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ON THE COVER

A matter of time

The atomic clock measures time based on transitions between two states of an atom. Two papers edge us closer to the first nuclear clock — based on transitions between states in a nucleus. Benedict Seiferle and colleagues directly measured the transition energy of thorium-229 from the ground state to the first excited state, and Noboru Sasao and colleagues used X-rays to excite ²²⁹Th to the second excited state, which quickly decayed to the first excited state. **PAGES 202, 238 & 243**



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