

## In the Final Analysis

**“I am so glad I listened today. I ponder these issues all the time.”**

— “Steve,” *posting a comment to lawandthemultiverse.com*

Okay. I’ll admit it. I’m one of those people—an NPR guy. (NPR being National Public Radio; a more global analog is BBC World News, which I tend to seek out as well.) I usually listen to “Morning Edition” on the way to work and “All Things Considered” on the way home. For the weekend? I get regular doses of “On the Media” and “Wait, Wait, Don’t Tell Me.” If you see me on an airplane with headphones stuffed in my ears, chances are really good that I’m listening to “Car Talk.”

While radio broadcasting is generally considered the least of the major media, lacking the depth of the printed word, the clinical immediacy of television, and the personalization of the Internet, NPR is uniquely immersive and engaging. When I listen to “All Things Considered,” I sense the frustration in the Middle East just a little bit better; I feel the wrenching tragedy in Japan just a little bit deeper. And I understand a lot of things a good bit better.

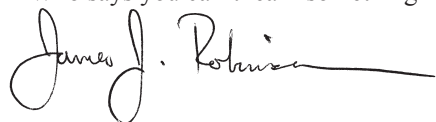
Just as NPR can add depth and dimension to events of great significance, it can artfully elevate the trivial to the sublime. For example, yesterday’s evening slog home through yet another construction zone was enlivened with the story of a web site started by a pair of recently minted St. Louis attorneys, James Daily and Ryan Davidson. The web site is Law and the Multiverse. What is it? Here’s what the authors say: “If there’s one thing comic book nerds like doing it’s over-thinking the smallest details. Here we turn our attention to the hypothetical legal ramifications of comic book tropes, characters, and powers. Just a few examples: Are mutants a protected class? Who foots the bill when a hero damages property while fighting a villain? What happens legally when a character comes back from the dead?” These guys play it straight up. In discussing the use of a teenage sidekick (c.f., Robin), they observe that “child endangerment laws should be a concern for any superhero with a minor sidekick. Absent pretty extraordinary (e.g. Batman-level) evidence of competence, safety measures, and general carefulness, fighting violent crime is probably dangerous enough to qualify as endangerment.”

Neat, huh?

Of course, when I indulge my inner geek for something fantastical, I don’t give thought to the legal ramifications of what a hero or villain just did. Rather, I think about the scientific underpinning and engineering practicality. Is that possible? Could it be possible in the not-too-distant future? Or, is it just too much “com’on”? Most especially, surprise, I think about materials science and engineering. . . . How fanciful is the mineral unobtainium in Avatar (a natural room-temperature superconductor)? How much disbelief am I suspending with the home modeled-and-manufactured gold-titanium armor in Iron Man? How much forget-about-it is there with the “mimetic polyalloy” liquid metal robot in Terminator 2? Spiderman’s webbing: Really? Captain America’s shield: Well, maybe.

In my perfect world, we’d have a web site that takes materials science fiction and frames it with the same by-the-book treatment that the lawyers provide. It would take Green Lantern’s power ring and answer questions about stress and strain, environmental degradation, thermal management, weight, . . . you get the idea. Not only would such a site be a blast, it might trigger the imaginations of young people. Said a Law and the Multiverse poster, “I heard about you on NPR yesterday and promptly forwarded you [sic] blog to our high school’s mock trial team. This sounds like an excellent way to get the youngsters interested in a law career.”

Who says you can’t learn something from a lawyer?



James J. Robinson  
Publisher

# JOM

184 Thorn Hill Road,  
Warrendale, PA 15086, USA

Telephone: (724) 776-9000

Fax: (724) 776-3770

Web: [www.tms.org/jom.html](http://www.tms.org/jom.html)

E-Mail: [jom@tms.org](mailto:jom@tms.org)

## PUBLISHER

James J. Robinson

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*JOM* (ISSN 1047-4838) is published monthly by Springer Sciences & Business Media, LLC (Springer) 233 Spring St., New York, NY 10013 in cooperation with The Minerals, Metals & Materials Society (TMS).

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