



The Cloud

Matt Richtel

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The Cloud is an exhilarating, cutting-edge thriller from Pulitzer Prize winner and *New York Times* technology and science reporter Matt Richtel.

When the next generation of technology seeps into the brains of the next generation of people, former medical student turned journalist Nat Idle must investigate and stop the invasion.

In the tradition of Lisa Gardner, Steve Berry, and Joseph Finder, Richtel has delivered a whip-smart page-turner that melds cutting-edge science with a technological mystery and a shocking finale. A deftly told tale, the scariest part of *The Cloud* is how close to reality it could be.

The Cloud Details

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Author : Matt Richtel

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From Reader Review The Cloud for online ebook

Robert says

If you stop to really think about it, it's amazing how books find readers, since the ocean is filled with more than 200,000 books produced each year, and this ocean is constantly expanding, a black hole of pages and kilobytes produced for what the author hopes is mass consumption. While it's not a grand tale, I discovered THE CLOUD through an online ad that I caught out of the corner of my eye, the cover being my first introduction to this fine tale, sampled the first several paragraphs, and then noticed a smattering of reviews. All of this piqued my curiosity, led to an impulse purchase on my Kindle, and now this review.

Why do I tell you this? Because it happens on occasion to me (I've never met a book that I wasn't willing to give a chance, and I have no problem stepping out from the pack), but it's rare when that connection works just perfectly, like the universe dropped a book into the market just for me. This was one of those books, and yet as certain as I am of this, it's hard for me to pinpoint exactly why.

I can be a bit of a sucker for first person novels. I love the immediacy and stepping right into the shoes of the main character and walking around for miles and miles until we reach some sort of destination. This novel afforded me this wonderful opportunity, and I have to admit I became rather fond of Nat Idle, even if he suffered post-traumatic stress disorder and stumbled around like a drunken sailor for much of this tale, forcing me to sometimes question my own equilibrium and state of sobriety, despite tea being my strongest drink as of late.

This novel bends genres, defies conventions, marches to the beat of its own drummer, or feel free to insert your favorite descriptive phrase. It could easily be classified as a mystery, although the mysterious deaths aren't really the primary focus for Nat, or it could just as easily be classified as a thriller, although it's not written from multiple points of view, and there's no real ticking clock. But THE CLOUD is a novel I didn't want to end, it's a novel I couldn't put down, and it's a novel where the voice carried me home, cheering me on every step of the way.

Character growth isn't normally a focus of thrillers, and yet I felt Nat grow as a character, as a person, and as a man, and his relationship with Faith added heart to a novel that might have otherwise been a bit lacking, since this tale ends up being driven by technology and the chase to discover the truth. It's a chase that kept me flipping pages, as fast as my brain could carry me, as I savored every moment of this thrilling read.

Matt Richtel isn't a new author, but he's new to me, and I look forward to checking out more of his tales. If you're smart, you might want to do the same as well.

Cross-posted at Robert's Reads

Susan Tunis says

Matt Richtel knows how to hook readers...

...The openings of his novels are always grabbers. In The Cloud, protagonist Nat Idle is waiting to catch a late-night train when an enormous drunken man staggers into him. They both crash to the ground, with Nat

very nearly thrown to the tracks in front of an oncoming train. A near-death experience instead becomes a nasty crack on the head, and a kind passerby rushes to assist. The drunk takes off, with a paper falling from his pocket as he exits. Nat's ready to write the incident off, grateful to have gotten off relatively lightly—until he picks up the paper the man dropped. His name is on it. This was no accident.

That is merely the beginning of another of Idle's investigative adventures. For a medical journalist and blogger, he does seem to become embroiled in some dark stuff. This story involves a technology designed to help kids learn to multi-task that may be causing a far more serious side effect. And yet, as intense of the plots of these novels are, at their heart they are character-driven, and none more so than this latest installment. Character absolutely drives plot, but in this case, prior knowledge of the character from his debut in *Hooked* or Devil's Plaything would be helpful. Nat sustains a head injury in that opening scene. It affects him. He's not himself, and I think that will be appreciated more by readers acquainted with the character. Nat's funny, friendly, flawed, and fallible. He'll go after a story like no one's business. But in *The Cloud*, he's altered. And he's something of an unreliable narrator, which makes an already convoluted mystery that much more mysterious.

Mr. Richtel, incidentally, is also a journalist. By day, he writes about technology for the *New York Times*. He, in fact, won a Pulitzer Prize for doing so a few years ago. My point is, the man can write. His prose has an effortless readability, a sense of fun, and frequently rises above what one expects to find in a thriller. The novel moves swiftly, as events take place over the course of just a few virtually sleepless days. Furthermore, by the time all is revealed, the elegance and intricacy of the novel's plot will become apparent. Oh, I had suspicions along the way. Some were right, many were wrong. But once I knew the truth, it was all so clear. The clues were salted everywhere.

Richtel didn't learn about character development, pacing, and plot on the day job. I'm not sure where he learned the tools of his trade, because in this novel especially, he eschews literary convention while at the same time embracing certain genre tropes, for instance a beautiful and mysterious woman straight out of a detective noir. Tropes are tropes for a reason, and Richtel has his fun. But it's where he diverges from convention, notably with this novel's conclusion, that things get really interesting. I can't discuss the choices made without spoilers, so I'll simply say that Mr. Richtel wrapped up his mystery in a way that was unexpected, unconventional, sophisticated, and satisfying.

And aside from solving the mystery, Mr. Richtel has taken his protagonist into uncharted territory. The tale comes to a complete conclusion with no annoying cliff-hangers, but Nat evolves so much (and so believably) in this novel that I'm now consumed with knowing what the next chapter in his life will bring.

Read Ng says

This was a GoodReads giveaway win.

It keep me guessing all the way.

Set in the San Francisco Bay Area, you will recognize many of the sites and locations. You are deep in the mind of journalist Nate Idle as he tries to piece together a mysterious attack on himself in a subway station. Who wants him dead? Who can he trust? The end left some loose threads, but overall I liked it.

The medical diagnosis of the various people Nate meets was a bit over done, but was an effective tool to get

you into Nate's mind. I just find it different that one would have all the medical school training, only to quit and become a journalist. It does tie in nicely the solving the puzzle.

Jim Nolt says

Judging from this one novel, Matt Richtel knows how to get off to a good start... and from there move the action forward very slowly. Also, it was often difficult to know when Nat Idle was interacting with the people in his present or when he was reliving, again and again and again, an event from his past. So... there were several times I almost gave up, but I persevered and was therefore surprised and delighted when, as the story neared its end, the action picked up... but then abruptly stopped. It isn't that the book is bad... it's just that it left me feeling cheated... cheated because it could have been so much better. I doubt I'll try another of Richtel's books.

John Datesh says

More like 3.8 stars. I stayed up until 4:00 AM to finish this The Cloud. Mind you, I'm usually up until 3:00 reading anyway, but this tech suspense novel kept me going. Very nicely done. The troubled hero drew me along his stumbling path. He had good reason to be wobbly, what with a couple concussions complicating matters.

I'm not sure what the genre is, but it is over 4 stars in it.

Veronica says

I won this book through goodreads first read giveaways. This book was well-written and very fast-paced. I would pick it up and always had a hard time putting it back down. I felt connected to the characters and what they experienced. This book did for me what all should do: took me to a new and exciting world. I disappeared into The Cloud. Thanks to Mr. Richtel!

Ray Palen says

Honestly, picked this book up during vacation as I was running out of reading material and needed something to occupy me for the flight home.

Having read Matt Richtel previously I was curious about THE CLOUD. The novel is ultimately satisfying but the trip the reader takes to get there is a bit strained. Freelance journalist Nathan Idle has a strange incident in a San Frisco subway station where a large stranger attacks him and attempts to throw him on the tracks. Injured and dazed, Nat is assisted by a female bystander who witnessed the assault.

Dealing with both a concussion as well as coming off of a strange relationship with his ex-girlfriend (and mother of his child), Nat tries to piece the clues together to figure out why he was attacked. Making it even more interesting is the fact that the man who attacked him dropped a piece of paper that included only two names on --- a former female reality television star and Nat's. What could the connection be?

THE CLOUD reads oddly as you are staring through the eyes of a protagonist who is badly concussed and not thinking straight. Additionally, his past relationship is revealed bit by bit until the reader eventually figures out what really happened. A decent paranoid thriller but not one that is easy to digest.

Monica Cooley says

This was my third "Nat Idle" book. Maybe not my favorite of the three from a plot perspective, but nevertheless a fabulous read--from the first paragraph I wanted to keep reading! I really like the main character as well as the milieu around him. and I appreciate the topics Matt Richtel broaches. Having not been disappointed yet, I would read anything Matt Richtel writes. Will start looking for more.

Richard says

Matt Richtel, a technology writer for the New York Times, also writes thrilling and provocative science fiction. *The Cloud* is set in — where else? — San Francisco and Silicon Valley in the present day, and follows Nat Idle, an investigative reporter, as he painfully uncovers a story that questions the safety of some emerging technology (any more details than that would qualify as spoilers).

Richtel's strong suit is the relentless energy of the plot and, with caveats, the likeability of his characters. On the other side is the over-likeability of those some characters — far too many of them are super-sized and exaggerated to the point of being superheroes. Probably the weakest element of the story is that Richtel throws in too much: there are so many elements to keep track of that it almost becomes necessary to keep notes, and this burden undoubtedly is enough to turn off some readers. The abundance left a few aspects and some characters half-baked. Richtel either needs a longer, more carefully paced book, or he needs to exercise a bit more discipline and get rid of some weeds.

The ultimate answer found in the reporter's quest won't surprise anyone that closely follows criticism of technology, although the danger is elevated here for dramatic emphasis. The only other place where current technology steps over the line into fiction is holography, which has been teasing technophiles for decades now.

The Cloud is a quick read and a quite enjoyable fast-paced adventure. Don't expect too much more and you'll enjoy it.

Joe Meyers says

Terrific paranoid thriller in the vein of 'Three Days of the Condor' & 'Parallax View' about a Bay Area tech journalist on the trail of a sinister new device designed to help kids keep their ever-growing information

streams organized in a 'cloud.' Richtel gives us great insight into the possible downside of tech devices on kids whose brains are still developing. Scary & thrilling.

Jordan says

I received this book as a part of the Goodreads Firstreads program. Which doesn't affect my review in any way except that it ensures that it exists, given that I'm not really buying many new books at the moment--too much of a backlog on my shelves as it is.

I didn't realize until I had already started that this book was the third in a series, or at least the third book by this author to feature this character. Had I known, I would have tried to get ahold of those books first. I'm a bit obsessive about that sort of thing, as a rule. At any rate, and contrary to all my ingrained prejudices, I don't really think reading this one cold negatively impacted my reading experience. I'll very likely try and track down those two previous books at a library....

Nat Idle is a freelance journalist, specializing in writing about the impacts of new technologies. He's had some notable success in the recent past, and is slated to be given an award for his work. His personal life is a bit more of a shambles, his girlfriend having left him after the birth of their son. We pick up Nat in a subway on his way home, gloomy and reflecting on his separation from his son, when a large man careens into him and almost sends him flying onto the tracks in front of the oncoming train. When Nat regains his feet, he finds a paper with his name on it that the large man must have dropped. Suffering a concussion that keeps him from operating at full mental capacity, Nat must try and connect all the disparate pieces of this puzzle and figure out just what is going on before it gets him killed....

I have mixed feelings about this book, honestly. It is told first-person, and for most of it Nat is concussed and loopy, which means that we (the reader) are also concussed and loopy when it comes to the story. On the one hand, I dislike that feeling of disorientation that such a book or film causes. I love sleight-of-hand or odd premise type stuff, such as Christopher Nolan might do in his films (*Inception*, *Prestige*), but I don't like being made to feel mentally deficient or of questionable sanity. On the other hand, Mr. Richtel manages to pull off that particular trick admirably. Writing first-person (especially first-person present!) is never the easiest way to go, but adding the disjointedness and confusion of Idle's concussion would make it even more difficult to pull off....and yet Richtel does. I have to give him chops for that. I suspect that to some degree Richtel added the concussion to keep his character from figuring out the plot too fast--it wouldn't be all that complicated if someone lucid was looking closely (but we are kept from being lucid by viewing everything through Idle's concussed POV). That said, Idle's concussed behavior does resonate thematically with what is going on, so it at least isn't solely a trick to keep us guessing.....

Also included in my copy is a bonus short story entitled *Floodgate*. Our POV character, Zach Coles, an ex-journalist now doing office work for a political watchdog company, is drowning the sorrows of underemployment at the bar when a burly man approaches him and offers him \$1500 to steal a flash drive from his boss's safe. If he doesn't, a little boy who may or may not be Coles' son will be killed.....

Gary Sedivy says

This book reminds me of Michael Crichton novels in which technology goes awry. I enjoyed this novel. The

protagonist is an investigative writer, who has gained some fame for exposing scams, etc. He gets sucked into a story, by accident - literally. But, because of personal issues, he is having trouble pulling all the loose strings together to solve the puzzle. I was deep into the book before realizing something about his personnel issues wasn't quite right. I didn't see what really happened coming. Good job.

I thought the little references to medical conditions were 'cute', but didn't add much to the book.

The mystery, who did what, when, where, and how it fits together was well done.

G.F. Smith says

The Cloud

By Matt Richtel

I've not been an avid reader of journalistic/investigative type works, though I like suspense, intrigue, and ultimately resolution in the stories I read. *The Cloud*, however, pulled me in from the start and intrigued me enough to keep reading.

I enjoyed the technological premise involved—the Cloud: that ever-growing cyber-space that houses the combined knowledge of humanity, literally. It certainly is becoming a repository of all that humanity has been, is, and possibly will be. Is it inherently good, bad, or neutral? Just like anything else, it's up to us to decide, and guide.

Good start, good middle, and good ending, Matt. I enjoyed this. I will look into more of your work.

G. F. Smith

www.gfsmithbooks.com

Howell Murray says

An ambitious tale that keeps the reader wondering all the way to the end.

Amy Rogers says

ScienceThrillers.com Review:

In *The Cloud*, Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and novelist Matt Richtel does it again, giving readers a beautifully written novel of suspense that defies categorization. Brooding, San Francisco-based journalist Nat Idle from Richtel's 2011 novel *Devil's Plaything*, is back with another complex tale of conspiracy, technology, and altered perceptions. In a fascinating back-and-forth between Richtel's real-life technology reporting for the New York Times and his fiction, *The Cloud* uses a fictional investigative reporter to ask hard questions about the power and danger of omnipresent electronic devices, constant digital multitasking, intrusive digital surveillance, and the impact these technologies have on human brains.

As with Devil's Plaything, The Cloud is no potato-chippy beach read. This is an ambitious novel that reflects a deep intelligence (Richtel freely uses words like sartorially and hubris). Readers expecting a standard genre thriller will be disappointed. But for readers who lean toward smart fiction and also want suspense, twisty plot, and some action, The Cloud is an excellent choice. Likewise, if you detest formulaic, made-for-movies plots, this book is for you because it refuses to follow predictable paths.

In his previous novel Devil's Plaything, Richtel used a clever device to create an uncertain reality for the protagonist: Nat Idle's sidekick was his grandmother who had dementia; her memories and perceptions could not be trusted. In The Cloud, Richtel takes this "unreliable narrator" idea one step further. From the first pages of this first-person narrative, when Nat Idle suffers a concussion, the reader knows that our hero's brain is not functioning the way it should. For the next several hundred pages, Richtel rises to the challenge of showing that Idle's thinking and memory are unreliable and that Idle is aware of this problem but incapable of doing anything about it. All the while the reader is kept guessing as to just how badly messed up is the protagonist's point of view. As far as the reader can tell, locked in Idle's world-view with him, Idle might be a little bit off his game, or he might be well on his way to a clinical diagnosis of paranoid schizophrenia.

In other words, is there a conspiracy, or is he making one up in his head?

A major strength of this novel is the sense of place. San Francisco, or more precisely, the South Bay technology corridor which includes Silicon Valley and Palo Alto, is a constant, colorful presence. The physical climate and the social environment are key parts of this tale. As I read The Cloud I started a list of wonderful tidbits that show local character. I quit about a third into the book because the list grew so long. Here are some examples from the early pages:

It's a first-generation iPhone, which in these parts makes me a Luddite, joke fodder, recipient of sad looks on public transportation.

Maybe this company, like many on the Peninsula, provides bus service from San Francisco, ostensibly an environmental play to reduce traffic and car emissions, but also so employees can get the first wave of emails knocked out during the commute.

Thanks to our hills, valleys, stretches of trees and lush park that suddenly give way to swaths of concrete jungle, I live in microclimate central. This city's motto should be: Don't like the weather? Take two steps to the left.

The Cloud earns 4 biohazard symbols for a unique combination of tech and medical themes. Globally, this novel is about technology but it's not a technical novel. Richtel isn't interested in engineering; he's interested in sociology and psychiatry. The Cloud (like Devil's Plaything before it) explores the negative influences of technology on individuals and on society. Some of these influences can be measured biologically, hence Richtel's fascination with brain research, which comes out in the novel.

Overlaid atop the tech are peripheral medical themes. Nat Idle is a med school dropout with an odd habit: he makes quick medical diagnoses of people he sees. Blepharospasm, camptocormia, scleroderma, acromegaly: all these awkwardly-named medical conditions get a nod of recognition from Nat.

Throughout, The Cloud works by generating a sense of uncertainty in the reader. Readers who like things clearly explained and who enjoy connecting the dots in a mystery might be put off. The Cloud has a reality-bending feel and some revelations that will have you turning back the pages to see how you missed it.

Because of the possibility of multiple interpretations of many previous events, this is a hard book to wrap up in the end. Richtel opts to use the Tolkien-esque technique of serial endings, spiced with yet more twists. I was left with a bit of a head-spin as I tried to trace back the plot lines and understand them in the context of the final revelations. My advice: don't bother. Richtel intentionally leaves some issues unresolved, and others are, I'm sure, logically intact from start to finish, but that's not the point.

Let The Cloud envelop you in its mists. You'll want to keep reading 'til the end, and you'll carry some of that fog with you as you think about this book in the days after you finish reading.

I have to go now. I need to unplug everything in my children's rooms except the light bulbs.

FCC disclaimer: An advance reader copy of this book was given to me for review. As always, I made no guarantee that I would read the book or post a positive review.
