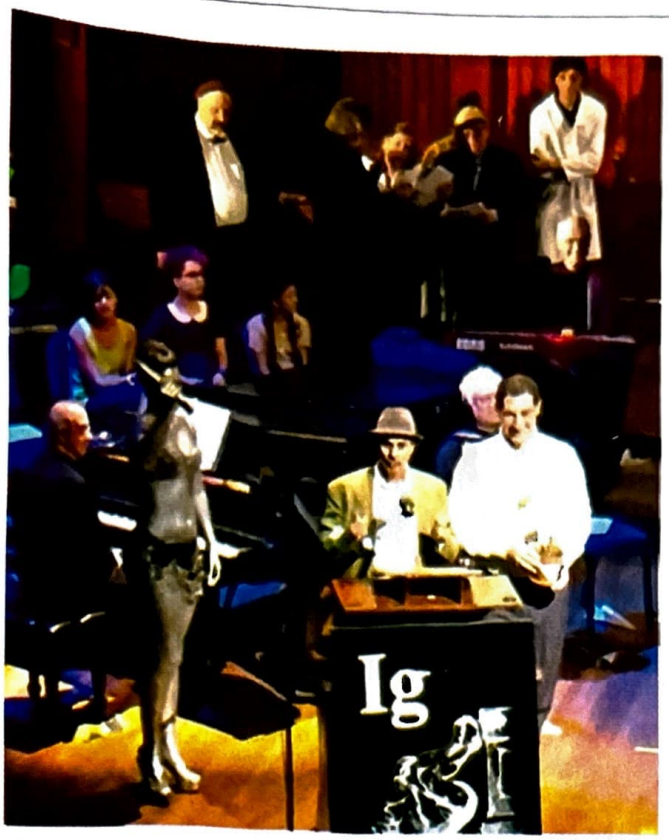
- Observing that when you attach a weighted stick to the rear end of a chicken, the chicken then walks in a manner similar to that in which dinosaurs are thought to have walked.
- Concluding that dogs prefer to align their body axis with Earth's north-south geo-magnetic field lines while they defecate and urinate.
- Discovering that when dung beetles are lost, they can navigate by observing the Milky Way.
- Demonstrating that kitchen garbage can be reduced by more than 90% in mass by using bacteria extracted from the feces of "giant pandas.'

Chemistry

- Disproving the old belief that oil and water don't mix.
- Inventing a chemical recipe to partially un-boil an egg.
- Discovering the previously unknown complexity behind why onion makes humans cry.
- Solving the puzzle of why, in certain houses in a particular town of Sweden, people's hair turned green.

Diagnostic Medicine

- Demonstrating that people make better decisions about some kinds of things, but worse decisions about other kinds of things; when they have a strong urge to urinate.
- Determining that acute appendicitis can be accurately diagnosed by the amount of pain evident when the patient is driven over speed bumps.



Researchers accept the Management Prize at the Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony on 17 Sept. 2015, at Harvard University's historic Sanders Theatre in Cambridge, Massachusetts.

- Investigating a possible cause of arthritis of the fingers, by cracking the knuckles of left hand but not right hand every day for 60 years.
- Discovering that symptoms of asthma can be treated with a roller-coaster ride

Economics

- Discovering that exotic dancers earn more when at peak fertility.
- Patenting a device to catch bank robbers by ensnaring them in a net.
- Demonstrating that tiny banks can be rapidly transformed into huge banks, and vice versa.
- Demonstrating that offering to pay policemen extra cash works if the policemen refuse to take bribes.

Literature

- Discovering that the word 'huh" (or its equivalent) seems to exist in every human language; and for not being quite sure why.
- Issuing a report about reports about reports that recommends the preparation of a report about the report about reports about reports.
- To be a high achiever, always work on something important, using it as a way to avoid doing something that's even more important.
- Preserving nudist history.

Mathematics

- Determining how the Sharifian Emperor of Morocco, managed to father 888 children during the years 1697-1727.
- Causing hyper-inflation by printing bank notes of denominations ranging from one cent to one hundred trillion dollars.
- Calculating the number of photographs that, mathematically, will make it highly unlikely that anyone in a group photo has their eyes closed'.
- Estimation of the total surface area in Indian elephants.

Medicine

- Experiments to study the biomedical benefits or consequences of intense kissing.
- Investigating the side-effects of swallowing swords.
- Termination of intractable hiccups with digital rectal massage.
- Demonstrating that expensive placebos (simulated or otherwise medically ineffectual treatment for a disease or other medical condition intended to deceive the recipient) are more effective than inexpensive placebos

Physics

- Testing the biological principle that nearly all mammals empty their bladders in about 21 seconds (plus or minus 13 seconds).
- Measuring the friction between a shoe and a banana skin, and between a banana skin and the floor, when a person steps on a banana skin on the floor.
- Concluding that some people could run in place on a body of water, if both were on the moon.
- Trying to determine why discuss-throwers become dizzy, whereas hammer-throwers do not.

Psychology

- Concluding that night-owls on average, are more self-admiring, more manipulative and more psychopathic than early birds.
- Experimentally concluding that people who think they are drunk also think that they are attractive.
- Study that proved that 'leaning to the left makes the Eiffel Tower seem smaller.
- How difficulties in recognising one's own incompetence lead to inflated self-assessments.

Public Health/Safety

- Finding that microbes cling to bearded scientists.
- Researching whether owning a cat is mentally hazardous.

- Concluding that nose-picking is common among adolescents.
- Inventing a 'Bra' that can be quickly converted into a pair of gas masks.

Peace

- Suggesting the research and development of a 'gay-bomb' which would cause enemy troops to become sexually attracted to each other.
- Adopting the legal principle that plants have dignity.
- Researching whether being hit on the head with a full bottle of beer or an empty bottle is more likely to cause a skull fracture.
- Scientifically validating belief that swearing relieves pain.

Golden Fleece Awards

The Golden Fleece Awards were presented to those public officials in the United States who, the judges felt, wasted public money. US Senator William Proxmire, a Democrat from Wisconsin state started the award in 1975 on a monthly basis and continued until 1988 when he retired from the senate. In all 168 Golden Fleece Awards were issued. *The Washington Post* referred to the award as 'the most successful public relations exercise in politics.' Few of the notable awardees were:

- US Department of Defense for a $3,000 study to determine if people in the military should carry umbrellas in the rain.
- The National Science Foundation won the first Golden Fleece Award, for spending $84,000 on a study on 'Love.
- The Federal Aviation Administration for spending $57,800 on a study of the physical measurements of 432 airline stewardesses, paying special attention to the 'length of the buttocks.'
- Office of education for spending $219,592 in a curriculum package to teach college students how to watch television.
- US Department of Justice for conducting a study on why prisoners want to escape.
- US Postal service for spending over $4 million on an advertisement campaign to make Americans write more letters to one another.

Golden Raspberry Awards

The Golden Raspberry Awards are the awards for being the worst in film. The term raspberry in the name is used in its irreverent sense, as in 'blowing a raspberry.' Often shortened to 'Razzies Awards,' it was founded in 1980 by American copywriter John JB Wilson. The annual awards ceremony precedes the famous Academy Awards ceremony by one day. Most winners, however, do not attend the ceremony to collect their awards.

The annual awards are made in nine categories (worst actor/ actress, worst supporting actor/ actress, worst screen combo/ screen play, worst director/ picture and worst remake or sequel). The awards have been declared uninterruptedly for the last 35 years. Till date, five 'Worst Career Achievement Awards' have been given, the recipients include Ronald Reagan, Linda Blair and Irwin Allen.



Viliumas Malinauskus, founder of Stalin World, accepting the 2001 Ig Nobel Peace Prize.

In addition, there are many special prizes like three prizes every decade for worst actor, actress and picture of the decade.

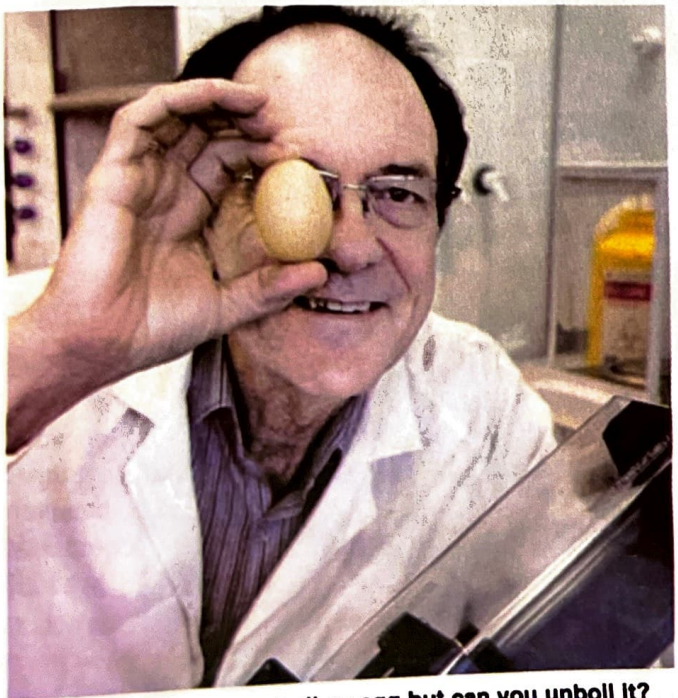
Members of the Golden Raspberry Award Foundation vote to determine the recipients. However, at times the award are based on votes from journalists, cinema fans and professionals from the film industry from different states in the United States as well as other countries.

Pigasus Awards

The Pigasus Award is the annual award presented by noted Canadian born magician, illusionist, writer and skeptic James Randi. The award seeks to expose parapsychological, paranormal or psychic frauds noted over the previous year and are announced on 'All Fools Day" the 1 April. The name 'Pigasus' denotes a pun term which combines the word 'Pig' with the mythological Pegasus, thus literally expressing 'when pigs fly.' The awards are made in the following four categories:

- To the scientist who said or did the silliest thing relating to parapsychology, few awardees being Charles Tart for discovering that the farther in the future events are, the more difficult it is to predict them; Colin Ross for claiming that he can shoot electromagnetic radiation from his eyes; and NASA engineer Richard Hoover for claiming unfounded evidence for microscopic life found on meteorite.
- To the funding organisation that supports the most useless parapsychological study such as The Pentagon for spending $6 million to determine whether burning the photo of a Soviet missile would destroy the missile; City Council of Auckland, New Zealand for a grant to the Foundation for Spiritualist Mediums 'to teach people to communicate with the dead' and Templeton Foundation for spending US$2.4 million and ten years research on a study researching the effectiveness of prayers.
- To the media outlet that reported as fact the most outrageous paranormal claim. Few of the (un)worthy winners were the reality television series that's Incredible for declaring a simple magic trick to be genuine, which the performer later admitted it to be false; awarded collectively to a number of media outlets for perpetuating the Roswell UCO incident; and to Dr. Mehmet Oz for his promotion of quack medical practices.

To the psychic performer who fools the greatest number of people with the least effort, few of the awardees being Sheldon Nidle who predicted the end of the world on 17 December 1996, then explained that it came, but we were all unaware of it; the Israeli illusionist, magician, and self-proclaimed psychic Uri Geller; and Jenny McCarthy for being a spokesperson for the anti-vaccination movement.



Almost everyone can boil an egg but can you unboil it?

Darwin Awards

The Darwin Awards commemorate individuals who protect our gene-pool by making the ultimate sacrifice of their own lives. Darwin Award winners eliminate themselves in an extraordinarily idiotic manner (death or sterilisation by their own actions) thereby improving our species' chances of long-term survival.

The origin of the Darwin Awards dates back to 1985 when it started with posts on Usenet group discussions which gave the award posthumously to people who died as a result of their actions and mentioned that 'the style of the death counts' and further stated that not everyone who dies from their own stupidity can win. It became famous when the website and the books were started by Wendy Northcutt in 1993.

There are five requirements for a Darwin Award: First, the inability to reproduce hence the nominee must be dead or have become unable to use their sexual organs. Second, the individual must possess astoundingly stupid judgment. Third it must be self-made decision that causes one's own demise. Fourth the person must be mature, capable of sound judgment and must be at least past the legal driving age and free of mental defect. Fifth and finally the event must be verified and the story must be documented by reliable sources like reputable newspaper articles, confirmed television reports, or responsible eyewitnesses.

The Weirdest Winners There are several books on the Darwin awards published by the Penguin

Group which gives details of various individuals, who

received the award only posthumously! In each case, the so-called stupidity of the winners appears to be better than the other guy! Read the ten weirdest cases and decide the ranking yourself.

- A frugal man once tried to save some money by using a grenade to create his own fireworks. He decided to use a 'chainsaw' to crack open the grenade to get that sweet gunpowder inside. Sparks started flying through the air. shortly before parts of the man's body started flying all around.
- One student took his kung-fu teacher's words that we are good enough to 'take-on-lions' seriously. One day, he went to the local zoo and many shocked zoo visitors reportedly saw the ensuing 'fight.' The youth in his death, won the coveted prize.
- We all are constantly told to not drink and drive. But drinking and flying, perhaps no one had told them! Two Canadian men, after a weekend of boozing went on to fly the stolen plane into some power lines.
- He used 'tape' to fix two different bungee cords together, and then he cut them to measure the exact height of the bridge he wanted to jump from. He tied to chord to his car and jumped into the abyss, forgetting that bungee cords are designed to stretch.
- An Iraqi terrorist sent out a letter bomb, which came back marked 'return to sender' because inadequate stamps were pasted. Happy to receive some post, he ripped it open. His career in terrorism ended there!
- A high flying lawyer loved telling his colleagues and clients that his windows were bullet-proof and unbreakable. One day, he decided to demonstrate the same by running into one at full pace. He crashed through the 'unbreakable' windows and ended up dead on the pavement 24 floors below.
- He tried to escape prison from his cell window, 150 feet above the ground using a rope made out of "tied together' bed-sheets. Before climbing out, he broke the window glass. His initial descent was normal till the thin sheets were cut by the broken glass, causing him to fall to his death.
- Two students, competing against each other to win the heart of a certain girl, decided to play a game of heroes on their motor scooters. Both rode at each other at 50 mph and neither flinched.
- Both crashed in to each other and died. The girl at the centre of the contest said that she hadn't been interested in either of them.
- A man after an argument threw his wife off the balcony of their eighth-floor apartment. She was caught in power lines below. When he saw her dangling in the wires, he jumped off himself in an attempt to finish the job. He missed, fell to the concrete floor and died. The wife survived to receive the award on his behalf!
- He planned a robbery at a firearms store. When he reached the store, it was full of customers including a uniformed police officer. The robber stuck to his plan, announced that it was a holdup and fired few shots into the air. In no time the cop and store owner drew their weapons, as did several of the customers, and the world's worst robber met his untimely death. ■



The winners for the Ig Nobel Prize in Diagnostic Medicine.

Food for thought

Need something extraordinary for the extraordinary achievements of our politicians.

Ours is a large country, managed effectively or otherwise by the wily politicians. No doubt, they are an intelligent lot as can be borne out by the fact that they have been fooling the masses for decades and yet ruling them! None of them would obviously qualify for a "Darwin type award' for they can never think of anything that can harm them even in a dream. Otherwise they would qualify for all other types of awards like Golden Fleece award, for being undisputed masters in fleecing and accumulating personal wealth; Pigasus award for fooling the people all the time; Golden Raspberry award for worst performances in almost every field year after year and finally the Ig Nobel prize for doing irrelevant acts that hardly alleviate poor people's problems.

We necessarily do not have to bestow these awards to our politicians; simply because these awards do not measure up to their genius, intelligence and talents! Their standards are much higher. We can think bigger and come out with much more meaningful awards that could really demean them, while highlighting their un-worthy achievements!