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Brilliant!: Shuji Nakamura And the Revolution in Lighting Technology (Updated Edition)

Bob Johnstone

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A revolution in the way we use artificial lighting is underway, one that is every bit as sweeping and significant as Edison's invention of the light bulb. The technology of light emitting diodes (LEDs) is ready for widespread implementation. Its impacts will include a reduction in energy consumption for electric lighting by up to 80 percent.

Brilliant! tells the story of Shuji Nakamura, a gifted Japanese engineer who came out of nowhere to stun the world with his announcement that he had created the last piece in the puzzle needed for manufacturing solid-state white lights. The invention of this holy-grail product, which promises to make Edison's light bulb obsolete, had eluded the best minds at the top electronic firms for twenty-five years. Until his startling announcement, Nakamura had not even been on the radar screen of most industry observers.

Veteran technology writer Bob Johnstone traces the career of Nakamura, which included many years of obstinate individual effort as well as a dramatic legal battle pitting him against his former Japanese employer. Over a five-year span, Nakamura distinguished himself with an unprecedented series of inventions—bright blue, green, ultraviolet, and then white LEDs, plus a blue laser that will play an essential role in the next-generation DVD players. Then he was forced to leave Nichia Chemical, the company where he had worked for twenty years, and his former employer sued him. The result was a multimillion-dollar settlement in a landmark decision that acknowledged, for the first time, the rights of individual inventors working in a corporate context. Today, Nakamura holds a professor's chair at the University of California at Santa Barbara, where he continues to develop the technology of LEDs.

Johnstone, the first Western journalist to meet and interview Nakamura, has received the brilliant engineer's full cooperation through a series of exclusive interviews given for the book. Johnstone has also interviewed other key players in the imminent lighting revolution, providing an exciting preview of the technological, entrepreneurial, and artistic creativity that will soon be unleashed by Nakamura's inventions.

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