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THE CRITICS

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THE FILM FILE

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Mikey Sklar is twenty-eight. He is five feet six, with an oval face, a high forehead, dark eyes, and brown hair in dreadlocks that fall to the middle of his back. His appearance is post-modern. He has no tattoos, for example, or any desire to have any parts of his body pierced. He does have a radiofrequency identification chip implanted in him, though, and he is enthusiastic about having other electronic devices implanted in him, too. An RFID chip is about the size of a grain of rice. People who use them in novel ways call them tags. They call themselves taggers; someone with a chip implanted in him has been tagged. The key-chain implement that you wave at a gas pump operates by means of a tag. Veterinarians sometimes implant a tag in a pet, so that a lost animal can be scanned, and its owner found. Taggers in Spain hold their hands in front of scanners and are admitted to the V.I.P. areas of night clubs.

Around Thanksgiving, Sklar had his tag implanted between his left thumb and forefinger. He wanted to be able to pass his hand in front of his computer and have the computer's security system recognize his password. He bought his tag online, from a company called PhidgetsUSA, for two dollars and ten cents. It is a livestock tag, meaning that it is typically embedded in an animal as a means of tracking its whereabouts at the slaughterhouse. Sklar bought an injector gun, to implant the tag, for seventeen pounds from a British company, also online. While he waited for the tag to arrive, he looked for someone to install it. "I found a retired vet assistant—she may have been fired—who used to implant tags in animals," he says. The injector gun turned out to be much larger than Sklar had imagined. "It was a really big syringe," he says. In the end, he persuaded a surgeon he knew to install the tag. The operation, which took seven minutes, was performed, with local anesthetic, at the kitchen table of Sklar's loft, in Brooklyn. "I immediately ran over to the computer and waved my hand, and it read the chip," he says. For two days, his hand was a bit sore when he typed.

Until February, when he quit, Sklar made his living working with computers at an investment bank in Manhattan. "Each evening, I would come home and build electronics—make circuit boards, work with schematics, solder up parts, build my own little computers." He became interested in tags while producing what he calls electric clothing. "Mostly, it lights up. It's designed for walking around the desert, or riding my bicycle, at night—riding my bicycle at, say, the Burning Man festival, which is in the desert and pitch-dark. It's a serious problem there."

A few weeks ago, Sklar and his girlfriend moved from Brooklyn to Truth or Consequences, New Mexico. They plan to open the Escuela del Fuego (School of Fire), where they will "teach students to program fire," Sklar says. He makes interactive fire-art installations. Electronics are involved. There isn't a lot of money in it. While Sklar lines up students, he is building two "fire trampolines" for a fair in San Mateo, California. When people jump on the trampolines, propane-gas flames will rise fifteen feet away. The trampolines will have a security system programmed to recognize Sklar's tag. That way, no one can tamper with them when he's not around.

Another use that Sklar intends for his tag involves the locks to his new house. He plans to open and close the locks by means of scanners, so that he can wave his hand "like a superhero," he says, and have his front door open. At the moment, the project is stalled. The locks have arrived, he says, "but the movers only got here yesterday."

— Alec Wilkinson

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