

**In the  
Final  
Analysis**

**“In short, anyone who told you that you would someday be able to make some significant contribution to physics played a cruel trick on you, a cruel trick indeed. Any questions? Of course not. I weep for the future of science; now if you’ll excuse me, the latest issue of *Batman* is out.”**

— Sheldon addressing students on *The Big Bang Theory*

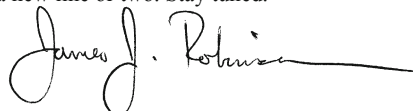
One of my favorite television programs is *The Big Bang Theory*, a comedy centered on the friendships, rivalries, and romances of a cadre of brilliant but nerdy science or engineering professionals. I know of no other program where Higgs Boson particles, comic books, Archimedes, looking for funding, video games, and x-ray diffraction are tossed around so conversationally, knowingly, and amusingly. Only on this show would someone shouting “Geology isn’t a real science!” incite a barrage in a paintball skirmish. With a nudge and a wink (and considerable broad comedy), the show humanizes the science and engineering professions; honestly, it is refreshing to see television characters who are not police officers, lawyers, physicians, or entertainment industry insiders. And the most amazing thing about *The Big Bang Theory* is that it is one of the most-watched shows on television. It gives me hope for our species!

Big Bang always puts me in a pleasantly goofy frame of mind, which many of you likely realize is pretty much my standard operating condition. If truth be told, “Goofy” is one of five settings that I turn my Editorial-Writing Dial to when crafting an IN THE FINAL ANALYSIS. . . . Before you ask, the other four are “2. Pompous Windbag” (very natural for me), “3. I-Hope-They-Don’t-Catch-Me-Being-Over-My-Head-with-the-Analysis” (the constant danger for someone writing editorials for a respectable technical journal), “4. Crank Something Out Fast/It Doesn’t Have to Be Good” (the mode that I’m usually working with), and “5. Comingle All of the Above” (the editorial equivalent of driving with the tachometer buried in the red). Having just watched a string of Big Bang episodes, I think that I’ll stick with the “1. Goofy” setting for this month’s column.

To wit: Among the regulars on *The Big Bang Theory*, we have a suite of Ph.D.s—theoretical physicist Sheldon, experimental physicist Leonard, astrophysicist Rajesh, microbiologist Bernadette, and neurobiologist Amy. Representing the M.S. community, we have aerospace engineer Howard. And, in the Cheesecake Factory waitress category, we have Penny. Employed at Caltech and given to wearing superhero tee-shirts, scary-smart Sheldon Cooper is easily my favorite character, having started college after fifth grade at the age of 11 and receiving his first Ph.D. at 16. He greatly admires his own intellect, sees himself as a future Nobel Prize winner, is officious in the extreme, has no interpersonal filters, and generally lacks empathy and humility, although he is completely guileless. Many of his comments for the science set are quite chortlesome. Four of my favorites that require no context:

- “Engineering—where the semi-skilled laborers execute the vision of those who think and dream. Hello Oompa-Loompas of science.”
- “A neutron walks into a bar and asks how much for a drink. The bartender replies, ‘For you, no charge.’”
- “Apparently you can’t hack into a government supercomputer and then try to buy uranium without the Department of Homeland Security tattling to your mother.”
- “You tell people I’m a rocket scientist?! . . . My God! Why don’t you just tell them I’m a toll taker at the Golden Gate Bridge! Rocket scientist, how humiliating!”

On next week’s episode, Stephen Hawking will be making a guest appearance to meet personally with Sheldon. I suspect that I will soon be expanding my list of Sheldonisms with a new line or two. Stay tuned.



James J. Robinson  
Publisher

# JOM

184 Thorn Hill Road,  
Warrendale, PA 15086, USA

Telephone: (724) 776-9000  
Fax: (724) 776-3770  
Web: [jom.tms.org](http://jom.tms.org)  
E-Mail: [jom@tms.org](mailto:jom@tms.org)

#### PUBLISHER

James J. Robinson

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