

The Dodovirus

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Scenario:

One of the far-reaching promises of synthetic biology is, among other breakthroughs, to resurrect extinct species. Such a popular science-fiction theme is mentioned, for instance, in George Church's book, *Regenesi*s. In one of its "technomoral vignettes", which are short stories to imagine the moral aspects of synbio's futures,¹ the Rathenau Institute for Technology Assessment has narrated the limited success of the recreation of the dodo.² The work of synthetic biologists resulted in the creation of a stupid, clumsy and human-dependent bird who did not know how to behave like a real dodo: The bird eventually came to be hated for accusatory dependence and its inability to absolve humankind of its earlier sins.

However, let's imagine that synthetic biologists have decided to pursue these experiments. The dodo 2.1 or "superdodo" is the offspring of this research. Able of better adaptability to the external environment, the new dodo is much more independent than their predecessors the Dodos 2.0. The dodo 2.1 is even capable of sophisticated social behavior ... While the potential of this "new new" dodo is very promising, a freak accident in a research lab during the visit of a cantatrice searching for a technology for enhancing her vocal performance, has triggered what might reveal to be the greatest pandemic of the Homo sapiens sapiens era.

The scream of the dodo revealed the presence of a dormant dodovirus in each human individual: the virus, indeed, is activable by the characteristic wavelength and frequency of the dodo scream. It then modifies the frequency of the human voice, and is thus transmissible by sound.

¹ <http://www.rathenau.nl/themas/thema/project/synthetische-biologie/what-are-tech-moral-vignettes.html>

² "Reinventing the Dodo": <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Iw-2886-Ft8>

Disease description:

Some studies lead to the following observations on the disease:

- The virus CH1NGAC8G00K (commonly known as the “dodo-virus”) is present in the hypothalamus gland of each human being. Yet, the normal state of the virus is a passive state: we are all born healthy carriers of the virus and keep healthy unless the virus is awoken.
- Frequency bands used by Dodo 2.1 to interact with its congeners are responsible for the activation of the dodo-virus.
- The particularity of the virus is that it is sono-activatable (through the ear).
- The virus causes the following symptoms:
 - Changing the frequency of the voice (which makes the condition transmissible by man)
 - Sterility (leading to earth depopulation)
 - Hair loss
 - Excessive overweight (altered fat burning process)
 - Accelerated senility
 - Unwanted saliva secretion

Current (lack of) solutions:

Symptoms are treatable one by one to some point. However, it is complicated to treat all of them simultaneously. This creates several issues:

- heavy medication
- financial burden of a patient’s treatment
- ...

Technologies are being explored to allow people to communicate in safe conditions, *ie.* with no risk of virus transmission (*e.g.*: voice Filters, special megaphones ...).

There is still no vaccine or medicine directly attacking the virus but research on this topic is gaining momentum.

To develop an antidote, humans need dodos, but the birds are very proud and refuse to be treated like mere guinea pigs. Obviously, this is not because humans know and master the dodos’ genome that these they accept to be treated like common molecule factories.

The big issue:

The scenario raises the issue of how to consider the cohabitation of humans and synthetic dodos.

Characters:

1. The Singer:

Looking for voice improvement, she once visited a research laboratory working on the Dodo. There, she intentionally walked over a dodo, becoming the first victim of a dodo ever. (*You don't mess with the dodo*).



2. The Dodo Leader:



Dodos are legion, reproducing rapidly. Proud and susceptible, they have grown increasingly hostile to Humans. Dodos have even shown able to create communities and develop societies. Some leading individuals have arisen among them and could ensure the long-term viability of their species.

Dodos are threatening our civilization but they could be as well the salvation of the human race.

3. The Virus:



Major belligerent, though he remains quite mysterious as Humans still don't know how to tackle him directly. Yet, the show offered by the limits of Science gives him a funny moment.

4. A Deaf:

The hopes of mankind may lie on deaf people. As they are immunized against the awakening of the virus, deaf people represent an alternative to the search for an antidote as far as experiences on Dodos is highly hazardous.

However, deaf people shall defend their basic rights and may intervene in the debates concerning the search for a vaccine, if they consider that the research processes could threaten their constitutional rights.



5. The Dictator:



He embodies the visceral rejection of cohabitation with the dodo and the exclusion of all contaminated human beings. He doesn't hesitate to take drastic measures to isolate his nation (seeking autarky) and chase the threat by any means (aphonisation of the population, imprisonment of alleged contaminated individuals, kidnapping and summary executions ...). The dictator is not necessarily an evil character. He simply thinks the most efficient approach of the Biosafety is the military one.

6. A member of the Transdodoist sect:

The *World Transdodoist Association* advocates the fusion of *Homo sapiens sapiens* with *Didus ineptus 2.0* through transbiological and hybridation techniques (developed in the 2020s). The newly created race *Superhomodidus totopossibilis* would no longer suffer the dodovirus, which explains the genesis of the transdodoist motto: "*just dodo it!*". But what would happen to Humans and Dodos if this new species is brought to dominate the world?



7. An historian-journalist-social sciences and humanities researcher:

He discovers the dark secret of the first Dodos and the real reason for their extermination in Mauritius at the end of the seventeenth century, as far as this phenomenon had already occurred on a smaller scale on Easter Island. He doesn't like the solutions backed by transdodoists, as he finds that these solutions are lacking credibility (transbiological and hybridation techniques may work in laboratory, that doesn't mean their products can be controlled outside) and are morally dubious.



The player has the possibility to develop the character's position (coexistence between Humans and Dodos, containment areas giving the possibility for searchers to keep a close eye on the species, population regulation etc.).

8. The researcher:

As a specialist, the searcher believes in the Dodos' potential. He is fighting against the extermination of the species in order to study its behavior in society, its seduction and reproduction specificities and find a cure for dodo-virus but also to help research against cancer (for example, through the audio-therapy by activation of vectorized dodovirus).



The player has the possibility to develop the character's position (coexistence between Humans and Dodos, containment areas giving the possibility for searchers to keep a close eye on the species, population regulation etc.).

9-10. Two Diplomats:

Deeply convinced that the problem of coexistence between Dodos and Humans can find a peaceful solution, diplomats play a mediating role between the two species. The problem is that they do not always agree on the solutions to be adopted...



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