

I am continuously worried about the possibility of social/mental degeneration. My doctor has told me that the idea of cybernetic dehumanization is a myth, yet I find that my personal experience is implying that he may be misinformed. Today at work I did not speak a single word aside from a few good mornings and have a nice days. Certainly I was always shy, but this takes things to a new level.

If the work of some more technophobic scientists are to be believed, this could be a complication of the head drive, a sort of mental infection from a dangerous operation. The nanomachines in my cyberframe are networking with the head drive, and in the process destroying my brain. While neuroscientists are still debating it, the practice of brain implants is still banned in plenty of states. It was illegal in Louisiana, but thankfully there was an underground market for cybernetics. Had there not have been, I would have died back there. It's funny- the implant that saved my life could be slowly killing me.

There is an alternative possibility, one I've avoided discussing with my doctor for obvious reasons. The violent imagery is getting more and more vivid. Earlier today at work I was using a boxcutter to open a box of mailing supplies. It reminded me of when I ambushed a taxman in his bathroom and used a boxcutter to open up his wrists. It was the smooth, graceful feeling of a razor blade tearing through such a weak, malleable material. It felt very calming, very relaxing. I remembered slowly dragging the blade down his arms as Kenny held him in place, mockingly pretending to calm him. It was a very relaxing assassination, very subtle compared to what the Copperheads had normally wanted from me.

At lunch a coworker brought in Doritos. It reminded me of the time the boys and I had robbed a gas station. We were loading up cigarettes onto our bikes, and I had grabbed a bag of doritos as well to eat. Indeed, it became a Real Rock & Rollers tradition- if we could, we'd steal some snack food to go with everything else. Robbery was normally never that violent. I'd clock a man over the back of the head and knock him out, usually while Crabmeat or Tank were holding him up. I never killed anyone as part of a robbery, but I had a close call the time some Crip in the liquor store pulled a gun on us. He and Tank got into a standoff, so I snuck up on him and glassed him with a bottle of jaegermeister. I had almost choked him to death, but Hogg had stopped me. Told me that if a Crip died at Triple R hands, there could be a gang war. I thought if he was alive he'd snitch on us out of spite, but it seems that they seem to have some sort of honor after all. Kenny probably would have balked at the idea of a black showing honor. I wish I had gotten the guy's name- I'd love to thank him for the respect and apologize for almost killing him.

Certainly a rookie doctor would probably say I have PTSD, especially after San Francisco. But here's the thing: none of this particularly haunts me. I've killed plenty of times, and I hardly regret any of it. I don't think I loved it, but there certainly was a rush from taking a life, a sort of high that you can't get anywhere else. Is this some sort of prolonged combat withdrawal? Did murder become an addiction? Maybe it was just fighting? I haven't hurt a single soul since I've come home. It's been over a year. The worst crimes I've committed were software piracy, jaywalking, and running a few stop signs at a dangerous speed. That last one is one of my favorite things. I rush around the small town streets and roads, weaving in and out of traffic. It's fun to exercise my reflexes and move around. Maybe I'm just an adrenaline junkie? I know one of the supplement packs I added to my cyberframe boosted my adrenal glands. Is that an addiction?

Perhaps it is just social isolation. I don't have anything in common with my coworkers. They're honest, hardworking, law-abiding people. One of them is even a vegetarian. They're depressingly boring. I don't have any desire to reach out to them. I don't even bother to remember most of their names. There's bald guy, tall guy, short girl, black dude, moppy-haired kid, and fat guy. The work day in general is a blur of pure work with periodic breaks to check my phone, eat, and use the bathroom. It's no different than school or college, albeit I'm merely apathetic about the people around me than disdainful.

So yeah, I don't even get where I'm going with this. I guess the big question is *why am I so fucking different from everyone else?*

I guess the best place to start with why I'm so different would be the cybernetics. I live in a small town in southeastern Pennsylvania. Even though we're close to Philly, we don't have a lot of cyborgs. If we do, I haven't seen them. I try my best to keep my own implants a secret. It's not that I think people are technophobes like some of the crazy neo-luddites out in the midwest, it's just that it would be weird and make me stand out. Cyborgs are still different than regular people, especially regular people who don't talk to cyborgs usually. I don't want to stand out, I want to disappear.

Anyway, I was born with scoliosis. The curvature in my spine was bad enough to warrant medical intervention in my developing years, lest I grow to look like some ugly hunchback. My parents decided to make an unorthodox decision and opt for nanotherapy. The procedure is still fairly limited, but it's amazing. The doctors inject you with a whole swarm of nanomachines. These tiny little robots physically re-write your own body, in this case adjusting the growth patterns of my spine. The presence of nanomachines spread throughout your body, called a cyberframe, is enough to qualify you as a cyborg. Because of my cyberframe, I grew to be a healthy 6'2" instead of being some deformed manlet.

It didn't really stop there, though. When I left college and joined up with the Triple R, I got my hands on some supplements, military-grade stuff. They were these big syringes full of nanomachines meant to modify your cyberframe and its functions. I took the accelerated growth one first, the one that caused a stir back at the Olympics. Thanks to that, I grew even more to being 6'5" and muscular as shit. I took some other supplements too. Some were civilian, others military. Before long I had augmented lungs, an increased pain threshold, a more durable liver, and an enhanced immune system. My metabolism was sped up, and my overall stamina was extended. I became what they call "a six million dollar man."

There's also the matter of my arm. In high school, I got in a bad motorcycle accident. I wound up losing use of my right arm entirely. Not to let that slow me down, I personally opted to have it replaced. The entire arm was removed from the shoulder down and I was given an artificial one, personally fitted for me. It was expensive, but definitely worth it. It's in perfect sync with the rest of my body. When I started taking supplements, my arm grew to match the rest of me. I've never experienced any phantom limb pain at all. I still keep the old, dead arm. I had to go behind my parent's back to do so, but I took it to a taxidermist and got it preserved. It's currently locked up tightly in our attic.

Finally, there's my eye. Two years ago, Triple R took a job to move some cybernetics down to New Orleans. The deep south was really technophobic at the time, I hear it still is today. Cybernetic enhancement is still banned down in Louisiana today, and only recently did they legalize it for medical emergencies. If they had two years prior, I'd still probably have my left eye. Sludge capital of the world, but I still hate NOLA to this day.

Anyway, we clear a trip down for the truck, make sure no one gets in our way. Traffic clears out really fast when a bunch of bikers waving around 12-gauges roll down the road. It's not until we hit the outskirts of the city where the trouble starts. Before we know it, there's a bunch of thugs blocking off the freeway. They were Jamaicans, crazy motherfuckers whacked out on Freakout. It had only been five or so years since Hurricane Tycho, and the police had just enough resources to protect the tourist districts. Of course, we figured if we took a road that the cops didn't watch, it would be easy pickings.

Problem was, we actually just walked into a bunch of crazy Jamaicans who figured our stuff could fetch a pretty penny.

So it started with us honking horns and yelling at them to move. When it was clear they wanted us to give up, we flashed our pieces and they flashed theirs. We had shotguns and pistols, they had SMGs. I don't know who started shooting first, but I'm 99% sure that it was either Twitch or one of those drugged up lunatics. I had clipped one good, blew his arm clean off and left some shot to spare in his side. Another I had gotten right in the chest, sent him flying backwards a good yard or so. Then this punk steps out from a car and I see this bright flash.

Next thing I know, I just fucking lose it. My adrenal glands kick over and start pumping out all they can. I had already lost sight in one eye, but I just charged the little piece of shit and took him down. The first right hand came like a jackhammer and broke his nose. The second shattered his cheekbones. The third one finally broke through into his brain. I still remember his eyes actually popping out of their sockets as his skull gave way to the fleshy matter beneath it. I was told later that the news said one body was totally unidentifiable. Moleman told me that he'd seen crime scene photos of the body circulating on shock sites. It's probably one of my greatest achievements. Anyway, after I'm done, I get up and try to walk away. Problem is, my head is killing me and I just pass out.

So when I wake up, I'm in some dingy apartment with a the rest of the gang and some seedy-looking asian. I still can't see out of my left eye and my head is still fucking killing me. Then Hogg personally breaks the news to me.

Turns out I had been shot in the fucking head.

This doctor who we had been moving the parts to, the asian, had helped fix me up. He had to open my skull up and remove the bullet, along with installing a micro-computer called a "head drive" to my brain to make up for any possible damage. In the process, he had my left eye removed and replaced with an artificial one. He had saved my life and I never even got the guy's name. The implant is great, mostly. I can literally take photographs and record video with my new eye, as well as adjust the retinal pattern to fool scanners. It also has an optional night-vision mode.

So yeah, I guess that's the bulk of my implants. My cyberframe itself is mostly internal and hard to notice. My eyes seem nondescript, and my arm is mostly covered at all times due to lacking a realistic skin graft. As far as my parents know, I was in another nasty accident doing courier work and that's why I periodically get splitting headaches. As far as they know, I was a courier back when I left college. I guess it wasn't far from the truth, given how much smuggling Triple R took part in.

But again, I don't think it's the implants. I really don't think it's them. Maybe they're just an excuse, a reason to avoid people. I mean I know they probably won't hate me, but it's a good reason to keep my head down, you know?

My parents don't know it, but I own a good deal of guns, ammo, and explosives. I got most of them off the street, paid for by means of cryptocoin. The guns and ammo are hidden under my bed, with the C4 stashed away in a safe deposit box along with a small stash of gold and a hard-drive containing my remaining stash of cryptocoin.

My go-to weapon of choice is a Glock Infinite 10mm machine pistol. It was built for the military, but never caught on due to high recoil. Thankfully, my fake arm lets me control it almost perfectly. 10mm rounds are amazing- they'll chew through body armor and stop any crazy motherfucker dead in his tracks. I've shredded quite a few people with my glock. It's a lovely work of art, both aesthetically and mechanically. Both form and function are amazing. I've had a number of modifications done: the trigger is much more sensitive allowing for quicker firing. I've had tritium sights added for more accurate night firing, and the built-in laser sight has been swapped out for a tri-beam predator model. I keep three fully-loaded 50-round magazines on my bike: two in the trunk and one hooked up near the middle. It's a big gun, but I can still manage to keep it holstered, albeit visibly, on my hip.

I've also got a 9mm Heckler and Koch P5000C "Negotiator" for concealed carry. It fits well in its holster, which I can conceal in most pairs of pants. It's got a built-in laser sight, along with a naturally attached stun gun. It's best feature, though, is that it's made entirely of high-end polymers that make it entirely invisible to metal detectors. Of course, that makes it illegal for civilians to own. It's real popular with plainclothes detectives for the stun setting, along with the easily concealable nature. I got it off of a federal agent who tried to go undercover and infiltrate us. The little bastard's gotten me out of plenty of sticky situations before, so I take it with me whenever I go out of town.

When I need a little more firepower, I have a 12-gauge Mossberg 650 Pump-Action Tactical Short Barrel Shotgun. I was unable to get a pistol-grip version, so I had to improvise, sawing off the stock and having one fitted. It's a little bulky and hard to wield, but it's loud and it scares the shit out of everyone else and will fuck you up hard if it hits. One shot from this will send most people running for the hills. It's a good driving gun, but a little unwieldy to fire one-handed even with my enhanced stability. It's also a royal pain in the ass to reload during a firefight, given that I normally keep the shells on my belt. I might be a six million dollar man, but I'm no terminator. Still, I seem to do well enough,

I took eight blocks of C4 and some detonation equipment with me when I left the Copperheads. I used half of it to blow up my apartment and told Kenny to tell them that I had died in an accident. I keep the other four locked away in my safe deposit box just in case of emergency. The detonator is linked to an inactive mobile phone that I keep with the rest of my guns. All it takes is one call to the right number and they'll blow. I don't even know why I'll need them, but I figured it would be good to have them just in case. I'm no explosive expert, but I know how to rig some C4 to a detonator. I did some work programming detonators with Moleman's counsel, but I never really did much beyond using simple improvised remote detonators and timed detonators. I can also cook up a good batch of napalm and I've had some experience with fertilizer bombs. Yes, I made use of the latter in San Francisco. It was probably one of the reasons why Dragon wasn't a big fan of me.

The gold is something I invested in under Moleman's advice. As far as resources go, gold is still a fairly stable commodity, and a safe means of harboring some emergency money. I've got a few ounces of it up in the box. Only problem with gold is that the feds monitor all transactions involving it, so it's not as safe as cryptocurrency. Still, it's a good couple thousand that I can get to should I ever need it. Not that I think I ever will, I've been out of the game for over two years now. Everyone but Kenny and Moleman think that I'm dead. Dragon probably also knows I'm alive, but I doubt he really gives that much of a shit. Any incriminating data I have on him I blew up with my apartment.

The hard drive is a little more risky as far as emergency reserves go: it's loaded with a few thousand dollars worth of cryptocurrency. I don't understand how cryptocurrency works and I don't think I ever will. I just chalk it up to hacker magic or something. If I don't know whatever Moleman is spewing on and on about, I call it "hacker magic." Either way it's a few thousand dollars that the feds can't track. The drive isn't even connected to the web, so the data is guaranteed to be safe from any cyber threat. I've got a few other pieces of contraband stored away on the drive, including a fake ID generator, a basic password/PIN cracker, an advanced internet proxy, and a few "pseudo-worms"- programs designed to, via hacker magic, wipe any trace of my access from any commercial database.

So if you want one reason I'm different than everyone else, just look under my bed or in that safe deposit box. I don't think the average person has enough weaponry to take on a small police force, nor does he praise the aesthetics of his guns. I certainly wish the average person was smart enough that they kept a good supply of emergency money in a safe form just in case, but I doubt they really need to think about the possibility. I mean there's plenty of other shit I hide from my parents too- like a stash of weed, a few inhalers loaded with berserker, and a cigarette rolling machine along with a fuck-ton of fresh Virginian tobacco. Actually, I doubt the average small town American shoots up with berserker, but I haven't touched that stuff in over a year. Mostly save it for special occasions, but those don't really happen anymore. One of my old friends won't even talk to me after I hooked up with her jacked up on the stuff.

I don't even know where this is going. I mean maybe it's not just one reason I'm not like everyone else and it's just some big gestalt complex that's keeping me from returning to a normal life. Do I want a normal life? Why do I keep the guns around? Why do I keep the berserker around? The C4? Why do I still have a ton of emergency supplies? Do I really think I can just go back to my old life? I know I don't want to. This is my hometown. This is where I belong. This is where I was born and raised and hopefully where I'll die someday. I want to stay here. I don't want to leave.