

Effacement

Hieronymus Hawkes

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Effacement is an action-packed, genre-bending thriller that introduces a white-collar superhero whose braininess and ethical behavior save the day.

In Hieronymus Hawkes's intense, chilling psychological thriller *Effacement*, technology invades personal privacy in a twenty-four-seven connected world where Big Brother is watching.

In this world, neurochips embedded in the brain stem record people's daily activity. Without such lifelogs, access to basic services becomes next to impossible. Cole, who developed the neurochip, is an executive at BioNarratus. He investigates an issue with a patch that led to the death of several users. Before Cole can report his findings to his boss, Lounis, Lounis's daughter drugs Cole and removes his neurochip with the help of his fiancée, Tesla. This wipes Cole's memory and exposes him to the crime of effacement, or any disruption to lifelogging.

As Cole sets out to retrieve his memories, he unravels a government plot to utilize the patch's faulty code to assassinate political rivals. Tesla proves evasive, so Cole enlists the help of a brilliant attorney and renegade crusader to stay ahead of the law and those seeking to destroy him.

The story is told from Cole and Tesla's alternating points of view. As Cole deals with memory gaps, he struggles with the anxiety and paranoia and not knowing who to trust. At the same time, Tesla struggles to hide her involvement from Cole, all while dealing with her own narcissism and loss of control. Their contrasting viewpoints play against each other well, heightening the story's sense of conflict and increasing its psychological tension. The focused narrative also makes use of crisp, to-the-point writing.

Loss forces the main characters to grow and evolve, giving them dimensionality. Before his attack, Cole embraces and champions the role that electronic surveillance plays in society. After his memory is wiped, he lives off the grid, which opens his eyes to a world outside of lifelogging. Tesla also becomes less narcissistic in the course of her story, as loss forces her to confront brutal truths about her behavior. But the secondary characters are less dimensional, and often play to tropes: the bad guys are menacing and gun-toting, while the good guys are ethical do-gooders and therefore beyond reproach.

One of the book's underlying themes is around-the-clock surveillance as a way to ensure law and order. The narrative is clever at integrating real-world events, including the 2020 elections, the Covid-19 pandemic, and racial strife, into its own origin story, using them as believable justifications for lifelogging and the eventual dystopian environment.

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NANCY POWELL (March 23, 2021)

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