



Power Void

Edward Vickery

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Clear and careful research is evinced in this thriller that concentrates on the complications of solar energy.

In Edward Vickery's timely thriller *Power Void*, two nations scramble to come out on top.

Professor Will Childress heads a research project dedicated to improving solar panel efficiency at Mississippi State University. He secures a grant from the US Department of Energy to fund his project and forges political and scientific relationships with colleagues at the Indian Institute of Science to complete his work.

Characters discover that sapphires could be a crucial component in transforming solar energy; this is one of the most intriguing plot points, and Childress is abducted over an issue related to mining rights. His research holds the potential to radically change energy production, especially in poverty-stricken areas with little to no access to standard electrical grids. Soon, Childress and his colleagues are threatened by politicians and terrorist groups. They must race to achieve their goals.

The text reads like a moralizing textbook entry, written without narrative tension or urgency. In fact, the story skips over and condenses its most thrilling elements, including Childress's abduction. It focuses more on the intricate and interlocking relationships between its major players, who are all involved in creating new technologies and who work for universities, private corporations, and governmental organizations. It's clear that the book's information draws upon thorough research, but its translation into fiction is bland.

The prose is dry, even detached, and it moves at a slow pace. Characters are not emotionally developed, and none secure much sympathy. Most feel interchangeable; even Childress is indistinct. A helpful list tracks which characters are aligned with which organization, down to their motives, but they are still difficult to distinguish from one another. They are an ambiguous bunch, and their actions have to be taken at face value. Conversations are redundant and expository, and are formatted in large blocks that are hard to parse.

Strongest when it comes to realism, the text captures the intricacies of scientific research and the obstacles that scientists face when it comes to achieving their goals. Still, technically proficient sections stretch too long, taking care to examine issues from multiple sides but losing interest in the process. There's little narrative payoff; the stunning new technology that causes so much trouble is not widely used in the end, and final portions of the book are anticlimactic.

In *Power Void*, scientists race to transform energy availability and efficiency—but their story is more about the science than it is a thriller.

JOHN M. MURRAY (December 10, 2018)

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