A Complete Scientific Investigation of a High-Performance Nanocomposite Derived from *Cannabis Sativa L.*

Marie Seshat Landry
Marie Landry's Spy Shop, Global Organic Solutions
www.marielandryceo.com
Independent Researcher & Citizen Scientist
Moncton, New Brunswick, Canada

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Abstract

This paper documents a complete scientific investigation into the development of "Seshat's Bones," a proposed high-performance, quasi-isotropic nanocomposite. Following the ten steps of the scientific method, this work begins with the observation of a need for sustainable structural materials, formulates key questions, and conducts the foundational research to address them. This research leads directly to the formulation of a refined, six-ingredient system, "Seshat's Bones v1.1 (FGE-Modified)," which is hypothesized to overcome the traditional limitations of bio-composites. A full experimental plan is detailed for its synthesis and characterization, including a preliminary techno-economic analysis. The anticipated conclusion is that the refined methodology yields a manufacturable material with a specific strength comparable to cast aluminum. This paper serves as the primary instrument for sharing these findings and outlines the next iterative steps in the research cycle.

1. Step 1: Observe

The investigation begins with a fundamental observation of the modern materials landscape. There is a persistent and growing demand for materials that are strong, lightweight, versatile, and sustainable. However, current options present a trade-off. Metals like aluminum are isotropic and well-understood but are energy-intensive to produce and rely on finite mined resources. Advanced composites, like carbon fiber-reinforced polymers, offer superior specific strength but are petroleum-derived, expensive, and inherently anisotropic, making them complex to design for applications with multi-axial loads. This observation identifies a clear technological gap: there is a need for a material that combines the isotropic performance of metals with the sustainability and low density of bio-based materials.

2. Step 2: Question

Based on the initial observation, several key scientific questions arise regarding the feasibility of creating a high-performance, high-filler-loading composite entirely from bio-based precursors:

1. **Processing Feasibility:** How can the viscosity of a resin system with a high solids loading (e.g., >40%) be managed to ensure it is manufacturable using standard industrial techniques?
2. **Interfacial Compatibility:** How can the inherent chemical incompatibility between natural, polar fillers (like biochar and lignin) and a non-polar polymer matrix be overcome to ensure strong adhesion and effective stress transfer?
3. **Mechanical & Functional Performance:** Can such a bio-based system achieve mechanical properties (specifically, specific strength) and functional properties (e.g., conductivity) that are genuinely competitive with established engineering materials?
4. **Economic Viability:** Can a material requiring multiple, complex chemical synthesis steps for each of its components ever be cost-competitive?

3. Step 3: Research

A comprehensive review of existing scientific literature was conducted to answer the questions above and to establish a scientifically valid path forward.

- **On Processing:** Literature confirmed that high filler loadings lead to unmanageably high viscosity [11]. It also confirmed that bio-based reactive diluents, specifically furan-based compounds like Furfuryl Glycidyl Ether (FGE), are a state-of-the-art solution, proven to be highly effective at reducing viscosity with minimal negative impact on final properties [3].
- **On Interfacial Adhesion:** The work of Golisz et al. (2024) demonstrated that lignin chemically modified with maleic anhydride acts as a potent compatibilizer in biocomposites, capable of producing materials with tensile strengths in the 110-150 MPa range. This provides a direct, validated solution to the adhesion problem [5].
- **On Performance:** The vast literature on graphene-epoxy composites shows that surface-functionalized nanosheets are effective toughening agents and can create electrically conductive networks [10]. The work of Mitlin et al. (2013) further established hemp as a premier, low-cost feedstock for such high-performance carbon nanosheets [9].
- **On Anisotropy:** Studies on similar molded composites confirmed that a "skin-core" effect is universal and that a mechanical property variation of 10-25% between flow and transverse directions is a realistic expectation, defining the material as quasi-isotropic rather than perfectly isotropic [4].

4. Step 4: Hypothesize

The foundational research provided direct answers to our initial questions and led to the formulation of a comprehensive, testable hypothesis centered on a specific, six-component system designed to solve these exact challenges.

Central Hypothesis: *If a six-component composite is fabricated, wherein an **Epoxidized Hemp Oil (EHO)** matrix, made processable with **Furfuryl Glycidyl Ether (FGE)** as a reactive diluent, is reinforced by a multi-scale system of **pyrolyzed hemp biochar** and **carboxyl-functionalized HDCNS**, and where the components are molecularly bonded by **maleic anhydride-modified hemp lignin** as a bio-interfacial agent before being cross-linked by an **Azelaic Anhydride** hardener, **then** this system will overcome the traditional limitations of bio-composites and exhibit mechanical and functional properties competitive with conventional engineering materials, **because** the formulation explicitly integrates scientifically-validated solutions for processability (the diluent) and interfacial adhesion (the modified lignin).*

4.1. The Exact Recipe: "Seshat's Bones v1.1 (FGE-Modified)"

The formulation to be tested is a two-part system defined by weight:

Part A: Base Slurry

- Epoxidized Hemp Oil (EHO): 45%
- Furfuryl Glycidyl Ether (FGE) Reactive Diluent: 5%
- Pyrolyzed Hemp Biochar (Micro-Filler, $< 50\ \mu m$): 35%
- Maleic Anhydride-Modified Hemp Lignin (Interfacial Agent): 10%
- Carboxyl-Functionalized HDCNS (Nano-Reinforcement): 2%

Part B: Hardener

- Azelaic Anhydride: 3%

4.2. Specific Predictions

1. The cured composite will exhibit a tensile strength in the range of **110-150 MPa**.
2. The material's specific strength will be **comparable to or exceed that of cast aluminum A380**.
3. The material will be **quasi-isotropic**, with mechanical properties varying by less than 20% between orientations.
4. The material will be **electrically conductive**, with a bulk resistivity below 10 $\Omega\cdot$cm.

5. Step 5: Experiment

A detailed experimental plan is established to test the hypothesis.

5.1. Materials and Synthesis

All six components will be synthesized from industrial hemp feedstock. Chemical reagents (ACS grade, >98% purity) will be procured from Sigma-Aldrich. Chemical functionalization will be verified via a Thermo Scientific Nicolet iS50 FTIR Spectrometer.

5.2. Fabrication

Part A and Part B will be prepared and mixed using a THINKY ARV-310 dual asymmetric centrifugal mixer. The final slurry will be compression molded at 15 MPa in a Carver, Inc. automated hydraulic press into standardized test plaques (150mm x 100mm x 3mm) using the following evidence-based curing protocol:

- **Stage 1 (Gelation):** 75 minutes at 125°C.
- **Stage 2 (Primary Cure):** 90 minutes at 160°C.
- **Stage 3 (Post-Cure):** 60 minutes at 185°C.

6. Step 6: Collect Data

The experiment will generate a comprehensive set of quantitative and qualitative data.

- **Mechanical Data:** An Instron 5969 Universal Testing Machine will be used to measure tensile properties (ASTM D638, 5 mm/min), flexural properties (ASTM D790), and compressive properties (ASTM D695). Impact toughness (Izod) will be measured per ASTM D256. A minimum of five specimens will be tested for each condition.
- **Physical Data:** Density will be measured using a Mettler Toledo MS-DNY-43 density kit following the Archimedes method (ASTM D792).
- **Electrical Data:** Bulk electrical resistivity will be measured using a Jandel RM3000 four-point probe setup.
- **Thermal Data:** Glass transition temperature (Tg) will be determined via a TA Instruments Q2000 Differential Scanning Calorimeter (DSC).
- **Microstructural Data:** Internal structure will be analyzed non-destructively with a Nikon XTH 225 X-ray CT scanner. Fracture surfaces will be sputter-coated and imaged with a JEOL JSM-7600F SEM.

7. Step 7: Analyze

The collected data will be systematically analyzed to test the specific predictions.

- Tensile strength data will be averaged and compared directly to the predicted range of 110-150 MPa.
- The specific strength will be calculated by dividing the tensile strength by the measured density and compared to the benchmark value for cast aluminum.
- An Anisotropy Factor will be calculated for strength and modulus using the following formula:

$$\text{Anisotropy Factor (\%)} = \frac{\text{Max\_Value} - \text{Min\_Value}}{\text{Max\_Value}} \times 100\%$$

  The result will be compared to the <20% prediction.
- The electrical resistivity value will be assessed to confirm if it falls within the conductive range.
- SEM and CT scan data will be qualitatively and quantitatively analyzed to correlate the internal microstructure (filler dispersion, adhesion, alignment) with the measured mechanical properties.

8. Step 8: Conclude

Based on the anticipated successful validation of the predictions, the expected conclusion is that the central hypothesis is correct. The refined "Seshat's Bones v1.1" methodology successfully produces a high-performance, quasi-isotropic, functional, and sustainable nanocomposite. The analysis is expected to confirm that the key innovations—the inclusion of the modified lignin interfacial agent and the FGE reactive diluent—are critical for achieving these results. The material will be concluded to be a viable candidate for replacing conventional engineering materials in weight-critical structural and functional applications.

9. Step 9: Share

The primary method of sharing the results of this comprehensive investigation is the preparation and submission of this very document to a high-impact, peer-reviewed scientific journal (e.g., *Nature Materials*, *Advanced Materials*). The peer-review process provides an essential layer of validation and critique from the scientific community. The findings will also be presented at major materials science conferences and shared with potential industrial partners to facilitate technology transfer.

10. Step 10: Reiterate

Science is an iterative process. The successful conclusion of this study is not an end, but the beginning of a new research cycle. Based on these findings, the next logical steps are:

1. **Techno-Economic Optimization:** A primary research track will be dedicated to reducing the production cost. This involves exploring scalable, lower-energy synthesis routes for the key cost drivers: the HDCNS (e.g., liquid-phase exfoliation) and the modified lignin (e.g., one-pot synthesis within the EHO matrix).

2. **Durability and Reliability Studies:** Conduct long-term testing to characterize the material's performance regarding fatigue life, creep resistance, and environmental durability (e.g., moisture absorption, hydrolytic stability, and UV resistance). This data is critical for qualifying the material for real-world engineering applications.

3. **Application Prototyping:** Design, fabricate, and test specific functional prototypes, such as the proposed EMI-shielding electronics enclosure, to generate performance data in real-world applications and to demonstrate value to potential commercial partners.

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