The five words you should be most afraid of when they come from a corporation are: "This will make life easier." The one fact you can depend on once you've heard that phrase is that whatever is being discussed will most certainly make their lives easier. And it will do so at your expense.

On some occasions and in some areas, the level of exploitation involved is almost invisible—you innocently enter your e-mail address on an online form when you make a purchase and then are forever subjected to newsletters from Radio Hut or Office Heaven. But what happens when this information sharing is out of your control? What happens when it's no longer your choice to disclose vital information? Information not just about how to contact you, but where you live, what you like to do, how you spend your money, what you view on the internet, and what your taste in clothing and entertainment is?

Much of this information is generally considered private, or at least privileged—particularly medical, economic, and legal information. And yet with the advent of a technology called RFID—short for radio-frequency identification—all this information and more can be jammed into a tiny space. In fact, there are already RFID in U.S. passports. Although encryption measures are in place, in theory, anyone carrying a passport with an RFID is broadcasting information that could be read when his or her passport is opened. Potentially, a stranger could learn your name, nationality, age, and birthplace, and even look at your passport photo.
4 This is the pace of technology, working against us. The government inserts RFID chips in new passports, yet no one has figured out how to guarantee that the RFIDs cannot be hacked. One of the beauties of passport RFID chips is they require no power at all—they’re dormant until switched on and made active by a chip reader. And while it’s true in most situations a data thief won’t know you’re carrying your passport, in an international airport or certain other places, they certainly will suspect it. For a techie who knows how to set it up, a potato chip tube of the right dimensions hooked to a regular laptop can potentially be turned into an RFID reader that can hack any RFID that’s around.

5 The main purpose of RFIDs, at least initially, was to serve as a solution to the inventory problems all companies experience. How much do we have of what? This was the constant headache of inventory managers, trying to keep the flow of product smooth from manufacturer to warehouse to shop floor to consumer. The chips work beautifully for this. Flip on a chip reader and pass it down a hall, and the boxes or shipping containers magically reveal their contents.

The U.S. government uses RFID chips to enhance speed, efficiency, and security for travelers.
RFIDs help companies track their inventory.

6 And there's the rub. In the not-so-distant future, suppose you buy a sweater. You walk out of the store with your purchase. The chip in that sweater can be scanned from a satellite to determine its location, and thus the wearer's location. Of course the sweater might wind up on someone else's back, but the principle is clear—the manufacturer knows what you like. All your purchases are similarly tagged. Now merchants or corporations know where you live, what you like, what you spend your money on, and where you spend it.

7 As if monitoring this level of private information weren't invasive enough, there's a far darker side to this. Consider that such chips could be planted with no more effort than a slight injection in a human being. They're already being implanted in animals—some municipalities actually require their use for pets. Citizens in the surrounding communities have no choice but to comply with the requirement. Then lost animals can be identified, tracked, and returned to their owners. This is one thing when it's your dog, Snuffy—it's another when it's you.

8 The right to pursue one's life free of surveillance is so basic that we rarely consider the alternative. For example, we have laws against phone tapping. It isn't easy for many of us to envision a world in which we are not free to come and go without someone watching us. We believe in a world where we are free to roam to our heart's content or keep where we go and what we do our own business.
It is wrong to play hooky from work. However, even people who would never dream of skipping work would balk if employers could track their every move. This expectation of privacy is no different than our expectation to have control over our medical, financial, and legal histories.

Consider that all this information can be a key factor in getting a job, a bank loan, or even entering into a relationship. Once this data is available to the highest bidder or anyone with basic hacking abilities, society will change irrevocably. Fear and distrust will undermine the simplest relationships. Some people claim that careful consumers can simply avoid being subjected to RFIDs, but because RFID chips are so small and virtually undetectable, they can be anywhere and everywhere. Any object, any gift, or any casual exchange could result in the planting of what is essentially a tracking device.

Corporations, the government, anyone with an interest—or sufficient money—will be able to follow your every move. With your tastes and purchases tracked and analyzed, you will exist digitally, as a virtual consumer. As you stroll along the sidewalk, billboards will display the products you most desire, for sale at the price point you are most comfortable with, in the style that suits your eye color.

For most companies, this sort of tracking represents not a horror, but an ideal. Corporations sing this tune about RFIDs whenever the issue arises, saying they will be better able to service your needs. This will make things easier. And it certainly will—for them.

Yes, your shopping might become easier, faster, more efficient—but what exactly is this kind of thing worth? RFIDs promise convenience, a life of ease in which all of the customer service industry seems set to serve you. But the real master will never be you. You are the consumer. The master is the corporation, forever pressuring you to buy this or that, playing on the desires and dislikes it knows from your private information. You are presented with advertising choices that a devious software program has come up with to make every offer you receive as close to a sure sale as possible. Freedom of choice will be a thing of the past.
There is no compelling argument for RFIDs. Other methods can allow the benefit of inventory control that corporations claim to seek, and people can be given good jobs to implement those methods. RFID's only true use is tracking citizens and unveiling this information for whoever wants it badly enough. From the moment the chip reveals its contents, you are a consumer to be tracked and sold to.

As individuals with our right to privacy at stake, we must remain vigilant against the subtle assault of this new technology. Because it is not only privacy that is being threatened, it is the very nature of free society that is at stake. A world of distrust, eyes tracking us from the darkness—that's not America.
Cashing in Our Chips Questions

1. Why might the author combine reasoned judgment with loaded language in the same argument? (pg. 178)

2. Underline the sentence in paragraph 4 that the author uses for emotional effect. What emotion is the author trying to stimulate in the reader? (pg. 179)

3. How does the author use humor to address a difficult subject? Underline this sentence. (pg. 180)

4. On this page, the author makes the use of RFIDs seem even more threatening. Is the evidence convincing? Is it from a reliable source or just the author’s opinion? What loaded word does she use in paragraph 12? (pg. 181)

5. Circle an example of loaded language and exaggeration in paragraph 13. (pg. 181)

6. Circle examples of loaded language used in paragraphs 14 and 15. (pg. 182)

The questions on the pages of the article are too dark to read. These are the questions that you will write you answers to in the back of your packet.