Problem 55.33 (RHK)

Some uranium samples from the natural reactor site were found to be slightly enriched in ²³⁵U, rather than depleted. We have to account for this in terms of neutron absorption by the abundant isotope ²³⁸U and the subsequent beta and alpha decay of its products.

Solution:

A possible chain of nuclear processes that can result in conversion of ²³⁸U into ²³⁵U by neutron absorption and subsequent beta and alpha decay is

n +
238
U \rightarrow 239 U \rightarrow 239 Np + $e + \overline{v}$, (beta decay)
 239 Np \rightarrow 239 Pu + $e + \overline{v}$, (beta decay)
 239 Pu \rightarrow 235 U + α . (α decay)