



## For the Win

*Cory Doctorow*

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In the virtual future, you must organize to survive

At any hour of the day or night, millions of people around the globe are engrossed in multiplayer online games, questing and battling to win virtual "gold," jewels, and precious artifacts. Meanwhile, others seek to exploit this vast shadow economy, running electronic sweatshops in the world's poorest countries, where countless "gold farmers," bound to their work by abusive contracts and physical threats, harvest virtual treasure for their employers to sell to First World gamers who are willing to spend real money to skip straight to higher-level gameplay.

Mala is a brilliant 15-year-old from rural India whose leadership skills in virtual combat have earned her the title of "General Robotwalla." In Shenzhen, heart of China's industrial boom, Matthew is defying his former bosses to build his own successful gold-farming team. Leonard, who calls himself Wei-Dong, lives in Southern California, but spends his nights fighting virtual battles alongside his buddies in Asia, a world away. All of these young people, and more, will become entangled with the mysterious young woman called Big Sister Nor, who will use her experience, her knowledge of history, and her connections with real-world organizers to build them into a movement that can challenge the status quo.

The ruthless forces arrayed against them are willing to use any means to protect their power—including blackmail, extortion, infiltration, violence, and even murder. To survive, Big Sister's people must out-think the system. This will lead them to devise a plan to crash the economy of every virtual world at once—a Ponzi scheme combined with a brilliant hack that ends up being the biggest, funnest game of all.

Imbued with the same lively, subversive spirit and thrilling storytelling that made LITTLE BROTHER an international sensation, FOR THE WIN is a prophetic and inspiring call-to-arms for a new generation

## For the Win Details

Date : Published May 11th 2010 by Tor Books

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Author : Cory Doctorow

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## From Reader Review For the Win for online ebook

### February Four says

Maybe it's just me, but Cory's books are beginning to read like libertarian fanfiction. As with Makers, this book was didactic and segued into "let's study economics" a little too often for my liking. As always, the bad guys are demonized and the good guys get all the sympathetic ink.

"Heavy-handed" is the word one would use for Cory's books. I applaud the clarity of the writing--there is no way to mistake what Cory's trying to say--but if there's one thing that turns me off, it's preaching. Little Brother was the strongest of all Cory's books, and on the strength of that (and Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom) I have given all his books a chance, but honestly, the pedantism throughout Makers was a letdown, and For the Win did not score a Win with me for the same reason. Cory needs to cut down on the lecturing, stat.

I think I'm done with Cory's books for life unless he pulls out something significantly different in the future. Don't get me wrong, I sympathize with the gold farmers and I deplore the exploitation that occurs, but I read For the Win hoping he would describe a solution (as he did in Little Brother). I was at least all right with the way Makers ended. With For The Win, I had the distinct feeling the ending was a cop-out. I am not impressed.

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### Ruby Tombstone [With A Vengeance] says

I'm in the middle of an epic Doctorow binge right now. Along the way I've been collecting my thoughts about all the books, and when I'm finally done I will write some proper reviews.

In the meantime, I'll tell you the most important thing you need to know: It is not possible to read a Doctorow book without learning something. For those who claim otherwise, you sir, are a liar. The topics are so wide and varied too: technology, social movements, unions, economics, hedge funds, security, business, literature, history, journalism, geography..... I even learned how to pick a lock FFS!

The other thing you need to know: This book actually made me cry - and that very rarely happens. I spent the last 25% of the book on the edge of my seat, my heart pounding for these brave young characters. For me, the characters in this book were highly relatable despite being from a range of different cultures and places.

For most of the book, there was a blurb before each chapter recommending particularly good book shops that Doctorow wanted to support. It's a fine idea, but it did mess with the structure and took me out of the moment quite often. I think Doctorow's writing gets better with each book, but he could structure the books a bit more tightly still.

Now to go donate some copies of this to some local libraries...

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## **Michael says**

A techno-thriller about kids trying to counter the nefarious forces behind the profit-making in the multi-player computer gaming world. The virtual gold, special weapons, and status items from the games form the basis of a serious economy, which includes sweatshops of impoverished kids in third world countries run by gangsters. The “what-if” in this tale has to do with the idea of international unions of such workers, which gains momentum by alignment with other more traditional factories that exploit workers, including dangerous plastic and electronic recycling enterprises. It was kind of fun to experience teens in China, Singapore, Malaysia, and India begin to collaborate and harness the power of virtual communities across borders and face down the brutal methods of big corporations and criminal cartels. But one’s patience is often tried by wallowing in technical details of their schemes and lessons in economics. Yes, I learned a lot about the depths of arbitrage, for example, but, as another example, I didn’t need so many pages on how a kid from California snuck into China by making a dwelling out of a cargo container. I was emotionally engaged and entertained by some of the large cast of characters, like the 14-year old girl in India who braved standing up to a local thug running a virtual gold mining crew of gamers and an internet radio host who inspired international factory girls. So more like 3.5 stars in my overall scheme of reading pleasure.

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## **Walter Underwood says**

Cory Doctorow sure is smart. He wrote this story, too, but that doesn't seem to matter because he is so busy telling you stuff, like how government borrowing and inflation work together, even though that has nothing to do with the story. And also how when we get together in the virtual, corporate-owned worlds, we can all work together as comrades for the common good and we don't even have to learn the words to "L'Internationale".

This is a "combine two things" book. Sometimes that works, this time, it doesn't. Doctorow combines gold farming in online games with the derivative-driven financial meltdown. Well, and labor unions, so three things.

It would be a better book without Cory lecturing us for two or three pages every once in a while, but even after I started skipping those, it wasn't a good book. There were big loops of plot that went nowhere, like when Leonard/Wei-Dong disappears into the LA underworld. I was sure that his dad was out of the picture after the car wreck, but no, the hand of the author takes care of that 170 pages later. And the shipping container thing is ridiculous. And the info about the Mechanical Turks could have been introduced differently, or heck, left out, since they make no difference in the end. The plot seems complicated, but it is all filigree on a pretty straight line. He doesn't do more than scratch the cardboard surface of most the characters. I couldn't remember whether one of them was male or female. The places feel real, he makes sure that his Chinese characters smoke all the time, and the Indian gamers are better fleshed out than the rest.

The real reason to skip this book is that it is so safe. This has all been hashed out before. It is sad that, thirty years after True Names, this is considered successful SF.

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## **Kathleen says**

Right now, millions of people are online playing Massive Multiplayer Online games (MMOs). These game

enthusiasts are running missions in virtual space, playing for high scores and game gold to level up and unlock new weapons and cool virtual prizes. But some players are in it to make real money. They can sell their experience points or weapons for cash to players who want to get to higher levels of gameplay quickly and have the money to pay for it. These are "gold farmers" and often work in sweatshop conditions in third world countries.

This is not the future, it is the now and Doctorow does a fine job of showing us the desperate scrabble to make a living in the underbellies of such places as China, India and Singapore.

However, from time to time Doctorow stops the storyline to digress into a lecture about economics: derivatives, pyramid schemes, supply and demand, etc. While these are clear, well argued, and probably very educational to the average teen, it does detract from the flow of the narrative.

I also wished that he would have focused less on the lack of cleanliness of the gamers. After the umpteenth reference to the unwashed body odor and poor diets my eyes glazed over. Perhaps because I am not the target audience of a teen male with MMORPG obsessions I cannot appreciate the finer points of this type of gross talk. And what about playing all night? Doctorow makes a point (several times) of having his characters figure out what country someone is from because of the time they come online. What about second and third shifters or just plain night owls? \*shrugs\*

But I like that someone is out there writing about the plight of the exploited worker in today's language, updated for today's global economy and internet-connected world. There needs to be more of this for the younger, privileged generation. That is, those teens who enjoy their cheap shirts made in Malaysia, and their inexpensive cell phones made in Taiwan manufactured on the backs of exploited workers. Most of the world isn't like middle class America and it doesn't hurt to remind Doctorow's target audience of this fact.

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### **Kim says**

Wow what a crazy book. From a slow, sometimes confusing, start it just rolls on and on and you have to hold tight. A book about the working class and slave labour of the computer future it stars the poor of the world driven to work in crappy conditions for crappy pay just to make "gold" for rich Westerners.

Interspersed with their quest to throw off the shackles of oppression and very vivid and frightening lessons on economy and just how fragile the global financial system is and how based on shit it is. If you really want to save for the future it's not money you should be storing.

A thrilling book with so many real situations I highly recommend it. I just hope we can find true equality for all before it's too late.

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### **Simon Yu says**

Some people have strange jobs, like weed farming, snake milking, and dog food testing. The people in *For*

*the Win* have less bizarre jobs, but they are still pretty unique. MMORPGs (Massively multiplayer online role-playing game) are computer games in which massive amounts of players interact with each other. Surprisingly, MMORPGs has a huge effect in the real-world economy. The characters in *For the Win* are gold-farmers who demand better wages from their bosses. They are not literally gold-farmers; instead they collect virtual gold as in game money from MMORPGs used in game for trade. After collecting game money they hand it over to their bosses who sell it for real life money.

*For the Win* is an educational book (that is not a bad thing) and it is highly intense, with unique characters (though I had trouble keeping in track with them). The educational factor actually made this book more interesting. It is realistic and every chapter is filled with action (unless he was explaining something). It shows how real lives are changed by technology.

If you are looking for a book on economics I recommend this one. It has many lessons on economics like inflation, stock markets, and arbitrageurs. It helped answer the questions I got from this book. It may help to understand this book if you played MMORPGs.

I appreciate how this book is told from many different perspectives. You can see the view of the people creating a union, and the people trying to break the union. But I believe that there were too many characters to keep up with each of them. But it was nice to see the many different types of characters though the girls stood out more.

*For the Win* is an educational science-fiction book. It displays the lives of others and how the virtual economy affects them. The characters fight to gain better working conditions and wages; Doctorow makes you want to root for them. Though it is educational, it is fast-paced and fun to read. I believe *For the Win* is a great book.

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### **Tfitoby says**

Apparently this is a young adult novel. I say apparently as I didn't really pick up on that fact throughout. How can a book that devotes a dozen pages at a time to discussing political, social, moral and economic ideals be aimed at thirteen year olds?

This is the multinational, multicultural story of how the future workers of the world might be unionised, told via the interlinked lives of disenfranchised game players who are being abused by their employers in one way or another.

“He hated it when adults told him he only felt the way he did because he was young. As if being young was like being insane or drunk, like the convictions he held were hallucinations caused by a mental illness that could only be cured by waiting five years.”

Can teen angst in a teenaged character just be considered good characterisation rather than aimed at teens? Nothing is sugarcoated in this story either, Doctorow uses strong violence alongside strong images and an entertaining post-cyberpunk story to craft some kind of hybrid GB84 meets The Windup Girl.

“We're going to fight this battle with everything we have, and we will probably lose. But then

we will fight it again, and we will lose a little less, for this battle will win us many supporters. And then we'll lose \*again\*. And \*again\*. And we will fight on. Because as hard as it is to win by fighting, it's impossible to win by doing nothing."

The didactic nature of Doctorow's prose could definitely leave the wrong readers cold and for me this was the only real flaw; whilst being an interesting and accessible education it was occasionally repetitive and stopped the natural flow of the story. This didn't dampen my enjoyment of the story too much but then I'm a thirty year old man who finds lots of things interesting to read about, but if you go back to the fact that it's supposedly aimed at teen boys/world of warcraft players I can't see the enthusiasm lasting through a treatise on union history or social contracts or some other complex economic idea. Also if the idea of reading page after page of in-game battle descriptions bores you, as it does me, think twice before paying for this one. Instead why not take advantage of Mr Doctorow's ideas on digital rights management and download it for free from his personal website? It's a no lose scenario.

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### **Michael says**

I'm not sure if I've just read a novel or had a lesson in economics. Cory Doctorow's dystopian novel For the Win tells the story of the exploitation of an online role playing game's economy. In the running of what could be classed as electronic sweatshops throughout Asia, gold farmers suffer from very poor work conditions in the effort to mine gold and find virtual treasure to sell to first world customers. The novel has a typical 'unite and rise against authority to improve our lifestyle' plot but add a Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game (MMORPG) this book makes for some interesting concepts. While this book is a book about slave labour, gangsters and forming a revolution, this book also dives into the world of global finance in a very educational way.

Full review can be found on my blog;  
<http://literary-exploration.com/2012/...>

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### **Kogiopsis says**

The short, I'll-really-try-not-to-gush version:

Cory Doctorow writes educational YA. No, come back! Stop running! I'm serious- and it's not a bad thing! Argh. I lost another one.

Anyhow. Basically, FTW explains the economics and mechanics of labor unions in the framework of MMORPGs (Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Games). It's cool, it's- as I said, and I know it's the word of death- educational, and it's fun. Oh, and here's another adjective: intense. Doctorow doesn't pull punches; Little Brother showed us that.

As far as I'm concerned, he's writing the most relevant young adult fiction around, and he's making it fun to read. As long as he keeps publishing, I'll keep reading his books, and I don't care if I'm sixteen or fifty six. FTW isn't out yet, so I recommend you go get Little Brother while you wait.

Read as a YA Galley book and nominated for the Teens' Top Ten.

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## Mark says

"A review of 'For the Win,' by Cory Doctorow."  
by Cory Doctorow.

David was a hip, streetwise, golden-hearted teenager. He was a native of Mumbai. He was talking to his friend Ravi, who was slumped in a booth in the corner of the teahouse. Ravi was from San Diego; he had never been to India before.

"I read this great book recently," David said. "It's called *For the Win*, by a guy named Cory Doctorow."

Ravi perked up at this. He had heard of Doctorow. Didn't he have some blog where anti-corporate hipsters complained about the long wait between issues of Adbusters?

"What's it about?" he asked.

"Well, it's about labor unions and global financial markets."

"Wait," Ravi said, "we're only 14. Why would we read something like that?"

"Oh, right," David said. "Well, it's a YA novel. So it's also about gold farmers in MMORPGs. The characters are all teenagers, and they play video games for a living."

Ravi sipped at his chai. It tasted nothing like the boxed kind his mom used to bring home from Whole Foods before he ran away to India to be with his friends from the games. (His parents had never understood him, though they meant well. Fortunately Ravi had escaped the socionormative values that they had tried to brainwash him with.)

"I can relate to that," he said. "But if the book is about teenagers, how is it about economics?"

"Well," David explained. "Like I said, most of the characters are gold farmers in the games. You know what those are, right? People who earn in-game gold, and then sell it to other players."

"Oh, so it's about phishing?"

"Huh?" David said.

"Well," Ravi said. "Isn't that what goldfarming is? Hacking legitimate accounts to steal the gold, and then selling it to other players. It's the fastest way to make money in the games, after all."

"Oh, I see your confusion!" David said. "No, this is a Cory Doctorow novel. The gold farmers are the good guys. They gain the gold by playing the game legitimately. In fact, they are by far the best players."

"Wait, the gold farmers are the best players? Not the people who spend all day on theorycrafting forums?"

"Right."

"I see..." Ravi said.

“So anyway,” David continued. “This whole enterprise creates a complex market economy, in which vast sums of money are exchanged. But it’s completely outside of traditional financial markets, so not many people realize it’s going on. But monetary theory applies as much to the games as it does to the real world!”

“Geez,” Ravi said. “That sounds heavy. How could this possibly be a YA novel?”

David smiled at this. “Excellent question! Okay, let’s say you’re an author, and you’re working on a book. The subject matter of the book is pretty intense, because you’re a smart guy and you’re interested in smart things. But your target audience is a bunch of teenagers. What would you do?”

Ravi thought for a moment. “Well, I’d probably start by making teenagers my main characters. They’d have to behave mostly like adults, because otherwise they wouldn’t really fit into the kind of book that I’m writing.”

“Very good,” David said. “But there’s more to it than that. How are you possibly going to explain the complex economic theories that are integral to the plot?”

“I suppose you’d have to engage in some pretty heinous info-dumps,” Ravi said. “Long passages of exposition, a lot of oversimplified metaphors.”

“But then you’re just writing an essay.”

Ravi considered this. “Maybe the best method would be to mask the passages of exposition as a dialogue between characters. For example, one character could be an expert on a subject foreign to the other. When one of them explains the subject to the other, the audience knows about it too.”

“Very good,” David said, “That’s called a Socratic dialogue, and it’s one of Cory Doctorow’s favorite literary devices.”

“He seems like a pretty pedantic writer.”

“Well, he is, but that’s part of his charm. The fact of the matter is not a lot of people are writing books that actually challenge YA readers, especially when it comes to stuff like consumer capitalism. You can bet a lot of parents are going to be pretty upset when they think they’re buying their kid a book about video games, only to find out that they’re actually learning about labor unions.”

Ravi nodded. It sounded pretty good. “But aren’t the kids also going to be upset when *they* think they’re reading about video games, only to find out that they’re reading about labor unions?”

“Maybe, but there are some serious concessions to gamer culture in here. Long passages of the book are spent describing the games themselves, using all sorts of wiki’d buzzwords about MMO culture. Loot, drop rates, raids, instances, that sort of thing.”

“So it’s about World of Warcraft?”

“Well, kind of. But it’s mostly fictional IPs. Like *Mushroom Kingdom*, which is a fictional Nintendo MMO.”

“Wait, you’re saying Nintendo has an MMO in this book? Featuring characters from the company’s various intellectual properties?”

"That's right," David said.

"Nintendo? The same Nintendo that won't even make first party multiplayer games with text or voice chat, in order to protect its audience from theoretical predators?"

David frowned. "Yeah, I guess."

Ravi shook his head. "So much for the suspension of disbelief."

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### **Anni says**

Watch out Wile E Coyote!

This techno thriller-with-a-message is not just for the online gaming community. The brutal dystopia portrayed here is not too far removed from today's reality of economic exploitation and the mobilising potential of the Internet to influence political change. Non-gamers may find difficulty with the jargon, but if you struggle with economic theory, this is a great crash course on the global economic meltdown that may be facing us all.

Extract:-

Confidence makes value. Value makes more value, which makes more confidence. Which makes more value.

But it's not infinite. Think of a cartoon character who runs off a cliff and keeps running madly in place, able to stay there until someone points out that he's dancing on air, at which point he plummets to the sharp rocks beneath him.

For so long as everyone believes in the value of a Svartalfheim sword, the sword will be valuable, and get more valuable. As the pool of people who might buy a Svartalfheim sword grows – say, because they're getting calls from their brokers offering to sell them elaborate, complex sword futures (a contract to buy a sword at a later date), or because their smart-ass nieces and nephews are talking them up – the likelihood that someone will say. 'Are you kidding me? This is a sword in a video game!' goes up.

Confidence is great, but it isn't everything. Reality catches up with everyone, eventually. All cartoon characters eventually plummet to the bottom of the canyon. And every sword is eventually worthless.

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Reviewed on [www.whichbook.net](http://www.whichbook.net)

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### **Joseph Cohen says**

I've read a number of Cory Doctorow's books including Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom and Little Brother, and For the Win is definitely along the same lines, a high-concept book wrapped around a modern concept. Here's it economics and union labor, along with virtual economies and gold farming.

There are plenty of reviews that give their two cents on the plot and characters, so I'm not going to go into too much depth about that. As far as the writing goes, I was very disappointed. First, as other reviewers have mentioned, Doctorow has a tendency to write dialogue between his characters that is clearly meant to educate the reader. I consistently felt like I was being told the theories of what was happening off-screen, because otherwise I wouldn't have been smart enough to figure it out.

Second, the whole book felt like a rough draft. There were at least a half-dozen parts where a certain comparison or description was used to explain a concept, and 100, 50, 25 pages later, there it was again. It felt, over and over, like Doctorow couldn't decide where he wanted to use a particularly clever turn of phrase, so he used it in multiple places, or he forgot to take it out of one of the spots and it made it past an editor into print.

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### **Maggie Desmond-O'Brien says**

The extra long blurb kind of sums up how I felt about this book. Insanely awesome...but disappointing at the same time. Too long-winded. Not enough story. Long tangents I don't really care about. Lots of that achey sadness I get inside when an author/blogger I LOVE doesn't live up to my expectations.

Let's get this straight. I still adored this book. Cory Doctorow = the coolest, geekiest author you will ever have the pleasure of reading. He never fails to challenge my beliefs in a non-offensive, mind-blowing way, and *For the Win* was no exception. But it still wasn't nearly as awesome as *Little Brother*. Was it the fact that there was EVEN MORE techno-geekery jargon? Was it the fact that there were way too many characters and not enough action that didn't happen on computer screens? Was it that I just didn't care as much about virtual economies as I care about the security vs. freedom debate? Probably a combination of all three.

The only "virtual economies" I've ever participated in are Neopets, Virtual Horse Ranch, and Runescape; and I was a very sluggish participant at that. (Well, I rocked at Virtual Horse Ranch, possibly the nichiest game of all time, but that was also because I was stupid enough to invest my real money in a game; something I have sworn never, ever to do again, no matter how tempted I am to join Second Life. And yes, that sentence did run on.)

Actually, I find the way the Internet and the economy interact to be fascinating. Ironically, I'm now reading *Wikinomics: How Mass Collaboration Changes Everything*, which is an excellent nonfiction book that quotes Cory Doctorow on many issues. And yes, in case you are wondering, I am a nerd. (Whoops, sorry, intellectual bad @\$\$.) Point being, though, that no matter how interesting the techno-geekery behind this book was, the story was spread too thin to carry it as well as *Little Brother* did. Also, I got really confused as to how much was fiction and how much was real; something I hate because it makes me feel stupid when I quote what I think is fact and then get informed that it is way, way fiction.

Hey, look! Imagine that! Another book I could go on about for PARAGRAPHS AND PARAGRAPHS AND PARAGRAPHS. Let's sum it up: I really do find the facts behind this book fascinating. I read it, enjoyed it, and don't regret buying it. And bravo to Cory Doctorow for keeping it real with his multicultural characters. But if you loved *Little Brother*, you're going to be disappointed. And if *Little Brother* just wasn't your thing, you will probably hate this book.

I just wish I could throw myself behind this book as much as I'd like to, but I can't. It's still worth reading,

especially in today's very virtual world, but it didn't leave me with that exciting tingly good-book feeling that Little Brother did.

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### **Raluca says**

I just finished reading this novel, the second from Doctorow after reading his brilliant "Little brother" and there is so much to be said about it. When I read the subject matter of the novel I was intrigued in more ways than I would have been about 4 years ago. I would not have understood much about gaming and gold farmers and probably would have been limited to "hear-say" and more or less exaggerated or erroneous judgment of these topics. But yes, having played an MMORPG the world depicted in the novel, the numerous game play depictions and jargon, all the references to PvP, raiding, questing, loot, class roles, buffs, bosses, dungeons and so on were familiar to me and exciting and fun to read about. This novel however is not just for gamers and it's not even just for young adults though it is rated YA. This novel deals with global economics, with labor unions and consumer capitalism. There were passages in which the reader is given economics lessons in a didactic, straightforward and simple manner. This is achieved either by the author seeming to lend his voice directly at the beginning of certain chapters explaining rules of economy or by the characters themselves having a Socratic dialogue in which one explains the rules to the other.

The action spans over 2 continents and 4 countries. We are introduced to an array of characters (admittedly it was hard to follow all these characters in the beginning): Mala or "General Robotwalla" as she is called by her beloved army is a 15 year old girl in the village of Dharavi, India who is very skilled at playing Zombie Mecha (one of the invented games in this novel). She gets picked up by Mr Banerjee, a businessman who wants to make money out of the talents of young players like her. But Mala and her army aren't gold farmers, their roles are to kill the people in the game who are obvious gold-farmers. They call themselves "Pinkertons". In Shinzen, China, Matthew and his gold farming buddies are trying to create their own business and defy their boss. Leonard nicknamed "Wei Dong" is an ocean-away in California, United States and he raids with his Asian buddies in a game called "Mushroom Kingdom", making money by letting new players, "gweilos" loot the bosses in the hardest raids in exchange for real cash. A mysterious person who calls herself "Big Sister Nor" gets in touch with them in the virtual world wanting to recruit them to join the IWWWW (Industrial Workers of the World Wide Web) union demanding a better pay, better working conditions and a pension plan (Nor and her helpers are from Singapore, Malaysia). They call themselves the "Webblies" (Doctorow pays homage to the "Wobblies", the Industrial Workers of the World). Though not so easily-convinced to risk everything to join this endeavor, Mala, her friend Yasmin, Ashok who lends his help as a master economist, Wei Dong, Lu, the mysterious Jie (or Jiandi, internet pirate radio DJ and supporter of labor unions who holds a radio show for women laborers) and Matthew all militate and risk their lives to fight for their rights. If their demands are not met, they plan on crashing the economies of all the virtual worlds at once. The technology used to escape the system, to avoid being tracked and discovered is exciting to read about as it is in "Little brother". On the other side of the battle we find the bosses of the gold farmers but also the creators and executives of the massive game empire (whose economy is said to be stronger than many real countries), the Coca Cola Games Company. Out of them, the chief economist stands out, Connor Prickel whose "fingerspitzengefühl" ("fingertip feel") tells him everything that is going on in their virtual worlds.

The economical observations were interesting to read about and it made me think about *Zeitgeist Addendum* a great lot (which I recommend watching for those of you who haven't) in which the absurdities of the monetary system, the perpetual debt and inflation created in exchanges between the government and the Federal Reserve are presented in similar ways to how Doctorow portrays them. He speaks about arbitrage:

"If you want to get rich without making anything or doing anything that anyone wants or needs, you need to be fast. The technical terms for this is arbitrage"

Then he goes on to give an example of how virtual goods like game gold or weapons or armor sell on the auction house and the bets that are placed on them and insurance policies that guarantee them making a "Svartleheim Warrior sword" that was originally worth 10 dollars have thousands of dollars of bets on it increasing its value substantially.

One of my favorite economical revelations brilliantly exemplified in the novel was Connor's story about an experiment that took place during his Masters in which 25 grad students were locked into a room, each given a poker chip and told to hold onto them for 8 hours as they would receive 20 dollars every hour and get to keep the money, the poker chips being worthless at the end. Tradings and rentals of the chips began with people ending up paying more for the chips than they were worth to get them back and panic ensued towards the end, the buying and the selling making no sense as the chips would be worth 20 dollars and finally, nothing at all:

"The poker chips were like soap bubbles, about to pop. But those holding the chips were the kings and queens of the game, of the market. In seven short hours, they'd been conditioned to think of the chips as ATMs that spat out twenties, and even though their rational minds knew better, their hearts were all telling them to corner the chip"

Years after this event when he is selling virtual goods farmed from games for real money, Connor has the revelation that it isn't greed that drives the bidders to bid recklessly but envy, which is not about what is good but about what another person thinks is good, what another person has. Envy is therefore the most powerful force in any economy. Ashok, the economist who helps the Webblies, points out how anybody who laughs at people spending real money on virtual money or assets in a game should really be laughing at the entire economy because it also uses make believe money. Ashok explains to Yasmin how governments borrow from each other, how they tax people and use inflation and how the currencies supposedly backed out by gold are in fact all based on nothing, just like game gold:

"Even gold isn't based on gold! Most of the time, if you buy gold in the real world, you just buy a certificate saying that you own some bar of gold in some vault somewhere in the world(...) And here is another secret about gold: there is more gold available through certificates of deposit than has ever been dug out of the ground"

Consumer capitalism is shown in how the games that our characters are playing work and whereas Ashok is an expert in all economical aspects, Yasmin as a gamer and strategist better explains what it is about these games that make them such huge economical empires encouraging consumers to spend, spend, spend, portraying their built-in addictive nature:

"Games don't need to be fun, they only need to be, I don't know, interesting? No, captivating! There are so many times when I find myself playing and playing and playing and I can't stop even though it's all gotten very boring and repetitive. One more quest, I tell myself. One more kill(...) The important thing about a game isn't how fun it is, it's how easy it is to start playing and how hard it is to stop".

Another aspect, the most important part of game design is "intermittent reinforcement". In exemplifying this, Doctorow uses the comparison to the Skinner box in which rats were being fed food at random times upon pushing a lever, the uncertainty of the result making it the most addicting system in the world (Doctorow has spoken in his lectures about how sites like Facebook also use this system). In a game, you may kill a boss

and pick up a legendary or rare item and then go to that same spot dozens of times in an attempt to get it again.

This novel is indeed a wild and exciting multinational and multicultural journey, very informative and the settings are described masterfully and with great detail, both in the real world and in the virtual world, the characters are interesting (some awarded a richer background story than others (Wei Dong, Mala) though overwhelming at first in sheer number as the action keeps jumping from one to the other. Wei Dong's journey from America to China hidden on the cargo ship in his self-made container was one of the best parts of the novel, filled with suspense, humor, leaving you bewildered by the boy's ingenuity but also stupidity in the risks he takes. Lu and Jiandi's development is also touching. The novel is filled with moral, social, political observations. There is brutality, injustice and tragedy but also, as in "Little Brother", there is hope as well. Fighting in itself and standing up against injustice, brutality, inequality is a victory in itself:

"We're going to fight this battle with everything we have, and we will probably lose. But then we will fight it again, and we will lose a little less, for this battle will win us many supporters. And then we'll lose \*again\*. And \*again\*. And we will fight on. Because as hard as it is to win by fighting, it's impossible to win by doing nothing."

All in all, I would recommend this novel to everyone, not just young adults and not just gamers although being a gamer most definitely makes you understand and appreciate the world described better (and also to put up with all the game play jargon used). You also don't need to be passionate about economy either, Doctorow makes it all simple to understand and appealing giving us much food for thought. This novel like all of Doctorow's is free to download being under a Creative Commons Attribution.

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### **Ben Babcock says**

I don't much like economics. I like Cory Doctorow's metaphor here in *For the Win* of the economy like a train: most people have no idea where it's going, or whether the driver is even still alive; while economists speculate on all of this, some people pay attention to them while others just ignore them entirely and watch the scenery go by.

I don't much like economics, but I guess I should admit that the economy is important. Similarly, I won't accept the cop-out idea that it's impossible to comprehend economics unless you're some kind of genius. That's why I love Doctorow's didactic novels: he is so good at taking a subject he is clearly passionate about and breaking it down into easier-to-understand lessons. So, yes, *For the Win* has a lot of pointed lectures about economic theories, from investments and hedge funds to shortselling and market panic—but it's all couched in examples from fictitious game economies. I love that.

The cast of this novel is also stunning. Doctorow assembles quite a diverse bunch: Chinese gold farmers and dissidents, Indonesian labour rights advocates, Indian gold farmer-busting gamers, etc. There are gamers and economists, concerned parents and bemused traditional union leaders. Most importantly, these characters don't always get along. Mala and Yasmin's opinions diverge in Dharavi, only for the two to be drawn back together after a dangerous confrontation. Even then, they don't always see eye-to-eye. I like stories where the protagonists have this kind of low-level conflict—conflict not for drama's sake, mind you, but in the service of acknowledging that it is seldom clear what the "right" thing to do is.

Most of the main characters change quite a bit. Doctorow allows some time to elapse between each major part of the novel. By skipping forward in this way, he can bring us to new and interesting impasses, whether it's the rift between Mala and Yasmin or Wei-Dong's crazy plan to smuggle himself into China. One notable impression this makes is how privileged I am, as a Western reader, compared to many of the characters in this book. There is a deceptive and dangerous idea that somehow technology, particularly the Internet, is somehow going to liberate people in developing nations from oppression and unjust labour and create a more equal society. That's clearly not the case here: Mala and her army have access to the Internet, but it's just another tool that her boss uses to keep her oppressed and dependent on him for income and protection.

On the flip side, Doctorow shows us how the Internet and related technologies *can* be forces for good, when used as one might use any other tool. The Webbly gold farmers take the very same economies that others use to oppress them and, by cornering the gold markets, take those economies hostage for their own ends. Doctorow distills the basic tenets of union and labour philosophy in a very simple way: one or two people standing up for themselves will end badly; nearly everyone standing up for each other makes a statement so loud the world can hear.

The resolution is somewhat unrealistic, perhaps, in its scope, although there are tinges of bittersweetness to it. It's appropriate enough given the big, dramatic nature of the entire plot. And throughout the novel, Doctorow shows realistically enough the brutal ways in which those in power respond to people's attempts to organize and unionize; he does not pull his punches there. He makes me feel such pitch-perfect pathos for these characters, both the ones who suffer and the ones who survive. It's easy to get caught up in the rush of the moment and that feeling of power and triumph; he encourages you to get a piece of that elation. There's so much more going on, though, and he captures that too.

*For the Win* has a great deal of nuance, then. It's not light reading, in the sense that Doctorow does digress on many points economical. But he does this through examples in games and game economies. He takes the topical—but global—idea of games and how those make money for companies and marries it with the issue of cheap and abusive labour practices. The result is a sometimes bizarre but somewhat brilliant piece of contemporary science fiction, and I, for one, feel much improved and much entertained having read it.

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## Richard says

I find Cory Doctorow a little bit of mystery. I've read three of his books. This one, plus *Down and Out in the Magic Kingdom* and *Makers*, and while he writes enjoyable stories, they aren't nearly good enough to warrant his fame amongst the digerati. I haven't yet read *Little Brother*, which *School Library Journal* recommends over this one.

I suspect there are several factors that account for his popularity.

First, not too many authors are doing near-term speculative fiction. The geeks amongst us are especially interested in this topic, since technology is a large determinant of what will happen in the coming decades, and they (well, "we" would be more appropriate) are especially intrigued by that interaction.

Second, his role as a high-profile blogger and co-editor at Boing Boing contributes to this. Dedicated fans of science fiction will know of dozens of other authors, but many of Doctorow's followers probably aren't

interested in the broader field of science fiction — just the stuff that seems most relevant to their lives that Doctorow specializes in.

Finally, he sucks up to his peeps. Geeks are the heroes in these stories. They are often imperfect, and don't always get what they want, but they are the center-stage protagonists, aggressively tackling big problems and changing the future, while non-geeks either flounder helplessly or are the enemy to be overcome.

*For the Win* is appropriate for teens and adults. The extensive discussion of finance and economics is complex enough that only a very precious tween is likely to be patient and interested enough.

And, sadly, that same extensive “discussion” is the burden that yanks this book down towards mediocrity. Yeah, Doctorow is famous for his progressive positions on economic freedom and libertarian intellectual property rules (both of which I agree with), but as part of the background of his story, he felt the need to explain financial derivatives, macroeconomic theory, and justification for labor activism. You've all heard that rule that a good author should “show, don't tell”? Well, he spends page after page *telling*. It doesn't help that all of that dross is also frenzily explained in the context to MMORPG economics, which might make it too abstract for many readers to translate into their non-fiction quotidian lives, which is presumably Doctorow's aim. This is too bad, because at least some of that discussion could have been elided. The wikipedia page on Show, Don't Tell quotes Hemingway:

If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them.

If Doctorow had trusted his readers' intelligence, he could have kept that info-dumping to a minimum and kept the story moving at a brisker pace.

Once the reader has received sufficient lecturing, things heat up nicely. Most of the latter portions of the book are quite riveting, although a late lesson in macroeconomics does intrude. Doctorow's characters are vividly portrayed, although perhaps there are one or two more central players than he really needed. As in most of his books, his speculative vision of our future is also hyperbolic enough to strain credulity — that several game economies would soon rank among among the world's largest real economies might have seemed barely plausible when the staggering growth curve of *World of Warcraft* seemed to keep it in the public eye, but we're over that now.

This stands a decent chance of remaining a minor classic, and it is a pretty quick read, so it is recommended to anyone interested in speculative portrayals of the next decade or two, or science fiction completists, or anyone who wants to get a sense at why Doctorow is a Big Name in some circles. For everyone else, read *Little Brother* and continue here if you discover you have a taste for more.

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## **Lizzie says**

I actually liked this a lot more than I thought I would. I expected it to make me cranky, but I really enjoyed reading it. When I thought hard about it, though, it was missing something... revelatory, I think, that's keeping me from rounding up the rating. In my heart. (And on Goodreads.)

One thing I knew right away, though -- it really is overlong. This story doesn't have to be 500 pages. To its

credit, there isn't any thread or character I immediately think of cutting, but there's just a *lot*. This book is a *ton* of people. Maybe a trim in each region would have helped. (Yasmin & Ashok in India and Matthew in China are nice but not critical. Conversely, more about Big Sister Nor would have been good.) The funny, exclamation-pointy authorial economics lessons work pretty well, and they lend some seriousness to the plot points, but they do stick out a bit too.

But generally speaking, the deeply international setting is wonderful, and written like the author has been on the ground in those places (not sure?), the slang is cool, there's a lot of day-to-day culture that feels right, and the sociological take is almost never off-key. (There are perhaps a dozen too many "chin-waggles".)

The best parts just stick out really well. Jie and her "Jiandi" folk-hero internet pirate radio show fame in China is amazing. That whole long, long, long scene when she first scoops Lu up and keeps him safe in one of her secret apartments and puts him on the air is probably the coolest part of the book. I also really liked Wei-Dong ("Leonard") and his flight from American boarding school, and his voyage in a teched-out shipping container. He gets the only kid-and-parents family drama in the book and that's done nicely, though feels a bit out of place in this book about teenagers, the internet, and bad business.

In general, this felt like a great book for this author to write because it's awesome to have so much *internet* in a novel, written by someone who isn't only doing research, who feels it too. (This reminds me of the item on my wish list that is John Green write a book about internet friends.) Pretty much all of this stuff is real, or like what's real, and it's a deep level of detail but written really invitingly. Most of it isn't in my experience, but enough is tangential that it's exciting or funny or touching when it should be. All the hacker-ish stuff is totally thrilling to someone who's never done any of it, I won't lie. You lost me at "proxy", but ok I am totally flipping the page! The level of totally real espionage needed just to stay online, it's great, portrayed really well, and relevant to actual real places.

The only thing is, the thrust of the book, unionizing the gamers and this mission's clashes with authority... I'm not sure any of this was... necessary? I mean it's set up to make a lot of sense, and we can see in the story how these workers are exploited (and just, charming to read this YA book about labor organization you guys). But I think the workers of the world thing connects in only a limited way. Characters die (one of which was surprising, one of which was *not*). And this ambition kind of hurts its ending -- the scope is so big that waiting for all the laces to tie up is sort of ho-hum, eventually.

Moments I liked:

"You violate the social contract, the other person doesn't know what to do about it. There's no script for it. There's a moment where time stands still, and in that moment, you can empty out his pockets."

And:

"Wei-Dong loved his parents. He wanted their approval. He trusted their judgment. That was why he'd been so freaked out when he discovered that they'd been plotting to send him away. If he hadn't cared about them, none of it would have mattered."

And, a joke worthy of repeating on the internet:

"He could feel everything that was happening in the games he ran. He could tell when there was a run on gold in Svartalfheim Warriors, or when Zombie Mecha's credits took a dive. ... He could tell when there was a traffic jam on the Brooklyn Bridge in Zombie Mecha as too many ronin tried to enter Manhattan to clear

out the Flatiron Building and complete the Publishing Quest."

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### **Gary says**

I have enjoyed Cory's books in the past and also liked this one but not as much as some of the others. The subject matter is appealing to me as it surrounds online games and the phenomenon of 'gold farmers' - those dedicated and possibly addicted gamers who are prepared to play endlessly to secure in-game gold or attributes for characters and then sell these to less dedicated gamers who want to level-up fast and amass gold to buy special equipment such as Vorpal blades etc. The twist in the story line is the worldwide nature of this activity and it's hold on the poor and disenfranchised young in countries where there is little other in the way of making a living, except for occupations that are hazardous to the worker's health - sweat shops etc. Doctorow spins a tale of the coming together of gamers from around the world to unite the gold farmers and break the strangle hold of the overseers and companies that use gold farming as a technological sweatshop, in effect. He introduces some very appealing characters and also creates scenes of sadness and humour that are genuine and skilfully wrought.

It is probably aimed at the young adult market more than the dyed in the wool readers such as myself but I enjoyed it anyway - even with the basic economic principles expositions from time to time.

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### **Byron says**

'For The Win' is possibly one of 2010's best works of fiction, at least for those readers who enjoy books that deal with big issues. Paraphrasing other writers in the genre, author Cory Doctorow has said that "good science fiction predicts the present" and part of what makes the novel so enjoyable is that this story could be taking place next year. While his last novel, *Little Brother*, explored issues around civil liberties and state power in the post-9/11 USA, *For The Win* shows that Doctorow's unashamedly left-wing worldview extends to many other issues; globalisation, inequality, labour rights and the farcical nature of finance capitalism are all explored in the space of 375 pages.

The story revolves around "gold farming" the practice of amassing virtual wealth in an online multi-player video game, and then selling it for real-world currency. Typically, that virtual wealth is collected by people in the developing world, and sold to players in the developed world who want to avoid the work required to advance in the game. For the gold farmers, the income is comparable to what they could earn working in other available jobs. Of course, most of these gold farmers don't own the computers and internet connections required to be a gold farmer (the means of production-albeit production of virtual commodities) and work for bosses who expropriate most of the wealth they create. Looking to remedy this situation is Big Sister Nor, a former garment factory worker in Malaysia who became a gold farmer after a strike caused the owners to move the factory to Indonesia. Nor has founded the "Industrial Workers of the World Wide Web" or "Webblies" (a homage to the Industrial Workers of the World (also known as Wobblies), the syndicalist union that had its heyday a century ago) and is organising gold farmers across borders in the virtual worlds they work in.

The story alternates between Nor's group of organisers located in Singapore, and Leonard Goldburg (a teenager in LA who joins the cause of the gold farmers he befriends in-game), and further groups of gold farmers in Dharavi (India) and Shenzen (China). In switching between the locations, Doctorow is able to

paint a vivid picture of the disparity between the United States; the planets largest slum, and the new ‘factory of the world’.

In parts you almost feel as though to be breathing the fumes of Dharavi’s plastic recycling plants. Shenzhen, where most of the novel’s climactic action takes place, is like the archetypical dystopian city of cyberpunk fiction. But this is a post space-race subgenre of science fiction that is more down to earth (literally), as it often explores social issues, and is infinitely more realistic because the sweatshops, heavy handed police force, and authoritarian state exist today.

The novel also includes explanations of global economics between chapters (some influence of Doctorow’s Marxist parents is visible here). These are well placed and serve to reinforce parts of the story rather than distract from it. The only criticism I could make would be that with so many important characters there is little room for character development. A small number of characters are given elaborate back stories, but few change throughout the novel. This is a minor point however and *For The Win* is a thrilling read that should be in every high school library. An in-depth knowledge of economics, labour history, and massive multi-player video games is not required to enjoy it.

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