Radical Energy Solutions
They’re risky—but they could pay off big
ON THE COVER
Better renewable technologies will broaden energy supply, but radical innovations are needed to fundamentally change the energy game. SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN has unearthed seven exotic technologies that may be long shots to succeed, but if they do, they could significantly improve energy security and efficiency. And the prototypes are just plain fascinating. Illustration by Chris Labrozzi.

FEATURES

SUSTAINABILITY
22 7 Radical Energy Solutions
Most of these technologies may fail, but the ones that don't could significantly alter how we generate energy and how efficiently we use it.

COSMOLOGY
30 The Lost Galaxies
By the latest estimate the observable universe contains 200 billion galaxies. Astronomers wonder: Why so few? By James E. Geach

NEUROSCIENCE
38 The Hidden Organ in Our Eyes
Our bodies adjust to the cycle of day and night thanks to specialized neurons in our eyes. Study of these cells could lead to new treatments for winter depression and other conditions. By Ignacio Provencio

MATHEMATICS
44 The Strangest Numbers in String Theory
A long-ignored number system invented in the 19th century provides the simplest explanation for why our universe could have 10 dimensions. By John C. Baez and John Huerta

MEDICINE
50 Fast Track to Vaccines
Biologists may have found a way to make effective vaccines against AIDS, tuberculosis and other difficult diseases. By Alan Adersen

PHYSICS
56 The Space Station's Crown Jewel
A fancy cosmic-ray detector is about to scan the cosmos for dark matter, antimatter and more. By George Musser

AGRICULTURE
58 The Growing Menace from Superweeds
Pigweed, ragweed and other monsters have begun to outsmart the advanced technologies that protect the biggest U.S. cash crops. By Jerry Adler

NATURAL HISTORY
64 Masters of Disguise
Animal mimicry takes many forms—including chemical and acoustic varieties—and offers unique insights into evolution. By Peter Forbes

CREATIVITY
68 Inner Sparks
Hearing specialist Charles J. Limb says that studying the brain in moments of musical improvisation may provide keys to unlocking creativity. Interview by Alicia Asinetti

May 2011, ScientificAmerican.com 1