

A conversation between two viruses: SARS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2 — based on a true story

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Around October 2019, two viruses, who only speak Chinese, SARS-CoV and SARS-CoV-2, had a friendly conversation in the province of Wuhan, China.

SARS-CoV-2 (from now on called COVID) said to SARS-CoV (from now on called SARS):

“I am really bored, SARS. I have been living inside bats, pangolins and other animals for centuries and there is nothing new to see. I have the desire to go around the world, see other people, other races, get to know them and maybe even give them some useful advice”.

SARS said: “I have done the same thing about 10 years ago, COVID, and it was a disaster. As soon as I migrated to a few countries, they immediately took draconian isolation measures and in a few months, I couldn’t move anywhere and I was left to die. Everybody forgot about me within two years; they never talk about me anymore. The same thing happened to some of our cousins: Ebola, MERS, etc. So, be careful. But why are you confident that you can succeed where we all failed?”

COVID: “I know I only have 29,000 nucleotides in my RNA sequence and I can make a handful of proteins, but I am a little bit more flexible than you. If I use some special tricks, I may actually go around without being noticed.”

SARS: “Can you tell me your plan?”

COVID: “Yes. I will first hide in the body of one of these small animals, like pangolins, and I will travel with them to the central fresh seafood market in Wuhan. I am sure somebody will buy the pangolin and eat it. At that time, I will jump into the customer’s lungs by grabbing onto the ACE2 enzyme with my spike protein, get in the cells and start proliferating.”

SARS: “It sounds like a good plan, COVID, but aren’t you afraid that the humans will catch you very early?”

COVID: “I am not worried because I will sit quiet for 1-2 weeks without giving any symptoms to my victims. During this period, I will produce billions and billions of copies of myself and then I will jump into other people, and here we go.”

SARS: “And how are you going to go to other countries?”

COVID: “It is very easy, SARS: by trains, planes, and automobiles. Have you seen that movie? I will find travelers and go along with them. I know that many Chinese are now traveling all over the world for vacation, business etc. Some of them even fly first class and enjoy the good food, unlimited drinks etc. While they enjoy the ride, I will be proliferating, proliferating, proliferating and infecting, infecting, infecting. I am sure none will wear masks and will be seating next to each other. When these people develop symptoms I will be sitting in thousands of people’s lungs and continue my trip.”

SARS: “And how many countries are you thinking of visiting COVID?”

COVID: “I plan to visit every corner of the world. As I said, I am highly curious and I want to see

everything from the Eiffel Tower to Big Ben to the Leaning Tower of Pisa, and the ancient monuments of Greece. Of course, I will not leave behind our best friend, the United States, and the city that never sleeps, New York. While in these places, I will arrange to meet prime ministers, members of the Congress and parliaments, famous actors, athletes, you name it. I will even get into the White House and have a little tour.

SARS: “But, COVID, some of these countries are very cold, like Canada; are you thinking of visiting them too?”

COVID: “As I said, SARS, I will visit everywhere, no matter what the climate is; every single corner of the world. Tell me a country, a city, a neighborhood and I will be there.

SARS: “And how much time do you need to do that?”

COVID: “Just a couple of months.”

SARS: “HaHaHa; I can’t believe it. It is a mission impossible (have you seen this movie?). How will you be able to visit every country, every corner, infect millions of people and, in the process, cause thousands of deaths in such a short time?”

COVID: “SARS, believe me. I have the weapons, as I told you: 29,000 nucleotides and 20 proteins. Besides, my intention will be not only to cause death. I will do other things which are probably even worse.”

SARS: “Like what?”

COVID: “I will destroy their economies from their foundations and leave millions without work. Do you know how much is a million dollars? It is a lot of money. Do you know how much is a billion dollars? It is a lot more money. And do you know what is a trillion? It is the whole US budget for a year. My objective is to make such damage that the economic fallout will be in the many trillions of dollars. It will take them years and years to recover. Trust me! I need to give these people a lesson.”

SARS: “I wonder, COVID, why do you want to give these people a lesson?”

COVID: “Listen, SARS; I have been around for a while and you have been around for a while and we have both seen what happened. Human beings are a strange species. While they say that they care about other humans and they want to help with this and that, in actual terms, and this is getting worse, they have proven to be greedy and selfish. They start unnecessary wars, make nukes that can destroy the world 10 times over, they invade other countries, they make the poor become poorer and the rich become richer, they play with the stock market and they steal other people’s money. In other words, politicians have become corrupt and morality and empathy has declined. While God blessed and empowered them to make this world better, to protect the animals, the environment etc. in actual fact they are destroying everything left and right. Look at the poor environment. How many more natural resources they will burn and how many more billions of animals they will eat or force go extinct? If we leave these people unchecked, in a few years, there will be no planet. In terms of life-style, they pack themselves in 100-storey buildings without realizing that epidemics like this one will proliferate like fire before they are able to react. Are they losing their common sense?”

SARS: “Why don’t you go on television and tell all these facts to the politicians and other citizens COVID? May be they will listen and correct themselves before you inflict your damage.”

COVID: “Unfortunately, SARS, I am not a good actor and I do not speak English. And most of those who need to listen they don’t understand Chinese. So, my only option to bring them back to their senses is to shake them with the pandemic, so that they will fortunately wake up. I feel sorry for doing it; I am not a bad guy as you know, but I believe this thing has gone too far. Humans have become selfish and arrogant and they believe they can do anything and can get away without consequences. I have no question that after I complete this trip around the world they will start thinking of what has gone wrong and maybe they will try to fix things.”

SARS: “And what if they don’t?”

COVID: “I will tell you what. I will retreat for a few months and monitor how they respond. If they don’t do anything, or become more arrogant, I will go back and give them another shake. Just sit back and watch me, SARS. I will do a lot more than you did, even if our genomes are about the same size. Size does not matter here!”



Note: All characters mentioned in this story are hypothetical and any resemblance to real people or viruses is purely coincidental. The author offers his condolences for lives lost during this pandemic. His essay will fortunately contribute to spark a debate as to what could be done to avoid the pandemic, and, most importantly, what can be done to avoid future pandemics.