



The Barmaid's Brain: And Other Strange Tales from Science

By Jay Ingram

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Here are twenty-one unexpected and fascinating tales of science's stranger facts and episodes—from why we laugh, to why moths fly to the light, to how slinging drinks affects both memory and perception in a barmaid's brain (for the better!).

Best-selling author and media personality Jay Ingram offers investigations from the very edges of science that evoke the impressive breadth of the scientific mind and demonstrate how science works. Ingram explores how science adds to a re-examination of history with startling new theories about the Salem witches and a psychiatric profile of Joan of Arc. He describes remarkable battles—from the parasitic nastiness of cowbirds to the microscopic viciousness of bacteriophages. And he lets us in on some of the odder concerns of scientists: Will we be able to build a ladder attaching earth to an orbiting satellite? Is it possible that early humans spent their lives in water instead of on land?

Surprising, witty, and always edifying, *The Barmaid's Brain* serves up a splendid cocktail of fact, theory, and anecdote guaranteed to entertain and stimulate.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

How can a waitress's brain allow her to remember every drink order at a table but be unable to know that the surface of beer in a tilted glass remains horizontal? Are the earliest human ancestors primates or aquatic mammals? Can mutant genes ever be beneficial? Canadian science writer Ingram (*The Science of Everyday Life, etc.*) examines these and other mysteries in this lively collection. He shows that science most often does not arrive at its conclusions through any straightforward method of hypothesis and experimentation. Instead, science involves a series of fits and starts as it probes the human psyche, the world of microbes and electrons, and the behavior of animals, often suggesting along the way different answers to the same question. For example, some scientists contend that male moths are attracted to candles because the infrared radiation of the burning wick "feels" similar to the infrared radiation that female moths produce in their sexual pheromone. Other scientists argue that once upon a time moths used moonlight to guide their nocturnal flights and that now, confusing porch lights with moonlight, they naturally fly to the first glow they see. In a story about microbiology, Ingram explains how being a carrier for cystic fibrosis—that is, having a mutant gene—may offer protection against cholera in the same way that being a carrier for sickle cell anemia provides protection against malaria. Finally, he discusses the "aquatic ape" theory of evolution, which holds that our lack of body hair, our subcutaneous fat and our ability to hold our breath argue for a marine, rather than a terrestrial, evolutionary ancestry. In these humorous and winning tales, Ingram displays a genuine wonder for the world around him; pop science fans will enjoy following these entertaining investigations. (Oct.)

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From [Booklist](#)

This hugely entertaining collection of popular-science essays is sure to appeal to fans of Oliver Sacks, Stephen Jay Gould, and Lewis Thomas. Like those best-selling authors, Ingram, a veteran science writer and television host (he anchors the world's first daily, science-based television show), combines snappy writing with interesting and unusual science. Here, among others, are stories about the nature of laughter; perpetual-motion machines; optical illusions (with, incidentally, a proposal concerning sea monsters); the phenomenon of simultaneous discovery; and a possible scientific explanation for the curious behavior that provoked the Salem witch trials. Ingram is an accomplished writer—an earlier book won a Canadian Science Writers Book Award--and fans of science books that spotlight the offbeat, the unusual, and the colorful will flock to this title. A must for science collections. *David Pitt*

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Review

"It is hard to imagine that there is any reader out there who will not find something in this book to capture his interest and teach him something he did not already know."--*Washington Times*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Carman Robertson:

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have far more or little spare time? Yep, you can

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