

Blue Crystal

Mark Ridler

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Blue Crystal is a science fiction story about technology and power that questions humanity's trust in government leadership.

Mark Ridler's science fiction drama *Blue Crystal* follows government scientists who are willing to risk the safety of the general public to test their cutting-edge technology.

Kingsley Khan and Henning Horlicks are scientists who have made the discovery of a lifetime: a way to turn quantum and electromagnetic fields into a form of telepathy. The American and British governments are both very interested in this technology, so much so that they'll even work against each other to stay one step ahead.

While governments fight over the rights, Kingsley and Henning participate in a series of dangerous experiments, some which involve the manipulation of people with mental illnesses and some which wind up being deadly. Kingsley, Henning, and the governments they are working for choose between ethical behavior and technological development.

Kingsley, Henning, and their CIA contact, Julia, along with a man referred to as Leather Jacket Man (LJM), are the novel's main characters. There are very few physical descriptions of people; only LJM's signature jacket is mentioned. Kingsley and Henning are similar in personality and voice, only differentiated when Henning becomes disturbed by the moral dilemmas posed by their experiments. Julia speaks with snark, though not many other traits of hers emerge.

LJM is an important character in the beginning, but disappears from the story for many chapters, resulting in his disconnection from the plot line. His mental illness is explained through his history of hospital admissions and his distrustful narration. LJM's experiences beg the question of whether you can really be called paranoid when someone is, in fact, watching you.

Numerous government agents from the CIA and M15 make appearances; some play a crucial role in exploiting LJM, while others have little impact on the story. David Cameron and Barack Obama are also supporting characters, and their dialogue, while not individualized, explores the motivations of world governments and what they are willing to hide from the public to secure power and money.

The novel takes place mostly in England. While imagery is scant, interesting historical and cultural information is conveyed through conversations between Julia, Kingsley, and Henning as they follow their machine's signals to ancient churches. A link between the church locations and the machines the team builds is a major plot point, but it is never fully explained. These machines are described with an abundance of confusing scientific and technological lingo, though the relationship between quantum and electromagnetic fields and telepathy is not fully established.

The novel begins with public distrust over a humming noise caused by the machines, progressing to link the potential for telepathy with people who are mentally ill. However, the middle of the novel pivots away from the experimentation to the mundane aspects of Julia, Henning, and Kingsley's lives; paragraphs about where they go to eat and what kinds of cars they drive slow the pace, and the original focus of the plot is lost. The novel's conclusion reveals a twist,

but does not wrap up the plot or complete the characters' stories.

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DELIA STANLEY (August 6, 2019)

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