The Forgotten Species

To hold the reprints of one's own article is an incomparable experience for every scientist and author. The work and the way from the original hypothesis to the final paper is long, sometimes even frustrating and disappointing, but in the end seeing the results published produces satisfaction and motivation.

There are a lot of others involved in the workflow: co-workers, mentors, and sometimes laboratory technicians or patients. Some of them may be listed as co-authors or seniors and receive some of the glory. The others hopefully received another kind of 'thank you' for their cooperation.

And what about the journal itself? For the publisher, the value of a journal depends on the quality of the original articles. High quality corresponds directly with the number of sold editions and the number of advertisements. Both are factors a journal cannot survive without. The editor-in-chief also has potential benefits from the article. His/her name is on the front page of every edition, and at the very least leads to recognition. But the workload of all the submitted papers cannot be handled by the editor-in-chief alone, and every journal has associate editors and an editorial board. Together, they decide on the orientation of the journal as well as the decision as to whether a submission will be accepted or not. Their names are also placed prominently in the journal, and they, too, benefit when the journal increases in value.

So, who is the forgotten one? Who quite possibly has the biggest workload in this setting? As already suspected, it is the reviewer of the submitted articles. Depending on the journal and the value of the article, up to 5 independent reviewers have to go through the whole submission, chapter for chapter, word for word. There are guidelines published on what to do and how to do it [1]. A reviewer should have experience in the field of the article as well as be free of any conflict of interest. This can sometimes be a problem, especially in the area of rare diseases. Reviewers should have enough time to go through the submission, but have

to do the work within a limited time frame in order to stick to time limits, which in our hectic world can only be done in their spare time.

To do this in the expected fashion, they have to screen the literature and stay up to date on the topic in order to assess whether the paper contains new contributions to the field. Peer reviewers also need to have basic knowledge in statistics and take enough time to carefully exam the graphs, tables and diagrams.

Finally, when all of this is done, they have to write a review and give a final evaluation of the article's merits. Does it need only minor revision or are there major problems? Should it be accepted or rejected? And all on a level of evidence not based on personal opinions.

What recognition do they receive? Depending on the journal, they might get their name listed in the first issue of the following year. That is it.

I therefore ask all of the readers to give a short applause to this often forgotten species. Without their work nothing would be published in the peer-reviewed way, and peer review is an essential dividing line for judging what is scientific and what is speculation. The whole workflow of the process screens article submissions and requires that authors meet the standards of their discipline and achieve scientific objectivity. This means that science is more than just another opinion. And this process of engaging experts to read, assess and comment on new research in order to validate and certify it is the most essential part of a complex process.

Maybe, while reading this issue you will pause for a second and think about the unknown reviewers. Enjoy reading this issue.

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Reference

- 1 <http://www.elsevier.com/reviewers/reviewer-guidelines>.