



Little Brother by Cory Doctorow

Subjects: Terrorism—Fiction; Computer hackers—Fiction; Civil rights—Fiction; United States—Dept of Homeland Security—Fiction

Awards: Best Books for Young Adults

Book Lists: America, Civil Rights, Gifted

Props: Cell phone, iPod



Technology is a wonderful thing—computers, (*Show cell phone, iPod*) cell phones, iPods. They make life interesting, convenient. But what if technology was being used by the government, by your schools to record your movements, your Internet searches, your conversations? Marcus, a 17-year-old computer hacker, lives in San Francisco in the not so distant future where the free laptops provided by his school snitch on students to the administration. The computers are designed to log every keystroke, watch all the network traffic for suspicious keywords, count every click, keep track of every fleeting thought you put out over the net, plus they show a never-ending parade of obnoxious ads. Basically, the computers worked for the man.

But for Marcus, cracking the school's computer had been easy. I won't bore you with the techy details. Suffice it to say, Marcus is pretty good with computers and now his school issued computer does what he wants it to do. But Marcus is used to outsmarting the man. On the day this story begins, Marcus has skipped out of school for a few periods—again—with his best friend, Darryl. This time they meet up with other friends in the city to play an online game. It's an ARG, an Alternate Reality Game and it's great. Imagine prowling the streets of the city, checking out all the weird people, the street maniacs, and funky shops searching for clues like a scavenger hunt, solving the clues and finding more clues—for a techy like Marcus—it's awesome! It certainly beats an afternoon in school.

But before Marcus even found his first clue, the world changed forever. He felt it first, a sickening lurch of the cement under his feet that every Californian knows instinctively—earthquake. But earthquakes are eerily

quiet—at first, anyway—but this wasn't quiet. This was loud, an incredible roaring sound that was louder than anything he'd ever heard before. The sound was so punishing it drove Marcus to his knees. Then there was another rumble, and a cloud of smoke spread out. It was the spreading black shape they'd all grown up seeing in movies. Marcus suddenly realized that someone had just blown up something in a big way. They all looked at the mushroom cloud in silence. Then sirens sounded and a voice crackled over the loud speakers, "Report to shelters immediately." People began running, shoving, in the chaos Darryl was stabbed with a knife. They tried to get help but the police car that stopped didn't help them, the police arrested them. It seemed beyond all reason, but Marcus and his friends were suspected of committing acts of terrorism. They were held for days in a secret prison and brutally questioned. After six days Marcus was finally released, but he finds that San Francisco has been turned into a police state that is now run by a power-crazed Department of Homeland Security. Everyone is a suspect and no one has any civil liberties. Marcus is appalled at just how much privacy the citizens of his city were willing to give up to feel secure.

Although Marcus is warned by the authorities that they will come for him if he tells about his arrest and interrogation, for Marcus, the only option left is to take down Homeland Security with an underground online revolution. Does he have the smarts and the guts to take down a government crazy with power?

The *Los Angeles Times* calls this scary and technologically riveting book "pretty freaking cool." Read it! (*Hold up book*) *Little Brother* by Cory Doctorow.