

SCIENTIFIC PUBLISHING

Will the Real Journal Please Stand Up?

For scientists who worry about their reputations, here's something new to lose sleep over: How can you avoid being accused of double publishing when your paper is being published in two different journals through no fault of your own? Absurd? Not to scientists whose work has been accepted by *Cellular and Molecular Biology*.

In the wake of an ugly battle that has erupted between Pergamon Press Ltd. and the editor of one its journals, there are now two versions of *Cellular and Molecular Biology*. They share not merely a title but an ISSN number, volume and issue number, and most of their contents. Both parties insist that their journal is the legitimate one and the other is an impostor, and lawsuits are in the works. But as the allegations fly, the dispute has left dozens of scientists facing the prospect of inadvertent duplicate publication. Librarians, too, are caught up in the conflict: Hundreds of them are being asked to pay for two expensive journals instead of one. And indexing services such as the National Library of Medicine are scratching their heads over how to handle what they describe as an unprecedented muddle in scientific publishing.

The story begins in the late 1970s when Raymond Wegmann, then and still the director of the Institut D'Histochimie Medicale at the University of Paris VI, met flamboyant and controversial Pergamon chief Robert Maxwell. Wegmann had founded and edited a journal known as *Annales d'Histochimie* since 1955, and Maxwell was interested in bringing the journal under the Pergamon wing. In 1977, they struck a deal, in the form of a four-page letter from Maxwell to Wegmann, which Maxwell characteristically neglected to sign. In it, Maxwell suggested that the copyright of the journal, now renamed *Cellular and Molecular Biology*, should be jointly held and that either party could offer at any time to buy the other's share. Maxwell soon lost interest in the journal, however, and never got around to drawing up a real contract, much less approaching any of the 13 Nobel laureates that Wegmann wanted on his editorial board.

Nevertheless, Wegmann spent the next 15 years publishing the journal through Pergamon. With help from his wife, he produced each issue in his Paris apartment—in recent years using a desktop publishing system—and Pergamon printed and mailed them. Wegmann was paid only his expenses until 1986, when Maxwell finally started giving him half of the profits. By then, however, Maxwell was running into his now-infamous

financial troubles, and in 1991 he sold Pergamon to the Dutch giant Elsevier Science Publishing Group. When the new management took a look at *Cellular and Molecular Biology*, they didn't like what they saw.

"We had suspicions that [Wegmann] was not following standard editorial standards, including peer review," explains Peter Shepherd, publishing director of Pergamon, which remains a division of Elsevier. Wegmann's former associate editor, M.A.Q. Siddiqui, the chairman of anatomy and cell biology at the State University of New York, Brooklyn, Health Science Center, makes a more explicit allegation: Most of the articles in the journal, he says, "are solicited and not peer reviewed. [Wegmann] simply selects a handful of people and asks them to submit manuscripts."

Wegmann denies the charges. He told *Science* that he sends all manuscripts to his 36-person editorial board, which then sends them to specialists for review. Every paper has at least two reviewers, he says. Nevertheless, by last year Pergamon officials say they had become sufficiently concerned about the editorial quality of the journal to want it in new hands. So they decided to treat the 1977 Maxwell letter—and its statement of 50-50 copyright ownership—as a contract, signed or unsigned. Pergamon offered Wegmann £75,000 last year for full ownership of the title, in line with the buy-out option in Maxwell's letter. When Wegmann refused to respond to the offer, Pergamon exercised its option and in July of last year claimed 100% ownership, effectively firing Wegmann. The company appointed Siddiqui as editor in Wegmann's place.

But Wegmann, who says Maxwell's unsigned letter is not legally valid, was not about to relinquish the journal he founded. He decided to publish it himself. With a stockpile of most of the 150 papers he received last year, he continued producing the issues just as he had under Pergamon, but now he printed and mailed at his own expense. And he launched an all-out attack on Pergamon to regain unchallenged ownership of the journal.

In December, Wegmann wrote to all the journal's subscribers, pointing out that

Pergamon, which had missed several issues in 1992 because of the dispute, was 900 pages short for the year. He urged them to demand their money back and to send their renewals directly to him in the future. Over the past 9

months, he has written and called dozens of scientists and librarians to bolster his defense. And now he says he is planning to sue Pergamon and Siddiqui for \$10 million in the United States for defamation.

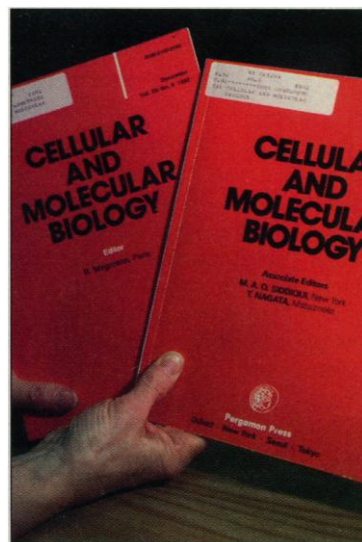
In a letter sent to subscribers earlier this month, Pergamon fired back, accusing Wegmann of unauthorized use of the journal's ISSN. The company announced, however, that it would now begin publishing the journal with a new title, *Cellular and Molecular Biology Research* (incorporating *Cellular and Molecular Biology*). This was interpreted in the academic library community as a sign

that Wegmann had won. But Pergamon's Shepherd insists that the company is not backing down. "We own that title," he says. Nevertheless, he explains, "pending the resolution of the issue we need to find a mechanism to distance ourselves from his product."

The library community is watching this struggle with a mixture of bemusement and frustration. To some librarians, Wegmann is a heroic underdog in taking on Pergamon, which is one of several publishers that have angered libraries for its high journal prices. Christian Boissonnas, a Cornell University librarian, has circulated Wegmann's story on electronic mail networks, for example, and he describes Wegmann as a David to Pergamon's Goliath. Donald Koepp, director of libraries at Princeton University, also supports Wegmann, as an example of "the scientific community taking back the publishing of their own work" from the commercial publishing houses. Nevertheless, says Boissonnas, "this is very complicated business for a library. Which is the official journal? It would be a real hassle for us to take both."

For the moment, most libraries are waiting to see how matters shake out between Pergamon and Wegmann. Several say they will take the opportunity to review their subscription, especially now that there are two publishers asking to be paid. And although the National Library of Medicine, which lists the journal in its Medline database, says it will index both journals for the time being, it intends to reconsider its policy when its literature review committee next meets later this year.

—Christopher Anderson



Double issue. Rival journals share more than their looks.