It was early 2003 and the outlook was bleak. The war had begun.

After three years of quiet research and planning, the MIT Auto-ID Center, a consortium of over 100 global corporations and government agencies, was set to launch the Internet of Things—a system using tiny computer chips with miniature antennas to tag, number, and track every object on the planet.

Major companies were preparing to test the system in real stores, on live shoppers. Gillette had announced plans to purchase 500 million RFID tags from a company called Alien Technology for use in its shaving products. Benetton was gearing up to put 15 million spy chips in women’s clothing. Other companies would quickly follow suit. And yet the world’s people knew nothing.

The experts behind the system expected little resistance from the public. Though their research found that 78 percent of people surveyed objected to RFID technology on privacy grounds, it also indicated they could hope for apathy, provided no one stepped forward to lead the public in opposition. The coast looked clear for a full-scale rollout. The world would be invaded by this technology before people even knew what had hit them.

But we changed all of that. In a David vs. Goliath style miracle, a small band of committed individuals armed with little more than the truth and a big dose of faith foiled the plans of some of the world’s richest and most powerful corporations.

In March 2003, CASPIAN (Consumers Against Supermarket Privacy Invasion and Numbering) launched a worldwide boycott campaign against the international clothing chain Benetton that brought media coverage from as far away as Tasmania and Sweden. The company was inundated with calls and letters from angry consumers around the globe protesting its planned use of spy chips in clothing. Within a few short weeks, Benetton canceled its plans to turn women’s clothing into tracking devices and promised consumers that their clothes would be spy-chip free.

Other companies took the hint and went underground with their RFID spy chip plans, but CASPIAN pursued them. This summer I found a Gillette smart shelf that uses a hidden camera to take mug shots of consumers as they pick up products. The shelf had been quietly installed in a Wal-Mart store in Brockton, Massachusetts, just an hour from my home. When word of the trial got out, Wal-Mart was inundated with customer complaints. While both Gillette and Wal-Mart initially denied the exis-

Katherine Albrecht plays the part of David. The role of Goliath is being acted out by some of the world’s most powerful transnational corporations. This is an ongoing story.
tence of the shelf, I bought a disposable camera and took a few photos for posterity. When I shared these photos with the media, suddenly Wal-Mart and Gillette remembered the shelf, but claimed it had never been activated.

As soon as it found itself in a public relations firestorm, Wal-Mart assured consumers that RFID technology would not be appearing on the retail floor of its stores, and Gillette claimed it would not be tagging any more products “for ten years.” When we later checked, sure enough the photo-snapping shelf in Brockton had vanished.

Wal-Mart, the world’s biggest retailer, had backed down, beating a hasty retreat from a controversial technology. Consumers had won their second enormous victory.

Soon after saving American consumers from spy shelf technology, we were dismayed to learn that Gillette was taking pictures of unsuspecting British customers at a chain called Tesco. (Tesco is Britain’s biggest supermarket chain, similar to our familiar Wal-Mart.) CASPIAN got the word out to UK citizens by working for over a month with a reporter from The Guardian newspaper to uncover documents and get the evidence published. After the resulting outcry led to protests at Tesco stores, those spy shelves, too, disappeared.

As these scandals were unfolding, the proponents of RFID were working on a top-secret public relations plan to “pacify” the public. The folks at the MIT Auto-ID Center (who had promised that data collected through their global spy system would be safe in their control), had left dozens of sensitive internal documents accessible on their website. We were able to access these directly over the World Wide Web by simply by typing the word “confidential” into their public search engine. These confidential documents revealed the Center’s strategies to “drive adoption” and “neutralize opposition” to RFID, while depending on consumer
“apathy” to minimize their troubles. They also listed by name several lawmakers, privacy advocates, and others whom they hoped to “bring into the Center’s ‘inner circle’”.

A flurry of critical media stories followed, busting the RFID issue wide open. Companies hastily canceled longstanding plans to test RFID tags on consumers. Almost overnight their focus shifted from tracking people and purchases to tracking inventory in back room warehouses, far from public scrutiny. Since that time, no company has dared to publicly attempt live RFID tests involving consumers in the United States. Any trials that had already taken place have been buried and quietly covered up.

Companies have not been entirely successful in destroying evidence of their trials, however. Recently, it came to light that Procter & Gamble and Wal-Mart used consumers as guinea pigs to test an RFID shelf holding Lipfinity lipstick. Lipfinity purchasers at a Wal-Mart store in Broken Arrow, Oklahoma were observed as they interacted with the tagged lipsticks, and images of them were beamed by webcam to P&G executives 750 miles away. Again, the companies first denied the trial, but caved in the face of evidence provided by the Chicago Sun Times, which uncovered the story. Wal-Mart and P&G were forced to acknowledge the tests but said no further RFID experiments were being planned.

In September, CASPIAN turned out to protest RFID’s version of a coming of age party: the official launch of the Electronic Product Code (EPC) network in Chicago. This is the event where “deputized evangelists” were enlisted to help spread the “holy grail” of RFID like a contagion to attendees. (These are real phrases, taken from actual documents and individuals promoting the event. Religious terminology abounded.) “EPC” is the official name for the RFID tags slated to replace the bar code on all manufactured products, thus turning the things we buy into tracking devices.

Over 30 demonstrators turned out to protest the EPC network launch, which we planned to coincide with Gillette’s “Reasons to Believe” speech. Some took time off from work and school and others drove over two hours in Chicago’s notorious rush hour traffic to attend. I filed a civil rights lawsuit to ensure our First Amendment right to speak publicly at the event and spent a full day in federal court to plead our case. We didn’t even learn where we would be assembling until the 11th hour.

A year ago, I felt powerless to fight the onslaught of MIT’s spy chip technology. What could one woman and a loosely affiliated band of consumers possibly do to slow the avalanche headed our way? I said my prayers and took a stand, armed only with a fistful of courage and a heart full of faith. And what a year it has turned out to be! To my amazement, almost one year to the
day after I first vowed to fight RFID, I found myself addressing an auditorium full of scientists, engineers, business executives and reporters – on MIT’s own property – as the invited keynote speaker on RFID privacy! Truly God had prepared a table before me in the presence of my enemies.

As if our blessing were not enough already, the icing on the cake was being able to present this assembled crowd with a position statement on RFID signed by over 40 of the world’s leading privacy and civil liberties organizations. (See it online at: http://www.privacyrights.org/ar/RFIDposition.htm) In this document, we call for a moratorium on item-level tagging of consumer products and outline a series of unacceptable practices.

The eyes of the world are now on the RFID industry. No longer can it operate in darkness and secrecy. No longer is our band of freedom-fighting consumers alone, but we have now been joined by organizations representing hundreds of thousands of consumers across the globe. God has called in the cavalry.

What looked bleak last year has taken an optimistic turn. We have much to look forward to: a few more years to live and worship freely.

To join the “cavalry”, go to www.spychips.com and click on “Get Involved”. See order form to order either or both of Katherine Albrecht’s two videos, “RFID: Tracking Everything, Everywhere” and “On the Brink of the Mark”.

---

**Whetstone**

**BY JOHN L. BRYANT**

1. I _____ toward the mark for the prize of the high calling.
   A. Run  B. Walk  C. Press  D. Pull

2. Solomon’s navy brought him this jungle creature.
   A. Ape  B. Giraffe  C. Elephant  D. Zebra

3. In Luke 17:17, Jesus cleansed ten lepers; how many thanked Him?
   A. 10  B. 7  C. 1  D. 5

4. In order to see, these fell from the eyes of Saul.
   A. Tears  B. Eyelashes  C. Drops of blood  D. Scales

5. Pharez and Zarah were twins. Name the other pair of twins.
   A. Cain & Abel  B. Jacob & Esau  C. Paul & Silas  D. Elijah & Elisha

6. In what place did the Israelis eat fish, melons, leeks and onions?
   A. Egypt  B. Assyria  C. Arabia  D. Babylon

7. After the baptism of Jesus, what bird is mentioned?
   A. Raven  B. Dove  C. Peacock  D. Quail

8. By what method was Stephen killed?
   A. Pierced by swords  B. Flayed with knives  C. Stoned  D. Hung

9. What bird brought food to Elijah?
   A. Stork  B. Seagull  C. Hawk  D. Raven

10. The Lord sent the brother of Moses to meet him in the wilderness.
    A. Aaron  B. Abraham  C. Lot  D. Jonah

11. Why do the heathen _____ and the people imagine …?
    A. Laugh  B. Cry  C. Sing  D. Rage

12. In Exodus 21:6, a pointed tool for piercing the ear lobes.
    A. Aul  B. Rivet  C. Stick  D. Thumbtack

13. For what organization would Matthew be working today?
    A. CIA  B. FBI  C. IRS  D. YMCA

14. Such as should be saved, the Lord added to the church...
    A. Monthly  B. Daily  C. Weekly  D. Yearly

15. Call me not Naomi, but call me by what name?
    A. Sara  B. Jochebed  C. Rahab  D. Mara

16. Who is worthy to _____ the book and to loose the seals?
    A. Open  B. Close  C. Print  D. Lift

17. Hath not the potter power over the what?
    A. Iron  B. Clay  C. Gold  D. Silver

18. Will a man _____ God … in tithes and offerings?
    A. Supply  B. Sue  C. Rob  D. Out talk

19. What fowl is listed as gathering her brood under her wings?
    A. Turkey  B. Duck  C. Ostrich  D. Hen

20. What is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong?
    A. Work  B. Race  C. Journey  D. Flight

Answers on page 25