

The 14th First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony

by Stephen Drew, AIR staff

NOTE: To see video of the entire ceremony, go to the Improbable Research web site: www.improbable.com.

The 2004 Ig Nobel Prizes, honoring achievements that first make people LAUGH, and then make them THINK, were awarded at Harvard University's historic Sanders Theatre on September 30, before 1,200 spectators in a ceremony filled with diet advice, lab coats, opera singers, paper airplanes, hula hoops, and scientists singing karaoke. This was the 14th First Annual Ig Nobel Prize Ceremony.

Eight of the ten new winners (or, in two cases, the winners' children) journeyed to Harvard -- at their own expense -- to accept their Prizes. They came from Japan, Sweden, Denmark, Canada, and various parts of the United States.

Daisuke Inoue was awarded the Ig Nobel Peace prize "for inventing karaoke, thereby providing an entirely new way for people to learn to tolerate each other." Inoue received a near-delirious, seemingly endless standing, screaming deluge of applause and weeping. Then, led by three Nobel Laureates and a slinky blonde, the entire audience serenaded him with a karaoke version of the song "You're Just Too Good to Be True / Can't Take My Eyes Off of You..." This was a rare instance of public acclaim for Inoue, who never made much money from the invention that made others wealthy.

The Ig Nobel Prizes were physically handed to the winners by Nobel Laureates Dudley Herschbach (Chemistry '86), William Lipscomb (Chemistry '76), and Richard Roberts (Physiology or Medicine '93). Herschbach was the prize in the annual Win-a-Date-With-a-Nobel-Laureate Contest.

The event was produced by the *Annals of Improbable Research*, and co-sponsored by the Harvard Computer Society, the Harvard-Radcliffe Science Fiction Association and the Harvard-Radcliffe Society of Physics Students.



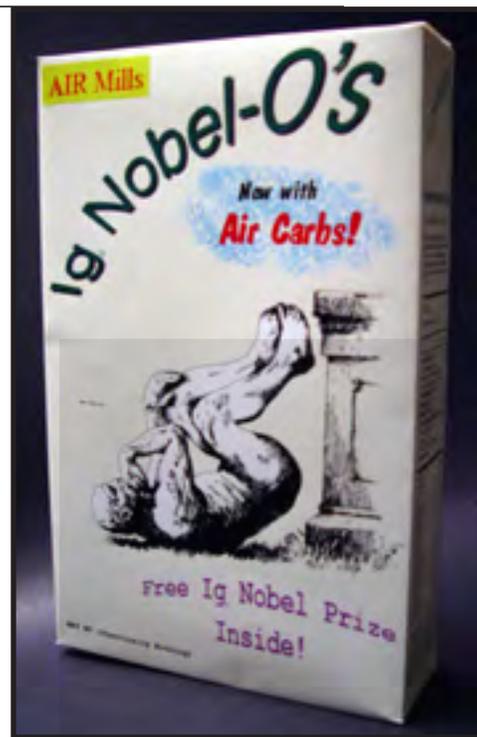
The evening also featured numerous tributes to the evening's theme of "Diet." Foremost were the 24/7-Lectures -- in which famous thinkers explained their field of research, first in twenty-four (24) seconds, and then in seven (7) words. Among the 24/7 Lecturers was Dr. Barry Sears, inventor of the Zone Diet. There was also a live comparison test of several popular diets -- Harvard Medical School doctors demonstrated that most diets are equally effective over the span of an hour.

The night also featured the premiere of a new mini-opera called "The Atkins Diet Opera," which starred professional opera singers Greg Neil, Margot Button, and Jane Tankersley, who were joined in the rousing conclusion by all of the scientists on stage.

Each new winner was permitted a maximum of sixty (60) seconds to deliver an acceptance speech; the time limit was enforced by a cute-but-implacable nine (9) year-old girl. The winners tried to explain themselves at greater length (five minutes each) in free public lectures two days later, in the Ig Informal Lectures at MIT.

The ceremony began with the traditional Welcome Welcome speech (which consisted in its entirety of the phrase "Welcome, welcome") and closed the ceremony with the traditional salute, "If you didn't win an Ig Nobel prize tonight -- and especially if you did -- better luck next year."

Eric Workman in a tribute to the 2004 Ig Nobel Literature Prize winner -- the American Nudist Research Library. The image is from the Ig Nobel documentary video.



The 2004 Ig Nobel Prize -- an empty cereal box. Photo: Eric Workman, who also designed and built the Prizes.



Harvard Medical School doctor James Michel (in white lab coat) weighs a volunteer test subject during the live diet comparison test, which was conducted onstage during the Ceremony. None of the test subjects lost weight over a period of one hour. The silver-colored human spotlights (Jim Bredt and Katrina Rosenberg) illuminate the proceedings. Photo: Kees Moeliker.



Nobel Laureates Rich Roberts (wearing hat), Dudley Herschbach and William Lipscomb perform a tribute to the 2004 Ig Nobel Physics Prize winners. The winners had published a research paper elucidating certain aspects of the dynamics of hula hooping. The image is from the official documentary video of the Ig Nobel Prize ceremony.



Physics Prize co-winner Michael Turvey explains certain aspects of the dynamics of hula hooping, at the Ig Informal Lectures at MIT, on the afternoon of the day after the day after the ceremony. Photo: Robin Abrahams.



The Ig Informal Lectures featured not only most of the new winners, but also two special guests: Professor Massimo Marcone of the University of Guelph and Kees Moeliker of Natuurmuseum Rotterdam. Here Marcone is seen serving luwak (which is also sometimes spelled "luak") coffee to Moeliker. Marcone explained his research on the chemical constituents of luwak coffee -- coffee made from beans that were eaten and then excreted by the bobcat-like animal that is native to certain parts of Indonesia. (Luwak coffee was the subject of the 1995 Ig Nobel Nutrition Prize.) Moeliker, the 2003 Ig Nobel Biology Prize winner, returned to the Ig Nobel Ceremony and the Ig Informal Lectures, to further explain his research on homosexual necrophilia in the mallard duck. Moeliker also took many of the photographs that appear in this issue of *AIR*. Photo: Robin Abrahams.

The winners and the Nobel Laureates gather at center stage at the conclusion of the Ceremony. Photo: Eric Workman.

