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# LITTLE BROTHER



**CORY DOCTOROW**

"A rousing tale of techno-geek rebellion."

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## Little Brother

*Cory Doctorow*

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# Little Brother

*Cory Doctorow*

## **Little Brother** Cory Doctorow

Marcus aka “w1n5t0n,” is only seventeen years old, but he figures he already knows how the system works—and how to work the system. Smart, fast, and wise to the ways of the networked world, he has no trouble outwitting his high school’s intrusive but clumsy surveillance systems.

But his whole world changes when he and his friends find themselves caught in the aftermath of a major terrorist attack on San Francisco. In the wrong place at the wrong time, Marcus and his crew are apprehended by the Department of Homeland Security and whisked away to a secret prison where they’re mercilessly interrogated for days.

When the DHS finally releases them, his injured best friend Darryl does not come out. The city has become a police state where every citizen is treated like a potential terrorist. He knows that no one will believe his story, which leaves him only one option: “M1k3y” will take down the DHS himself.

## **Little Brother Details**

Date : Published April 29th 2008 by Tor Books (first published January 1st 2008)

ISBN : 9780765319852

Author : Cory Doctorow

Format : Hardcover 382 pages

Genre : Young Adult, Science Fiction, Fiction, Dystopia

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# From Reader Review Little Brother for online ebook

## Ashley says

I think I might be too stupid to write this review.

Long story short: This book was a hell of a ride. It was slightly problematic as a novel, but damn if it wasn't powerful anyway. It should probably be required reading. Long story long? Weeeeeelllll. That's when my brain starts to make whirring and booping noises and then I want to put my laptop away and go to sleep. Or eat a milkshake. Either one of those things, really.

Marcus Yallow is a seventeen year old in near-future San Francisco. When a terrorist attack hits the city, he and three of his friends are detained by the Department of Homeland Security. When Marcus doesn't comply with their illegal interrogation tactics, they treat him even more harshly than they do his friends. When they are released, only three make it out. No one knows where Marcus's friend Darryl is, if he's even still alive. They are released back into the city, warned to tell no one of their experiences, and soon learn they're not the only ones who are being closely monitored by the DHS. San Francisco has become a security state. Its citizens, terrified by the attack on their city, have given over most of their privacy in exchange for what they see as security from terrorists. But Marcus, with his firsthand experience of the effectiveness and illegality of the DHS's tactics, knows there is more at stake than preventing terrorist attacks.

At first I wasn't sure how I was going to feel about this book. The beginning is a very uncomfortable experience, to say the least. In parts, it actually made me so angry I could physically feel my blood pressure rising and had to stop listening for a while to calm down. But as soon as Marcus accidentally becomes the leader of an underground youth cyperepunk revolution intent on jamming the illegal activities of the DHS and upholding the Constitution and Bill of Rights, I was totally riveted. It was like the parts of *Ready Player One* where Wade is trying to take down the evil corporation, mixed with the parts of *1984* where Winston has his life ruined by a paranoid government with no regard for his humanity or individuality, except worse because in this book we're watching Marcus's freedom slip away. We watch as the USA slips and slides down a path to becoming that government from *1984*.

The problematic stuff comes when the desire to tell a story is overwhelmed by Doctorow's need to pontificate about the dangers of sacrificing privacy and true freedom in the name of security. It's a great message, and for the most part he integrates it organically into the story. But there are definitely spots where the message takes over and becomes the main point. I didn't mind because I think, especially as denizens of the internet, the issues he dwells on are ones that are extremely relevant to all of us, no matter where on the political spectrum your beliefs lie. Plus, the fact that he uses a young narrator lends a really energetic, nerdy, techie vibe to the whole thing.

I'm really glad I read this book, and it's definitely one I'll be going back to in the future, once I can get myself a copy. Doctorow actually offers free copies of all his books on his website in many different forms, if you're interested. I listened to the audiobook, which was great if you're into that sort of thing.

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## Noriko says

I started reading this book expecting to be as blown away as I was four years ago, but I think I'll settle for

3.5 out of 5 (or 3.75) stars this time.

That's not to say I didn't enjoy the book, I did a lot in fact, it was just I wasn't inclined to give this book full 5 stars which I did the last time.

Firstly, the writing; I think the writing is decent and strong overall, but there were some scenes that failed to peak the tension and excitement as much as I had hoped; it felt slippery and underwhelming at times.

However, as I said it's pretty gripping and intense and I liked this book is told in the first person, through Marcus's narration which I personally think made this book more engaging.

What bothered me was the volume of 'tech talks' in this book. This book deals with a lot of cyber issues such as Internet privacy, electric surveillance, coding, snooping, cryptography etc, etc. Although these talks are accompanied by a crash course along with ample examples, as the story proceeds and gets more complicated, I started to feel it a bit overwhelming. I did think Cory Doctrow did a great job of breaking technical aspects down to bitable pieces, but you might find it a bit over your head if you are not a tech-savvy. It is OK that you don't understand all the tech talks in this book (because I didn't), it is totally enjoyable even if you just follow the main plot, but it might be a good idea to know the basics prior to reading this.

As for the characters, other than the protagonist, Marcus, none of the other characters left much impact on me; I didn't find the characters are fleshed out enough.

In this book, Marcus attempts to save his best friend, Darryl, who is still held captive by the Department of Homeland Security and goes to such length of waging a war against the government. However, the bond between those two characters is not drawn well enough so Marcus's desperate attempts to save Darryl didn't strike me as strongly as I would have liked. As for Ange, the love interest and who was supposed to be an impactful character that drives Marcus forward – felt one-dimensional, too. Overall, all the characters felt a bit lackluster and underdeveloped.

I think what kept me going was the plot. It is gripping right from the beginning and entertaining to read through. The plot itself is pretty simple but it's got some exciting and thrilling sometimes devastating twists scattered throughout the book.

I particularly liked the execution of the Operation False Positive; it describes how Marcus sucks down the numbers of others' credit cards, their car keys, passports, every sort of identification that proves who is who and then swaps them with someone else's unnoticed. It beautifully illustrates how sharp and smart he is; it was pretty exhilarating to read. Brilliantly done.

What jumps out about this book is the author incorporated some history lessons such as the freedom campaign and civil rights movements into the main plot. Through this sequence, we get to see how our predecessors fought against the authorities and the government for our fundamental human rights, for freedom of speech, how many lives had lost and how the United States has become a 'free country' as it is today. Since this sequence is done against the backdrop of social studies classroom and includes some enlightening discussions, it comes into me quite naturally, it doesn't come across preachy but it definitely brings such issues to our attention and I appreciated that.

I also like how Marcus develops himself as the story goes. In the beginning, he is just an incredibly smart 17 year-old high school student who can easily outsmart school surveillance system. But after the bombing attack and the detention by DHS, being stripped way first his privacy then his dignity, he becomes more Constitution-minded and realizes how much he loves his country and values freedom and then wants to take back what has been lost since the attack.

I don't find the romance between Marcus and Ange necessary, given the ensuing development in the latter part, I can make sense out of it.

Overall, I enjoyed this re-read. There are parts that I found a bit redundant and drag which could have been cut, but the last 30% of the book is definitely exciting, it's a page-turner.

If you are a tech-savvy and like this type of genre, it's recommended.

Even if you're not, I think you'll end up enjoying this. It would be definitely better if you had some knowledge of Internet technology though.

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## Chloe says

One of the things that I love most about science fiction is its ability to look at trends in contemporary society, extrapolate them to their most extreme ends, and then use those extremes to reveal a fantastic analysis of our world and the directions that we are heading down. Good science fiction is the type that makes you step back when you finish and take a closer look at our own lives. With *Little Brother*, Cory Doctorow has crafted just such a novel. The fact that this is a book whose intended audience is young adults makes it all the more powerful.

The story focuses on Marcus Yallow, a technically gifted teenager who, in between rounds of an alternate reality game he plays, finds new and interesting ways of harnessing technology to his needs. At the start of the book this is mostly by getting around the surveillance that his high school has in place for tracking students, ostensibly for their safety. All that changes once terrorists destroy the Bay Bridge and Marcus finds himself captive of the Department of Homeland Security. Tortured and interrogated for the small infraction of demanding a lawyer, Marcus is eventually released and sent home.

The home he returns to bares little resemblance to the one he had initially left. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is busy installing more and more RFID sensors, monitoring the internet, and surveilling everyone that falls outside their very thin definition of *normal* behavior. Outraged at his treatment at the hands of DHS, Marcus begins throwing monkey wrenches into the system in an attempt to point out to all the ludicrous nature of the surveillance state and its complete ineptness at tracking or catching any *real* terrorists.

The writing is clear and simple, particularly in the sections where Doctorow is explaining the technical ins and outs of a particular tool that Marcus is using. He offers up some of the most easily understandable descriptions of cryptography and Linux operating systems that I have come across, and does so in a way that makes what could be a dreadfully boring description very interesting and informative.

What really pushed this book over the cusp, for me, is that all of the applications that Marcus and the DHS use in their war against one another already exist. Anyone with some basic knowledge and tools could build a hidden camera locator. Anyone who wanted to could download and install the Linux build that Marcus employs throughout the book. Doctorow makes it even easier by including a Further Reading section at the end of the book where he points readers toward resources they could use to delve further into the worlds opened up in the book.

This is a book with everything. A fun and fast-paced story, realistic teenage characters, technology that piques the reader's interest, and a political message that desperately needs to be imparted to younger generations. The state of American democracy is in their hands and depends very strongly on the lessons that they receive. Unfortunately, I'm not sure whether schools are as dedicated as they should be toward creating free thinking pupils who value the intent of the Constitution over blind dedication to the flag and whoever the current occupant of the White House may be.

Finally, best of all for me, Doctorow is a proponent of Creative Commons copyright. This form of copyrighting has allowed him to make available the text of this book on his website so that anyone who wishes to may download it to read, alter or remix it. So, if you're leery of putting down the cold hard cash for the hardcover edition, you can download it from Doctorow's website to see if it's something you think you may want to read. You can find the link to the download here:

<http://craphound.com/littlebrother/>

Do yourself a favor and read this book post haste.

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## **Michael says**

Hacker teens fight back when Homeland Security clamps down excessively on human rights after a terrorist bombing of a bridge in San Francisco. Brilliant in conception, but it's kind of painful to immerse yourself in the plot and characters with all the didactic content. The impetus to move toward a policy state in the name of security is an ongoing issue well covered in this young adult morality tale. How these kids go about foiling the restrictions of our government with their own secure network was heroic and fun. I'm glad I read this "classic" published in 2008. Doctorow deserves respect for his work with the Electronic Frontier Foundation and for making the book free at Tor Books.

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## **Bones says**

So I was required to read this entire book. Over the summer. For a computer science class. And I don't want to be melodramatic, but my enjoyment of that task was on par with Marcus' enjoyment of being waterboarded by the DHS. After suffering through nearly 400 poorly-edited pages, I now understand why people ban books.

Pretty much everything I wanted to say about this book has been said before by people more eloquent than I, so I thought I'd let "Little Brother" speak for itself.

Here are some passages taken straight from the page.

Read at your own risk.

"Spending Fridays at school was teh suck anyway,"

"Darryl had fallen in love with her mind. Sad, really."

"She was totally h4wt - that is to say, hot."

"She was pretty, in a weird, horsey way,"

"I was pulled in right close to her, close enough to smell her perfume, which smelled like new cars. I love that smell."

"She wasn't h4wt in the traditional sense,"

"A new IM window popped up.

> herro!"

"She took the book and read the passage again for herself. 'Wow, dingedodies! I love it!"

"...melt into a puddle of horniness."

"Marcus, you are about to get laid for the firstest time EVAR,"

If I could meet one person and ask them one question, I'd meet Cory Doctorow and ask him if he's ever interacted with a human girl in his entire life.

My overarching issue with this piece of literature is that, for all of Mr. Doctorow's waffling on about revolution and anti-establishment and other leftist ideas, he's completely forgotten the human element to the ideology he's trying to promote. Homophobic and transphobic slurs are needlessly thrown around when describing various characters, the underage teenage girls (!!!) are all objectified and grossly sexualized, and characters of color are used for a plot point and one line of meaningful dialogue and then discarded for the rest of the narrative.

What good is a page-long speech about giving power to the people when the narrative dehumanizes those very people that are supposed to be uplifted?

The only salvageable part of this entire book was this piece of wisdom imparted by Jolu (who introduced our dear Marcus to his perfect little manic pixie dream girl and then was tragically never heard from again).

"I hate to say it, but you're white. I'm not. White people get caught with cocaine and do a little rehab time. Brown people get caught with crack and go to prison for twenty years. White people see cops on the street and feel safer. Brown people see cops on the street and wonder if they're about to get searched. The way the DHS is treating you? The law in this country has always been like that for us."

Cory Doctorow clearly has at least a basic understanding of how deeply racism is entrenched into our government, and this could have led to a much more profound story, with a truly revolutionary message. Unfortunately, this sharp analysis of the US justice system is promptly discarded for Ange and Cory's - I mean Marcus' - horny teenage shenanigans.

But hey, I guess even a broken clock is right two times a day.

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## **Sandi says**

There is a reason why totalitarian governments ban books. The reason is that books can change the world. "Uncle Tom's Cabin" and Frederick Douglass' autobiography opened people's eyes to the evils of slavery; Anne Frank's Diary taught us that genocide kills innocent young girls; "To Kill a Mockingbird" showed us that justice isn't always just and that people should be judged by their character rather than the color of their skin; "The Grapes of Wrath" opened our eyes to the plight of migrant farm workers; "1984" warned us about the perils of a nanny state. Now, in 2008, a new book of power has emerged. "Little Brother" is "1984" for the 21st century, but with more impact.

I don't recall that the book ever states what the year is. It really doesn't matter. It takes place post 9/11.

Terrorists blow up San Francisco's Bay Bridge and everyone's constitutional rights get trampled in the aftermath. This book is aimed at teens, but every American adult should read it too. Parents should read it with their teens and discuss it with them. (There are a few scenes of teenage drinking and sex, but the overwhelming message of this book is so strong that even this conservative mother is willing to overlook it.)

My daughter was 18 on 9/11. My son is only 4 years away from being the same age as the protagonist. I remember how idealistic I was a teen. I read this book with all that in my experience. I read it as a mother; I read it as an idealistic teen; and I read it as a true believer in our rights as American citizens. I read this book with tears in my eyes and a lump in my throat. At 47, I thought I was past the age when a book would have the power to move me and change me as profoundly as "Little Brother." I've read thousands of books in my lifetime. I have very fond memories of so many of them. But, when it comes to real power, "Little Brother" is right up there next to "To Kill a Mockingbird." I'd give it 6 stars if I could. It is that good.

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I do have to add that I gave this to my son to read before I read it. He is almost 13. He loved this book. He wants to read more books like it. I'm going to have to tell him that it's just a unique book. And, he did ask me why I didn't tell him it had "adult situations." I had to tell him that I didn't know. I really recommend that you let your teens read it before you do. They'll be less embarrassed that way. You can use the "adult situations" as a tool to talk about those touchy subjects of sex, drugs and alcohol.

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### **Wil Wheaton says**

More polemic than novel, Little Brother is the kind of book I would have devoured when I was a teenager. I gave it to my teenage son, and he went nuts for it (he isn't a reader) and was inspired by the various suggestions in the text to learn more about RFID, surveillance, privacy, EFF, Linux, and other technologies Doctorow explores or mentions in the text.

The story and characters aren't as complex as they could have been, but I didn't mind. Cory wrote this for teenagers, and he was clearly more interested in getting them worked up than doing a character study.

I enjoyed it. I wanted to see what happened when a bunch of kids did in fiction what a lot of us adults wanted to do in real life during the Bush years, and I wasn't disappointed.

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### **Jim says**

Yes, I put a book that was published 8 years ago on my 'Classics' & 'Historical' shelves. It's NOT on my 'Science Fiction' shelf. I read a fair amount of history & SF. This book is very important historically & will be acknowledged as a classic. I've been fiddling with computers since before the Internet was public & have been administering networks for 20 years now. There's nothing in this book that takes the science into the realm of SF.

One of my basic duties is dealing with security against both internal & external threats, along with some basic database & other programming skills. What I can know about my users just by running a few quick



routines against the Internet traffic is scary. (Thankfully my current job doesn't require me to monitor Internet usage like my last one did. I don't want to know that much about my coworkers.) When put together with even a cursory knowledge of their personal life it's far, far worse. I don't really want to know & yet I do, sometimes just because I've had to look up something else. I try hard not to see & forget quickly. What if I didn't?

**What Doctorow has written is real, folks.** Unfortunately, instead of a big blow up, it's happening in little, almost unnoticeable stages with a facile logic to them. A bit of privacy loss here & there taken away in the name of safety. ('Safety' is becoming a curse word to me.) News dumbed down, skewed by special interests, lost in all the babble, &/or spun out into a fantasy & another law gets passed, so there is one more way the authorities can look at us. And, just like Doctorow said, few norms understand it. Most people don't understand the paradox of the false positive & just how badly it impacts our society & security. (If you missed that reference, read it here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False\\_po...](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/False_po...))

Read this as a cautionary tale. Read the afterwords. They're very good. Even the bibliography is of great interest & pretty good. I will add Hackers: Heroes of the Computer Revolution by Steven Levy to the reading list. This book focuses on the early hackers that started in the 1960's at MIT in the Train Club & continues to follow the history of hacking for a couple of decades. Yes, it's a lot more primitive in some ways, but it shows the growth of the system, the mindset of hackers, & will make a great deal more sense to older norms. Imagine making free phone calls using a whistle from a box of Captain Crunch, an iconic hack by John Draper. (Read more here: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John\\_Draper](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Draper))

Obviously, I think it's a great book. Supposedly it's YA, but don't let that throw you. Yes, there's a simplistic bad guy (Probably the only thing I didn't care for much. He was too simple & bad.) & some romantic stuff, but it's not a huge part. It's also FREE. Yes, Doctorow is giving it away. One version I have seems to be a shorter version, but that's OK. Get it here: <http://craphound.com/littlebrother/do...>

It was really interesting listening to this in the middle of The Killer Angels by Michael Shaara, a classic account of the Battle of Gettysburg. As General Longstreet noted, war had changed. It has again &, like during the Civil War, the issues & the enemy are complicated. Far more complicated now, I think.

Update 3Oct2017: Some more reading. Has Big Data Made Anonymity Impossible? Well, yes, it has, but that's not the biggest danger to democracy. Try to ignore politics & focus on what Cambridge Analytica is doing in this article (They're mentioned about 1/4 of the way through. Long article.) It's plain scary.

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## Michael says

In an attempt to win over a new generation of sci-fi readers, Cory Doctorow's "Little Brother" is marketed as a young adult book. However, adult readers shouldn't worry that Doctorow's book will leave them behind or have them feeling juvenile for reading it.

"Little Brother" is a mature, contemporary novel that looks at the issue of security in a near-future that doesn't seem too far from today. When San Francisco is attacked by terrorists, seventeen-year-old hacker Marcus and his friends are out playing the latest mission of the most popular game of the day. Because of their proximity to the attack and their background as hackers, Marcus and his friends are detained and

questioned by the Department of Homeland Security. Stripped of his rights, Marcus is eventually set free, but finds that new restrictions placed on the Internet and the world under the banner of making his country more safe are having the opposite effect. Marcus sets out to restore his true freedom and take out the oppressive regime of the Homeland Security Officers.

"Little Brother" doesn't shy away from the big questions. While this novel is set in a non-defined near future, Doctorow is clearly commenting on the ways and means used today to keep our country and world "safe" from the next attack. At one point does it go from keeping us safe to denying us our freedoms and is that tradeoff worth it in the long run? Doctorow's story of Marcus and his fight against the larger Big Brother is fascinating and terrifying all at the same time. As you read the story, you may realize just how much of our basic, assumed freedoms have been abridged all in the name of security and safety.

Doctorow also takes this opportunity to provide readers an education of security systems and computer programming. In what easily could have been some of the driest portions of the novel, Doctorow is able to give the reader some insight and knowledge, which may leave you curious to pursue more information on the inventors and security methods.

Doctorow is something of an Internet celebrity, having revolutionized the marketing of his novels through taking advantage of on-line distribution. He's grown as a writer since his debut in "Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom" and with "Little Brother," while he's writing for a young adult audience, he's found a new level of mature and assured writing that makes "Little Brother" one of the more remarkable and haunting books I've read this year.

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## Wendy says

Torn between two and three stars. I enjoyed reading this; the plot was interesting, and all the informative parts were pretty accessible (well, the computer/crypto stuff was done much, much better than the history). But I thought the writing was pretty bad--it got increasingly melodramatic as the book went along. I kept waiting for Marcus to say to one of his friends "But down here, it's our time! It's our time down here!". I never bought his voice as that of an American kid--there were Britishisms that I don't think could come entirely from having a British mother--but that's probably more due to sadly sloppy copy-editing than anything else. Phrases were repeated all over the place (Marcus told us twice that the best role-playing games were at "the Scout camps out of town", for instance), the text said "Van" when it should have been "Ange" at least once, Marcus's mother was referred to as both Louisa and Lillian on the same page... Overall, the book is a vehicle for the author, not an organic story.

I can see that this is an important and thought-provoking book that a lot of kids will enjoy, but for the love of god, please don't give it the Printz.

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## Mohamed IBrahim says

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## Monica Edinger says

I'm feeling totally weird about feeling so unenthusiastic about this book as everyone I know who has read it seems to have loved it. (Just see that it got another star, this one from the Horn Book.) Seems like I'm the only person on earth who didn't. Ah well. (Cory, if you are reading this stop --- I'm clearly alone in my feelings here. Go read all the reviews of people who like it. Forget about mine.)

So anyway, I read it on the plane to ALA and had to really push to finish it. Some of the writing drove me nuts. I mean, how many times did Marcus have to "piss like a racehorse"? (Two for sure.) The sex scenes made me cringe. I found way too much telling. Telling about hacking, telling about programming, telling about the 60s, telling about the Yippies, et al. I don't have the book at hand to give specific examples, but I just felt too lectured at too often.

I really disliked the setup with the nasty boy. (Chuck was his name, I think?) The one who argued with the teacher about Vietnam and was horrible? I felt he was such a straw man (and I'm a pacifist, was very into anti-Vietman demos back in the day, and a hippie wannabee.)

I had trouble suspending disbelief that he would never have gone to see Daryl's father till his parents take him there weeks (months?) after his supposed death. I mean, weren't they really close friends? He thought about Daryl, but never about any of Daryl's family.

I understand the appeal, the call to arms, and all, but I stand alone I guess in my lack of enthusiasm for this title.

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## Evgeny says

Seventeen-year-old Marcus studies at a normal school in San Francisco set in the very near future. In this case normal school means total surveillance over the students, complete control over their movement and what they read. Marcus is knowledgeable and rebellious enough to fool the system into giving himself some freedom and privacy. One normal day at school follows another until Marcus and his friends escape it during a break and almost perished in a terrorist attack.

The survivors are rounded up by the Department of Homeland Security and sent to an old prison to sort them out. Marcus refused to cooperate initially still thinking the standard justice procedures are applied to terrorist suspects and as a result earned himself a status of one. I do not need to say about the state of surveillance after a terrorist attack (hint: it increased to the level of that of Big Brother), but Marcus does not like it and thinks he can fool the system by his usual methods and discredit it. Can he really?

I am sorry, but this review would be much more political than my usual ones. It is impossible for it not to be. For starters let us just say that **the terrorists won**:

If you think I exaggerate, just try crossing US/Canada border to see that I talk about, and these are two friendly neighboring nations which are very close to each other.

I would be the first one to admit that Cory Doctorow preaches in this book. He preaches a lot. However his preaching is related to very important subjects that fall under the radar for a lot of people: internet privacy, cryptography, snooping, false positives paradox, and other related things.

He does provide a crash course for all of these from technical point of view and while he tries to keep thing simple the amount of information can still be overwhelming at times. It is still a good idea to read it to get the most general idea on the topic, at the very least.

I cannot stress the importance of the lessons in the book enough. In my opinion this book should be a must read for anybody with an IQ higher than that of an average potato. Do not expect an easy read and it does get depressing the way the classic 1984 gets depressing - this novel has some similarities with the latter, except that it hits way too close to home quite often - too often to qualify for a comfort reading.

The plot combined with the importance of discussed subjects yields **4.5 stars** rounded down.

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## Hayden says

Oy, what a disappointment. I kept thinking, right up until the very end, that this book was about to get awesome, but it never did. The premise--a very near future where Homeland Security cracks down on ordinary citizens like a mofo--could be great. But unlike 1984, Little Brother is never able to build any tension, or take advantage of all the possibilities for betrayal and suspicion in a world where the DHS recruits teens to spy on each other.

Instead, Little Brother seems to be just a gross fantasy of what Cory Doctorow wishes he had been like at 17,

with all the chicks TOTALLY DIGGING HIM for no apparent reason. Also, it is boring.

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### **Lyn says**

Little Brother by Cory Doctorow hits some sensitive themes over and over in a narrative of the sooner rather than later dystopian problems following a post 9/11 terrorist attack on America, this time in San Francisco.

Making an obvious tip of the cap to George Orwell, Doctorow begins his story in 2015 with hip, techie teenager Marcus and his exploits trying to avoid problems with his assistant principal. Geeky adolescent shenanigans are quickly interrupted by the attack and the subsequent martial law that comes down in the form of a Department of Homeland Security squad of jack booted thugs led by a “severe haircut lady” who would be at home in Orwell’s Thought Police or the Gestapo. Our protagonist’s world is changed forever after his arrest and Doctorow uses Marcus’ declared war on the DHS as a means to discuss topics of law, freedom, Constitution and the nature of our precarious balancing test of safety versus personal freedom and privacy.

Marcus’ techno-revolution will undoubtedly strike a filial chord with many young adults, presumably the intended audience for this novel, and his fear and paranoia surrounding the hard times of the DHS crack down is a clear and intentional throw back to the counter culture, social activism of the 60s and Doctorow’s setting in San Francisco is no accident.

This book will raise divergent discussions about the nature of security and the foundations of our Bill of Rights in light of very real threats from abroad and from within. While Doctorow is not shy about standing on a soapbox, his writing falls short of being preachy and for the most part he simply spins a good story.

Heavily one sided, though, the author steers clear of objective descriptions of the attack and responsible parties, focusing instead on the safety versus privacy issues. While this focus provides a linear narrative and a theme centered storyline, the book may have been made better with a more balanced discussion of all the issues surrounding a terrorist attack.

Still, prophetic warnings of our Department of Homeland Security turning into above the law secret police hits home and Doctorow effectively creates a healthy environment for cautious activism as our society continues to struggle with how to be safe while maintaining our identity as a free nation.

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### **Krystyn says**

Just finished reading the free .pdf version of Cory Doctorow's Little Brother.

The writing is not the tightest I have ever read, nor does it even begin to exude elegance, but it does a decent job of keeping you reading.

I was incredibly put off by the chapter-start bookstore dedications. It felt like a weird meta sort of pandering. This is what you do when you are relentlessly self-promotional. You tell people you like them, and tell

everyone in the world their name and where they "live." The obligation to return the favor feels like less of an obligation, so now Doctorow's cultivated a network of bookshops who are probably going to be more amenable to keeping his stuff in stock, perhaps waiting for the day he strolls in (to the brick and mortar businesses, anyway) to sign whatever they've got of his on-hand. I was never allowed to read the book purely for the first several chapters, as I was worried that I might be missing some plot-related element if I skipped the bookstore plugs. After a few chapters, it became obvious that I did not need to read them at all, and became pretty adept at skipping the italicized bits before reading on. The narrative also started to become more relaxed, so it felt easier to read once the main pin of the plot started to act as its hinge.

This novel is pretty heavy-handed. I was cool with the concepts of security theatre and freedoms being slowly, subtly, and needlessly stripped from citizens volunteering them up in the name of 'Freedom,' but I was absolutely NOT down with the 2-dimensional and laughable caricatures painting Rooney and Perfect Haircut and Charles. I don't actually care how 'real' those depictions might actually be, weirdly enough. It was a cheap narrative element, and drew me out of the story so much that I actually began to resent the narrator and the hubris layered over him by the author like thick, crusty calcium deposits. The martyrdom of Marcus is all well and good as a plot device, but other than the concert event and the flash mob, there was never any real sense of the scope of what was happening in the world of the book. It isn't until much later that you actually get some mortality numbers from the book's pivotal event, and honestly, that would've been good to know much, much earlier. It's as if none of this actually occurred to Marcus until he was forced to look at it. He was clueless about the DHS people he encountered, and it only took a few minutes of television-watching to clue him in. It was also frustrating to have him be so careful about getting off the grid when the vans came by, and to make such a huge point of it, but then, when it mattered the most (after he escaped from Masha in the moving truck), when he was keeping the evidence he most needed alive and accessible (Masha's phone), he didn't seem to care much at all about being detected.

I dunno. It's a decent read, but it felt sort of hacked together, more than a little holier-than-thou. Appropriating the "Don't trust anyone over 30" slogan and re-tooling it to "25" thoroughly pissed me off, for obvious reasons. I am not the enemy, and I do not come from a generation that defines the habit of voluntarily giving up one's freedoms. I became a teenager during the Cold War, and I remember what it was like to constantly fear nuclear fallout from an attack, of Ronnie accidentally pushing the wrong button. Maybe that's something Doctorow felt necessary to put into a Young Adult book, but as a teenager, I would've found that a little insulting, especially since Marcus shows plenty of trust in his History teacher and later on, the journalist. It's ridiculous that they are painted as the exception to the rule. What a grim message to send to teenagers, who already might feel disenfranchised by simply being teenagers.

Anyway, I read it. It was intriguing initially because the kids were playing a game they called an ARG (I would have liked to have heard even more about it, but whatever), but the rest of it was, strangely enough, a lot of fear mongering, grandstanding, and a couple sex scenes. Oh, and I was pretty irritated that Darryl became a footnote, collateral damage, unexplored. What happened to him was pretty interesting, and would have given much more gravitas to the themes of the book, but it was more important to have Marcus and Ange close out the book by sweatily groping each other in a little tiny office with their shiny new hip revolution. Sigh.

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## **Brendan says**

What sounds from the description like a fun techno-thriller tinged with lefty politics is instead a didactic bore of a blog entry masquerading as a novel. I agree with the politics of the book; it's the bad writing I have a

problem with. It seems Doctorow was so concerned with conveying his Important Message that he forgot that long lectures tend to kill plot momentum. (He also forgot about credible characters and dialogue that sounds like a real human being would actually say it.) A colossal disappointment, and I downloaded it for free.

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## Becky says

I have to admit that the first couple pages or so had me rolling my eyes and wondering if I would be able to actually finish this book. There's so much technoslang that it seemed to me to be trying too hard, even though it is a book about hackers and technokids... Like, *"Spending Fridays at school was teh suck anyway, and I was glad of an excuse to make my escape."* Teh suck? Really. Ugh. (Although, to be fair, at least he spelled out "suck" and didn't write "teh sux" or something. I probably would have just had to close the book right then and there. \*shudder\*) Another example is using "vibe" rather than "vibration" when talking about receiving a text message, or "h4wt" for "hot", which doesn't make sense to me anyway, because it's longer and more cumbersome to type "h4wt" than it is to type "hot". But then later, the full and unabbreviated word "tarpaulin" is used rather than just "tarp", which felt out of place considering the shortening/slang usage of other stuff. I don't understand the stupidifying slang netspeak anyway, but then I'm older than 25, so I'm probably a lost cause.

Add to that that there is a lot of hacker exposition and explanation that I didn't really think was necessary, and you have the only two reasons that I couldn't give this 5 stars. I appreciate the author/narrator explaining the technical aspects of the story for those of us who aren't technologically super-savvy like the characters in the book, but it seemed like there was a lot that could have been contextualized (like gait-cams) rather than explained for pages.

But these are small nit-picks. Other than these two things, the book was brilliant, relevant and prophetic. I want to buy copies and hand them out at schools. I want my library to pick up 10 more copies and I want them to just magically appear in people's check-out stacks. I want people to read this book. I want people to learn from it and take away the knowledge that our freedom is more likely to be taken from us by Americans than by anyone else, and to fight against it when it happens.

This book is set in the not-very-distant-at-all future, after a "terrorist" attack in San Francisco, which essentially results in SF being turned into a vicious data-mining police state... Now with even more "With us or against us" mentality per square mile! \*Used car salesman smile\* It's frightening, because it's already happening right now. Innocent people are being held without trial, without representation, without anything, in the name of "security". This terrifies me more than anything, because there's no limit, no boundary. When there's a nameless, faceless, general "threat", "security" must by necessity become ever more pervasive and intrusive in our lives to find it. And the only people who suffer are us.

Benjamin Franklin said **"They who can give up essential liberty to obtain a little temporary safety, deserve neither liberty nor safety."** The characters in this book understand this concept and they go about fighting for their freedom and their rights as American citizens even when the people they are fighting are the very people who are supposed to defend their rights as American citizens. Color me proud. Considering that this book is told from the point of view of a 17 year old, I can only hope that REAL 17 year olds think about this stuff, like prejudice and fear-mongering and overzealous uniformed officials, among others...

Anyway, I loved Marcus's character. Most of the time, probably because of the technoslang and the gaming,

he felt younger to me than 17. More like 15. But in a way, that only made him more impressive to me. I loved that he was smart, and willing to stand up for himself and do the right thing, and learn from the world around him and from his own mistakes. When I have kids, I hope that they are something like Marcus... only minus the skipping school to play games stuff. Marcus carried the book well, and was believable as both a smart, mostly responsible teen, and a freedom fighter. I liked his honesty, and how he was unsure of himself but didn't let that stop him.

I expected certain things to happen as the story progressed, and I was right about many of them. The escalation of the security/police-state, the defenders of the security measures, the dissidents, etc. (They were done in a more high-tech way than we have now, but they aren't far off. RFIDs are already gaining popularity and there are 2 cameras that I can see from my house without leaving my porch.) But I was wrong about some predictions and suspicions that I had as well, which always makes me happy, because I really hate knowing where a story's twists will be.

This book should be a must read for everyone, right along with Nineteen Eighty-Four. Go read it. Look past the slang, and the technical explanations, and read this for the snapshot of our future if we aren't wary and vigilant with this so called "War on Terror". See you on Treasure Island... ;)

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## **Nataliya says**

*"It's not about doing something shameful. It's about doing something private. It's about your life belonging to you."*

What do you value more - privacy or security? What if the endless security measures lull you into thinking you're safe but are in fact little but an excuse for a tight grip on your, ahem, 'unmentionables' in order to keep you meek and docile?

Billed as a young adult book, Cory Doctorow's *Little Brother*, despite its decidedly young voice and a few overexplanations aimed at chronologically underchallenged, is strikingly mature.

- \* It's about encouraging the young minds to be subversive instead of meek.
- \* It's about the dangers of fear-mongering and paranoia.
- \* It's about the principles of civil liberties and social activism.
- \* It's about the principles of human rights including the right to question authority.
- \* It's serious about the idea of actually holding the government responsible.

Our world has gone through a lot of changes in the name of that nebulous idea of safety and security. We learned to take things and make them the new normal. Of course you cannot carry certain things on the airplane. Of course you will get a full body scan and a full grope patdown in addition to that (I'm 30 but look 16, I was told - an innocent-looking baby-faced and harmless-appearing young woman - and I keep getting randomly swabbed for gunpowder and extra-patted down whenever I try to board a plane - must be that inner subversiveness shining through). Of course the government can easily read your emails and listen to your phone - but insists on keeping its secrets as it's reading yours. Of course your Internet search is monitored for the tell-tale trigger words. Of course your whereabouts are tracked and your GPS - and who else by extension? - always knows where the hell you are.

*Little Brother* a novel of the aftermath of a terrorist attack on San Francisco, when in the wave of seemingly



well-intentional (but who are we kidding, inevitably political) paranoia the surveillance state tightens its 'anti-terrorism' grip, and caught in the safety-security-quasi patriotism grip are, of course, not only the 'false-positive' terrorist suspects but the rest of the quasi-free society.

The Orwellian Big Brother here is DHS, the Department of Homeland Security, turning San Francisco into basically a surveillance state by playing on the usual human fears and desires to be safe and protected.

*"I thought I lived in a country where I had rights. You're talking about defending my freedom by tearing up the Bill of Rights."*

But for every Big Brother there is a Little Brother, and here this role is taken on by a 17-year-old technology-savvy young man Marcus Yallow, whose natural incline towards questioning authority (by, really, quoting the Declaration of Independence) and accepting freedom of speech as the undeniable right, combined with the poor luck of ending up in the wrong place at the wrong time make him a target and a victim of those in power - and make him a thorn in their side that they cannot get rid of. Instead of obediently accepting the new reality of 'anti-terrorism' leading to curbing of rights and freedoms, Marcus rallies the young into a cyber war against the Big Brother.

*"I couldn't believe it, but there was no other explanation. It had been sheer vindictiveness. My mind reeled at the thought. They had done all that as a mere punishment for defying their authority.*

*I had been scared. Now I was angry. "Those bastards," I said, softly. "They did it to get back at me for mouthing off." [...]*

*"I'm going to get them," I whispered, staring at my soda. "I'm going to get them."*

*Jolu shook his head. "You can't, you know. You can't fight back against that."*

What follows is Cory Doctorow's treatise (disguised as a smart and witty novel) on why your freedom and privacy is important and how you can fight back and ask inconvenient questions. Do we have the right to privacy? The right not to succumb to fear-mongering? The right to liberty? The right to freedom and justice for all?

Read this book. Ask the questions. Be a little subversive - it may just pay off in the long run.

**4.5 stars.**

You can read it legally - and free - from Cory Doctorow's own website:

<http://craphound.com/category/littleb...>

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**Jeffrey Keeten says**

**"Governments are instituted among men, deriving their powers from the consent of the governed, that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness."**

Marcus Yallow may not be a typical 17 year old kid, but he is fairly harmless. He might hack a secured website once in a while or figure out a way to circumnavigate the school security system, but only to insure himself a few moments of illicit freedom. He has been in trouble enough times to be the prime suspect when anything involving a technology hack becomes known, even when he didn't do it. *"Never underestimated the determination of a kid who is time-rich and cash-poor."* His life is changed forever when he decides to bust out of school for a few hours to play a Japanese scavenger hunt game. His best friends come with him because they work well as a team.

### **And then someone blew up the Bay Bridge.**

Needless to say all hell broke loose, and in the melee Marcus and his friends are detained by the Department of Homeland Security (DHS). This turns out to be the ultimate in being in the wrong place at the wrong time. The scavenger hunt game looked to DHS more like a game to plant bombs. After several days of humiliation, threats, and mild but unsettling forms of torture, Marcus does something he never thought he would do...he gave them what they wanted.

The passwords to all his devices satisfy them for now. They cut him loose. The embarrassment of giving in to them leaves a festering wound in his guts and makes him want to do something to fight back. He is further motivated by the fact that his friend Darryl has disappeared, and DHS denies ever having him in their possession. The Bay Bridge terrorist act gives the government cover to make people disappear that they think should disappear. Those missing agitators just died in the attack, and their bodies are unrecoverable.

### **Easier to do than you would think.**

DHS keeps implementing more and more control over the city of San Francisco. The rest of the country doesn't care after all: *"The nation does not love that city. As far as they're concerned, it is a Sodom and Gomorrah of fags and atheists who deserve to rot in hell."* Marcus gets stopped within a few days of his release for having a **NONSTANDARD RIDE PATTERN** on BART. DHS is tracking everything. Cameras at school have been installed that measure the distinctive walking patterns of students to determine who they are. Marcus combats this by putting pebbles in his shoes.

Marcus's parents were radicals in the 1960s, protesting anything and everything, but now that they are older, they have turned from radical anarchists into scared conservatives. They want the government protecting them and are willing to sacrifice their own civil liberties to feel safer.

Land of the ~~FREE~~ and the Home of the ~~BRAVE~~.

### **"Don't trust anyone over 25."**

The adults have turned to the dark side, so if there are any hopes of pushing back against the thuggish tactics of DHS, it is going to have to be from the kids, and as it happens Marcus/Win5t0n/M1k3y becomes their leader. Through the XNET on XBOX he is able to recruit an army of teenagers who need directions on how to best combat the "security measures" that have been put in place by the government. Marcus is scared and worried about the news circulating that the people they really want gone are being shipped to Syria. As he grows this revolution, he also begins to feel responsible for all the people he is encouraging to put themselves in harm's way.

He checks out *On the Road* from the library to look for inspiration. In the *"rhythm to the words, it was luscious."* His new girlfriend Ange, a tech head like him with the added bonus of being as horny or hornier

than he is, also enjoys his choice in books. They read passages to one another.

*"They danced down the streets like dingedodies, and I shambled after as I've been doing all my life after people who interest me, because the only people for me are the mad ones, the ones who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones that never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes Awww!"*

That Jack Kerouac could bring it! He does make me want to hop in a car with no clear destination to meet new people, see new places, and leave the old in the dust cloud behind me.

I first became aware of this series when I was watching the movie *Citizenfour* about Edward Snowden. During the filming of the movie he was reading the second book in this series called *Homeland*. I decided to pick up the first book in the series and see if Cory Doctorow could further stiffen my spine about reigning in our government. After all I am 48 years old, way too old to be trusted.

I have been all over the map about what I wanted our government to do for us. I too was willing to give up some of my rights to keep all of us safer. Unfortunately, we opened up a door that never closed. The government kept taking more and more control of our lives. I've seen reviewers who have said that if you aren't doing anything wrong then you have nothing to fear. Not true. A perfect example of this is when Marcus is stopped for a Nonstandard Ride Pattern. Anything out of the ordinary can be interpreted as suspicious.

### **We do have the right to privacy.**

I know that people give that up daily on Facebook, telling the world about their private life, but that is their choice. In emails to my friends, I expect that the only eyes that will see my words are those that I intended to see them. My phone calls should be between me and one other person. There should not be a third set of ears in the equation. I should be able to travel around my country without someone tracking my every move. I should be able to check books out of the library or buy books over the internet without the government logging my ownership. When we take away our liberties, then the terrorists win. When we live in fear, the terrorists win. The terrorists would love nothing more than to turn the United States of America into a mirror of their own repressed societies (or with our homegrown terrorists their own hellish vision of what a country should be). I guess we have to hope that there is a Little Brother out there capable of standing up to Big Brother. I hope I am strong enough to offer my own voice, my own hands, and my own words to the fray.

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