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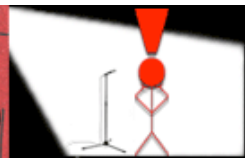
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**The 300-Million-Dollar Battery**

*By Thomas Eldredge*

Electrons are very energetic particles. They carry a negative charge and move around at nearly the speed of light. Depending on what material they are moving through, electrons can perform a number of useful and interesting tasks. Most notably, electrons can be used in various ways to create and manipulate motion, light, and sound. However useful electrons may be under the right circumstances, they are very negative and tend to disagree a great deal. Because of this disagreeable tendency, technology has seen fit to create electron prisons, known as "batteries."

Much like American prisons, electron prisons hold particles that have been charged with being more negative than the average negativity of the surrounding particles. Also like American prisons, the efficiency of an electron prison is rated by the density and negativity of its inmates. Current electron prisons are far less efficient than the highly effective, privately owned and operated prisons that provide America with security, jobs, and a false sense of moral superiority.

The success of the American, privatized prison industry has inspired politicians to try to emulate that success in the field of electron incarceration. Presidential hopeful John McCain has proposed an incentive for private research and development of electron prisons. This incentive takes the form of a 300-million-dollar prize to be awarded for the development of a high-density electron prison capable of

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Electron prisons have an impressive history. Historical evidence of the first attempts at incarcerating electrons was found, appropriately, in Baghdad. The mysterious "Baghdad Battery" is essentially a clay pot with copper and iron electrodes that could be filled with an acidic liquid to start an electrochemical reaction. These ancient devices are over 2000 years old and are postulated to have been used for electroplating and to power the neon signs in Baghdad's ancient red-light district.

The Baghdad Battery remains a historical mystery. If it is indeed a battery as claimed, it would predate the credited discovery of electrochemical energy by 1700 years. Though this abominable possibility exists, it is much more palatable to go with the assumption that Europeans discovered electricity just like they always said they did.

The formal study of electricity began with a man named Luigi Galvani. In 1780, Galvani began poking frogs with various pieces of metal. Through methodical poking and analysis, Galvani found that certain combinations of metal would induce a dead frog to twitch. Though initially thought to be nothing more than a potential culinary novelty, the twitching frogs were actually the first demonstration of electrochemical manipulation, and they paved the way for important advances in prisoner interrogation.

The era of frog poking came to an end when Alessandro Volta developed the "voltaic pile" in 1799. This system was simply a stack of electrochemical cells connected in series to achieve nearly 50 volts. Volta is given broad credit for the invention of the battery, though he never clearly understood the nature of electrochemical reactions.

After this discovery, Volta enjoyed enough name recognition to allow him to retire. He now tours with his own wicked awesome tribute band "Mars Volta."

In 1830, Michael Faraday explained Volta's electrochemical reactions in terms of the corrosion they caused. With Faraday's explanations came the development of more advanced battery systems.

The first batteries were simple, organic, and fairly weak. Modern battery technology utilizes reactions with far more longevity and higher energy levels. The most common battery technologies are lead-acid, nickel-cadmium, nickel-metal hydride, and lithium-ion. Though battery technology has advanced considerably, there is still no technology that will allow us to store electricity on the scale we require for today's energy demands.

The solution to this problem lies in the ingenuity and inventiveness of today's scientists, engineers, and crackpots. The necessity for this invention is clear, and developers are hard at work. Unfortunately, they are not working hard enough or fast enough to satisfy the rest of us, who want that freaking battery like yesterday. Politicians have heard our whining and have taken decisive action.

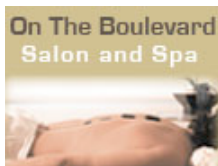
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The initial response was to fund the construction of a time machine, so that after the batteries are finished, they can send them back to yesterday to satisfy voter demand. After sufficient pork-barrel funds were distributed on the time-machine project, attention was shifted to developing the actual batteries. Unfortunately, most politicians are unfamiliar with the principles of engineering, so nearly a million dollars was spent on duct tape, fishnets, and prostitutes before the first prototype was complete.

The first prototype battery was, of course, a prostitute in fishnets duct-taped to the hood of a Rolls Royce. While impressive in form, the function of this battery was not satisfactory. Undeterred by their failure, the politicians went back to the drawing board, which was, of course, a naked prostitute they drew on with licorice-flavored markers.

Though John McCain is a respectable politician, he has no experience with prostitutes whatsoever. This handicap would seem to make him an unlikely candidate to head development of a new battery technology, but McCain chose a radical new route for development, one that did not require prostitutes. McCain's direction for development saves recurring legal and pimping costs, but relies heavily on a very expensive and scarce resource in America. The resource McCain hopes to exploit is called genius.

The going rate for genius in America is around 1 million dollars per idea, and it takes about 300 ideas to ensure at least one of them does not involve prostitutes. McCain's proposal for 300 million dollars for an effective battery is a finely calculated figure. This amount should be sufficient to inspire those who need money for prostitutes to think about something else for a little while.

McCain's proposed 300-million-dollar prize is currently only a proposal. As a proposal, it serves as an economic incentive while costing taxpayers nothing. While it would be great to have an efficient and effective battery, it would be even better if we could get one without paying 300 million dollars for it. McCain knows this, and he knows that once we have our battery, no one will care who made it or if they got paid or not. McCain also knows that the 300-million-dollar prize would almost inevitably end up going to some brilliant foreigner, and nobody likes foreigners with more money than us.

America needs a better battery. John McCain may be able to provide an incentive to build one, but it will take genius and hard work to turn that incentive into real invention. Unfortunately, it probably won't happen any time soon, because in America, "battery" is best known as a natural phenomenon that occurs when folks don't like you.

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