



Exactly how the brain encodes memories has long been one of science's big mysteries. Research shows that small sets of neurons deep within the brain are capable of being activated by the memory of someone familiar—your grandmother, say. This neural architecture makes the brain more efficient than if each memory were spread among many millions of cells. Image by Jean-François Podevin.

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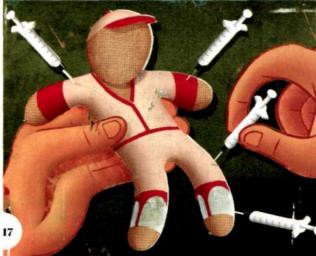
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If you're reading this, the purported Mayan apocalypse failed to arrive in 2012. To mark the nonoccasion, we tour some of the more memorable doomsday scenarios and investigate the factors that contribute to their appeal. Go to www.ScientificAmerican.com/feb2013/doomsday

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