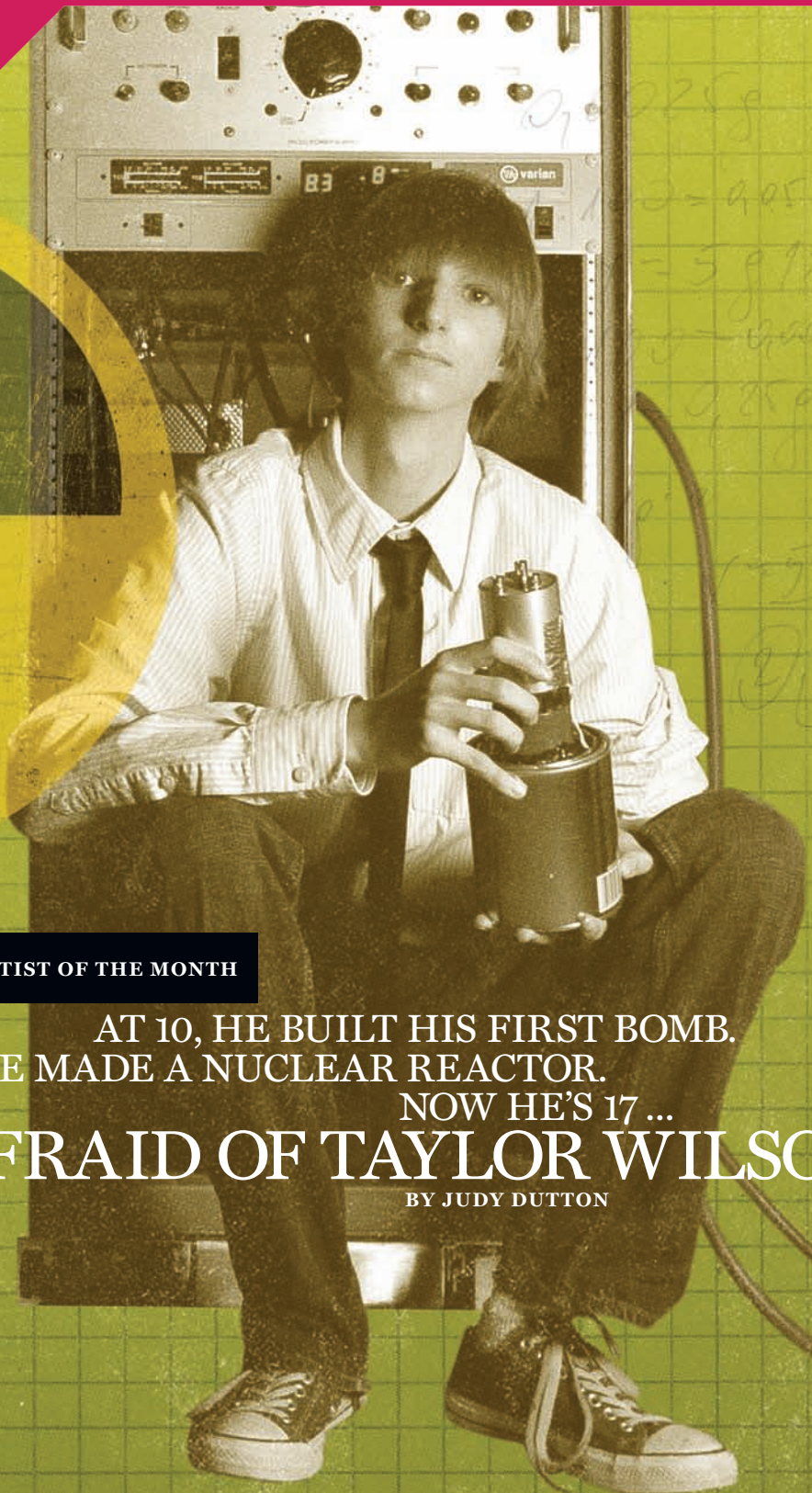


# Left Brain

🧪 SCIENCE | ⚙️ LOGIC | 📐 MATH | ⚖️ REASON | 🏠 ECONOMICS



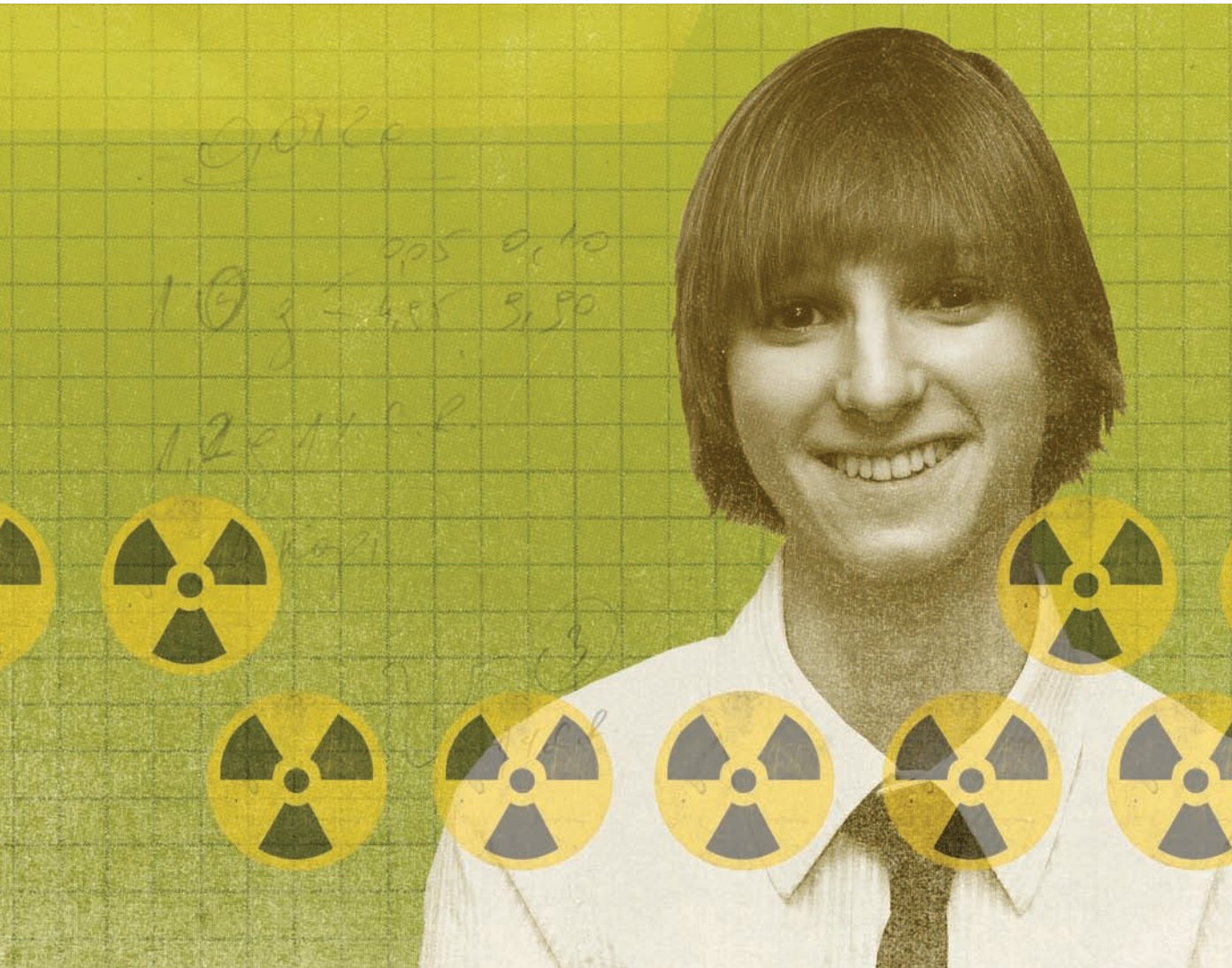
MAD SCIENTIST OF THE MONTH

AT 10, HE BUILT HIS FIRST BOMB.  
AT 14, HE MADE A NUCLEAR REACTOR.

NOW HE'S 17 ...

## WHO'S AFRAID OF TAYLOR WILSON?

BY JUDY DUTTON



# TAYLOR WILSON MAKES PEOPLE NERVOUS.

While his beanpole frame and Justin Bieberesque haircut suggest he's just a harmless kid, his after-school activities paint a far more ominous picture. At age 10, he built his first bomb out of a pill bottle and household chemicals. At 11, he started mining for uranium and buying vials of plutonium on the Internet. At 14, he became the youngest person in the world to build a nuclear fusion reactor. "I'm obsessed with radioactivity. I don't know why," says Wilson in his laid-back drawl. "Possibly because there's power in atoms that you can't see, an unlocked power."

Shouldn't teams in hazmat suits descend on Wilson and shut down his operations before someone gets hurt? On the contrary, there are

people in the government who think that Wilson is key to keeping this country safe. "The Cold War is really when nuclear physicists got their shot, and those people are all retiring," points out one of Wilson's mentors, Ron Phaneuf, a professor of physics at the University of Nevada in Reno. "I think the U.S. Department of Energy is a little concerned that the motivation of young people to get interested in that kind of science has waned. I think that's one of the reasons doors have been opened to Taylor. He's a phenomenon, probably the most brilliant person I've met in my life, and I've met Nobel laureates."

When the U.S. Department of Homeland Security heard about Wilson two years ago, officials invited him to their offices to hear more about his research and determine whether or not it could be applied toward their counterterrorism efforts. Because Wilson was only 15, they weren't expecting much, but Wilson came prepared. After shaking everyone's hands, he announced, "You know your building's radioactive, right?" The pager-sized Geiger counter attached to Wilson's belt was beeping, an indication that the granite surrounding them contained unusually high amounts of uranium—not enough to be harmful, but enough for Wilson to raise a few eyebrows.

"Their own building was radioactive and most didn't know it," Wilson says. "That's when they started to take me really seriously."

## The Young Fusioner

Wilson got his start on Fusor.net, a website where nuclear hobbyists who call themselves "fusioners" fill message boards on topics that would enthrall only the geekiest subset of society, like "So where can I get a deal on deuterium gas?" The goal of every fusioner is to build a reactor that can fuse atoms together, a feat first achieved by scientists in 1934. Ever since, nuclear fusion has been hailed as a potential "clean" energy source, although scientists have yet to figure out how to harness its power. By the time Wilson stumbled across Fusor.net, 30 hobbyists worldwide had managed to produce the reaction; Wilson was determined to become the thirty-first. He started amassing the necessary components, such as a high-voltage power supply (used to run neon signs), a reaction chamber where fusion takes place (typically a hollow stainless steel sphere, like a flagpole ornament), and a vacuum pump to remove air particles from the chamber (often necessary for testing space equipment).

Wilson also funneled money collected from Christmases and birthdays toward buying radioactive items, many of which, to his surprise, were available around town. Smoke detectors, he learned, contain small amounts of a radioactive element called americium, while camping lanterns contain thorium. In antique stores, he found pottery called Fiestaware that was



painted with an orange uranium glaze. Wilson trolled websites such as eBay for an array of nuclear paraphernalia, from radon sniffers to nuclear fuel pellets, and came to own more than 30 Geiger counters of varying strengths and abilities. Most of Wilson's radioactive acquisitions weren't dangerous, given their small quantities. But a few—vials of powdered radium, for example—could be fatal if mishandled, which is why he's never opened them. (Although he's been tempted.)

To expand his collection, Wilson dragged his dad, Kenneth, on long road trips into the New Mexico desert to go prospecting for uranium ore; they returned with boxfuls. Meanwhile, Wilson's growing obsession with all things radioactive "worried me a whole lot," admits Kenneth, who turned to pharmacists and professors he knew around town to ask if what his son was doing was safe. "After they talked to Taylor, they'd tell me not to worry so much, because they said Taylor understands what he's doing," Kenneth says. He and his wife, Tiffany, tried to tell themselves that Wilson's "nuclear phase" would pass, just like his previous obsessions. At age 3, he asked for a hard hat and orange cones and then directed traffic on his street. At age 7, he'd memorized every rocket made by the U.S. and Soviet governments from

reactor together, using the basic blueprints posted on Fusor.net. He added his own personal touches. It looked like a cappuccino maker on human growth hormones. To find out if it worked, Wilson filled its reaction chamber with deuterium gas, retreated behind the lead wall, and then flipped the switch to the reactor's high-voltage supply. Tens of thousands of volts of current coursed through a golf ball-sized wire grid within the reaction chamber. If all went well, this would fuse the atoms of deuterium together and release radiation—not nearly as much as fission (or the splitting of atoms) produces, but enough to cause radiation poisoning or other health complications if things went to hell.

Wilson picked up a tiny glass tube called a bubble dosimeter that he'd placed near his reactor. If he saw bubbles, the subatomic particles that make up radiation had penetrated the tube, heating the hypersensitive liquid inside. Squinting at the tube, Wilson spotted five bubbles.

On Fusor.net, Wilson was proclaimed the youngest fusioner ever, at just 14 years old. A year later, he met with officials at both the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Energy, who offered him their expertise and equipment and encouraged him to apply for a research grant. "I started

## HIS TEACHER WORRIED THAT HE'D IRRADIATE HIS PARENTS—AND THE NEIGHBORHOOD.

the 1930s onward. But of all of Wilson's obsessions, radioactivity stuck.

Hoping that the right guidance could keep their son from doing damage to himself or others, the Wilsons moved from Texarkana, Ark., to Reno and enrolled Wilson in the Davidson Academy of Nevada, a public school that caters to gifted kids. (Wilson's IQ tested in the 99.99 percentile.) His physics teacher, George Ochs, encouraged Wilson to enter the local science fair, but did a double take when he heard that Wilson had his heart set on building a nuclear reactor in his garage. "I said, 'Whoa, wait a minute. You're going to irradiate your parents, and maybe the whole neighborhood,'" recalls Ochs. "I suggested he build it someplace safe, like at a university."

Ochs introduced Wilson to Phaneuf, and the professor quickly saw Wilson's potential and helped him set up shop in the subbasement of the university's physics department. Around Wilson's work area, a shield of paraffin and lead absorbs any radiation he might produce. A radiation safety officer stops by periodically to assess the safety conditions, and Wilson must wear a dosimeter, a badge nuclear power plant workers use to measure an individual's radiation exposure levels. So far, Wilson says, "I've never gotten a dose that's above legal levels."

After months of researching, building, and welding, Wilson put the parts of his nuclear

thinking, "What can I do with this?" Wilson says. "I wanted a real challenge. So I decided to try fighting terrorists."

### Becoming a Terrorist Fighter

Every year, more than 35 million cargo containers reach U.S. ports of entry. "They're big, and there are so many of them. It's the perfect way to smuggle in nuclear weapons," Wilson says. "If I were a terrorist, that's how I'd do it." Making matters worse, the most sensitive radiation detectors contain helium-3, a man-made chemical that is expensive and in short supply. "The only place you can get helium-3 is in the decayed remains of nuclear weapons components, and our supply is running out," Wilson says. He started wondering whether there were a cheaper, more plentiful alternatives.

In May 2010, Wilson entered his nuclear fusion reactor in a series of science fairs that won him a trip to Switzerland to tour the Large Hadron Collider, the world's largest particle accelerator, where many of the most cutting-edge nuclear experiments on the planet take place. Within the collider's labyrinthine corridors, located 300 feet below ground, Wilson gawked at swimming pool-sized Cherenkov detectors, which identify radiation by measuring the light that is emitted when these subatomic particles move through water. That got Wilson thinking: Water is plentiful. Maybe he could →

## ↓ WHIZ KIDS

MORE PROOF THAT AMAZING THINGS COME IN SMALL—AND SLIGHTLY SCARY—PACKAGES

### JACOB BARNETT

→ At age 12, the Noblesville, Ind., native started spouting mathematical gibberish that his mom (who failed math) turned into a YouTube video. In March 2011, professors at Princeton reviewed the recording and pronounced that Barnett had developed his own theory of relativity that was so brilliant it could disprove Albert Einstein's original findings. Barnett, whose IQ tested higher than Einstein's (at 170), studies astrophysics at Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis. He taught himself calculus, algebra, and geometry in two weeks, and he can recite pi to 200 digits. How's that for a parlor trick?



### KATHRYN GRAY

→ In January 2011, the 10-year-old Canadian became the youngest person to discover a supernova, or exploding star. Gray made this discovery by scrutinizing more than 50 images of the night sky collected by an observatory before pinpointing what would become known as Supernova 2010lt, which is 240 million light years away in galaxy UGC3378. Her knack for astronomy runs in the family: Her dad, Paul, was also once the youngest person to find a supernova, when he spotted his first at age 22 in 1995.



### BALAMURALI "DOOGIE HOWSER" AMBATI

→ He became the world's youngest doctor at 17. While going through residency, his age never ruffled his patients much. "Part of the reason, I think, is that I'm 6 feet tall," he told *The New York Times*. "So most people can't readily tell I'm so young." Now 33, he works as an ophthalmologist at the University of Utah's School of Medicine.



### ELISE TAN-ROBERTS

→ At five months, this North London girl was already speaking. At 2, after she was tested and found to have an IQ of 156, she became the youngest individual ever to join Mensa. According to *The Times*, the toddler could already name 35 capital cities and identify three types of triangles. She can also count in Spanish. Nonetheless, dad Edward, a car dealer, pointed out, "She's still my baby."





**THE "CAPPUCCINO MAKER" FROM HELL**

Taylor Wilson and one of his "nuclear mentors," Bill Brinsmead, in Wilson's basement lab at the University of Nevada in Reno (left). In the foreground is the nuclear fusion reactor Wilson built at 14—making him the youngest person in the world to ever do so. He spent two years scrounging the parts and radioactive materials. In April 2011, Wilson completed his second-generation reactor (right). More portable, it could be used to produce radioisotopes, which can be used in radiation therapy and as medical tracers.

build a liquid-based radiation detector that would work on a smaller scale.

Wilson returned home, went to the hardware store, bought a five-gallon drum, and filled it with water. He mixed in gadolinium, a chemical element that emits light when hit with radioactive particles. Because those flashes would be too weak to be seen with the naked eye, Wilson bored a hole into the drum and inserted a highly sensitive light detector, which he hooked up to his computer. He then placed the drum next to his nuclear reactor, behind the lead wall, and flipped the reactor's switch to produce a silent explosion of radiation. Checking his computer, Wilson was delighted to see that his detector had picked up brief emissions of light. The detector worked—and unlike helium-3 testers, which cost hundreds of thousands of dollars, Wilson's cost a few hundred bucks.

He filed for a patent. In May 2011, Wilson entered his radiation detector in the Intel International Science and Engineering Fair

universities, including the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, have recruited Wilson to lend a hand in various research projects. Since Wilson's meeting with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the U.S. Department of Energy two years ago, both government agencies are checking in with him regularly to monitor his progress. For now, in order to protect his intellectual copyright, Wilson has refused their offers for funding, but once his patent is securely in place, he hopes to share his findings and roll out his radiation detectors in Iran, North Korea, and other high-risk countries.

"It would scare my mom to know I'm in some hostile country, tracking down terrorists," Wilson admits. But if his parents have learned anything over the years, it's to trust their son

from household chemicals like stump remover). Now, when the dog smells explosives, he gives Wilson a wide berth.

In spite of his efforts to make the world safe from terrorists, Wilson is still sometimes seen as a menace. In March 2011, when an earthquake and tsunami in Japan caused one of the country's nuclear power plants to leak radiation into the atmosphere, Wilson tested the groceries in his refrigerator. He found trace levels of radioactive isotopes iodine-131 and cesium-137 in milk and spinach. After posting his findings on his website and talking to the Associated Press, "I got a lot of angry calls from the dairy association," Wilson recalls. "I had explained that the radiation levels were low and not a health threat, but still some people freaked out." Even at the physics lab where Wilson works, "next door there's a laser guy who was scared that my nuclear reactor was irradiating him," he says. "I had to calm his fears. A few people at the university have said, 'You shouldn't do this. You're scaring people.' I have to keep telling people I'm not a terrorist—I'm *fighting* the terrorists."

Part of the problem, says Wilson, is that "pop culture has instilled in Americans an irrational fear of radiation, when in fact the household chemicals under your sink are more dangerous. I also think it unsettles people because I'm so young. They associate age with experience. But that isn't always true." Carl Willis, a nuclear engineer in New Mexico and a Fusor.net member who's tracked Wilson's progress, agrees. "Age discrimination against the young is widespread and was a constant obstacle in my early chemistry hobby life," says Willis, who built his first bomb at age 12. "We automatically associate young age with poor judgment and inexperience, and while that's typically the case, that's just not Taylor. He shouldn't be prejudged."

In fact, Wilson thinks his youth is an asset. "Because kids haven't been exposed to the

**"SOMETIMES I'LL BLOW UP SOMETHING IN THE BACKYARD THAT'LL RATTLE ALL THE WINDOWS IN THE HOUSE."**

against 1,500 competitors and won the \$50,000 Intel Foundation Young Scientist Award. In September, once school begins, he plans to do full-scale testing of his invention by hauling a 30-foot cargo container into the Nevada desert. If all goes well there, he will start road-testing his detector at ports. "I want to get this stuff deployed—the sooner the better," Wilson says. "Radioactive materials could be coming through ports as we speak."

Wilson's expertise is in high demand: Raytheon, the fifth largest defense contractor in the United States, tried to hire Wilson to develop security technologies. Numerous uni-

and let go. "Sometimes I'll blow up something in the backyard that'll rattle all the windows in the house," Wilson says. "My mom will come out, shake her head, and then head back in."

**Chicks Dig Nukes**

Wilson isn't an across-the-board thrill-seeker. Roller coasters scare him. He was reluctant to obtain his driver's license and avoids getting behind the wheel. The only time he was grounded was when he let the family's golden retriever out in the backyard while he was detonating bombs (not nuclear ones, Wilson clarifies, just garden-variety explosives made



## ↓ RADIATION VACATIONS

THE BEST IN ATOMIC TOURISM IS JUST A HAZMAT SUIT AWAY!



### → CHERNOBYL NUCLEAR PLANT

Pripyat, Ukraine

Strange but true: The site of the world's worst nuclear accident in 1986 has become a major tourist attraction. It isn't exactly SeaWorld. Where you go, what you eat, and how long you stay is strictly controlled. Visiting certain areas, such as the sarcophagus that entombs the melted reactor's remains, requires stripping down to your underwear in a "clean room," then walking into a "hot room" to don a hospital gown, overcoat, scrub cap, hard hat, boots, gloves, face mask with air filter, and radiation-detection badges.

### → NEVADA NUCLEAR TEST SITE

Mercury, Nevada

From 1951 to 1992, this 1,400-square-mile dry lake bed was the site of nearly 1,000 nuclear tests and detonations. Now, tour buses wind through the crater-filled expanse, which is riddled with the mangled remains of bank vaults, concrete bunkers, and other edifices placed in blast zones to gauge how much damage the nukes could do. According to the site's tour guides, the radiation levels are minimal, although "beneath the ground," one guide told *The New York Times*, "is another matter."



### → TITAN MISSILE MUSEUM

Sahuarita, Arizona

This underground missile silo houses a 103-foot-tall intercontinental ballistic missile with a 9-megaton warhead called the Titan II (nuclear fuel removed, of course). In the 1960s, 54 complexes like this had missiles aimed at the USSR, but they have since been deactivated. During a tour, you'll visit the control room and see a simulated launch. The closest we ever came to launching: right after JFK's assassination, when fears of Soviet complicity prompted the keys to be placed on tables near the ignition.

### → BIKINI ATOLL

Marshall Islands, South Pacific

In 1946, the United States came to this tropical island, relocated its 167 indigenous residents, then tested three nuclear bombs on older Navy ships to see what would happen. Not surprisingly, they sank. When crew members on a passing Japanese fishing boat suffered radiation poisoning, fears of mutated monsters inspired the 1954 film *Godzilla*; the U.S. kept testing nukes here until 1958. Today those waters serve as a popular diving site. Where it's not unusual to see sharks missing a fin—further evidence of possible mutation.



### "MOM, HAVE YOU SEEN MY URANIUM?"

In March 2009, Wilson built a radiation detector (top) out of a five-gallon drum filled with water and gadolinium, a chemical element that emits light when hit with radioactive particles. It won him \$50,000 at a science fair and interest from the Department of Homeland Security. Wilson also likes to collect radiation detectors, such as this one from China (center), and uranium ore (bottom).

bureaucracy of professional science, they're a lot more open to trying things," Wilson says. "In that way, I think kids are able to sometimes do better science than adults." Among his peers, Wilson's interest in science also has its perks. "At first when I was doing nuclear stuff I wondered, Is this going to make me a nerd? But I don't think that was ever the case," he says. "I've even used it to pick up chicks. I take women to my lab sometimes." After all, what girl would be able to resist the line "Would you like to see my nuclear reactor?"

As for how he balances the demands of being a terrorist fighter/radioactivity obsessive/mad inventor with the challenges of being a 17-year-old kid, Wilson says it's tough. "Nuclear stuff takes up most of my time," he says. "Sometimes I have to decide: Do I want to be at my lab or hang out with Sofia?" (Sofia, a fellow Davidson student who's an avid softball player, is his latest crush.) "She's one of the few people who've been to my lab, which makes my friends mad, because not many have been able to visit," Wilson says. But no one gets *too* mad, he jokes: "My friends always say, 'Don't mess with Taylor. He has radioactive stuff.'" ☛



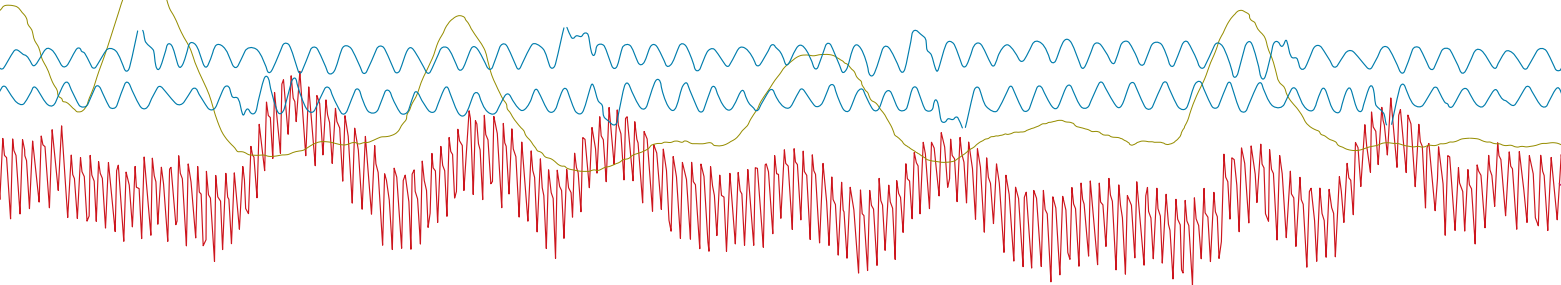
# THE LIE CATCHER!

FORGET THE POLYGRAPH. THIS CUTTING-EDGE SOFTWARE IS PUTTING FEAR INTO FIBBERS. BUT JUST HOW GOOD IS IT? TO FIND OUT, WE PUT IT TO THE TEST. BY JUDY DUTTON

Catching liars is tricky: On average, our ability to pinpoint fibs is no better than chance. Even cops who are trained to detect deception are only successful 60 percent of the time. The polygraph, invented in 1921, improved those odds to around 65 percent, but it's so notoriously fluky that it's used mainly to elicit confessions. Now, two professors at the Stevens Institute of Technology (SIT) in Hoboken, N.J., claim they've created software that ferrets out falsehoods; they plan on marketing it to firms and law enforcement agencies soon. This sounds great, but gets our own b.s. detectors tingling. Is it too good to be true?

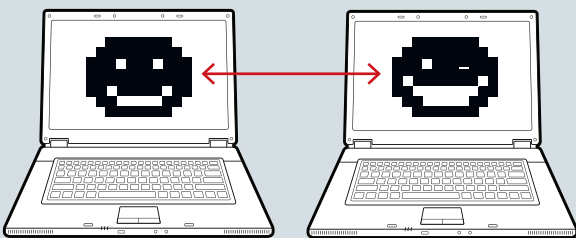
According to the creators, Rajarathnam Chandramouli and Koduvayur Subbalakshmi, the software works by analyzing the words we say, write, or type for red flags. This basic idea isn't new: Back in 1901, Sigmund Freud noted

that the truth often leaks out no matter how hard we try to cover it up, a phenomenon that came to be known as a "Freudian slip." The profs created an algorithm to prove it. Just upload at least 50 words of text, and within seconds, the software combs for 88 psycholinguistic cues that indicate whether the person delivering those lines is trying to cover something up. To test it out, they uploaded 1,000 known email hoaxes from Snopes.com and other scam-tracking sites, as well as 1,000 truthful emails for comparison. The result: an 86 to 99 percent success rate in separating the phishy falsehoods from the honest emails. It was so promising that the professors filed for a patent, formed InStream Media, and drafted a business plan to sell their software to companies that often run up against liars. "Insurance companies could use it to detect false claims," says Subbalakshmi.



## 5 SIGNS OF AN ONLINE LIE

Looking to unravel a tall tale? Watch for these red flags.



→ **Words longer than eight letters:** Long words aren't typically used in day-to-day conversation, so people who deploy them may be trying too hard to sound authentic—when, in fact, they're pulling the wool over your eyes.

→ **A lack of *me, myself, and I*:** "In deceptive text, expect fewer first-person pronouns," says Subbalakshmi. "This is because deceivers try to dissociate themselves from their words. This is done to avoid personal responsibility for their behavior."

→ **Too much *you*:** Text riddled with second-person pronouns like you, your, or y'all are also suspect. Often, it's an attempt

to deflect attention from the liar toward the person he's trying to dupe.

→ **No *ifs, buts, or withouts*:** "Since lying requires cognitive resources, deceivers tend to tell a less complex story," explains Subbalakshmi. "They typically do not distinguish between various branches in the story. This could be characterized in the form of a fewer number of exclusive words, like *except, but, or without*."

→ **A lot of *hatee, sad, and bad*:** "The act of deception induces short-term as well as long-term guilt," says Subbalakshmi. "This leads to a higher frequency of negative emotion words."

## GENDER DETECTION TIPS

Some of the ways to tell if a man or woman is behind the email:

**"I" statements:** Men use "I" more often—a subtle attempt to establish independence and brag about what they've done.

**Salutations:** Women typically start their correspondences with "Dear Dave" or "Hello, Helen!" Men tend to skip this formality and launch right into what they want to say.



**Really, very, quite:** Women use adverbs to intensify their statements ("It's really hot outside"), whereas men will most often deadpan, "It's hot out."



**Triple punctuation:** Women are prone to using multiple punctuation marks, as in "Are you really???" or "How exciting!!!". Men tend to use punctuation sparingly and often incorrectly.

**Women write *more*:** On average, women write 119 words to a man's 114. Women also tend to break their text into paragraphs, while men pile it all into one big block of text.

“Law offices could use it to sift through testimonies and know if someone’s lying or not.”

One added bonus: It’s a gender detector, too. The software is designed to determine if an author is a man or a woman, and to do so with 80 to 85 percent accuracy—even when individuals try to pass as the opposite sex. To hone the gender radar, Chandramouli and Subbalakshmi extracted data from more than 500,000 Enron emails made public after the company went bankrupt. Since the genders of the emails’ senders were known, the software could comb for more than 156 cues indicating male or female styles of writing. Gender detection could help users (and authorities) sniff out sexual predators online—or help identify the freaks trying to mess with our heads in Internet chat rooms or dating sites.

But James Pennebaker, a psychology professor who has studied deception for 30 years and worked with the FBI and U.S. Homeland Security, isn’t yet sold. “It’s a great idea, but anybody who claims they can detect lies at a rate better than 70 percent I don’t believe. It’s impossible,” he says. Still, he believes the technology could be useful when combined with other types of

evidence. “Eyewitness testimony is known to be terribly inaccurate, but it’s allowed in court,” points out Pennebaker. Someday soon, he predicts that the FBI and other agencies will be using a computerized lie detector, either this one or another. “It won’t be even remotely close to perfect,” he says, “but it’ll still do way better than humans.”

Still, the SIT professors see this technology affecting everyday life as well, with regular Joes tapping into a computer program to spot liars in their own lives—analyzing comments from coworkers (“Hey, awesome presentation today!”), instant messages from unfaithful spouses (“Hi honey, I’m stuck late at the office again.”), or any suspicious emails that land in their in-boxes. And maybe that’s just the start. Consider the uproar over Gay Girl in Damascus, a world-beloved blogger who was supposedly kidnapped by the Syrian government this past June, before reporters exposed that the blog was actually written by Tom MacMaster, a 40-year-old dude from the state of Georgia. The software could have outed this hoax in mere seconds: When it was fed a “Gay Girl in Damascus” blog post, it concluded that the author was male.

## ↓ OF LIES AND LITERATURE

Throughout history, famous authors have written books from the perspective of the opposite sex. To find out how well they pulled it off, we ran the first paragraph of a few well-known works through the Stevens professors’ software. The first sentences from each novel and the results below:

### → Mary Evans, *Middlemarch*

“Who that cares much to know the history of man, and how that mysterious mixture behaves under the varying experiments of Time, has not dwelt, at least briefly, on the life of Saint Theresa, has not smiled with some gentleness at the thought of the little girl waking forth one morning hand-in-hand with her still smaller brother, to go and seek martyrdom in the country of the Moors?”

**Verdict:** Evans, who wrote under the pseudonym George Eliot, doesn’t dupe the software, which deems the novel’s first paragraph to be distinctly female.

### → Edith Wharton, *Ethan Frome*

“I had known something of New England village life long before I made my home in the same county as my imaginary Starkfield; though, during the years spent there, certain of its aspects became much more familiar to me.”

**Verdict:** Wharton’s unnamed gentleman narrator passes muster as male, according to the software.

### → Wally Lamb, *She’s Come Undone*

“In one of my earliest memories, my mother and I are on the front porch of our rented Carter Avenue house watching two delivery men carry our brand-new television set up the steps.”

**Verdict:** Lamb’s teenage girl narrator may have wowed Oprah, but the software is unimpressed, and pegs the writing as male.

### ↓ Charlotte Brontë, *The Professor*

“The other day, in looking over my papers, I found in my desk the following copy of a letter, sent by me a year since to an old school acquaintance.”

**Verdict:** Brontë may be best known for her female characters, but her first novel was narrated by a man—and successfully so, according to this software, which says the writing sounds male.

### ↓ Charles Dickens, *Bleak House*

“A Chancery judge once had the kindness to inform me, as one of a company of some hundred and fifty men and women not labouring under any suspicions of lunacy, that the Court of Chancery, though the shining subject of much popular prejudice ... almost immaculate.”

**Verdict:** Dickens’ attempts to write from the POV of his heroine, Esther Summerson, fails. It’s a man, baby!



## ↓ THE WORLD’S GREAT MYSTERIES ... SOLVED!

We fed a few highly contested quotes into the software. Here are the verdicts.

### Casey Anthony’s statement to the police about her missing daughter:

I have spent every day, since Monday, June 9, 2008, looking for my daughter. I have lied and stolen from friends and family to do whatever I could. ... I avoided calling police, or even notifying my family, out of fear. I have been, and still am afraid of what has, or may happen to Caylee. **Verdict: Lie**



### Lee Harvey Oswald, when asked if he killed President John F. Kennedy:

No. I have not been charged with that. In fact, nobody has said that to me yet. The first thing I heard about it was when the newspaper reporters in the hall asked me that question. ... I did not do it. I did not do it. ... I did not shoot anyone. **Verdict: Truth**



### Former IMF head Dominique Strauss-Kahn, on allegations he sexually assaulted a hotel maid:

To all, I want to say that I deny with the greatest possible firmness all of the allegations that have been made against me. I want to protect this institution, which I have served with honor and devotion, and especially—especially—I want to devote all my strength, all my time, and all my energy to proving my innocence. **Verdict: Lie**



### Michael Jackson, when asked if it’s acceptable to share his bed with kids:

“Of course. Why not? If you’re going to be a pedophile, if you’re going to be Jack the Ripper ... that I’m not. That’s how we were raised. And I didn’t sleep in the bed with the child. Even if I did, it’s OK. I slept on the floor. I gave the bed to the child. **Verdict: Lie**



### O.J. Simpson, in his memoir *I Want to Tell You* about the murder of his wife:

I am 100 percent not guilty. ... When asked at my arraignment, where the charges against me were first formally stated in court, I said, ‘I am 100 percent not guilty.’ I said it again in Judge Ito’s chambers, and I say it again here. **Verdict: Truth**



### The U.S. Air Force, on the existence of alien remains at Roswell:

The research indicated absolutely no evidence of any kind that a spaceship crashed near Roswell or that any alien occupants were recovered therefrom, in some secret military operation or otherwise. ... All the records ... indicated that the focus of the concern was not on aliens, hostile or otherwise. ... **Verdict: Truth**

