NOTE: All citations and references are made to the PDF version of the book that can be downloaded for free (and legally) from <http://craphound.com/littlebrother/download/>

The book Little Brother by Cory Doctorow is a novel about a 17 year old boy named Marcus Yallow. He uses his technological skills in attempt to fight for freedom. Marcus tries to do this with the help of the Xnet, which is basically a more secure and private version of the internet. The story takes place in the city of San Francisco, possibly not too long after the book was published (April 29, 2008). This is evident when Marcus talks about a newspaper headline, saying “The headline was set in the biggest type I'd seen since 9/11” (Doctorow, 189). This combined with him talking about playing his Sega Dreamcast (released in 1999) at the age of seven means that it is at least 2009 and probably not too much later in the future (Doctorow, 151).

The main character, Marcus, is a very well-written character. He is a great problem solver, he is brave, and he is passionate and true to his beliefs. This is evident throughout the entire book as he manages to come up with solution-after-solution to many of the problems he faces. On the other hand, there are parts in the book where he allows fear and anger to negatively affect his decision making. This can be seen when him and two of his friends are returning from being wrongly imprisoned. Here he says, “This is me and them, now. I'll beat them,” and decides for the group that they will not tell their parents about what they have gone through because he feels the need to get revenge (Doctorow, 46). It is obvious that they should have asked their parents for help and that Marcus’s anger only leads them into more trouble. This combined with other mistakes he makes in the story allow Marcus to be such a believable character. Overall, all his traits—the good and the bad—make the reader want to see him succeed and thus making the reader more involved in the story.

This book greatly focuses on freedom and the challenges involved in trying to preserve freedom while, at the same time, trying to fight terrorism. The story takes off when Marcus and three of his friends are detained by the government because of “...the worst terrorist attack ever perpetrated on [USA’s] soil” (Doctorow, 35). They are randomly taken off the streets to a close-by evacuated island, where they get imprisoned, investigated, and humiliated. Doctorow does a great job in this part of the book. He gets the reader feeling very angry at the government in the story for treating their own citizens—many still under the age of 18—with so much hostility and stripping them of each and every single one of their rights. That being said, there are some very stale parts to this book as well. For example, on page 162 Marcus talks to the reader about internet protocol. It is very informative and maybe interesting to some, but it is too lengthy and takes the reader out of the story. This however, is not a large issue as this book does not have too many unnecessarily lengthy explanations. So, for the most part, the story flows nicely. In fact, there are many parts where the reader will not want to stop reading. This happens when Marcus faces obstacles that seem nearly impossible to overcome, making the reader curious as to if and how he will move past these obstacles. One part that quickly comes to mind is the part where he is getting tortured by his own government. The story is filled with many of these kinds of moments and Doctorow does a great job with them, creating suspense and filling the reader’s mind with curiosity about the story.

For the most part, the storyline of this book is straightforward and it does not have any plot twists. It mainly just focuses on showing how terrorism can cause a country to take too many precautions that may end up being more freedom-restricting than any actions that the terrorists can directly take on that country. This provides the average reader with a sufficient amount of shock and so, no plot twists are needed. Just like the rest of the story, the ending is also simple and satisfying. It answers all the questions that a reader could have during the story and at the same time it remains realistic and believable.

In conclusion, Little Brother is a great book, filled with many exciting moments and well-written characters. It does an amazing job on showing how easily a society can have its freedom taken away from it. On top of that, it demonstrates the struggle with fighting terrorism and the direct and indirect effects terrorism has on its victims. Despite having a few stale moments, Little Brother is definitely a good read for just about anyone who is looking to read a novel.

References

Doctorow, C. (2008). *Little brother*. New York: Tom Doherty Associates.