

## Rock, Paper, Scissors, Lizard, Spock

By Robert Payne  
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Greetings, fellow science enthusiasts. Dr. Sheldon Cooper here. Of *The Big Bang Theory* fame. B.S., M.S., Ph.D., Sc.D. – OMG. (Ahem.)

I am reporting to you – under some duress from my friends – on the most recent winners of the Ig® Nobel Awards. The Ig® Nobel Awards is a playful set of “science” awards put on at Harvard University for research that, by their own estimation, better deserved to be left unexplored. What a colossal waste of resources by an institution of higher education, even one that also champions the liberal arts. And that cheap play on words – “IgNobel/Ignoble/Nobel” prize – is probably something a bunch of fraternity brothers came up with on 2-for-1 night at the Cheesecake Factory on a used paper napkin. Now, you may disagree with me, but I’m a very smart man. Don’t you think if I were wrong, I’d know it?

Oh, well. Here goes. The “Medicine” prize went to researchers who found people make better decisions about some kinds of things – but worse decisions about other kinds of things – when they have a strong urge to urinate. Oh, for goodness sake. You could say the same thing about waiting for hot chocolate to cool off. Yes, this was published in *Neurology and Urodynamics*, an otherwise respectable journal, according to my girl friend who’s really just a friend but happens to be a girl. Personally, I think they’d be more intellectually honest by calling themselves the “*Pee-Brain Monthly*,” but that’s just me.

You’d be better off deciding by our classic game of Rock, Paper, Scissors, Lizard, Spock. You know: Scissors cuts paper; paper covers rock; rock crushes lizard; lizard poisons Spock; Spock smashes scissors; scissors decapitate lizard; lizard eats paper; paper disproves Spock; Spock vaporizes rock; and, yes, as it always has been, rock crushes scissors.

The “Biology” prize is even worse. Some researcher – please take note of my air quotes here – found that a certain kind of Australian beetle often mistakes short, stubby beer bottles for females of its own kind during mating. But the work is clearly second class. It doesn’t explain when the male developed his “first clue” that something was “amiss” (note my own play on words – bazinga). We don’t know what he thought after noting the coital anomaly (“hmmm . . . *that’s* different”). The Darwinian notion of survival of the fittest and smartest is clearly under siege here, but we wait in vain for an explanation. We might just as well be bound to a chair by burglars with an endless loop of “Jeopardy” music droning on in the background. It also begs the burning question: Would teensy eyeglasses have made a difference? Furthermore, we are left wondering whether playing the ruttin’ fool to this deception in the name of Science soured him on future encounters with female coleoptera. My mother says when we deceive for personal gain, we make Jesus cry.

The “Mathematics” prize was awarded to a number individuals, such as Harold Camping, who predicted the imminent End of the World, based on mathematical calculations. I’m told this award represents some kind of “sarcasm.” But I for one applaud their foresight. True, one shouldn’t take in others by unsupportable mathematics, designed to prey on the gullible and the lonely. However, the alternative of thinking ahead would be to think backwards, and that’s just plain remembering. Yes, there is indeed a fine line between being visionary or just plain wrong. Unfortunately, you have to be a visionary to see it.

As for the “Chemistry” prize, it was wasted on a determination of the ideal density of airborne wasabi (a pungent cabbage, if you will) in a “smell” alarm to awaken people hard of hearing. A patent application was filed on this in 2009, no less.

My goodness, think of the germs that would fester in only a few hours! Frankly, it would be more hygienic if a plague-infested gibbon sneezed on your face. Provided he could tell the proper time. Just thinking about it gives me more nervous ticks than a Lyme Disease research lab. It’ll never reach the market though. It has as much chance of becoming a product as the Hubble Telescope has of finding that -- at the center of each black hole – there’s a little man with a flashlight trying to find the circuit breaker.

I was told these were science awards, but I see I’ve been deceived, yet again. The mayor of Vilnius in Lithuania received the “Peace” prize for solving the problem of illegally parked luxury cars. He ordered them to be run over by a former Soviet tank, thus continuing the Lithuanian public’s endearment with their former Russian masters. This reminds me of one of my classic pranks while going for my first doctorate, during puberty. Let’s just say the reconstruction at the physics lab took almost two years, but it’s finally been paid off. Now, you may think that I was insane, but I wasn’t. My mother had me tested.

Oh, I could go on, but you can read it all for yourself online by inputting “Ig Nobel.” Assuming you spell it correctly (air quotes).

As a side note, I understand it is a social construct to wish each of you a felicitous new year at the beginning of January. I however prefer the Vulcan ritualistic salutation. Live Long and Prosper. – *Dr. Sheldon Cooper, B.S., M.S., Ph.D., Sc.D.*