

guest comment

Note on the game of editormanship

In a recent paper, J. M. Chambers and A. M. Herzberg¹ outlined the game of refereeing. The game of refereeing is played with three teams called "author," "referee" and "editor." All teams may consist of one or more co-operating players, and any two teams may side together to compete against the third. The assumption made by Chambers and Herzberg that the editor is a neutral umpire is so artificial as to oversimplify the game. It will be shown that the editor may be a very active participant who can at any time side with the referee or the author. The editor may also take an independent stand, thus making the game three-cornered. Since the editor makes the ultimate decision as to whether a paper is published in his journal, the objective of the author or the referee is to get the editor on his side.

The basic rules of the game are well known. It will be shown how editors or authors may extend what appears to be a determined game and change the result.

Outline of the game. Play opens as stated by Chambers and Herzberg with the submission of the paper by the author. At this point the editor of the journal intervenes. The editor has several possible moves open to him. He may decide at once, for any reason whatsoever, that the submitted paper is not suitable for publication in his journal. This is known as *instant rejection*, a term initiated by someone who has often seen one editor make this move. In very rare cases, the editor may decide that the paper is extremely suitable and accept the paper at once. This unusual event is known as *instant acceptance*.

Instant acceptance is more likely to occur when the editor has not accepted enough papers for the next issue. Similarly instant rejection is more likely to happen when the converse is true. It is, therefore, very helpful for the author to time the submission of his paper. Extra points accrue to the editor in the case of instant rejection and for the author in the case of instant acceptance. An author has reached the pinnacle of the game when all his papers are instantly accepted; such an author is known as an *authority*. If the reverse happens, the author should immediately try another journal.

More often, the editor will send the submitted paper to a referee. Since the



editor is free to choose someone who will confirm the editor's own opinion of the paper, this move is used in some situations to prolong the game.

In certain situations, the referee or author may have to admit defeat very early in the game. Fewer points are gained by the other side when this is done in a gentlemanly way. For example, the referee may write to the editor "At a point where most people would have given up from the sheer magnitude of the problems (and this comes very early), he (the author) simply gives the impression of enjoying an appetizer."

Referees can also reject papers diplomatically. For instance, the following two reports are equivalent in content but only the second gives the referee extra points. "I have read this paper n times. It is difficult to see the wood for the trees. I suggest the paper needs a lot of pruning." "This paper is so badly written that I cannot see what the author is trying to get at; and even if there is an underlying idea, it must be a relatively trivial one. I see no case at all for publication."

Obvious moves. Several moves that may be made by the various teams are obvious and will, therefore, be mentioned only briefly.

Editors may "send off" authors without appeal by refusing to answer any further correspondence about the paper. Unfortunately this move does not at present lead to their suspension from future games. This play may be made by the editor at any time during the game.

A rather superior strategy for the author is to write, on submitting the paper, that it has already been rejected by another journal and enclose the relevant correspondence. This is, however, a gamble in that while it is certainly likely to make the editor more inclined to accept the paper, he may pass it on to the referee, who will then merely rewrite the previous comments. The author can, of course, flatter the editor with such comments as "Furthermore, I do not want to strain this journal's hospitality, already severely taxed by this author. If you feel your referee is likely to concur with those of, spare him the pains of reading this."

If the author feels the referee and editor are taking too long with their moves, he can subtly remind them by sending at various intervals corrections to his paper no matter how trivial.

A referee can keep himself out of the fray by writing to the editor "This paper could be accepted (or rejected) perhaps," thus forcing the editor to read the paper himself.

Overtime. The game does not have a time limit. Editors may remind referees that they are taking too long in contemplating their move, but authors, because of some well-known unwritten rule, are never told to hurry with their move. The best tactic for the referee is the frustration tactic R9 of Chambers and Herzberg; that is, the referee deposits the manuscript in the bank.

In this section it will be shown how an author or editor, in spite of the fact that the outcome of the game has been stated by the editor, can put the game into overtime. The objective of an author whose paper has been rejected is, of course, to get the editor to change his decision.

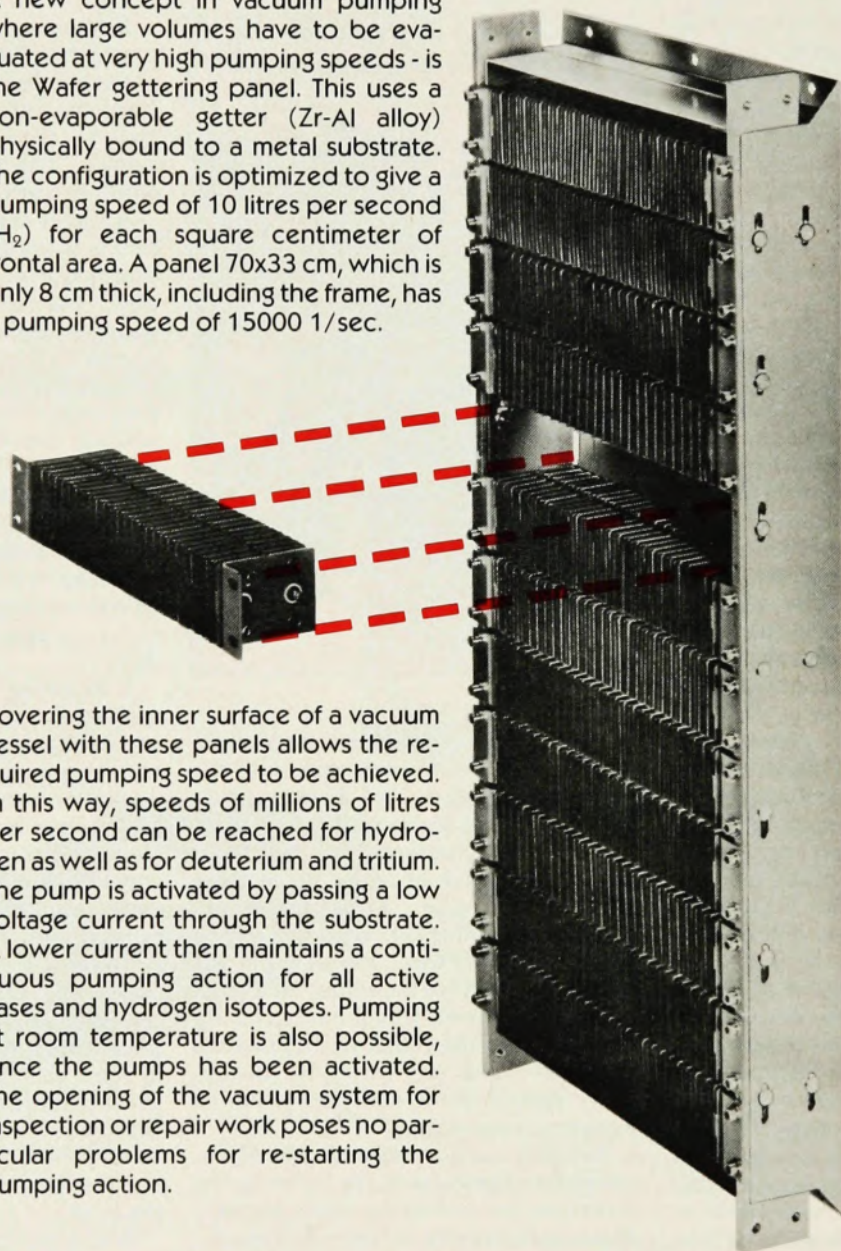
There are broadly three moves open to an author whose paper has been rejected. He can write to the editor saying the referee is mistaken in his judgment. "I am writing this letter because the reasons

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stated in your letter for rejecting the paper are based on the referee's comments which are in error. This is probably due to the fact that the referee misunderstood a major point in the paper. . . . This is not intended as an offensive statement, but rather a matter of fact."

The author might write to ask if he changes the paper as the referee suggests would the paper then be acceptable. "If your decision remains in the negative, I would prefer that you return my first draft to me for burial."

The best tactic is to have arranged beforehand that Professor Flossglotten (an eminent person in the author's field who is also on the editorial board of the journal in question) suggested that the paper be submitted to the journal. The editor will rarely contradict Professor Flossglotten since the editor would then risk excommunication.

Once the paper has been accepted by the editor for publication either the author or the editor may put the game into overtime. When a paper has been accepted, it then goes to the copy readers who, as described by Goudsmit,² do the "laundering" of the paper. The launderer is usually on the editorial team, but may on occasion compete against it. The launderer (or laundress) goes through the paper to discover inconsistencies and to prepare the manuscript for the printer. If he discovers inconsistencies, he may doctor these himself, or if he wants to put the game into overtime, send it back to the author. In some situations, this may hold up the publishing of a paper until at least the next issue of the journal. The launderer can, of course, also soil a paper by changing various points which he will then refuse to change back at the galley stage.

By preparing his manuscript carelessly, the author may reduce the launderer to a nervous pulp, a term introduced by Wilkinson,³ or the author may give the journal's business manager apoplexy if the symbols required are very expensive. At the galley stage the author may try to insert sentences that were originally deleted to please the refereeing team. Extra points are gained by the author when these moves are successful.

The author must be very careful with his tactics because the launderer and/or the editor can change anything at the second proof stage that the author will not discover until the paper is published. If the author wants the launderer to make a lot of changes, he might write "Let me say first of all that I think the compositor (launderer) has done a first class job with my rather demanding manuscript. But"

Although, as has been pointed out, the editor is not a neutral umpire, the game does not necessarily terminate in the way the editor has intended. For example,

the editor may be away for one reason or another and his assistant will not necessarily make the move he had intended. Such unexpected variations make the game more interesting for all players. The ultimate objective is of course to make one's opponents forsake their own serious work and devote twenty-five hours a day to the game in question. Authors and referees may easily do this to the editor. As W. S. Gilbert might have said, "An editor's lot is not a napping one."

* * *

I am indebted to various authors, referees, and editors who have unwittingly and perhaps unwillingly contributed the ideas and examples used in this paper.

This paper is shorter than originally intended because authors and referees were winning too many games while this work was in progress.

As a point of interest this paper has perhaps already taken part in one game.

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AGNES M. HERZBERG
Imperial College
London

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