



IMPLANTABLE BIOCHIPS UNDERWAY

Is there a number or a mark planned for the hand or forehead in a new cashless society? Yes, and I have seen the machines that are now ready to put it into operation." --Ralph Nader

The implantable microchip is perhaps the most likely candidate for a real-life Mark of the Beast. Previously relegated to the often pulpy pages of science fiction, recent technological advances have brought this frightening concept into reality.

A number of companies currently market implantable microchips for animals. One of the first such products available was the InfoPet transponder, available for as little as \$10 at your local animal shelter. The InfoPet chip is small enough to inject using a special syringe under the scruff of Muffy's neck. One quick jab, and your beast is marked with an electronic ID number which can be easily read using a hand-held scanner. If Muffy ever runs off to chase a cat and gets lost, his chip can be read at the animal shelter via portable scanner to retrieve the name, phone number and address of the owner.

AVID, another animal identification company, says that once implanted,

"the identity tag is virtually impossible to retrieve. Surgical removal, using the most advanced radiograph techniques available, is extremely difficult. The number can never be altered." AVID's plans for its system are ambitious: "Our goal is to 'chip' every pet in the U.S."

Texas Instruments even boasts in promotional literature for its transponder-based TIRIS system that "You can run, but you can't hide."

Over the course of a few short years, millions of animals have been injected with these microchip transponders. For those involved in the livestock industry, these chips offer an efficient way to track their herds.

Pet identification companies, on the other hand, exploit the fear of losing one's beloved pooch to sell their product. "Most pet owners believe it could never happen to them," reads an InfoPet brochure. "But collars and tags get lost, tattoos can be missed or mis-read..."

A brochure for Schering Corporation's HomeAgain Companion Animal Retrieval System reads, "It only takes a moment, a door left ajar, an unlatched gate... and your precious pet is gone. And then comes the sorrow, the worry, the guilt..."

The fear of losing something as beloved as a pet led millions of people to have their beasts marked. How far of a stretch would it be for these same products to be marketed to parents for an identical purpose?

Representatives at Destron-Fearing, the company which manufactures the DESTRON/IDI injectable transponder used in animal tracking systems, claim to have no intention of advancing their product for use in humans. (Incidentally, Destron-Fearing's manufacturing partner is military-industrial giant GM/Hughes.)

Dr. Daniel Man, on the other hand, holds the first patent in the United States for a homing device designed specifically for implantation in humans. Man had the idea for this device "while I was a resident in plastic surgery and I kept seeing on TV all those stories about missing and abducted children." Man's device was designed for use in conjunction with a network of existing communications satellites, which would locate the implantee via triangulation.

This same concept was very nearly realized by entrepreneur Jack Dunlap, who proposed the KIDSCAN system in Arizona. The system would track children who had an ID chip planted under their skin by transmitting a signal to a satellite. The satellite would then relay the child's location to police via a map on a computer monitor. A local ACLU spokesperson who objected to the plan told the Arizona Republic, "police could use the system to enforce curfew laws or trace the movements of teen-agers who had not agreed to such scrutiny."

Scary, huh? But not nearly as scary as losing your child.

Dunlap was originally encouraged by employees at military-industrial powerhouse Martin Marietta, who initially agreed to manufacture a prototype at the company's Oak Ridge National Laboratory. Then, mysteriously, the folks at Martin Marietta threw him a cold shoulder. "It was like they had been told to shut up and stay away from it," Dunlap said. "It was really weird."

As soon as Martin Marietta turned away from the project, Dunlap's financial backers left him high and dry, and the KIDSCAN system never progressed past the planning stage. The year was 1989. Perhaps the idea came before its time. But as the technology for such tracking systems continues to advance, more and more companies are eyeing the potentially lucrative human tracking market.

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