FOREWORD REVIEWS THE INDIE WE LOVE.

Historical

Lightning
Jean Echenoz
Linda Coverdale, translator
The New Press
978-1-59558-649-0
(May 31, 2011)

At precisely midnight, in the midst of a raging storm, with lightning flashing and thunder crashing, a child is born who grows to envision and invent new technologies that transform the world. Based on the life of engineer and inventor Nikola Tesla, the story blurs the boundaries between fiction and biography.

French author Jean Echenoz follows Gregor, a prodigy who struggles to find his place in the world and whose brilliance is used by others. His story depicts a man fighting to succeed when no one knows what to do with his genius while trying to create a life despite growing psychological challenges. Ultimately, Echenoz pens a book about believing in oneself and one's dreams despite obstacles and without guarantees.

Gregor's scientific gifts are evident from early childhood when, even then, he is little understood. In young adulthood, in America, acceptance appears more promising; he even begins work on electrical power with Thomas Edison. But soon, Gregor's own scientific ideas and insights cause friction and eventually a bitter fight. He launches out on his own, and his inventions thrill the scientific community. But gradually, the battle between the two scientists, the treachery of an acquaintance, and the schemes of business partners threaten to undo everything. Yet his greatest danger may come from within.

Gripping from the first pages, the author creates intrigue in a scientific world, a sometimes challenging feat. Describing Gregor's dramatic lectures, Echenoz writes, "Sparks are soon exploding all around, their brilliance at times shooting through the air in every direction, launched by Gregor's long arms …" Echenoz's warm voice shortens the distance between narrator and reader, sounding like a friend with the storyteller's gift. What in many hands would be boring and erudite becomes compelling and simple.

The author's previous novels, five of which are in English translation, earned him

numerous literary prizes, including the Prix Goncourt, the Prix Médicix, and the European Literature Jeopardy Prize. And this intriguing book, made accessible to English-speaking readers by award-winning translator Linda Coverdale, makes it easy to see why.

Diane Gardner