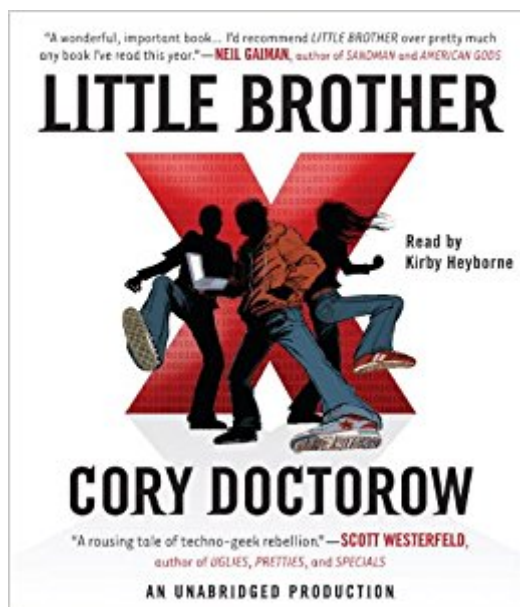


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# Little Brother



## Synopsis

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, Marcus discovers that his 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: to take down the DHS himself. Can one teenage hacker fight back against a government out of control? Maybe, but only if he's really careful . . . and very, very smart.

## Book Information

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Age Range: 12 and up

Grade Level: 7 and up

## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. Grade 10 Up • When he ditches school one Friday morning, 17-year-old Marcus is hoping to get a head start on the Harajuku Fun Madness clue. But after a terrorist attack in San Francisco, he and his friends are swept up in the extralegal world of the Department of Homeland Security. After questioning that includes physical torture and psychological stress,

Marcus is released, a marked man in a much darker San Francisco: a city of constant surveillance and civil-liberty forfeiture. Encouraging hackers from around the city, Marcus fights against the system while falling for one hacker in particular. Doctorow rapidly confronts issues, from civil liberties to cryptology to social justice. While his political bias is obvious, he does try to depict opposing viewpoints fairly. Those who have embraced the legislative developments since 9/11 may be horrified by his harsh take on Homeland Security, Guantanamo Bay, and the PATRIOT Act. Politics aside, Marcus is a wonderfully developed character: hyperaware of his surroundings, trying to redress past wrongs, and rebelling against authority. Teen espionage fans will appreciate the numerous gadgets made from everyday materials. One afterword by a noted cryptologist and another from an infamous hacker further reflect Doctorow's principles, and a bibliography has resources for teens interested in intellectual freedom, information access, and technology enhancements. Curious readers will also be able to visit BoingBoing, an eclectic group blog that Doctorow coedits. Raising pertinent questions and fostering discussion, this techno-thriller is an outstanding first purchase.

—Chris Shoemaker, New York Public Library Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

**\*Starred Review\*** Seventeen-year-old techno-geek Marcus (aka Marcus) bypasses the school's gait-recognition system by placing pebbles in his shoes, chats secretly with friends on his IMParanoïd messaging program, and routinely evades school security with his laptop, cell, WifiFinder, and ingenuity. While skipping school, Marcus is caught near the site of a terrorist attack on San Francisco and held by the Department of Homeland Security for six days of intensive interrogation. After his release, he vows to use his skills to fight back against an increasingly frightening system of surveillance. Set in the near future, Doctorow's novel blurs the lines between current and potential technologies, and readers will delight in the details of how Marcus attempts to stage a techno-revolution. Obvious parallels to Orwellian warnings and post-9/11 policies, such as the Patriot Act, will provide opportunity for classroom discussion and raise questions about our enthusiasm for technology, who monitors our school library collections, and how we contribute to our own lack of privacy. An extensive Web and print bibliography will build knowledge and make adults nervous. Buy multiple copies; this book will be a hot item (that's for the nonhackers). Grades 8-12. --Cindy Dobrez --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Bought this for my kindle for my teens to read. Especially after reading in the LA Times of how some school superintendent banned it and took it off the recommended reading list for high school - then I just had to get it. Of course, I read it also. It was written a while ago, but is very pertinent to today with Big Brother everywhere. Of course, as in all young adult fiction, the kids are smarter than the adults and need to save the world - with a little help from some adults. I really enjoyed that the characters were all flawed, learned valuable lessons and seemed like real people - except for some of the villains who are a little cartoonish. Appropriate for high schoolers and possibly some mature 8th graders. Does have swearing and some sexual content, so keep that in mind.

OK, so I admit I'm late to this particular book party. Better late than never. I see in many reviews mentions of the book "1984," but what I thought it most resembled is a novel most haven't read: THE SHOCKWAVE RIDER by John Brunner, a book that predicted the Internet and viruses, and how the State would use them as control mechanisms, long before there were such critters. NECROMANCER is another influence on this. But other books, from Kerouac to Thoreau to Abbie Hoffman's STEAL THIS BOOK, pop up in the novel. It very brilliantly portrays the power of the State to destroy all we have in order to "make us safe." How readily people give up their rights and freedoms to people who promise to keep the wolves from the door. All you have to do is watch a Trump rally to see how that works. It also shows that, yes, we all can take a stand, and even one person can matter. But you do have to realize that it may come at great personal cost. I could probably go on at length on the perfection of this book. Many have already. I'd like to address two glaring areas that needed work, however. The first failure: The protagonist is as much a 17 year old as I am (\*cough\* NOT). Nor does this child exist in any reality in America. Marcus is so very clearly a construct of an adult. I've read other books that more accurately capture a smart young person. Doctorow tries to jam this character into the cultural zeitgeist too hard. Yes, a lot of kids are into role-play, cosplay, cons, and online stuff. But every single solitary movement of his time? No. It just tries too hard and misses a lot of nuance. However, the "love scenes" ring truer than most of the rest. (I also get why adults are almost the "talking horns" of a Charlie Brown cartoon. But it was often depressing that every adult was 2 dimensional). No Millennial is allowed to roam around without their parents checking in with them on their cell phone every few hours. Even in San Francisco, kids (especially well-heeled kids) aren't allowed to run around low-rent areas by themselves, and certainly not at night. Then the parents allow Marcus to travel the same

routes by himself after he's held up? I found that part hilarious. This doesn't invalidate that the book is readable by a teen or an adult. The developmental editing fell short (I'm a developmental editor, so stuff like this rattles my cage). I realize that famous authors get away with stuff that regular authors don't, but this really should have been flagged. Marcus goes on for pages describing the intellectual or authorial sources for the thing he's about to think (or in the process of thinking). I am married to a geek. Yes, they think deeply about stuff most don't. And they can absolutely recite pages of information to you about any subject. But they don't think about that. They think thoughts around that. Had I edited this, I would have made these "asides" into website information pages at the start of a chapter. Or hypertext, or links, or something. It just wasn't realistic, and slipped into didacticism that distracted the reader from the story. But those are quibbles, really. This is an important book for our times. I'm glad this is being taught in schools (or at least, some schools). Kids need to understand that they are as much a part of the American experiment as anyone else. A powerful, forceful argument for personal liberty.

This book is an interesting mix of YA, SF, adventure and tech thriller. Although the main characters are young adults, folks of any age should enjoy reading this book. Set in the nebulous near future in San Francisco, the accurate technical aspects of the book are what I really appreciate. The descriptions of the use of computers, technology, and especially ParanoidLinux are dead-on. Having worked for over 35 years in the computer industry (IBM, MCI/Worldcom, Cisco, Red Hat, etc.), and being familiar with REAL operating systems like Linux, I can say without hesitation that the descriptions of technology used in this book are disturbingly real. As with any tool, today's computer and communications technology can be used for good and evil. Little Brother depicts both sides of that equation very convincingly. The book's depiction of the effects of that technology on our lives, for good or evil, whether intentional in its application or not, and whether by organized entities or individuals or loosely affiliated groups of individuals is quite amazing in its accuracy. And very chilling in some ways. The characters are well developed and it is easy to like the protagonists and the antagonists are quite despicable. Yet most of the characters are more complex than that, especially the main characters. The plot is intense and makes the book hard to put down. A really good read.

Little Brother is definitely worth the read. It is inspiring as Marcus fails and seems like he has lost, he doesn't give up. This teaches perseverance and dedication. If you are a computer person, this book is a good choice for you! It has a lot of technological components that have the potential to be very interesting if you are involved with technology. If you are not a computer person, like myself, parts of the novel may be boring or confusing but Doctorow explains the tech aspects very well and helps the reader understand what Marcus is doing, I also learned a lot from this. The plot does sometimes jump around a lot but the story line and character development makes up for this and the sometimes boring "tech talk". I found myself wanting to read and also very intrigued in the characters. Tension builds throughout the novel, which leads to a very eventful climax. I recommend this book mainly to the teenage reader, like myself, because they can relate to Marcus well. Overall I do recommend this book to majority of people but mainly to people who like computer science and to teenagers.

This is a wonderful novel about CyperTechnology pitting young people in San Francisco and the U.S. versus the Department of Homeland Security. Along the way, the author in the voice of the teen hero of the novel explains a lot of the CyperTechnology featured in the novel. If you want more, there are two great afterwords by experts in CyperTechnology, followed by a Resources section by the author himself. The author also gives permission to read the novel on any of your devices and it is not encumbered by digital restrictions management (DRM) software! The novel has won a large number of awards. You should definitely read it to see why!

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