

UPHILL: UPGRADED

A Short Story by James Rickard



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What follows is a short story about bio-enhancement in sport, maybe it is a look into the future, or just a long tale.

I follow professional cycling as a sport. I started watching in 2006 and in the years since then I have witnessed many stories about doping within the peloton. Everyone has their own story and reasons for it, and watching those stories unfold has been fascinating.

This is my take on bio-enhancement, an idea that I thought up a long time ago. Although the commits (<https://github.com/frodosghost/Uphill-Upgraded/commits/master>) show the first public draft was made in January 2015, I have an early save show a date of **5th April 2012**.

I am glad that is making a way into a readable and public format.

James Rickard

25th April 2015

This story is written by James Rickard. There are more of my stories up at:

<http://frodosghost.com/stories>

The source and changes have been put into GitHub, you can see changes to the text and different drafts as they have been made.

<https://github.com/frodosghost/Uphill-Upgraded>

Photos in the glossy edition were found on <https://unsplash.com/>

You can see more for the photographers by visiting their pages on Unsplash at the following URL's:

https://unsplash.com/bec_brown

<https://unsplash.com/kamillehmann>

<https://unsplash.com/alexalmon>

UPHILL: UPGRADED

James Rickard
Writer and Part-Time Cyclist

You never learn anything about yourself **WITHOUT SUFFERING**. The fact that I come back to it everyday says something about myself, a masochist, maybe. I love my job; I live and breathe it. I have dedicated my life to it.



 Hills and the roads stretch alongside the mountains. Photo taken by Alex Talmon

These excerpts are taken from the biography of Harden Croft, a professional cyclist, they speak to the Nano-Doping which was so prevalent while he was racing. The retrospective tests showed that since the third season he was involved in a bio-tech enhancement that helped him win the three grand tours, in a single season. The autobiography is released in a few months, called "Uphill: Upgraded", is his first time discussing the issue in public.

Pain. Suffering. Glory. The three go together. The first two are certain and the last depends a lot on luck - maybe how you influence it.

This is the second auto-biography written by Harden Croft. His first "**Three in a Year, Four in a Failure**" brought him much acclaim and he was very strong in his advocacy of being anti-drugs in sport. This new auto-biography, which was released due to revelations of his blood-doping, goes into much more detail than we have excerpted, here and we encourage you to pick it up as it comes out. The revelations contained within the book go on to name cyclists, and other professional athletes involved in this bio-tech enhancements.

~ The Editor

You never learn anything about yourself without suffering. The fact that I come back to it everyday says something about myself, a masochist, maybe. But I cannot say for sure, I love my job; I live and breathe it. I have dedicated my life to it.

Pain. Suffering. Glory. The three go together. The first two are certain and the last depends a lot on luck - maybe how you influence it. Just because you win a race in your first season does not mean you are destined for great things. Lady luck often favours those who know how to pull her strings; to change her mood. Sometimes it is destiny and sometimes destiny can be influenced.

I moved from Under 23's to a professional squad in the year cycling, as a sport, was at it's weakest. A few years of unrest had caused the sport to fall behind, it was no longer the sport I remembered while growing up. A few giants had to be felled:

First: The traffic systems of the world were changing to Independent Guidance Control and we had partitioned the government to keep our roads. It was a hard fight, it took many years, but they did allow us to retain the roads we had cycled on for over 200 years. Alternative routes were created for the cars, and we got to ride on historical land.

Second: Waves had been made to replace the UCI. Years of failed tests and fines being paid under the table had made everyone question their existence. In the end, they were replaced and the federation was overhauled, it had taken close to a quarter of a century. The skeletons of the past were thrown out and a new day begun.

Third: The anti-doping agency was suspended for being impartial in several of its cases, a new commission was selected. The Coalition Against Drugs In Sport (also known as **CADIS**), an external governing body, was selected to eradicate performance enhancement. They were impartial and united in the fight to see all sport compete on a fair and even field.

CADIS extended their hand into many professional sports. They become "The Name" in hindering and even expelling the use of performance enhancing drugs in sport. Baseball and Football had been free of drug enhancement for years, facilitated by **CADIS**. It is laughable to think we could eradicate Enhancement at all, when there is money involved, but **CADIS** had made it possible.

I first met Professor Giovanni Ramano in a small coffee shop two weeks before the Tour of Spain. The **Vuelta a España**. I



A man like you could win all three of the stage races in one year...

was called in by my team, **Target Highroad**, to visit with a new specialist to “tune-up” aspects of my riding.

We had finished a tough Tour that year. France was hot and the racing was brutal, I have never before seen the groupetto so big on so many consecutive stages. I had not raced the tour then, I was not good enough to carry the bottles of Nicholas Bolchev (he was nicknamed **The Cagefighter** because of the way he rode in the mountains), but I working my way up to being that good.

The coffee was beautiful as we sat in the August sun overlooking some of the finest vineyards of Italy. I lived and trained in Italy for most of the year, the roads and the people are why I stayed - both of them were beautiful. Giovanni brought the discussion around to my racing and we discussed my training in detail. Hours, intensity, styles, indoor and outdoor.

Eventually the discussion lead around to performance enhancing drugs. Up until that point I was sure that cycling was a clean sport. I was sure the men I rode with, my comrades, my betters and my worsts, were all clean. I would have sworn on my deathbed that all were equal and no-one was enhancing their performance. That day, in the sun with the coffee and a slender Italian professor, my hopes were shattered and the walls came falling down.

That year the team rode a great Vuelta a España. I, on the other hand, fell down in my domestique duties. I was pulling the

peloton up the first mountain, the Bola del Mundo, of stage 14 with three more treacherous mountains for that day. My legs were burning, the rest day had not treated me well. My mind was in another place, usually I would enjoy the pain but that day was awful. My mind was taken back to the meeting four weeks before with Giovanni overlooking the vineyards of Italy.

I was told to take the first keep a high pace up the two mountains, to make it difficult for the other teams to and keep our team leader, Bolchev, at the front. Doubts had already started to circle in my mind, like vultures over a slowly dying body, that I would not make it to the summit of the first mountain. Words spoken in the darkness often come back to haunt us at opportune times.

“A man like you.” Gionvanni had said in the sun overlooking the vineyards, “A man like you could win all three of the stage races in one year, with some help. If you would like your name to be etched

In essence they had redesigned a military system for sports.

in history then you come back and see me.” He had smiled then, in the sun, in Italy. I was grimacing while riding up the Bola del Mundo.

I flicked my elbow and signalled a rider though, the Bola del Mundo was besting me and I needed a break from the front.

“It is difficult to explain.” It took a three day tutorial to explain the factors involved with the enhancement program. The tutorial was required for everyone involved, as bio-enhancement is not just a short-term risk, it has many factors that should be considered over the long term.

The man leading the tutorial was slim with hard eyes and a grey face. His glasses glinted in the sun light, and his white chemists jacket seemed comforting in the plain study room. I was still unsure about any kind of sporting enhancement. He was



After a while you can forget you have the enhancement...

called Doctor Dubois, his was patient with his words but very clear with his English. “In the simplest form we are injecting small nano-bots that repair your blood and body cells while they are being damaged.

“After a while you can forgot you had the injection, the enhancement is not an ongoing program, nor is it permanent.”

Doctor Dubois explained that nano-doping was an adjustment of military technology. Nano-Enhancement was a technology created by the European Defence Council and deployed to the war field mid 2000's. Sometime after the military has begun using it the technology was brought by a civilian company and refactored for commercial purposes.

In essence they had redesigned a military system to be undetectable by adding **Redeemable Replication**, a process that multiplies or culls nanoids based on usage or environment. High levels of lactic acid would increase the amount of nanoids, while long periods of inactivity would cull unneeded nanoids reducing them to their original number. Detection of high oxygen levels; undue heat, cold or force; or the introduction of foreign chemical compounds would cull the nanoids at a rapid rate - these were breakpoints added to lower detection levels when the blood was analysed.

In accordance with the **Redeemable Replication** functionality the bugs would

The technology was not **CHEATING**, the purpose was to make me **FUNCTION** at 100% of my capability and remove the ebb-and-flow of strength.

not over-enhance my body. The purpose of the nanoids was to enhance my natural functions making me function at 100%, all the time. They would not make me super-human.

The introductory course was direct. They explained the history of the technology, how it worked and the benefits it would give me. The technology was not technically “*cheating*”, the purpose was to make me function at 100% of my capability and remove the ebb-and-flow of strength. **Consistency** is the key to winning a stage race and this would allow me to perform at my expected level.

I sweated every step of making the decision, but what had inspired me to accept the injection was that I vowed never to let my team down when there was a job to be done. I vowed never to let my family down in their times of need. I vowed always to put in 100%. It was those vows that lead me to feel comfortable with making the decision. It wasn't for me, it was for others.

I remember climbing off the bike before the summit of the Bela de Mundo, throwing my bike into a small clump of trees. Everything I had trained for had come to nothing, all that hard work and I couldn't even do my job. I just couldn't go through that again, I couldn't put my team through that again.

I accepted the injection because I knew others were cheating, and I was prone to some bad days, as I showed on the Bela de Mundo. Despite it causing a lot of stress in the days leading up to it, I knew it was the right idea.

In the end that overshadowed the doubts. There was no other steps I could take. This injection would help my friends, my family and myself. We could all reach what we had set out to achieve. It all depended on me.

My third season is where it changed for me. The first race I got better, not worse, as the race went on.

By the first of the week-long stage races, we did Paris-Nice that year - *the Race to the Sun* - the media were waiting for me to cross the line. “*That new training program is really paying off.*” they had said. I would say a few words and roll away to the team bus. All the time thinking that being at the front is better than finishing at the end.

By the end of the **Ardennes Classics** I had moved up in the ranks, greater responsibility. I helped Pieter Ross to win his first **Liège-Bastogne-Liège**. That was a spectacular win. I pulled back a breakaway of favourites with Pieter on my wheel. He jumped the gap, and continued his attack. I rolled in seven minutes later, as tired as I had ever been.

I didn't know what it felt like to stand on the podium, but I sure felt like I was up there with him that day. I felt integral to the team, like a cog that would break the machine if it fell away.

I worked hard all season. Finally in the last mountain stage of the **Vuelta a España** I broke away with the idea that our team leader, who was out of the general classification, would make the gap and



Descending the mountains.
Photo by Alex Talmon

There were no other steps for me to take. This **ENHANCEMENT** would help my **FRIENDS**, my **FAMILY** and **MYSELF**.

then take the stage. I was just beginning the final ascent when I heard over the radio that there has been a crash in the peloton at the bottom mountain. Our leader wouldn't be making the gap and I was given the chance to take the stage, if I

could stay away.

Being in the lead of a stage race, on the Queen Mountain stage of a tour is like being a mouse in front of a cat. One mistake and the cat will eat you whole. I was given the chance to take my first stage victory. Like some devine, Karmic retribution we were climbing the **Bola del Mundo**. I had seen those corners in my mind a thousand times since last year, replaying that horrible day over and over. I would win this stage.

Six kilometres from the summit I was pedalling in squares. I was checking my cadence, and my watts, and they were dropping. The contenders had started their battle further down the mountain, making their way across the gap, wanting to take away my stage victory.

I dug so deep that day that I couldn't see straight with one kilometre to go. Everything was colours, turning slowly like a kaleidoscope. My muscles burned, I thought they were on fire. I was cramping, the pain of every stroke felt like my muscles ripping apart. I did whatever I could to keep moving forward.

I focused on the crowd. The cheers in those final kilometre made me feel like a hero. And when the signs were counting down the meters I knew that the stage was mine. The crowd grew louder, banging the barriers harder and harder. I collapsed after the line.

In the end I managed the victory by twenty seconds, **Victor Moser** had taken a massive gap on the contenders and was pulling me in.

The next morning I asked if I could go on a breakaway again. My Director Sportif patted me on the back with a huge smile, “*Just enjoy what you did yesterday.*” I didn't tell him I felt fine, not tired at all, and I could easily have done it again.

The following two seasons saw me progress from **SUPER-DOMESTIQUE** to team leader, and from team leader to possible **TOUR WINNER**.

To be honest I forgot about the nano-injection.

Giovanni since the second meeting, not even in passing. My following two seasons saw me progress from a super-domestique to team leader and from team leader to possible Tour winner.

In the public eye I had never been considered as a good rider before the past three years and to them it looked like lots of hard work. It was hard work too. The training program Dr. Phelps ran was tough. Yet as the days passed I felt I could sustain harder efforts for longer periods of time. It was working and I was improving.

Truth be told after three years of hard work, training with Doctor Phelps, I had started to believe that all of this success was happening because of my hard work. I had almost forgotten about the nano-bots in my blood. I started to focus on the goal of winning the three Grand Tours in a single year.

No one had done that before.

There is always wind. An alluring mistress, like sirens to sailors. Always calling to you to go out too hard, too fast, too soon. Then it is a gradual depression to nothing as every ounce of energy is wrung from you. The lights go out. There is nothing that will help when you have gone too deep and asked too much of your body, except

The Long Road
stretches down the cold roads of Iceland. Photo by Kamil Lehmann

to hope that tomorrow will be better - if you can beat the stage cut off.

I love the feeling of riding the knife edge between glory and defeat. I love the sounds that follow when you drop the chain down a few cogs and start dancing on the pedals. There is a flurry, a crunching of gears, sighs of disapproval, heavy breathing. If everything is timed just right they fade down the mountain side as I took off towards the heavens. Time to breathe.

There is always the **WIND**. An alluring mistress, like sirens to sailors. Calling you to go too **HARD**, too **FAST**, too **SOON**.

Time alone. It is a wondrous feeling.

Then the peloton approaches. There are a few words over the race radios and it will be time to go again. Team leaders springs from the group trying to bridge across to me, the lone rider. Some of them make it and I bury myself for the next four kilometers. Try to hold on. Try to get to

the finish. Try to get the glory.

We ride together for a while. Call a truce. Smile inside about dropping the guys who were too weak. Take a gel, drink some water. We don't look at the scenery, that is for the spectators. The gladiators look at the road and to each other. I know there is a steep section coming up and that is where I will attack.

The wind swirls off the craggy peaks in the mountains. It blows and pushes me in unexpected directions. The rider who is aware will take the spoils of victory. I knew there was a steep section, but the wind caught me off guard. My wheels slipped with a sudden gust, like I ran over oil on the road, I did not fall but Moser took advantage and pushed

ahead. I lost his wheel around a sharp bend but I didn't panic. You cannot panic under stress it only takes your energy. Focus on the road ahead.

I knew the gradient was steep. I knew **Moser** would not make it up there. So I just kept it steady.

The bend lead slowly around to the incline,





23% for 700meters. A short, punchy climb in the middle of a 19km mountain. This was the kick in the pants, the colloquial “FU” to all the riders, from the Tour organisers. I pushed back a few gears and started up the incline with a *fury*. The 700 metres aren’t the problem, it is the 300 or so afterwards, where your recovery takes place, that causes the problems.

I knew that **Moser** hates sudden inclines. So I hit it hard and went past him when the incline dropped to around 12%. I continued pushing until I was sure that he was beaten, both physically and mentally. I needed him gone to take the title, to have the time I needed I win the jersey for my first Tour victory.

The nights were long when I could not sleep. The press wanted my opinion on every allegation, my thoughts on every rider who doped in past and present. The days were blurry, incoherent and confusing to me, with a bad case of insomnia - the doctor said it started because I thought everyone was out to get me.

Riders had been talking of winning all three Grand Tours in a single season since the early 2000’s and no one had managed to get it. I was the first, and when I had completed it the Cloud of Suspicion fell upon me. No positive tests, no indication in my results; it was just because I finally completed the impossible.

Was it too much to have Three Grand tours to my name? There always has to be a first for everything, so why did I have to be suspected of doing something wrong? I have said before that being a professional cyclist is being an entertainer and I was a star - does it really matter how an actor embraces a role if the performance is brilliant?

During my long nights I looked back on riders who were caught in midst of this Cloud of Suspicion. Any cyclist caught up in the midst of doping allegations were never free from the heavy burden for the rest of their career. Some cyclists ignored it, some kept on competing when their bans had finished, but not one of them walked free again - every win, every success carried this burden.

My worst worry was that many of the accused cyclists had already lost in the public’s eye before the judgement had even been handed down. A marvellous performance lead to “public doubt”; a crime that held a sentence before a court hearing. There was no winning in the public eye. Like the Black Dot among pirates, an accusation with little fact brought death to a career. Death to my career.

I took my chances. I influenced Lady Luck at just the right time. I made my mark on history.

The investigation started two months into the following year. However I was to learn (years later) that it started earlier.

CADIS had created a test for nano-technology, and had been using it in secret

What is winning? Is it COMING FIRST? Is it a more MORAL victory? Is it based on not GETTING CAUGHT? Or not CHEATING? Where do we draw the line?

with a small sample alongside their normal blood tests. They had been following my blood since July, the year before I won three Grand Tours, and they had made the test conclusive April the year I won Paris-Nice, the following year I won all three Grand Tours.

CADIS had developed and refined the nano-doping test with my blood, in secret,

for three years. They had instated a test, gathered the samples over a prolonged period, a wrote a large document, that included all evidence against me. I got to read a copy of it two days before it was made public. I talked to my lawyer and said goodbye to my career.

Editors Note:

It seems that CADIS had been keeping samples of blood whenever they had tests. They had devised a test that compares blood values based on interval testing, to see if natural or unnatural values are reported with the testing. They have a few tests that have been working on as well - working with doctors who are known to have prescribed certain “training regimes”.

What is wining? Is it coming first? Is it a moral based victory or is it not getting caught? Can someone come first, but get some assistance? Where do we draw the line? Is it legal to enhance our soldiers and yet frown upon sports people doing the same thing?

Coming out of the other side of my depression, insomnia and paranoia I have come to the conclusion that I cannot change my past. Despite what my jurors call “cheating” I am the same now as I was before I received the nano-injection. I am no different mentally or physically. I am no different to 10,000 soldiers on the front lines in the West-Asian borders. I do not think of myself a cheat, otherwise half of the people I rode against competitively would be considered the same.

I trained hard for this. I was out pushing my body to the limits for everything I achieved. Nano technology did not short-cut my work, it didn’t enhance the training, it didn’t decrease my hours on the bike. It helped, but it didn’t allow me to shortcut all the training and hard work I needed to be a champion.

I did my job. I performed and entertained. I worked hard. I live with no regrets. I was every bit the champion that the people asked for, in my work ethic and my palmarès. I am a product of the sporting system that people enjoy to the tune of 70 trillion dollars a year.

Don’t forget to pick up your copy of **Uphill: Upgraded** when it comes out next month.