

„What I cannot create, I do not understand.“

Richard Feynman, 1988

After ten years of toil, and roughly \$ 40 million, the geneticist J. Craig Venter published a paper that described a bacterial cell that his team had created. Its genome had been assembled not inside a parent cell, as with every other cell in history, but in a computer. (...) To illustrate our command over DNA, and to distinguish Synthia – aka *Mycoplasma micoides* JCVI- syn 1.0 – from naturally occurring bacteria, Venter and his team hid what video game players call an “Easter egg” in its genome. This was in the form of secret encrypted messages in the DNA of his creation. One of them was:

“What I cannot build, I cannot understand.” , which fractionally misquotes Feynman. (...) But, errors aside, this Easter egg quotation served the purpose of stamping an indelible “watermark” into this bacteria, proving that it was unnatural in origin. It also showed that DNA can act as a data storage device, a means of encoding information that is not biologically relevant.

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