

## Echelon

**Walter De Brouwer**

Lulu (May 2007)

Softcover \$12.73 (110pp)

*Echelon* named for a global intelligence agency with links to the NSA and the British MI5 opens with narrator William Mansfield recounting in awe the rise and fall of voice technologies pioneer John Ingleton. The storytelling slant comes off like the concentrated hero worship of Philip Roth's *American Pastoral*. "I write a book about him because he reminds me that we are made for greatness but that we allow society to program us for mediocrity." The specific relationship is shortly clarified with a twist that radically redefines the narrative's nature.

Early-frame protagonist Ingleton runs afoul of the US intelligence community and the Pentagon by nearly cornering the entire field of speech-mining his coveted knowledge crucial to an unprecedented boom in industrial espionage. Ingleton's business partner also attracts negative attention by securing funding for buyouts from sources hostile to the American government. The net closes and options are death or disappearance.

Pragmatic individualism is the dominant philosophy of a self-fascinated boldly scamming Ingleton who says "Being ethical in an unethical world is a losing strategy." His chronicler's worldview is essentially similar but tempered by the experience of substantial losses and uncertain prospects. Mansfield writes about Ingleton from a soft purgatory in the paradisaical Seychelles where he hopes to be invisible to various spook organizations. A relationship with an island woman named Sutkin includes discussion of cutthroat business practices and behavior studies such as Prisoner's Dilemma. He warns her to expect people to let each other down: "If you think there is good in everybody you definitely have not met everybody."

This spy-thriller achieves a greater immediacy by integrating facts regarding well-known information and software companies going so far as to include Microsoft's Bill Gates as a snidely quirky secondary character. Insights into entrepreneurial strategies and the appalling extent of surveillance in the brave new world are presented with obviously earned authority. The author reaches for overmuch detail though by listing amounts of money involved in acquisitions and tax-reduction plans. Completely inexcusable are the many crossed-out words left in the text.

Author Walter De Brouwer is a Belgian collateral thinker into technologies of the future best known for founding the blue-sky research company Starlab. His education in Philology and Semiotics followed a series of publishing ventures. Today he divides time between teaching entrepreneurship at Cambridge and Monaco and newer business ventures. *Echelon* smartly caters to those with knowledge of the I.T. sector. The story distinguishes itself for the better by favoring fresh character-revealing theoretical discussion over traditional thriller action. Readers can be sure they haven't seen a clone of this work under another title.

(August 21, 2009)

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