We built a 2020 time capsule out of synthetic DNA — here's how

Somehow, it's the end of December. What is there to say about 2020? This year has felt like a turning point, a cliff, the end of one world and the beginning of another. For us on *The Verge*'s science desk (and so many others), it's been a year we want to both lock away forever and also never forget.

As 2020 wound down, we decided that we wanted to commemorate this unreal year with a time capsule, so that whatever happens in 2021 and beyond, there will be a small, resilient snippet of 2020 that future historians, scientists, or space aliens can unearth and wonder about. So we took a whack at distilling a year's worth of science memories into a handful of digital files. It's far from comprehensive, but it tells some intriguing stories.

The first part of the project was compiling the time capsule assets themselves. We built a file browser here, where you can click through the digital moments and ephemera we included and think about what our descendants might make of them.

The second challenge was figuring out how to preserve the files themselves for hundreds or even thousands of years. Most modern storage media — like hard drives or flash memory — is built to be cheap, not durable. But there's one up-and-coming storage medium that could keep our files safe for millennia: synthetic DNA. Over the past few weeks, we worked with a team of scientists and engineers to encode our digital mementos into custom strands of DNA. The result has to be seen to be believed… even if it's technically too small to actually see.

Check out the video above for the whole story, and here’s to a brand-new 2021.

https://www.theverge.com/science/22188122/dna-data-storage-synthetic-time-capsule