

Virus (2010 – 2039) BHARTI KHER

An artwork that is conceived as a 30-year project, beginning in 2010 and ending in 2039. This text combines prediction (*in italics*) and chronology. One Virus will be released a year to mark an entry into space somewhere. Like a time-tunnel that you can climb into, or a vortex, or a womb or a safe hole. A mutation of color and pattern so light, a virus so subtle, that no one will notice its slow and transformative essence.

Except you.

You have chosen to be a part of this project that will culminate when our children have grown older and have left home. You and I may or may not be alive. Our lives will have changed in ways we cannot imagine now. Wars may have been waged or natural disasters that wreak havoc on civilizations will push humanity to rethink its relationships with other living beings and our planet. Cities may never sleep again. People who live longer than before can roam spaces of changing realities that have been mapped digitally and created in the mind.

This text will continue to change as I meet time and add narratives.

VIRUS I 2010

The first artificial life-form, *Mycoplasma laboratorium*, is created. It is a new series of bacterium, with a man-made genetic code, originating on a computer and placed on a synthetic chromosome inside an empty cell. Using its new “software”, the cell can generate proteins and produce new cells. Wikileaks, an online publisher of anonymous and classified material, leaks to the public over 90,000 internal reports about the United States-led involvement in the war against Afghanistan from 2004–10. More follow. I am 41.

VIRUS II 2011

Japan is hit by a devastating earthquake and tsunami. The Fukushima nuclear plant disaster becomes the worst nuclear accident since Chernobyl in 1986. The world’s first synthetic organ transplant is carried out. The Arab Spring marks the beginning of the war in Syria. Osama Bin Laden is killed. My daughter starts a new school. I am 42.

VIRUS III 2012

The Mayan Long Count calendar completes its cycle, prompting some to believe that the end of the world is near. Voyager I crosses the heliopause, already travelling 19 billion kilometres. *It is expected to enter the Oort Cloud in another 300 years, crossing that region after a period of 30,000 years, then passing the red dwarf AC +79 3888 in the year 42,000 AD.* I am 43.

VIRUS IV 2013

The first human embryonic stem cells are created by cloning. This transformative development has pushed research into treating several diseases and conditions with no current treatments. Social movements against mass surveillance gain ground after leaked documents about surveillance on citizens surface. Gene therapy, for the first time in the Western world, is made commercially available for a particular rare, inherited disease. I am 44.

VIRUS V 2014

Google glasses are launched, making augmented reality a possibility using voice command and eye-tracking technology. It doesn’t work very well. The Orion spacecraft made for explorations to Moon, Mars and beyond is test-launched without a crew. Belgium becomes the first country to legalize euthanasia for terminally-ill patients of any age. I am 45.

VIRUS VI 2015

Solar Impulse is circumnavigating the globe; personal genome sequences change the way the body is medically treated. Concerns are being raised over privacy of information and the potential for “genetic discrimination”, as well as the psychological impact of test results. Religion is fast becoming a game plan for political power and division. The world’s largest and highest energy particle accelerator, The Large Hadron Collider, reaches its maximum operating power. This was aimed to recreate the conditions immediately after the birth of the universe. I am 46.

VIRUS VII 2016

NASA’s Juno aircraft enters Jupiter’s orbit and begins survey. USA and China, responsible for 40% of world’s carbon emissions, ratify the Paris global climate agreement. Refugees move across international borders. The number of people forcibly displaced worldwide surpassed a record 60 million—the most since the end of World War II. Twenty million of those displaced, half of which are children, are refugees fleeing wars, conflict and persecution. David Bowie, Prince and Leonard Cohen die. My son starts university. Delhi air pollution reaches hazardous levels. I am 47.

VIRUS VIII 2017

China establishes its largest megacity in the world with a population of 42 million. Electronic papers are now in widespread use. *The first full human transplant will be carried out.* JFK files are released yet President Trump withholds certain details, citing national security. 8.2 billion internet-connected video devices are now installed worldwide, exceeding the population of the planet. I am 48.

VIRUS IX 2018

A universal flu vaccine will be made available to the public, and polio will be eradicated from the world. A drug is developed to prevent obesity and lets people eat whatever they want without gaining weight. Robotic surgeons are now operating on humans. Ireland legalizes abortion. The #MeToo movement galvanizes women together to begin conversations about sexual abuse. I am 49.

VIRUS X 2019

Cannabis is legalized in many countries, bringing in tax revenues for governments. Japan sends spacecraft using solar sail propulsion for the first time, a technology that uses no fuel but taps into the Sun’s energy in the form of high-speed gas particles and protons. *Pinhead-sized cameras are changing the potential of photography. Devices that deliver sensations to the skin surface of their users (e.g., tight body suits and gloves) are now used in VR to complete the experience. Virtual sex becomes a reality—two people are able to have sex with each other virtually, or a human can have sex with a “simulated” partner.* I am 50.

VIRUS XI 2020

Generation X shapes politics more actively. There will be a world oil crisis. *Drones will patrol the skies. Texting will be made possible by thought power alone, using headsets that detect and convert brain signals to digital signals. A pill for curing malaria will be available, and major experiments in longevity will yield promising results.* Right wing ideologies find voice in leaderships across the world. Climate crisis caused by changes in the weather, becomes a major threat to the earth and its ecosystems. Floods, droughts and major temperature changes affect cities across the world and sea levels rise. Covid-19 brings the human population on earth to a standstill. I’m sick all year. I am 51.

VIRUS XII 2021

A first crewed mission will take place to gain new insights into the economic value of asteroids. Brood X, the biggest swarm of insects in the world, will re-emerge in New York destroying crops. Male birth control pills will be made available, making this the most significant contraceptive for men since the condom. China eliminates Malaria. A team of researchers release data from clinical trials in the development of an HIV vaccine that shows a 97% response rate. 77 countries in the world have now announced full or partial bans on plastic bags. Governments in some countries introduce initiatives to tackle hygiene and sanitation issues for more than half of the world’s population that menstruates, but 2.3 billion people live without basic sanitation services globally. This “period poverty” disproportionately affects women and girls. I hit menopause. India is hit by a brutal second wave of Covid-19. Oxygen shortages and lack of Government planning leave a conservative unaccounted death rate of 6.5million. I am 52.

VIRUS XIII 2022

Water will be the new weapon of war, with worsening climate changes affecting fresh water reservoirs. Massive flooding In Pakistan affecting 75% of the population. Climate change affects disproportionately poorer countries. *Upstream countries will have leverage over downstream neighbouring ones and use this to forward political and economic agendas. Nanotechnology will be used in producing everyday as well as specialized garments for the military and the police.* Unreleased letters of Sigmund Freud become open source, changing opinions of his processes and theories. Lola finishes high school. I am 53.

VIRUS XIV 2023

NASA’s Orion spacecraft, which will undertake manned missions to Mars, will conduct its first crewed test flight. Brain implants will make it possible to restore lost memory, giving hope to people suffering from Alzheimer’s disease and trauma. I am 54.

VIRUS XV 2024

Bangladesh will see the biggest refugee crisis to date, with torrential flooding affecting its high-density population. Conflicts will start erupting along the borders with India and Myanmar as refugees attempt to cross. Sweatshops in developing countries will become obsolete with 3D printing making possible the production of very low cost clothing. Artists now include creative computers, capable of making their own art and music. I am 55.

VIRUS XVI 2025

3D-printed human organs will be developed in the field of medicine. This printing will no longer be limited to inorganic materials like artificial jawbones, replacement skull parts. Vertical farming will become common in cities as crops can be stacked on top of each other like floors in a building, and grown using hydroponics and aeroponics, bringing down usage of space, soil, water and fertilizer. Phone calls are three-dimensional holographic images of both people. I am 56.

VIRUS XVII 2026

Dark matter will be fully understood and Earth will be mapped as a dot in an infinitely growing cosmos that changes how we define time. 3D-printed electronic membranes that can be attached to the exterior of the heart will be used to monitor, diagnose and treat heart diseases, and prevent heart attacks. Restoring damaged and aging hearts will become a normal procedure for doctors. Due to rising sea levels, a mass evacuation plan in Maldives will be underway, with the nation’s citizens resettling in India, Sri Lanka and Australia. I am 57.

VIRUS XVIII 2027

The BRIC nations will overtake the combined GDP of G7 nations. This year will see the release of Elvis Presley’s autopsy report that was sealed for 50 years. Human-robot relationships develop faster, as simulated personalities become more convincing to the living. I am 58.

VIRUS XIX 2028

Britain’s national newspapers will be taken out of circulation as digital formats take over. By 2028, a number of extinct species, including the woolly mammoth and dodo, are resurrected using cloning, selective breeding and genetic engineering. This process will be vital towards restoring Earth’s biosphere, which has been pushed to its environmental limits. Other extinct species are ignored as water, land use and viability are debated. I am 59.

VIRUS XX 2029

Artificial Intelligence in a computer will pass the Turing Test wherein a human can no longer distinguish the machine from a human being. Intelligent advertising in ads, billboards and posters will be able to identify the interests and lifestyle of specific people passing by. Direct brain implants allow users to enter full-immersion virtual reality, with complete sensory stimulation and without any external equipment. People can have their minds in different places at any given time. I am 60.

VIRUS XXI 2030

Another 2 billion people will be living in the world, with food, energy and water supplies reaching a crisis point. Depression will become the leading disease burden in the world, though progress is made to de-stigmatize mental illnesses. USA declines as a world power as its economy and industrial might plummets. China and India gain hegemony over the world. Crime scene analysis becomes hyper-fast with cases being solved in a matter of seconds using an array of DNA technologies. Jails reach breaking point. I am 61.

VIRUS XXII 2031

Virtual telepathy becomes a reality. Human organs will be grown easily for transplant. Stem cell pharmacies will be commonplace with walk-in diagnosis, stem cell collection and banking services possible. Chocolate will be as expensive as caviar due to diminishing harvests of cocoa in Africa. Rising sea levels will send much of the city of Bangkok, south-east England and Dubai underwater. I am 62.

VIRUS XXIII 2032

Ukrainian astronomers predict that a giant asteroid will destroy the world. Half the world is desperately short of water. India’s capital, Delhi, is now completely waterless and the city empties. I am 63.

VIRUS XXIV 2033

Man will finally land on the surface of Mars. Asteroid mining will be pushed towards the asteroid belts between Mars and Jupiter. Hypersonic airplanes will make human air travel faster at speeds of Mach 5. China and India will lose more than 80 million people due to smoking and pollution. I am 64.

VIRUS XXV 2034

Rising sea levels and storms will destroy large areas of the UK coastline, affecting housing, farmland, nature reserves and nuclear power plants. The last of Switzerland’s nuclear reactors will be closed. Ectogenesis transforms reproductive systems in humans by creating artificial wombs, giving men and transgenders possibilities of carrying a child. I am 65.

VIRUS XXVI 2035

The European Union finally collapses with several splits and formations of new fragile alliances. Russia will become the world food superpower. There will be an economic decline in the Middle East, with crude oil production taking a sharp dip. Holographic recreations of dead people will become a possibility. Wars will be fought by autonomous fighting factions, machines and mercenaries, pushing further debates of ethics, morality and democracy. I am 66.

VIRUS XXVII 2036

Bionic eyes will soon begin to offer more than just ordinary sight. They will be capable of providing infrared vision, for improved health and safety in night-time situations and for surveillance. They will include video recording capabilities, serving as the ultimate portable webcams. I am 67.

VIRUS XXVIII 2037

Quantum computers will become more accessible, increasing computing speeds to previously unseen scales. Nanotechnology creates food, objects and body parts. We travel to planets in our vicinities for spans of 100 days. There will be a single world government. I am 68.

VIRUS XXIX 2038

Complex organic molecules like DNA and proteins can be teleported. This is to follow on from experiments conducted in the 2000s when scientists transferred zero mass particles of light over short distances. Humans begin tests on themselves. No one knows whether it works or not yet since they never come back. I am 69.

VIRUS XXX 2039

I am 70 now. *See you then.*