



The H Factor

L.E. Indianer

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Imagine an America less dependent on fossil fuels. Imagine an America producing clean energy and halting climate change. That's the vision of brilliant engineering students Gerri Miller and Marc Garrett in L. E. Indianer's second novel, *The H Factor*. They dream of developing the titular H Factor, a machine designed to separate hydrogen from water, turning the hydrogen into energy that can be used to run everything that now requires oil. What begins as a college project takes on global ramifications when a combination of natural disasters and world events call for the device to be put into immediate use.

As the H Factor technology enters the international arena, the drama becomes personal and political. While Marc and Gerri attempt to balance their personal relationship with their newfound celebrity, the White House must fend off Big Oil and terrorists in the Middle East, who are angered by the loss of revenue and influence the invention of the H Factor represents. By embracing this technology, Gerri, Marc, and the United States acquire some ferocious new enemies.

The author masterfully interweaves intrigue, suspense, science, and social commentary to create a tense novel in which readers become invested in the fate of both a college couple and a nation. With today's real-world political gridlock, partisan bickering, and militant patriotism, Indianer envisions a refreshingly practical America, as embodied by Republican President Gary West. West acts decisively and pragmatically in bringing together citizens and Congress to endorse the H Factor by looking beyond his own self-interest to see that the survival of the country depends on the machine. He thinks carefully before retaliating against terrorists, but he does not waver. He possesses characteristics readers would appreciate in their real-world politicians.

While the U.S. government and its allies earn merits by being likeable, so, too, do Gerri and Marc. Progressive readers will be especially gratified to learn that Gerri supplies some of the key brainstorms crucial to the success of the machine. With women severely underrepresented in scientific fields, brainy Gerri would make a superb role model. And Marc and Gerri's relationship provides a suitable counterpart to the book's international drama.

The novel is well-researched in terms of politics and grounded in sound science, making both the invention of the H Factor and the responses to its introduction seem plausible. Like Marc and Gerri, readers will treasure the story's peaceful interludes with bated breath, as they await what lurks on the next page. It's to Indianer's credit that he can spell out a scientifically solid, clean-energy solution while maintaining the momentum of the plot and the interest of his readers without preaching or pushing an agenda. While the H in the H Factor stands for hydrogen, it could also stand for horror and hope, both of which will linger with the audience long after they let out the breath they have been holding and turn the last page of this astute thriller.

JILL ALLEN (May 15, 2012)

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