

Unfair treatment

Sir — I completely agree with Franklin D. Rumjanek about acceptance of papers from developing countries by leading Western scientific journals (*Nature* 384, 509; 1996). I have had several bad experiences and I feel that many of my papers have been arbitrarily rejected.

There is one more misdeed indulged by many Western scientists. Published papers (even in journals published in the West) are never cited when the editors of the relevant journals are approached — they send a bland reply saying that the journals policy is not to correct faulty citations.

The same fate has befallen several of my colleagues. Most of us remain silent because we know we will not get any justice.

V. D. R. Nathan

40 Muthiyalu Chetty Street,
Vepery, Chennai 7,
600007, India

Sir — Rumjanek presents the difficulties of publishing a manuscript produced by his group in Brazil, although the quality of the work was essentially the same as papers he published while he was a postdoc in England. He suggested that the referees could be influenced by the geographical

location of the laboratory responsible for the submitted manuscript. As I am working as a postdoc in France and thinking of going back to Brazil in the near future, I am conscious of this problem. I should like to suggest a protocol to the editors of scientific journals that could eliminate or diminish some of the problems encountered by Rumjanek and other scientists.

As the authors of a manuscript don't know the referees, why don't the referees who evaluate a given manuscript do it without knowing its origin and authors?

Hernan Terenzi

Unité d'Expression
des Genes Eucaryotes,
Institut Pasteur,
28 rue du Dr Roux,
75724 Paris, France
e-mail: hterenzi@pasteur.fr

Sir — I have a small contribution to the recent correspondence on national prejudice in reviewing. I spent my first 28 years in England, and was educated at an old-fashioned high school where I was always near the top of the class in English language and literature. Now I live and work in Germany. Last year, a paper I had submitted was returned by the journal concerned complaining that it was "strewn with spelling mistakes and grammatical errors". Neither accusation was true, according to both my

(admittedly British) spelling checker and a professional linguist friend. Nevertheless, the editor advised me to seek the help of "a colleague whose mother tongue is English".

Christine Clayton

ZMBH,
Im Neuenheimer Feld 282,
D69120 Heidelberg, Germany
e-mail: cclayton@sun0.urz.uni-heidelberg.de

Life imitating art?

Sir — I was seized with a sense of *déjà vu* while reading of the summary dismissal of Dr Mark Hughes from his position as head of preimplantation and prenatal diagnosis at the US National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the disavowal by the NIH and Georgetown University of any knowledge of his actions (*Nature* 385, 190; 1997).

I was transported into Rick's Café Americain in the film classic *Casablanca*. Ordered by Major Strasser of the Third Reich to close the establishment, Louis blows his whistle and announces that Rick's is closed because "I am shocked to learn that gambling is going on here". Precisely at that moment, he is handed his night's roulette winnings.

Hughes was recruited from his highly successful laboratory at Baylor University to head the NIH's programme of

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Terri Davis is a cellular
biochemistry technician
working in New York, NY.

