

## STICKY WICKET

## Predators

Mole

AND SO TODAY, DEAR FRIENDS,  
I WILL BE TALKING ABOUT THE  
REVIEW THAT I REFUSED TO  
PUBLISH IN "RAPTOROUS REVIEWS"!!

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Well, *that* was fun. I have just returned from an actual, in-person meeting with *no* on-line presence, and many of us talked about work that was not published, and (in my case) might never *be* published, but yeh, it was great. Not the part about staying in dormitory rooms better suited for small rodents (I remind you I am *not* a rodent) or the mediocre food, or the very limited availability of things to imbibe. But talking about science, and not *science that was*, but the living, breathing, exciting, in-progress kind. That was great. Except for the part where my computer crashed the night before I was to speak, and the back-up disk I had my talk on was somehow blank (I mean, WTF?). So, I wrote to the organizer that I would not be able to speak, but then woke up four hours later, realizing that I had emailed a talk (not the one I had been planning – *ne anticipating* – to give) to a molet, and a couple of hours later (and just a bit shy of when I was scheduled), wonderful Prof. Goshawk lent me his laptop so I could download *that* talk, get it loaded onto the meeting laptop, and informed the organizer that I would indeed give a talk. And it wasn't

terrible, based on the extended discussion. So there was that, at least. But I did give the talk on four hours of sleep, so I don't think I was at my best. Still, disaster abated. I forgot that computer issues can produce disasters even at in-person meetings. Still, it was in-person. To reiterate, it was fun.

Which is not what I wanted to talk about. ("Really, Mole? You are changing the subject? What a surprise!" Keep laughing, Fuzzball. Wait, sorry, I was channeling my inner Han Solo).

There was a subject that came up at the meeting a few times while we talked over unidentifiable foodstuffs, and I wanted to talk about that. Predators. And no, we were not talking about velociraptors (actually, I don't know if there are velociraptors in the latest offering from the Jurassic Park franchise – maybe in that one the dinosaurs take over Wall Street and crash the stock market with bundled assets; I haven't seen it. Wait, no, that was 'The Big Short' and I did see that, and I don't think there were velociraptors). We were talking about predatory journals.

Just for the record, predatory journals do not, in any way, include the one you are currently perusing. We were talking about journals that appear to exist exclusively to make lots of money, lots and lots of money, with little or no real benefit to the enterprise on which we toil away our days. Maybe that isn't fair – perhaps they *think* that they are benefiting us. But there is no question that bucks, euros, semolians, greenbacks, and all of your spare change is the overarching goal.

I will give you an example. Over the past couple of years, one of these journals has enlisted many senior trainees and very junior faculty to serve as 'guest editors' of special 'review issues' on a wide variety of topics (by 'wide variety' I mean several issues on nearly identical topics). Each guest editor contacts people in their fields to contribute to their special project. I know this, because many of my own trainees (and recent ex-trainees) have asked me to contribute to nearly identical review issues. And of course we say yes, because, well, they are our friends. But what neither they (the 'guest editors') or we (the 'suckers') were told is that each of these myriad reviews would come with a rather large publication price tag to be extracted after submission, review, revision, resubmission, and acceptance. By 'large price tag' I am talking about much more than a home theater flat-screen television with surround sound, but less than an SUV. You know, thousands of semolians.

Is this a scam? One may want to argue, as the journal did when I asked, that they are providing young scientists with an opportunity to highlight their area of expertise to gain recognition, while providing the field with collections of interesting reviews on a topic of interest. And further, one might argue (and I agree) that many journals put out review collections, as this can draw attention to emerging fields of interest while potentially raising the impact factor of the journal. And there are costs involved with publishing, so it is only fair to ask for payment from the authors who benefit from moving their writing to publication. It's win-win, right?

Wrong. First, I am involved with several legitimate journals that produce collections of reviews now and then, when there is indeed an emerging field that should be highlighted. But these journals do not charge for invited reviews, given that (a) there is a perceived benefit to the field, and (b) there is a perceived benefit to the journal. (We can discuss whether review articles still raise citation 'hits' for increasing journal impact – I'd like to see the metrics on this. Then again, limitations on numbers of references in many journals do force authors to cite reviews, which is another whole thing to talk about. But some other time). As my friend, Prof. Bull would say, "bullocks." No, this feels like a scam.

Predators. Hey, maybe they *are* velociraptors, but they are taking over scientific publishing houses. (Is that what Jurassic Park: Dominion is about? Don't spoil it for me. But it would be cool to see dinosaurs sending our requests to review. No, maybe only cool for me).

This is just one example. There are others. But even respectable journals have a little carnivorous dinosaur in them. I am often amused that I am charged for color figures by journals that

only publish the final paper *online* (to be clear, I understand that printing color figures comes at a cost, but please explain to me why it is more expensive to put a color figure online). Did I say 'amused?' Sorry, I meant to say something cruder, vaguely translating as urinated-off.

On the other hand, some of the genuinely predatory journals write to invite me to contribute to their 'special issue,' having read with great interest my article entitled 'W Domains and the Chocolate Factory' (the actual article they cite, generally a commentary piece, has a title that is similarly farcical, because, hey, I like funny titles for commentary pieces). Out of curiosity, I sometimes respond to them to innocently ask if there might be any charges associated with the publication of the invited work in their journal – I am always directed to their web page for any information (and indeed, the information can be found by pulling down the menu item marked 'About the journal,' then clicking on the 'Additional information,' and finally engaging the button marked, 'Danger, this may crash your computer.' (Come to think of it, maybe *that* was the problem I had at the meeting). Of course, the fact that I responded at all ensures that I receive several dozen more requests, and then notifications that I have missed their deadline.

There is another type of predation that, while not potentially costing me money, does cost me time. We all know that publishing papers is vitally important to this Biomedical Research thing we do, and in order to do this in a meaningful way, our papers have to be reviewed. Which means that we donate our time to reviewing papers, which is important work. I am very careful to truthfully respond to requests from legitimate (non-predatory) journals if I do not have time, or if I *do* have time, to do the reviews as quickly as I can (I wish the reviewers of *my* papers did the same). But recently, I have been receiving a *lot* of emails either reminding me that I had not responded to a request I never previously received, or worse, thanking me for agreeing to review a paper that I never agreed to. Many of these journals have names that *look* like legitimate journals, and in some cases I have been tricked into responding. I imagine that a velociraptor is at the other end, licking his fangs.

Here's a message to the predators and perhaps to the entire scientific publishing enterprise. We won't be played. Scientific publishing is essential to us, and it must be done with rigor, care, and the best interests of the scientific community at large. Many of us are already willing to share our hard-won information in alternative ways than publishing in journals. Those of you working for honest, real publications, help us here. Put an end to the predators and to predator-ish behavior.

I know that I am a terror only to small insects, but I am putting the predators on alert. We are coming after you. Yes, I know you are big and fast and have menacing teeth, and we are small, weak scientists. But remember what happened to the velociraptor at the end of the first (and best) Jurassic Park movie – the *T. rex* ate her.

And I have a very good friend in Prof. Tyrannosaurus, of the very big head (and little, bitty hands). Go find some other bunch of suckers to prey upon.