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Cory Doctorow

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In Cory Doctorow's wildly successful *Little Brother*, young Marcus Yallow was arbitrarily detained and brutalized by the government in the wake of a terrorist attack on San Francisco—an experience that led him to become a leader of the whole movement of technologically clued-in teenagers, fighting back against the tyrannical security state.

A few years later, California's economy collapses, but Marcus's hacktivist past lands him a job as webmaster for a crusading politician who promises reform. Soon his former nemesis Masha emerges from the political underground to gift him with a thumbdrive containing a Wikileaks-style cable-dump of hard evidence of corporate and governmental perfidy. It's incendiary stuff—and if Masha goes missing, Marcus is supposed to release it to the world. Then Marcus sees Masha being kidnapped by the same government agents who detained and tortured Marcus years earlier.

Marcus can leak the archive Masha gave him—but he can't admit to being the leaker, because that will cost his employer the election. He's surrounded by friends who remember what he did a few years ago and regard him as a hacker hero. He can't even attend a demonstration without being dragged onstage and handed a mike. He's not at all sure that just dumping the archive onto the Internet, before he's gone through its millions of words, is the right thing to do.

Meanwhile, people are beginning to shadow him, people who look like they're used to inflicting pain until they get the answers they want.

Homeland Details

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From Reader Review Homeland for online ebook

Derek Newman-Stille says

Marcus was known as m1k3y when he was younger, a web protestor and advocate of human rights who exposed government corruption. In Homeland, Marcus is a young adult, just beginning life outside of university. He has all of the regular issues facing a young person – searching for a job, dealing with student loans, new relationships... but he also has had a new set of responsibilities placed on him. When two of his friends are kidnapped, they leave him with a huge document listing and proving a remarkable variety of government and corporate abuses of power, criminal activities, and general corruption. He has to think about his own safety and the safety of his friends and family when he decides whether to release this information to the public.

The world Cory Doctorow creates in "Homeland" is one of corruption by people in positions of power (the 1%), government control, surveillance, invasions of privacy, and the general disinclination of the public to challenge these systems of control and abuse.... in other words, our world. Homeland, as well as being a brilliant story, is a call to activism, a demand that readers open their eyes and see the world around them with all of its flaws and to do something about the horrors that are being perpetrated in their name (in the name of the public, in public security, or 'our best interest').

You can read a larger version of this review at my website at <http://speculatingcanada.wordpress.co...> .

Ricky says

Is it too much to hope that this book lives up to the high-water mark of its predecessor?

Apparently not. While there's a lot less action and/or humor than the first book, the general spirit of rebellion and justice remains, and it's still a most satisfying read. After all, Joss Whedon stated that he would like to make The Avengers 2 something "smaller" and "more personal" than the first. Doctorow seems to have followed a similar philosophy here. The book depends more on small moments than big, sweeping events, for example the early scene where Marcus and Ange take shelter from a sandstorm at Burning Man and end up playing D&D with Wil Wheaton, of all people. (Having just started watching Star Trek TNG for the first time this weekend, I found this scene especially hilarious.)

In addition, it feels a lot more current than the first book ever did. When Little Brother came out, it may have been clearly influenced by the decisions of the Bush Administration, but with its pervasive use of more advanced technology even than today's stuff, it was quite obviously meant to be Twenty Minutes Into The Future. This book updates the setting very slightly, as only two years have passed in-universe (compared to six in reality), so now we have more up-to-date references like Twitter, Occupy and Android (I especially liked how Marcus was able to make and use a ParanoidAndroid smartphone OS.) It also means that the first book feels (unintentionally) dated, which is really sad because Little Brother's supreme scariness should not be underestimated.

After reading, stick around for two afterwords - the second of which was written by the famous Aaron Swartz (RIP). Had this book been written maybe a year later, I bet Marcus would have probably devoted one of his little tangents to Swartz the way he did for Alan Turing in Little Brother.

Jana Tetzlaff says

Homeland

I was very excited to read this and I was well aware that I would compare this to *Little Brother* constantly. *Little Brother* blew me away and any novel so closely related to it in scope and theme would have a hard time passing scrutiny.

The first chapter didn't quite pull me in. I understood that it was supposed to set the tone, that the freedom of the Burning Man festival was intended as a stark contrast to the oppressiveness and bleakness of the 'real world' waiting back of Chicago. I found it remarkable that all the positive aspects of Burning Man were brought out in opposition to everyday life: the absence of surveillance, commercial transactions etc. Burning Man acted as a counterpoint and, for me, added to the sense of oppression and captivity and the constraints exercised by society waiting on the return to 'civilisation'. The need to point out how great it is that something is absent in a confined space and time only emphasises how fucked-up reality really is. Of course, the happy, carefree, and peaceful setting of the first chapter also served to make the invasion of outside forces, intent on disrupting the harmonic atmosphere of this seeming paradise, even more shocking.

Even though surveillance and control, and the abuse of power were ever-present in the portrayal of the school system in *Little Brother*, the kid's attempts to circumvent the measures put into effect by the school board added a playfulness that came to an abrupt end with the bombing. It's very much the same formula in *Homeland*. While similar to the narrative strategies employed in *Homeland*, *Little Brother*'s opening chapter worked better for me. I'm pretty sure that my own claustrophobic nature and dislike of large groups of people and extreme heat evoked a personal reaction contrary to the one intended for the Burning Man setting.

The pacing of *Homeland* is near perfect. There are episodes of relative calm that ease the readers into the story but always keep them in suspense of the dreadful things that might happen next to shatter the serene and joyful atmosphere. And when these awful things do happen (as they inevitably will, but in a different way than expected), you sit there clutching the book, holding your breath, and fervently hoping the protagonists will find a way to prevail and face down their opponents. I'm pretty sure that other reviewers will criticise the protagonist's vast knowledge of almost everything and his tendency to explain things to his readers in detail. I didn't mind that at all. As in *Little Brother*, the story is told from the POV of Marcus Yallow who, by now, has finished school and quit college because of financial difficulties and is looking for work in a very unstable economic situation. The reader follows Marcus' reasoning and emotional and logical reactions. Marcus explains a lot of technical and scientific know-how, which was quite fun to me, whether I was already familiar with what he talked about or not. I admit that quite a bit just washed over me, but my paranoia was definitely fuelled again, so much so that I had to resist the urge to remove batteries from mobile phones and laptops and to cut the internet wires. Cory Doctorow is occasionally being accused of being overly didactic but I really cannot say that I share the sentiment. Since I'm usually someone who shuts down as soon as I get the feeling of being preached to and really start climbing the walls when people patronise or proselytise, I'd argue that Marcus' insights into technical and scientific, societal and political developments are delivered in an agreeable manner that asks you (politely) to consider these issues for yourself and make up your own mind about how you feel about and how you'd choose to react to them.

All in all, *Homeland* is an excellent book and exactly what I was craving at the time I read it. The ending was hinting at the possibility of a third book, which I would really like to see a lot (as long as Masha does not turn into a competing love interest). I'm wavering between a four and five star rating ... what the heck, it's been too long since I handed out five stars. I enjoyed reading *Homeland* very much and that is worth 5*.

Melody says

I should never start a Doctorow book in the evening because I will surely be up all night alternately reading and pacing and Googling and despairing and hoping.

This sequel to Little Brother is splendid. The technology bits make me frightened and determined to learn more. The story is gripping, the people (with the possible exception of Carrie because I just can't believe in that much evil- for my own tenuous sanity, I mean) are real and wonderful. The quiet defeat of Marcus' parents is heartbreakingly believable. The late-adolescent love stories are a welcome diversion throughout the narrative.

Reading Doctorow now is, for me, a lot like what reading Heinlein was back in the day; there's plenty of preaching but since I'm already sitting in the choir loft, I'm happy to hear it. And I holler AMEN at every opportunity.

Read this one, then give it to all the teenagers you know.

Monica says

I must say that, after reading -and greatly enjoying- Cory's first book in the series, Little Brother, I found Homeland, the sequel, a little disappointing.

The plot and the main theme are more or less the same as the previous novel, following Marcus Yallow and his friends in their fight for freedom and civil rights.

But, if both the goal and the message are highly remarkable, the plot simply isn't.

Don't get me wrong, it's a nice, enjoyable read. But it can't be compared to the previous novel.

It sometimes looks like the author doesn't know what he's getting at, either. The conclusion of the story is rushed and absolutely anti-climax, as if he had no more new ideas, as if he didn't know how to end it without mimicking the first book, and so he just rushed to the end without twists.

On the other hand, in other parts of the book, he just goes on rambling and rambling about apparently random subjects, like Burning Man festival (Ok, it's great, we got it: but is it really necessary to talk about it for a quarter of the book?), or how to draw a perfect coffee, or how random numbers are nice.

It's OK, more than OK actually, if a book teaches you things you wouldn't expect to learn: but in the end it started to sound like a collage of science mini lessons, oddities and fun facts.

So. Not bad, enjoyable, but if you expect it to hold on to the premises of Little Brother you may be disappointed.

Thomas says

Homeland was a book I hadn't really planned to read as part of my "finish up my unfinished series" project for the year. I enjoyed Little Brother, but I wasn't itching to see where the story went from there. At the last minute, I decided to add it to the list, and now that I've finished it, I can say that I made the wrong decision. I should have gone with my first instinct and left it well enough alone.

That's not to say that the book is bad; it's not. It's actually quite readable, compelling, and intriguing. The problem is that it's padded with a bunch of unnecessary detail because it's all about the things that Cory Doctorow writes about on Boing Boing. It's about Burning Man and cold-brewed coffee and 3D printing and third-party political candidates and drones and darknet and so on and whatever and yadda yadda. These aren't even things that are mentioned in passing, either; if you ever get a hankering to try cold-brewed coffee (and don't think that Doctorow doesn't extol how awesome and good and better-than-yours this coffee is, because he does, for about two pages), just open this book to page 56. He doesn't write out a recipe, but he tells you how to make it, in insane, ridiculous detail, detail that doesn't belong in a novel.

In fact, here are things you will learn about, and how long you will have to endure the details, while reading this book:

- Secure passwords (four paragraphs)
- Random numbers (four pages, namely because at one point he quotes pi for 1000 places)
- Cloud server computing (three pages)
- Astroturfing (fake grassroots campaigns) and sock puppet accounts (two pages)
- Beating lie detectors by clenching your asshole (two very uncomfortable pages)

If Doctorow had cut all that detail, the book might be about 250 pages long. As it stands, the book is about twice that length.

The characters and plot take second place to all these details, and Doctorow doesn't really bother to hide that fact. There's no real development of the characters, and aside from a handful of the main characters, everyone is a two-dimensional shell that's there to serve as a reason for an info-dump, or to move along what little plot there is. Instead, the tone of the whole novel was ingratiating. That should have come as no surprise to me, since Doctorow is usually in full-on self-promotion mode, and the ideals and philosophies he discusses in this novel are his own.

There are still some aspects of the novel that grated on me, outside of all that detail. Doctorow has a habit of having his characters talk in detail to each other about things that both of them already know about. At one point, a character asks another one if he's read a book, to which he responds that not only did he read it, but he wrote a paper about it in AP English (because that's the sort of characters there are in this book). So the other character then goes into a whole lot of detail about the book, prefacing it with "Then you'll remember" so the author can pretend that he hasn't just written dialogue that has no place in the scene. Sure, he wants to convey information to the reader that they may not have, but there were other, better ways to do that.

This kind of thing peppered Little Brother, too, but it didn't bother me as much then as it does now. I think it's partly because the info-dumps were a service to that story. That was a book about terrorism, security, privacy, and government, so getting a bunch of information about all of those things was necessary to keep the reader engaged in the story. With Homeland, everything just seems sort of random. There was no real reason to go into so much detail about Burning Man, or to have the main character meet a bunch of friends of Doctorow's within the narrative. It was just a moment where Doctorow could look smug and make himself look important because he knew enough about these people to include them in their novel. I'm surprised that Randall Munroe didn't get name-checked in the book, too.

I also noticed that there were a ton of "have got"s and "has got"s all over the place in this book. I cringe inside when I hear that phrase, since "I have" conveys the same information as "I've got," with the added bonus of it being grammatically correct (see also: "Where are you at?"). When I see it in books, it bothers me even more. I can accept it when the narrator or character is talking in a conversational style, but when you have a poised, professional, severe character who keeps using that phrase, it just winds up being completely unbelievable.

The ending was disappointing, too, because it just happened, through no effort on the main character's part. What resolution there was occurred off-screen, making much of the effort of getting to that point wasted. Doctorow will show us the details that involve public Maker spaces, but not what happens to the primary antagonist?

I'll admit that most of what I dislike about this novel is the little pieces, but at the same time, the book serves as the kind of propaganda that Atlas Shrugged was, and continues to be. Even being on the side of the issues discussed in this book did little to prevent me from being annoyed at the details. The bigger picture is a decent story, it's just ruined by Doctorow being Doctorow. It's one thing to post and discuss this kind of thing on a blog, but when you're writing a story, you need to know when to draw that line and put the focus back on the story. Unfortunately, Doctorow (and, more egregiously, his editor) doesn't know how to do that.

Demercel says

The book is nice, same basic plot as its predecessor - Little Brother. But it is less scary and less original - exactly because it has a similar plot. It also lacks a climax at the end. I am not the guy that wants every book to end like some western movie with the hero riding toward the sunset with the beautiful girl, but I still want the story to have a real end. I suspect the reason it lacks a climax is intentional, because the story is supposed to be motivational and as a result of this "real", and not like a movie/book plot.

The other thing that bugs me about this book is the technology. For someone who talks about paranoia, the author repeats some ideas about anonymity, that are like web browsers 101 or article in wikipedia in simple English. The all powerful government with basically endless supply of money is supposed to go through available to the public encryption schemes like hot knife through butter. If you think that a three letter agency can be stopped just by downloading free software, well, let us just say you are not exactly paranoid. Tor for example is something, that was developed by the military and then they abandoned it. Just like that? The military gave the whistle blowers a key instrument to be used when exposing secrets anonymously?

Yeah, right! :) I think a good read about Tor is this: <http://www.cryptogon.com/?p=624>

That's the thing about paranoia. It is never enough. If you are paranoid and cynical enough, you have to expect honeypots and other dirty tricks. Usually the easiest way to do something that the authorities don't want you to do is already covered. So all this 4chan and tor and stuff is probably full of agents and traps and trojan horses. So if you want to take this book as a motivation to do some of the stuff described in it, then I think the instruments described in it are at least insufficient.

On the positive site the book has a higher goal - to persuade the reader that he/she has to fight for his/her digital and "analog" rights and that he/she shouldn't be stopped by the thought that he/she is just a really small gear in the big System and is unable to change anything. And other than my objection about offering Tor as some panacea, the book is written very well from technological point of view and represents issues, technologies and events that are very real and present.

Rob says

This is a "Young Adult" novel so although it is well written, there is a healthy dose of over-explanation (as you might expect). I might be showing my age here, but it did irk me that Marcus (or Doctorow) felt he could trust the reader to get the oblique "My Little Pony: Friendship is Magic" reference but needed to explain a quote from "2001: A Space Odyssey" to death.

While Little Brother was concerned with the "war on terror", Patriot Act and Guantanamo, the background to this novel is the Occupy Movement, Wikileaks and the age of austerity. It seemed to be setting out to inspire,

more than to teach, so not so much on the details of TOR or cryptography. Because of the focus on movements against the system, I felt that Homeland was less bleak than its predecessor (unlike Kathy Ceceri at wired.com).

A compelling read, which I finished in a few days. The edition I read contained an essay at the end by Aaron Swartz, which I found poignant. Highly recommended.

terry gibbs says

Despite being more than slightly didactic (Doctorow slips in lectures on politics, internet privacy, and making good coffee, and the maker and free software movements) Homeland (like "Little Brother," to which it is the sequel) manages to be entertaining and suspenseful, primarily because its viewpoint character, Marcus is so credible as a young hacker who becomes increasingly politically radicalized in the face of escalating violations of privacy and civil liberties in the US (in Doctorow's "if this goes on" near-future story, the terrorism panic of 9-11 has been escalated by a second major domestic terrorism event). The author is mostly successful in delivering his lectures in Marcus's voice. And they are good lectures.

Tom Lee says

At first I refused to believe this book was a YA novel, and consequently disliked it. I cracked this open as part of a book club assignment -- I hadn't read any of Doctorow's other fiction. I knew that the first book in this series, *Little Brother*, had been billed as a YA novel. But isn't that just something people say these days when they're vaguely embarrassed by their novel's enthusiasm for chase scenes or wizards?

But no: this is a straight-up YA novel. It's written in the first person, it's full of exposition and straightforward descriptions of the protagonist's easily-comprehensible emotional states, and it has the kind of safe, square sense of humor that adults feel it's okay to model for kids. This isn't a genre I read much, but once I realized what I was dealing with I instantly recognized the aesthetic from the books we ask the kids to read at FLOC. Presumably there are good reasons for picking this kind of literary presentation (*so* much of the market for this age group is written this way, and kids do seem to read it). I was just sort of surprised that Doctorow is so adept at the style, I guess. I expected something a little more science-fictional!

This being a true-blue YA novel, the plot and prose probably aren't going to do much for adults. But that's okay: they're mostly here in service of the milieu that Doctorow wants to transmit to his young readers. And I have to say, it's a surprisingly inspiring one. Superficially this is about indoctrinating kids into contemporary/near-future San Francisco/hacktivist/Burner/protest culture, but it's all grounded in a commitment to personal liberty, civic-mindedness and responsibility that's downright heartwarming. Doctorow ably conveys the culture that Boing Boing catalogs on a daily basis, and convinces you that it's actually real and worth participating in.

As you might expect, he's very good on the technology -- the book convinced me to cancel my (unused) SuperNews account and register with IPredator. Things here are very-near-future -- AFAIK MSNBC isn't flying drones over protests yet, though I'm sure they soon will -- but everything is technologically possible and accurate, with some allowances for making the construction of drones and exotic laser sintering projects seem inspiringly easy. The only misstep I spotted was in the description of Hadoop as if it were Stata (and, not being a big Hadoop user, it's possible I'm the one who's turned around on that).

As you might imagine, I found the book's treatment of politics to be a bit frustrating. Through the character of Joe Noss, Doctorow implicitly endorses the idea that our politics suffers from bad people rather than bad systems, and indulges in some familiar but still irksome third party daydreaming. The book's view of money's role is consistently grounded in quid-pro-quo, the potential importance of technology relative to traditional organizing efforts is massively overstated, and (with the exception of a reasonably humanized portrait of the SFPD) the book's worldview is consistently Manichean and adversarial. All of this is probably appropriate for a book aimed at kids, but I hope it's not what Doctorow believes (the Jacob Applebaum afterword, though inspiring in its own way, is not encouraging on this score; the second afterword by Aaron Swartz is much better).

Still, I enjoyed the read and I came away feeling like I'd been at least partially, temporarily extracted from my cynical DC technology rabbit hole. Thanks for that, Cory. I'll be recommending your novels to the next budding young hacktivist I spot.

Simona Bartolotta says

Not as thrilling as the first one. Still very good, and for the same reasons *Little Brother* was, but not as much as I expected from the sequel of one of the books I loved the most in the entire year. The ending, moreover, was too feeble and flat, and thus very disappointing.

usagi ?? says

4.5/5 stars.

I didn't think Doctorow could top himself in terms of perfectly blending social commentary with important issues that more YA readers should be looking at with "Pirate Cinema", but I was wrong. "Homeland", the follow up to the 2008 release, "Little Brother", absolutely blows everything else out of the water. And yes, while he gets a bit didactic in this and his other works, it's stuff we need to be reading. It's stuff that's firmly rooted in reality that is absolutely frightening, and something that needs our attention. So much so that Jacob Appelbaum from Wikileaks and the dearly departed Aaron Swartz did afterwords. If that doesn't get your attention about activism and rights, I don't know what will.

Since the technical areas of this book are more or less flawless (though I took off some points for didactics when it came to certain things like 3D printers, which kind of slowed things down in some areas), I won't be talking about them. Instead, I'll be talking about why this book matters so very much to us right now as a society, and why YA readers, regardless of age, should be paying attention.

You may or may not have heard about the story of Aaron Swartz. For the sake of brevity, I won't be telling his story here - just check out his wiki page for more information. But much like Doctorow's fictitious main character Marcus, he was prosecuted, to be made an example of for his online activism about privacy, piracy, and beliefs about an open, transparent internet by the government and other entities. To the point where he became so depressed that he hung himself earlier this year - January 2013. While Marcus never goes that route, the depression of being hounded by the very people we put into office and are supposed to trust is no

less than haunting. I had no idea Swartz was going to be writing one of the two afterwords, and reading it now, a month after his death, actually brought tears to my eyes. When we lose people like Swartz, we lose a lot. We lose bravery. We lose so much more than just one life.

To say this is a paranoid book is an understatement. It will teach you how to make a darknet, how to encrypt your files, and how to cover your ass when it comes to your own privacy and online rights. But it's a paranoid book we desperately need. And while a lot of "Little Brother" and "Homeland" are very, very exaggerated, if you do your research after reading, you'll find that some of it isn't so far off. Swartz's death just brings home that fact all the harder. It will make you pay attention, and want to do something. If there's anything to be said about Doctorow's books, it's the way he writes, the way he prods at you, making you want to do something, to help in the cause. Some people feel that this is too much sociopolitical commentary for the YA market, and I can see why they'd say that. But at the same time, it's the kick in our asses that we really need.

But this book is also full of hope. Hope that we're still able to stop in our tracks, turn around, and demand change. Demand what's ours, what's been taken away from us, what needs to be restored. Any and all of the above, Doctorow makes you want to get up, get angry, and do something. Whatever your cause may be, this book urges you to take up the fight. Don't be passive. Do something. Because in the end, that's how things get accomplished these days - you have to be the squeaky, annoying, loud wheel in order to get the grease. This book asks a lot of us - to have faith. That using our hope will make things change. And that's the hardest thing of all to do (if it weren't, it wouldn't be called faith, right?).

So, final verdict? This book is very dear to me, and I hope it finds a place in must-read YA fame. Enough with the paranormal romance. Enough with the love triangles. This is a book that truly matters. Pick it up, read it, and pass it along to someone you know. "Homeland" is out now from Tor Teen/Macmillan in North America, so be sure to check it out once you get the chance.

(posted to goodreads, shelfari, librarything, and birthofanewwitch.wordpress.com)

Pat F. says

This sequel to "Little Brother" doesn't quite live up to its predecessor. At the end of LB, Marcus has gone from a somewhat cocky teen rebel to a wiser, scarred near-adult. He learns; he grows; he evolves. In contrast, Marcus ends Homeland in basically the same shape he starts in. It's a shame, because the writing in both books is good, if a bit tech-y in places.

In any event, the book begins with Marcus and his girlfriend Ange having a great time at Burning Man. They run into Masha, a former baddie in LB, who gives them a USB stick with a complete and very damaging dossier on "Severe Haircut Lady," the Big Bad from LB. She wants Marcus to leak it, Wikileaks-style, in hopes that the info will bring down the clandestine Homeland Security apparatus.

Then Masha disappears, and Marcus has a dilemma--how to release the info without drawing the attention of the baddies. In the meantime, he's found a dream job as a webmaster for an up-and-coming politician. The rest of the book covers his attempts to get the info out without losing his head, his friends, or his job.

I'll keep this one, because I do like the characters, it's a quick read, and the writing is good. I had the pleasure of hearing Cory Doctorow talk about Homeland on his recent tour, and I don't think we've heard the last of Marcus. I just hope that in the next one, Marcus continues to evolve, and the tension/stakes are higher.

Nicholas says

The best measure of how I feel about Cory Doctorow's *Homeland* is that I read it in the course of two incredibly busy days. I carved out time late at night and between highly productive work projects to devour this book. I really enjoyed it and it made me tear up a time or two.

It's not perfect. It doesn't have the impact of *Little Brother*, but it is a worthy follow up and does a number of things better than the first one. I think it does a better job of serving as a gate-way drug to geek skills than *Little Brother*, and that's a non-trivial data point.

The book is highly politicized, but I think Doctorow's restraint is important to note. Much more so than in *Pirate Cinema* (another didactic YA tech novel by Doctorow) Cory Doctorow paints his juvenile tech hero's path as one of restraint. Marcus Yallow (the protagonist) chooses intentionally how to exercise the power his tech skills grant him. This restraint is contrasted to the techno-anarchism or techno-vigilantism of Anonymous and other hacker communities. This fine and subtle distinction may be lost by those looking for clearer distinctions between the white and black hats, but I want to applaud the author for showing that the ability to do things with technology != the right to do them. Yallow chooses well, but his restraint may be lost on less sophisticated readers and/or reviewers.

In the end, I'm on board. Doctorow has done a fine job turning the moral quandries of the information frontiers into a very human novel for young people. In the end, it is better for all of us to empower ourselves to make as many choices as possible, since the alternatives are to surrender that agency to government, corporate, or black-hat computer criminal groups. The choices aren't easy, but better to make difficult choices than to be a pawn.

Kelly says

Older does not necessarily mean wiser, not for Marcus Yallow, hero of Cory Doctorow's bestselling and award winning novel, *Little Brother*. The sequel, *Homeland*, is set a couple of years later and opens with Marcus and his girlfriend, Ange, living it up at the Burning Man Festival in the Black Rock Desert of Nevada. There, in the middle of nowhere, Marcus' demons come to haunt him.

First is Masha, who used to be on the wrong side, but might now be on the right side. She hands Marcus her insurance policy: a USB drive with access to dirty documents she's been collecting about the dirty dealings of private enterprise, government departments and a certain former employee. She urges him to publicise the documents should she disappear. Enter Marcus' worst nightmare, the woman who oversaw his capture and torture in *Little Brother*, Carrie Johnstone. She's at Burning Man, too and she's not there to celebrate what seems to be the largest gathering of unplugged nerds in history.

Masha is kidnapped and Marcus is injured in the explosion triggered to cover the retreat. He returns to San Francisco with a broken nose, the USB and a job offer. The broken nose is annoying, but Masha's insurance policy and his new job--webmaster for a charismatic political candidate--are at direct odds. To do one justice, he has to all but fail at the other. Having a job is a Big Deal; he's been out of work for the better part of a year and, as a result of his shenanigans in *Little Brother*, his parents' careers have hit the skids. But, this is Marcus. He's a nineteen year-old guy, he's smart and curious. He downloads the treasure trove of data accessed by the key on the USB. It's incendiary stuff.

The gang gets back together to process the data. Before they can officially decide what to do with it, however, some of it is leaked. Marcus falls into another nightmare that feels like a paranoid delusion until his laptop starts talking back to him.

From there, the novel follows a similar path to its predecessor. Marcus is roughed up, there's a riot and government types do Bad Things. Marcus' voice is engaging, though, and the reader gains a good sense of a young man who is trying to grow up on his terms...and realises he can't. Like so much of his life, even this process is going to be dictated to him, for him, and until he locks step with events, his yelling and flailing will continue to sound like the obstreperous tantrum of a boy. Marcus faces a decision greater than protecting himself, those he loves, or even compromising his job. Can he do what's right?

I can't say the message of *Homeland* is particularly new, not so many years after *Little Brother*, but it's still relevant and there is a definite sense the author practices what he preaches. Security and freedom of ourselves, our lives and our data are important issues and while Cory Doctorow has a definite opinion, he never veers into the territory of telling the reader: You Are Wrong--which is greatly appreciated.

Cory Doctorow writes for a young adult audience, but the novel is just as enjoyable for an adult. The in-depth explanations of technology and how it works could be condescending. They never are. It's interesting stuff that inspires more than one bout of 'net research. A bibliography in the back of the book helps with that. There are also two afterwords, one by Jacob Applebaum of WikiLeaks and the other by Aaron Schwartz, co-founder of Reddit, also described as an internet activist. Sadly, Aaron Schwartz is no longer with us. His message in the back of this book is worth reading, however. I found it more accessible than the one written by Applebaum.

All in all, there's stuff to think about wrapped in a neat little adventure. If Marcus' story is to continue and I suspect it will--Carrie Johnstone is still out there--I'd like to see a different approach. A different book. Given Marcus gains some much needed maturity by the end of *Homeland*, I think I will.

Note: *Little Brother* is still available for free download at: <http://craphound.com/littlebrother/do...>

Another note: I read the free version in 2009 and liked it so much I went out and bought two copies, one for the shelf and one to give away. I'd say that's a successful model of online publishing.

Written for and originally published at SFCrowsnest.

Brick says

Another book of ideas, to be read after *Little Brother*, its predecessor. Same criticism of character development, and as before, it is often more than a little preachy, putting the protagonist and his family in the middle of the many difficulties of the 2008 recession, compounded by the logical results of Marcus' activities, his father's loss of his security clearance, etc. Most ironic, and sad, is the afterword by Aaron Swartz who has since been hounded to suicide by Federal prosecutors, and the other afterword by Jacob Applebaum who asks "... if you could travel back in time and help Daniel Ellsberg leak the Pentagon Papers, ... would you risk your life?" Interestingly, Bradley Manning contacted several national papers, including the NYTimes who acted with such courage re. the Pentagon Papers, and ended up talking via IM to the despicable self-serving hacker Arian Lamo, who turned him into the FBI. The NYTimes seems to have lost the moral high ground of the Pentagon Papers times, became an apologist for the phony WMD run-up to the Iraq war, and seems to have ignored Manning's attempt to engage them in the disclosures about the Iraq war.

We live in interesting times, in which whistle blowers of all stripes are faring worse than ever. Speaking truth to power, or even to your fellow citizens has rarely been so hazardous. Perhaps some of the many adolescents who are excited by Doctorow's ideas will be able to stem the anti-democratic tide in which we are presently immersed.

If you wonder if the events described in Homeland might be an avoidable dire prognostication about some time in the hopefully distant future, take a look at the story of the seeming approach by the US Chamber of Commerce engaging a major cyber security firm in an effort to use these kinds of malware that used to be available on Rootkit.com to attack their domestic "enemies". <http://truth-out.org/news/item/14951-...>

This book shows the exciting possibilities, and the risks to friends, family, and individuals who act on these possibilities.

Josh Bancroft says

So very, very, good. But not for the usual reasons I call book "good".

This book will make you want to do something, even if its just exploring the world of privacy, encryption, and the technologies that strengthen them (and weaken them). It might make you want to go out and join and Occupy protest. Or get involved in campaigning for an independent political candidate. It might make you consider starting to use TrueCrypt to protect your personal data. It might make you finally get around to figuring out that whole Tor thing, and how the darknet works. Or virtual machines, anonymizing proxies, or 3D printing. Or it might just help you be more sensitive to future issues that center around privacy, civil liberties, money in elections, or simply the difference between right and wrong.

That's quite a lot for something that's nominally a "young adult" novel. But that's what Cory does. And he's very, very good at it.

Read this book, and then, as Jacob Applebaum says in the afterword, give it to the person that needs it most.

James Swenson says

If you loved Little Brother, you'll want to read this, too. It's the same mix: one teenage moral dilemma after another, blended with evangelism for freedom through cryptography.

Since Cory Doctorow is a fellow of the Electronic Frontier Foundation, I was irritated by his use of a sandstorm to literally blow his main characters into a tent containing three of the leading lights of the EFF -- and Wil Wheaton, the internet hero formerly of Star Trek: The Next Generation and eponym of Wheaton's Law. Through the rest of the novel, I felt the EFF hanging over me as a *deus ex machina* in waiting. It didn't seem to occur to Marcus, though.

The book ends with an afterword by Aaron Swartz, which gives a sadly appropriate conclusion to a story about the breakdown of society.

Stacey says

Well crap. Once again Doctorow paints a pretty grim and believable picture of what happens when we allow our rights to privacy, autonomy and freedom of expression to be circumscribed in the name of "safety" and "protection."

The most disturbing thing about the potential of this tale to become reality, is that many of the MOST disturbing plot aspects of the novel *have already occurred*, and even as the perpetrators get their hands slapped, their attorneys rewrite service agreements, that we click "accept" in the little checkbox, and say "Hello nice corporation, I COMPLETELY trust that you will not use any of my private information for nefarious purposes, nor will you turn it over to, or sell it to, any other corporation or government agency that wants it."

All the while, your phone is sending out "location and usage data" to 50 different services all the time, even if your CarrierIQ has been disabled. That's okay, they have other ways of getting what they want out of your devices.

So here I am, typing on a website that shares my personal opinion with anyone who wants to see it, any website that wants to aggregate it, I've voluntarily placed up my own personal image, stated approximately where I live, given my cellphone permission to gather more "user statistics," and now I will page over to Facebook, and G+, and use my MapMyWalk, and my GPS, and take pictures that get geotagged and upload them to Flickr...

We are doing it to ourselves, and even when we know, do we plan to stop?

This short story is relevant and worth reading: The Perfect Match, by Ken Liu

Ubik 2.0 says

Hackers & Villains

Homeland è un libro contraddittorio, difficile da definire in maniera univoca, tanti e tali sono i motivi di interesse e per contro talmente vistose sono le debolezze che presenta.

In primo luogo va precisato che il romanzo, edito nel 2013, è il seguito con i medesimi personaggi di **Little Brother** (2008), pubblicato in Italia col titolo **X**: le date sono importanti perché gli argomenti trattati prefigurano in maniera inquietante gli eventi che nella nostra realtà contemporanea ruotano intorno al caso Assange e al caso Snowden.

Si tratta quindi di documenti segreti e decriptati abusivamente in grado di rivelare una massa enorme di dati scottanti per i Servizi Segreti americani e dei tentativi, assolutamente scorretti per uno Stato democratico, di bloccarne la diffusione fino a contrastarne anche fisicamente la pubblicazione con metodi repressivi degni di un regime totalitario.

Sull'altro piatto della bilancia abbiamo purtroppo una forma molto insoddisfacente, nei caratteri dei personaggi, nelle dinamiche fra di essi, nel modo di dipanare una trama che, per dirla in breve, presenta gli elementi di un genere a me fastidiosissimo, classificabile nella categoria "Young Adult" (protagonisti tutti teen-agers incompresi dalla famiglia, generosi e idealisti, scarsamente distinguibili l'uno dall'altro con

peculiarità rappresentate dall'autore in modo grezzo e impersonale, in assenza di qualsiasi sfumatura o di un minimo spessore psicologico).

Volendo proseguire questo gioco di contrapposizioni si può annoverare con (lieve) soddisfazione un'atmosfera libertaria, ancorché piuttosto carica di ingenuità e utopia, che pervade il libro, ma d'altra parte un eccesso di tecnicismi informatici che a volte rendono il testo quasi un manuale per aspiranti hackers (anche un po' datato, mi pare, pur non essendo il sottoscritto un esperto in materia...).

In definitiva il romanzo di Cory Doctorow (nessuna parentela col grande omonimo...) è un coacervo di elementi non ben amalgamati fra loro, un instant book volenteroso ma anche velleitario cui va riconosciuto il merito di affrontare tematiche di grande risonanza attuale, un mondo finora poco rappresentato dal suo interno e dico "interno" perché l'autore è chiaramente un ex-hacker oggi blogger attivista nei movimenti per i diritti digitali... Sono argomenti di cui sentiremo sempre più parlare ma, si spera, affrontati con una cura rivolta non solo alle "meraviglie tecnologiche" ma anche, trattandosi di romanzo, ad un impianto narrativo decente.
