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Short Communication

Identification and Characterisation of Periodicum Pradatorius: An Emerging Pathogen of Physicus Novicius and Litterae Scientific

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"The way to reason with a predator is to make it aware that it can live in a cage, or it can die, but it can no longer prey upon us". Litterae scientific has, over the last decade in particular, been the subject of escalating insult from a number of rogue elements; none more insidious than Periodicum pradatorius [1]. Coinciding with the growth of the internet [2], this opportunistic infectious agent gains access to its intermediary host (Physicus novicius) primarily via Email, though social media platforms have also been implicated [3]. Once established in the hosts' inbox, the virus either remains dormant until activated by the unwitting host or neutralized by the hosts' immune defenses (i.e. antispam software). Several subspecies of P Pradatorius exist, each exhibiting varying degrees of sophistication in terms of the infection process: ranging from the rather simplistic subspecies generalist (which lacks any discernible host specificity; including the target's name, correct salutation or area of specialization), to the more targeted variant, P. pradatorius certis. While P. pradatorius generalist usually addresses the host in general terms, including "Dear Doctor", "Dear Professor" or in some less evolved strains, "Respected Sir" (presumably suggesting a sex specific tropism), P. pradatorius certis, by contrast, exhibits some degree of specificity. Indeed, subspecies certis not only uses the host's full name, but often refers to one of the host's previous publications. The cited paper (usually the source of the P. novicius contact details used by the pathogen to initiate the infection in the first instance) often bares little or no relevance to the P. pradatorius subject matter. A typical line from a P. pradatorius letter of invitation will read "We have read with interest your work on Acne vulgaris and feel that it would make an excellent addition to our journal Life on Mars". To illustrate the absurdity of such an association: our team's Prof Throb, a noted expert in acne (particularly of the rhino variety), has never as much as set a foot on Mars!

Another characteristic of P. pradatorius is an innate sense of urgency in the nature of the initial contact; P. novicius is often informed that a single submission is needed to close a planned future issue, which is usually due for publication in as little as two weeks. This demand is usually followed by the reassurance that "if your research is not ready" … "review articles, case reports, short communications, perspectives, editorials, letters to the editor, etc." are all welcome (in essence, anything will do!). Peer review is rarely mentioned (and, with such rapid turn-around times, is hardly likely). Furthermore, analogous to prion-like spread, P. pradatorius will endeavor to sequester P. novicius itself as part of the infectious process; forwarding the request to others, encouraging them to contribute their "important research". Indeed, some strains of P. pradatorius go even further; inviting P Novicius onto the journal Editorial Board; thereby endeavouring to actively assimilate the host in true Borg-like fashion [4]. The overall effect of P. pradatorius infection of P. novicius varies from the relatively minor inconvenience of a cluttered inbox [5] to the much more serious reputational damage associated with publishing in a journal which lacks credibility, is not appropriately indexed and as such is unlikely to be extensively cited [6,7]. Indeed, the long-term effects are likely to, at best, retard and at worst completely prevent the normal evolution of P. novicius to Physicus statutum; the most evolved of the genus Physicus. Furthermore, and perhaps more detrimental in global terms is the combined effect on the primary host, L. scientific. If sufficient P. novicius numbers succumb to P. pradatorius, then the entire L. scientific complex will be compromised [8]; the key symptoms being a lack of public trust in the scientific process which ultimately risks the integrity of the Academy as a whole [9].

A separate, yet related, species within the genus Periodicum (P Colloquium), has also begun to emerge in recent years [10]. While this variant has only a minor impact on P. novicius (who have limited access to research budgets), it can exist in a symbiotic relationship with certain strains of P Statutum. In exchange for exorbitant registration fees, P Statutum can enjoy grant funded

trips to exotic climes (no talk or poster presentation required!). In conclusion then, P. pradatorius, and related species, are on the rise and continue to pose a real and present threat to both P. novicius and L. scientific [11]. While vigilance is key in the battle against these insidious imposters [12], humor is also an important ally - Castigat ridendo mores!

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