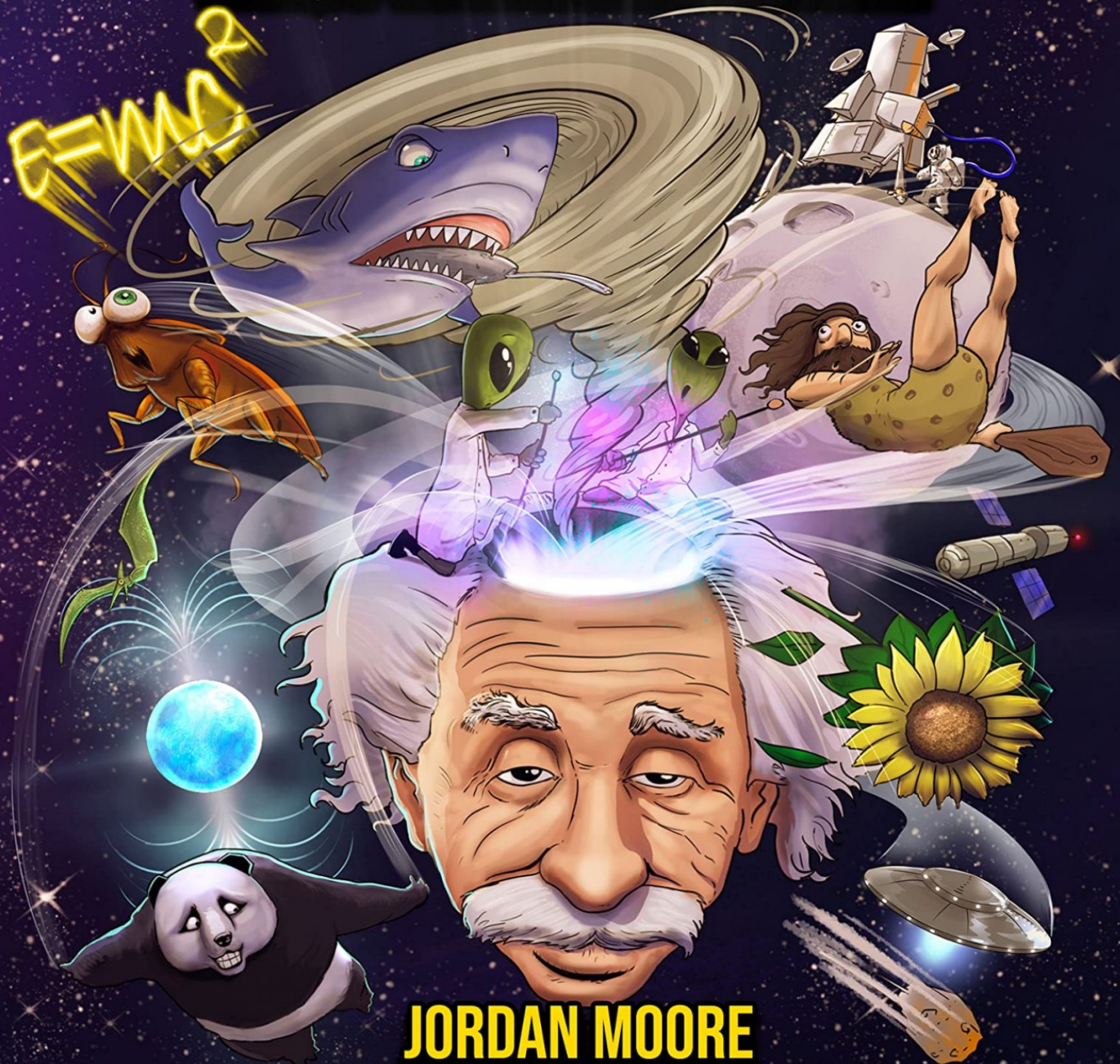


# INTERESTING FACTS FOR **CURIOUS MINDS**

1572 RANDOM BUT MIND-BLOWING FACTS ABOUT HISTORY,  
SCIENCE, POP CULTURE AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN



**JORDAN MOORE**

# **Interesting Facts For Curious Minds**

1572 RANDOM BUT MIND-BLOWING FACTS  
ABOUT HISTORY, SCIENCE,  
POP CULTURE AND EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN

JORDAN MOORE

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## INTRODUCTION

If you're reading this, you're likely the kind of person who enjoys pondering some of the more obscure facts about our world. Maybe you've wondered how some seemingly unmedical things, such as alligator dung, became medical prescriptions.

Or perhaps you've wondered how marriage became the institution that it is today?

And maybe you've considered how crypto currency began, or how it works?

All of these questions, and many, many more are covered here in *Interesting Facts for Curious Minds: 1,572 Random, But Mind-Blowing, Facts About History, Science, Pop Culture, and Everything in Between*.

As the title indicates, this book takes you on a fun-filled odyssey through just about every nook and cranny of this planet, and far beyond, to bring you 1,572 factoids that will make you scratch your head and give you some fodder to impress your friends and family at your next gathering.

This book is divided into 63 chapters according to the subject matter, with 25 factoids per chapter. The book is written in a way that allows you to choose how it can be read. You can read it from cover to cover, or you can move back and forth, picking the chapters that interest you the most.

And as noted earlier, this book is a great conversation piece for parties and get-togethers. You can use *Interesting Facts* for friendly quizzes or just to break the ice, and it's also a good tool to learn a thing or two about your friends and family. Maybe you don't know the difference between an igneous and metamorphic rock, but by reading *Interesting Facts* with your best friend, you just learned that she's a geological whiz.

There are nearly unlimited options for what you can do with *Interesting Facts* and countless hours you'll spend having fun with this book. So, sit

back and get ready to learn 1,572 of the most interesting - and sometimes  
strangest - facts that are known to humanity!



# THE WILD WORLD OF MUSICAL INSTRUMENTS



The harmonica is the world's top-selling instrument, with about three million of the free-reed wind instruments sold globally each year. Its popularity is based on the fact that it is small, lightweight and affordable.

The kazoo is often a person's first musical instrument. An American original, the kazoo is likely derived from the eunuch flute, which is held horizontally while the kazoo is played vertically.

Spoons have been used as musical instruments for centuries. Former UB40 singer Duncan Campbell was once a registered spoon player with the United Kingdom's Musician's Union.

A luthier is a person who makes a string instrument that has a neck and a sound box, which includes members of the violin family, guitars, banjos, and even the 42-string Pikasso guitar with four necks, two sound holes and 42 strings.

Benjamin Franklin invented a lot of devices, but music lovers probably think his coolest invention was the glass harmonica (aka armonica). Invented by Franklin in 1761, the glass harmonica is a series of glass bowls arranged horizontally in graduated size (larger to smaller) that produce music through friction.

Equine jaw bones make popular percussion instruments in some parts of Latin America. Known as the Quijada or Charrasca in Spanish, or simply the jawbone in English, the instrument was originally brought to the Americas by African slaves.

With an estimated price of more than \$20 million, the Messiah Stradivarius is the most expensive violin to ever exist. It was crafted in 1716 by [Antonio Stradivari](#), a world-renowned maker of the best violins in the world. Stradivari created the Messiah during his golden period, and it stayed in his shop until he died in 1737. Violinists do not play with it as much, hence its relatively new condition.

The Earth Harp is the longest stringed instrument in the world. Invented by William Close, the Earth Harp's strings extend up to 291.71 m (957 ft 0.6 in) and is installed in different locations that have optimal acoustics.

The “world’s smallest violin” is a real thing! Venezuelan luthier and violinist Baltazar Monaca performed Vivaldi’s “Violin Concerto in A Minor” on a three-inch violin in 2014.

*The Guinness World Book of Records* considers the Great Stalacpipe Organ in the Luray Caverns of Virginia to be the largest musical instrument in the world. The organ was first constructed by Leland W. Sprinkle in 1956 and covers 3.5 acres of the caverns.

The harpsicord and piano may look like similar instruments, but they’re actually in different instrument classes. The harpsicord functions by the strings being plucked, like other stringed instruments, while the piano works by hammers hitting the strings, making it a percussion instrument.

If you ever watch the 1989 post-apocalyptic B-film, *Cyborg*, you'll notice many of the characters are named after musical instruments. There's the hero, Gibson Rickenbacker (Gibson guitars), the antagonist, Fender Tremolo (Fender guitars), and the cyborg, Pearl Prophet (Pearl drums).

The popular instrument known as the Jew's harp is neither a harp nor associated with Jewish people. It originated in 3rd century BCE China and although it's plucked like a harp, it's played in the mouth.

The Aztecs of Mexico loved music and human sacrifice, mixing the two in elaborate rituals. Death whistles were musical instruments carved out of different substances into the shape of human skulls that were used by priests during human sacrifice rituals.

Before the record player/phonograph became affordable and popular in the 1930s, anyone who was anyone had a player piano, or pianola, in their home. Player pianos played programmed music on paper or metallic rolls.

Clapperless cowbells are common in modern Latin music and can be heard in pop music from around the world by musicians who "want more cowbells." They are played by simply beating them with a drumstick.

The theremin is a musical instrument that is played without physical contact. Invented by Russian Leon Theremin in 1919, the theremin is played by moving one's hands around and between two metal antennas.

The sistrum was a hand-held percussion instrument that was popular in ancient Egyptian religious rituals. Music was made by simply shaking the sistrum, which rattled the metal rings that hung on it.

A typical piano has over 120,000 parts, of which more than 10,000 of these move. Pianos also have more than 230 strings and 88 keys, making them one of the most complex instruments in the modern world.

Late Nirvana's front man, Kurt Cobain's acoustic-electric 1959 Martin D-18E sold for \$6.1 million at an auction in 2020, making it the most expensive guitar ever sold.

American engineer Robert Moog and his 1964 invention, the Moog synthesizer, changed popular music forever. The Moog synthesizer was groundbreaking because when it became available to the public in 1965, it became the world's first commercial synthesizer. It was used in the Beatles' album "Abbey Road" in 1969.

If you're a fan of the film *Star Wars: A New Hope*, then you certainly remember the scene at the Mos Eisley cantina. The band actually had a name, Figrin D'An and the Modal Nodes, and the clarinet-looking instrument some of them were playing is known as a "kloo horn."

One of the oldest stringed instruments ever discovered is the "bull harp" or "bull-headed lyre." It was discovered in the ruins of the ancient Mesopotamian city of Ur (modern Iraq) and is believed to have been made sometime between 2,550 and 2,450 BCE.

Bucket drumming—simply playing the drums on one or more plastic buckets—has become popular in urban landscapes around the world. New Yorker Larry Wright is often credited with starting the modern music trend in 1990 when he was around 13.

You've probably heard a musical saw but didn't know it. A musical saw is simply a flexible handsaw that is held between the knees and played with a bow.

## ECCENTRIC DICTATORS

In 1974, Spanish artist Salvador Dali gave to the Romanian dictator, Nicolae Ceaușescu, a scepter that he had made. The dictator treasured the gift, but most people at the time thought, and still do, that the clever artist was trolling the clueless autocrat.

Adolf Hitler was a vegetarian in his later years and near the end of his life ate only mashed potatoes and clear broth. The reasons for the dictator's dietary choices remain a mystery.

Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin was as brutal as they get, and also very paranoid. He was so paranoid that he had his scientists examine people's feces, believing he could determine their loyalty from it! During a visit by Mao ZeTong, he had his scientists examine Mao's feces to judge what mood he was in....

From 2005 to 2013 Mahmoud Ahmadinejad was president of Iran, but his first love was traffic. The tough-talking dictator actually earned a PhD in civil engineering and traffic transportation planning in 1997.

South Sudan's dictator, Salva Kiir Mayardit, was given a black Stetson by US President George W. Bush in 2006. Kiir Mayardit loved the gift so much that he bought a large collection so he's never without one.

Haitian dictator, François "Papa Doc" Duvalier (1907-1971) claimed to have cursed American President John F. Kennedy after he withdrew American support for him. Duvalier said he made a Voodoo doll of Kennedy and stuck it 2,222 times with a needle!

Over four short years, from 1975 to 1979, Pol Pot and the Khmer Rouge systematically exterminated up to 3 million people. The people of Cambodia had to live in fear, knowing that they might be the next ones dragged out to the Killing Fields. The chances of being chosen were indeed high – by the end of the massacre, the Khmer Rouge had wiped out nearly 25 percent of the population.

Belarus strongman Alexander Lukashenko is known for his love of hockey, his fashion sense, and his belief in the right to bear arms. He had a custom-made golden pistol made for his son, who was five at the time.

Kim Jong-Un of North Korea is reportedly a heavy drinker who has spent more than \$30 million a year on booze. He is said to throw large parties but is also quite a heavy drinker.

Mobutu Sese Seko Kuku Ngbendu Wa Za Banga did a lot of strange things when he ruled the Democratic Republic of the Congo (from 1971 to 1997 it was known as Zaire). One of the strangest was forcing the national TV news cast to depict him descending from the clouds in the opening credits.

Cuban dictator Fidel Castro was a pragmatic leader. One of his best-known quotes is, “A revolution is not a bed of roses.”

Saddam Hussein was never afraid to tell people how he felt. In 1981, just after the Iran-Iraq War began, Hussein ordered a 1940 pamphlet that his uncle wrote, titled “Three Whom God Should Not Have Created: Persians, Jews, and Flies,” to be republished and distributed in schools.

Although a hardcore communist, North Korean dictator Kim Jong-Il (1941-2011) enjoyed the good life. For example, he once traveled by train across Russia and dined daily on lobster, which he ate with silver chopsticks.

Joseph Stalin was actually born Ioseb Besarionis dze Jughashvili. When he moved from his native Georgia (the country, not the state) to Russia to embark on his revolutionary career, he changed it to the cooler-sounding Russian name, Joseph Stalin, which means “steel.”

In 1997, Saddam Hussein supposedly had a Quran written in his blood to celebrate his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. The book is known as the

## *Blood Quran.*

Before inheriting the presidency/dictatorship of Syria when his father died in 2000, Bashar al-Assad led a rather unassuming life. He was an ophthalmologist in London before his older brother Bassel died, making him the heir apparent to the presidency.

Chinese dictator Mao Zedong never wanted his people to be too educated. He once said, "To read too many books is harmful."

Idi Amin ruled Uganda with an iron fist from January 25, 1971, before being deposed on April 11, 1979. In that relatively short time, he did a lot of bizarre things, but one of the funniest was claiming to be the "[uncrowned king of Scotland](#)."

When "Papa Doc" Duvalier died in 1971, the rule was passed to his son, Jean-Claude Duvalier. The younger Duvalier was just as brutal as his dad, but he never quite got the same amount of respect, earning the nickname "Baby Doc."

Most World War II dictators had nicknames that are often translated into English as "leader." Hitler was Führer, Stalin was Vozhd, and Benito Mussolini of Italy was Duce.

Panama may be a small country, but Manuel Noriega was able to build a personal fortune of \$300 million as its dictator from August 12, 1983, to December 20, 1989. He built the fortune through drug smuggling, CIA contracts, bribes, money laundering, and fraud.

Late Libyan dictator Muammar Gaddafi (1942-2011) was about as eccentric as you can get. His bodyguards were all females, he only stayed on the first floor of motels, and he often took his bulletproof Bedouin tent with him.

Stalin was said to routinely humiliate his subordinates and advisors. His successor as ruler of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev, even claimed that Stalin made him perform a traditional Ukrainian dance for a small gathering.

Francisco Macias Nguema managed to anger plenty of people in Equatorial Guinea with his outlandish ideas and policies from 1968 until he was removed in 1979. Perhaps the strangest thing he did was ban all boats and fishing in the country.

Idi Amin was no philosopher, but he was known to offer some good advice. He was quoted as saying, “You cannot run faster than a bullet.”



## FROM CROESUS TO CRYPTO

Paper money was invented in China's Song Dynasty in the 11th century CE. Despite its widespread use at the time, no samples of Song paper money exist today.

Although the US Federal Reserve was started by the government and is the country's tax-exempt central bank, its 12 bank branches have been cited as "independent, privately owned and locally controlled corporations" by the courts.

The *deben* was the unit ancient Egyptians used for measuring weight. Although not a true currency, the deben was a standardized measure of precious metals.

The inventor/developer of Bitcoin is believed to be a Japanese man named Satoshi Nakamoto. Many believe Nakamoto is actually a group of developers. So why has the anonymous Satoshi Nakamoto never come forward? Gyorfi believes the Bitcoin founder has remained in the shadows so that the digital currency is never connected to one person, to uphold it as a decentralized system in which no single person or group has control.

The US dollar is the reserve currency of most nations and the official currency of several independent, non-US countries. Panama, Ecuador, El Salvador, the Marshall Islands, the Republic of Palau, and the Democratic Republic of Timor-Leste all use Uncle Sam's dollars.

On June 28, 2021, El Salvador became the first nation in the world to make Bitcoin legal tender. Bitcoin is now accepted at Salvadoran retail stores and for taxes.

As of March 2022, Elon Musk was the richest person in the world, worth more than \$268 billion. Not bad for a nerd from South Africa!

More than 20 countries use a dollar as their currency, including Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the US. A thaler is one of the large silver coins minted in the states and territories of the Holy Roman Empire and the Habsburg monarchy during the Early Modern period. A thaler size silver coin has a diameter of about 40 mm and a weight of about 25 to 30 grams. It's believed that the use of the word began in Germany in the 1500s with coins known as the *thaler*.

You may find it hard to believe, but inflation was a problem in the Roman Empire. The debasement of the silver *denarius* coin, the Antonine plague (CE 165-175), and other factors led to an incredible inflation rate of 15,000% between CE 200 and 300.

When the “debt ceiling” was first created by the US Congress in 1917, it was \$11.5 billion. It's now nearly \$31 trillion!

King Croesus of Lydia (ruled ca. 560-540s BCE) is believed to have been the richest man in the world in his time. Croesus acquired his wealth by mining the silver-gold alloy known as electrum near the city of Sardis.

In November 2008, Zimbabwe's economy hit 6.5 sextillion percent inflation. The worst of the inflation occurred in November 2008 with a rate estimated at 79,600,000,000% per month, with the year-over-year inflation rate reaching an astounding 89.7 sextillion percent, leading to the abandonment of the currency.

In economics and finance, *fiat* is a term used to describe money that isn't backed by gold, silver, or other commodities. Fiat is a Latin term that means “let it be done.”

Coin currency began in Lydia in the late 7th century BCE. The earliest coins were made of the gold-silver alloy, electrum.

The new shekel replaced Israel's previous currency, the Israeli shekel, in 1986. The term “shekel” is quite ancient, though, being

used in the Near East in the 2nd millennium BCE as a measure of weight.

A troy ounce - which is used to weigh gold, silver, and other precious metals - measures 31.1 grams. A standard ounce weighs 28.3 grams.

A cryptocurrency is any decentralized, digital money/currency that uses cryptography to protect transactions and prevent fraud. Bitcoin became the world's first cryptocurrency in 2009, and now cryptocurrencies, as they're called, are a dime - or should I say, a Bitcoin - a dozen.

According to the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation FDIC, one in 12 Americans is "unbanked," or they have no bank account. Note that home to 225 million adults without an account, China has the world's largest non-banking population, followed by India (190 million), Pakistan (100 million), and Indonesia (95 million)

Financial analyst and TV personality, Jim Cramer, proclaimed in February 2000 that there were ten stocks everyone should own. By 2009 all of those were either out of business or a fraction of their 2000 value.

The British pound, or pound sterling, is the world's oldest currency still in use. It was adopted more than 1,200 years ago and remains strong, as the fourth-most traded currency.

If you ever come across some gold or silver in your grandma's attic, you may have to have it metallurgically assayed. An *assay* is a chemical analysis of precious metal to determine its quality.

Midas was the ruler of the Anatolian Kingdom of Phrygia from about 738 to 696 BCE. Although he was wealthy, the idea that everything he touched turned to gold was added much later by the Roman poet Ovid (43 BCE-CE 17/18).

“Helicopter money” is a term used when central banks inject money directly into an economy to prevent a recession. This is achieved by funding programs, debt relief, or stimulus payments.

Most economists and historians believe the Amsterdam Stock Exchange was the first stock exchange in the world. Starting in 1602, it became part of the Euronext Exchange in 2000. Euronext N.V. is a pan-European bourse that offers various trading and post-trade services. Traded assets include regulated equities, exchange-traded funds, warrants and certificates, bonds, derivatives, commodities, foreign exchange as well as indices.

The US’s gold bullion depository is held in a vault on a 42-acre complex next to the army base, Fort Knox, Kentucky. It houses more than 147.3 million troy ounces of gold.