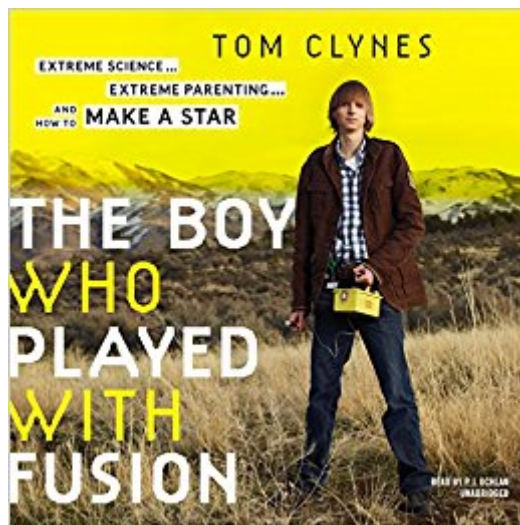




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# The Boy Who Played With Fusion: Extreme Science, Extreme Parenting, And How To Make A Star



## Synopsis

[Read by P.J. Ochlan] This is the story of how an American teenager became the youngest person ever to build a working nuclear fusion reactor. By the age of nine, Taylor Wilson had mastered the science of rocket propulsion. At eleven, his grandmother's cancer diagnosis drove him to investigate new ways to produce medical isotopes. And by fourteen, Wilson had built a 500-million-degree reactor and become the youngest person in history to achieve nuclear fusion. How could someone so young achieve so much, and what can Wilson's story teach parents and teachers about how to support high-achieving kids? In *The Boy Who Played with Fusion*, science journalist Tom Clynes narrates Taylor's extraordinary journey -- from his Arkansas home where his parents fully supported his intellectual passions; to a unique Reno, Nevada, public high school just for academic superstars; to the present, when now nineteen-year-old Wilson is winning international science competitions with devices designed to prevent terrorists from shipping radioactive material into the country. Along the way, Clynes reveals how our education system shortchanges gifted students -- and what we can do to fix it.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Here is the amazing story of an unbelievable boy -- somebody who seems more like a figure out of fiction (science fiction, to be specific) than reality. But the story is true, the boy is true, and the science is true. And the world that opens up to us through his story is both fascinating and slightly terrifying...but in a good way. You won't be able to walk away from this tale." --Elizabeth

Gilbert, author of *Eat, Pray, Love* and *The Signature of All Things* "Imagine if cartoon whiz-kid Jimmy Neutron were real and had a brainchild with MacGyver and his adolescence got told as a rollicking bildungsroman about American prodigies and DIY nuclear reactors -- well, that's this book." --Jack Hitt, author of *Bunch of Amateurs*. "Clynes guides us on an engrossing journey to the outer realms of science and parenting, *The Boy Who Played with Fusion* is a fascinating exploration of "giftedness" and all its consequences." --Paul Greenberg, author of *Four Fish* and *American Catch* "Popular Science contributing editor Clynes (*Music Festivals From Bach to Blues: A Travellers Guide*, 1996, etc.) uses the story of Taylor Wilson -- who, at age 14, became "one of only thirty-two individuals on the planet to build a working fusion reactor, a miniature sun on Earth" -- to illustrate the potential for improving our educational system. "What does it take to identify and develop the raw material of talent and turn it into exceptional accomplishment? How do we parent and educate extraordinarily determined and intelligent children and help them reach their potential?" These are the questions the author seeks to answer in this enlightening book. Clynes first learned about Taylor in 2010 when he was interviewing members of a small community of 'nuclear physics enthusiasts.' At the time, Taylor was attending the Davidson Academy, an experimental secondary school in Reno that offered students the opportunity to attend classes at the University of Nevada-Reno. Taylor enrolled in physics seminars and had successfully completed a project to build a tabletop fusion reactor that allowed him to study the properties of different materials. The family had moved to Reno so that Taylor could take advantage of the Davidson opportunity. His father was a successful entrepreneur who had fostered Taylor's developing interest in science, beginning at age 6, with his fascination with rocket propulsion. Although he had no technical training himself, Wilson enlisted the help of more knowledgeable friends from the community to help his son safely pursue experiments with rockets. Clynes chronicles Taylor's development since their first meeting, during which time he invented a prototype for a 'hundred-thousand-dollar tabletop nuclear fusion device that could produce medical isotopes as precisely as the multimillion-dollar cyclotron or linear accelerator facilities could,' as well as a highly sensitive, low-dose device for identifying nuclear terrorists. Clynes makes a persuasive case for allowing gifted children the freedom and resources to pursue their interests." --Kirkus Reviews

How an American teenager became the youngest person ever to build a working nuclear fusion reactor By the age of nine, Taylor Wilson had mastered the science of rocket propulsion. At eleven, his grandmother's cancer diagnosis inspired him to investigate new ways to produce medical isotopes. And by fourteen, Wilson had built a 500-million-degree reactor and become the youngest

person in history to achieve nuclear fusion. How could someone so young achieve so much, and what can Wilson's story teach parents and teachers about how to support high-achieving kids? In "The Boy Who Played with Fusion", " " science journalist Tom Clynes narrates Taylor Wilson's extraordinary journey from his Arkansas home where his parents fully supported his intellectual passions, to a unique Reno, Nevada, public high school just for academic superstars, to the present, when now twenty-one-year-old Wilson is winning international science competitions with devices designed to prevent terrorists from shipping radioactive material into the country. Along the way, Clynes reveals how our education system shortchanges gifted students, and what we can do to fix it." --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Inventor Taylor Wilson, now 22, actually made a  $\sim 10^{-14}$  "star" in a home garage at age 14, as a carefully controlled nuclear fusion reaction. His experiment could ultimately lead to a prototype that utilities could use to generate clean power. Wilson invited an outside writer to tell his story, rather than relating it himself. But Wilson writes very detailed technical prose on his own website ([www.taylorwilson.com](http://www.taylorwilson.com)) "sciradioactive" ([www.taylorwilson.com/sciradioactive](http://www.taylorwilson.com/sciradioactive)). As a teenager, he showed amazing grasp of physics that is beyond most graduate students. You wonder if he is proof of reincarnation. Wilson also has ideas that would be very mission-critical for Homeland Security, ranging from less expensive detection devices at ports and airports, to providing small underground fission reactors to local utilities so that power becomes more decentralized and less vulnerable to possible terror attacks or even solar storms. Wilson has benefited from a fellowship by libertarian activist (and, oddly, Trump supporter) Peter Thiel, who pays entrepreneurs to drop out of college and work on their inventions. Wilson also attended the Davidson Academy, in Reno NV, for the profoundly gifted. His family moved from Arkansas. The book has many color illustrations and is quite professionally written and edited.

This is a wonderful story about parents who are willing to do anything to support their son's passion of (and talent for) physics. Tom Clynes knows his math, science, and engineering, and he did a great job of introducing concepts into the book that would have been tough to explain by a less qualified author. I loved the conversational nature of the book. Brilliant!

A true, well-written, story about a schoolkid who grew increasingly fascinated about nuclear science after spending much of his childhood experimenting with chemicals in a makeshift lab in his grandmother's garage. The author does a superb job describing Taylor's early childhood and the

various escapades that led to an eventual interest in building a fusion reactor. This is a most amazing story that the author narrates with perspectives from professionals on how a gifted child can develop on his/her own and make a tremendous contribution to the world. He states early that he started the book as a biography, but once he understood the dangers posed by Taylor's work with both chemicals (including rockets) and then highly radioactive materials, he poses the question "Where were his parents and why did they allow this?" Exactly, and the answer comes steadily, and clearly, throughout the book. It is an inspirational read, and full of useful science. But it will be remembered as much for the author's (Tom Clynes) analysis of how a child could become as gifted and productive as Taylor. That is the reason for the second portion of the title: "Extreme Parenting and How to Make a Star." The pace of the book is fast since Clynes fills it with humor, such as the time his parents took him to a space museum (middle school age) and his pronouncements to the tour group of many facts and figures of, for example, the Saturn rocket's thrust, speed, flight principles and fuel chemistry caused them to back away and the docent leading the group to bring the head of the operation to see Taylor. A thoroughly enjoyable book.

I found this book fascinating. "The boy" is so full of life and energy he nearly jumps off the page. And his story, told with enthusiasm and work-man-like zeal, is simply fascinating. I actually found the sections on the state of gifted education in this country and the chance for kids who are as talented and smart and hard-working and creative as Taylor to be given sufficient opportunities to advance, to be really interesting, especially in terms of the future of this country in the fields of science, technology, medicine, and the like. I worry about this amazing kid and wish him well as he navigates himself into the rest of his life. He's no longer a "child prodigy" and that can be a real shock. I hope he can hold on to his belief that anything is possible, his "never say no" attitude, his immense creativity and curiosity. I don't want him to get "so big for his britches" as my mother would say, that he antagonizes people who can help him and forgets the virtues of charm and collaboration.

A fascinating book. I'm an engineer - so I can empathize with the main character's yearning for tinkering. The book goes beyond this however - It gives careful attention to parenting especially for a young son with special gifts. I give the book aces. I have shared it with many friends and they all come back with positive reviews. A great book to give a young parent, an engineer, a science teacher. Encouraging young minds like this book describes is a big factor in development of answers and solutions to today's questions.

Very interesting and well written. Not just a story about a kid playing with fusion, one of the real strengths of the book was the discussion of how to raise a kid that wants to play with fusion. It was a wonderful amalgam of biography about a gifted boy, a history of nuclear physics, and a parenting guide all in one, which may seem daunting, but the author makes it work, and work well! My only complaint is that the book ends, but short of Taylor inventing a time machine, it looks like we're just going to have to wait and see what is next.

The science, very complex, was well explained. The research was extraordinarily extensive. Readers without a science background who feel lost, don't give up, just skim the areas that feel over your head. Taylor's parents approach to parenting a gifted child was brilliant. The author's research on gifted children was extensive and quite interesting. A great read.

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