WEEKEND SCIENTIST: LET'S MAKE A THERMONUCLEAR DEVICE

D. I. Radin
Belly Laboratories

Introduction

Worldwide controversy has been generated recently from several court decisions in the United States which have restricted popular magazines from printing articles which describe how to make an atomic bomb. The reason usually given by the courts is that national security would be compromised if such information were generally available. But, since it is commonly known that all of the information is publicly available in most major metropolitan libraries, obviously the court's officially stated position is covering up a more important factor; namely, that such atomic devices would prove too difficult for the average citizen to construct. The United States courts cannot afford to insult the vast majorities by insinuating that they do not have the intelligence of a cabbage, and thus the "official" press releases claim national security as a blanket restriction.

The rumors that have unfortunately occurred as a result of widespread misinformation can (and must) be cleared up now, for the construction project this month is the construction of a thermonuclear device. We will see how easy it is to make a device of your very own in ten easy steps, to have and hold as you see fit, without annoying interference from the government or the courts.

The project will cost between $5,000 and $30,000 dollars, depending on how fancy you want the final product to be. Since the last column, "Let's Make a Time Machine," was received so well in the new step-by-step format, this month's column will follow the same format.

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Construction Method

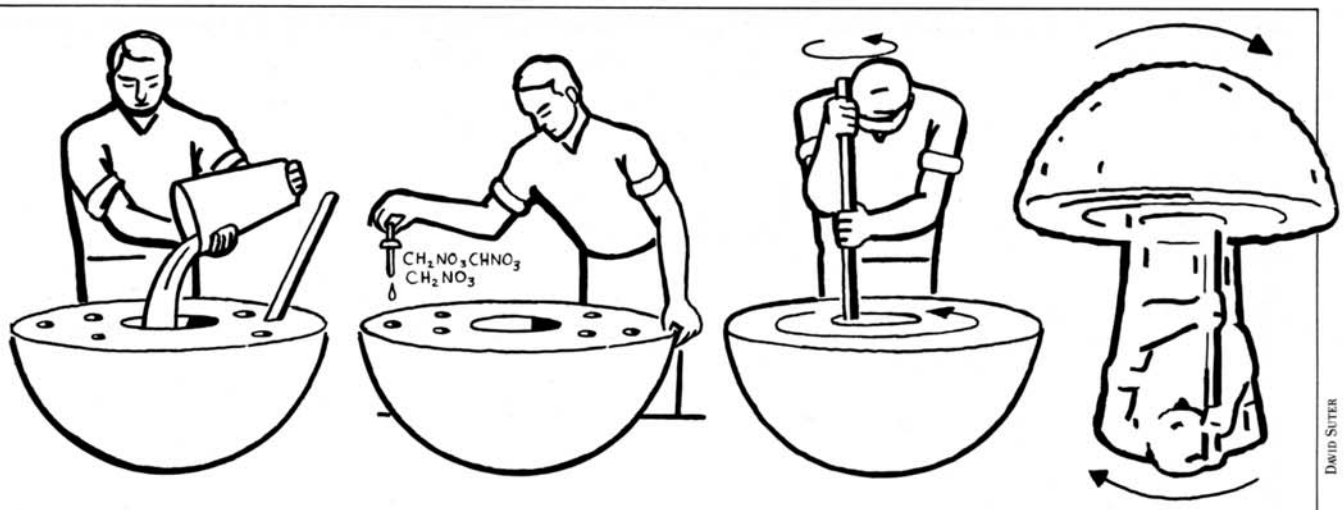
1. First, obtain about 110 pounds (50 kg) of weapons grade Plutonium at your local supplier[1]. A nuclear power plant is not recommended, as large quantities of missing Plutonium tend to make plant engineers unhappy. We suggest that you contact your local terrorist organization, or perhaps the Junior Achievement in your neighborhood.

2. Please remember that Plutonium, especially pure, refined Plutonium, is somewhat dangerous. Wash your hands with soap and warm water after handling the material, and don't allow your children or pets to play in it or eat it. Any left over Plutonium dust is excellent as an insect repellent. You may wish to keep the substance in a lead box if you can find one in your local junk yard, but an old coffee can will do nicely.

3. Fashion together a metal enclosure to house the device. Most common varieties of sheet metal can be bent to disguise this enclosure as, for example, a briefcase, a lunch pail, or a Buick. Do not use tinfoil.

4. Arrange the Plutonium into two hemispheral

[1] Plutonium (PU), atomic number 94, is a radioactive metallic element formed by the decay of Neptunium and is similar in chemical structure to Uranium, Saturium, Jupiternium, and Marisum.



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shapes, separated by about 4 cm. Use rubber cement to hold the Plutonium dust together.

5. Now get about 220 pounds (100 kg) of trinitrotoluene (TNT). Gelignite is much better, but messier to work with. Your helpful hardware man will be happy to provide you with this item.

6. Pack the TNT around the hemisphere arrangement constructed in step 4. If you cannot find Gelignite, feel free to use TNT packed in with Play-Doh or any modeling clay. Colored clay is acceptable, but there is no need to get fancy at this point.

7. Enclose the structure from step 6 into the enclosure made in step 3. Use a strong glue such as Krazy Glue to bind the hemisphere arrangement against the enclosure to prevent accidental detonation which might result from vibration or mishandling.

8. To detonate the device, obtain a radio controlled (RC) servo mechanism, as found in RC model airplanes and cars. With a modicum of effort, a remote plunger can be made that will strike a detonator cap to effect a small explosion. These detonator caps can be found in the electrical supply section of your local supermarket. We recommend the "Blast-O-Matic" brand because they are no deposit–no return.

9. Now hide the completed device from the neighbors and children. The garage is not recommended because of high humidity and the extreme range of temperatures experienced there. Nuclear devices have been known to spontaneously detonate in these unstable conditions. The hall closet or under the kitchen sink will be perfectly suitable.

10. Now you are the proud owner of a working thermonuclear device! It is a great ice-breaker at parties, and in a pinch, can be used for national defense.

Theory of Operation

The device basically works when the detonated TNT compresses the Plutonium into a critical mass. The critical mass then produces a nuclear chain reaction similar to the domino chain reaction (discussed in this column, "Dominos on the March," March, 1968). The chain reaction then promptly produces a big thermonuclear reaction. And there you have it, a 10 megaton explosion!

Next Month's Column

In next month's column, we will learn how to clone your neighbor's wife in six easy steps. This project promises to be an exciting weekend full of fun and profit. Common kitchen utensils will be all you need. See you next month!

Previous Month's Columns

1. Let's Make Test Tube Babies! May, 1979
2. Let's Make a Solar System! June, 1979
3. Let's Make an Economic Recession! July, 1979
4. Let's Make an Anti-Gravity Machine! August, 1979
5. Let's Make Contact with an Alien Race! September, 1979

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