

Publisher's Page

Ponderous Peer Review

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Does the peer review process take too long? Some in the SETI community say so. Others feel no scientific finding should ever be published before it has been independently confirmed. Both sides of this argument make a good case.

Remember cold fusion? In the 1980s, two chemists in Utah thought they had sustained a fusion reaction at room temperature. After an exuberant press conference, a flurry of scientific papers and presentations, and the concerted efforts of physicists and chemists around the world, it appeared that their results could not be duplicated. To be sure, they had discovered something. Just what, we still can't say (it may have even been cold fusion), but if a discovery cannot be verified independently, it has little scientific merit.

Pons and Fleishman, it has been argued, should have waited for their findings to be published in a refereed academic journal, rather than announcing them to a waiting world. Why, then, did they resort to premature public presentation? Perhaps, it was because the process of independent academic review can often take years. As rather senior academics, they may well have feared that they would have been long retired when their discovery finally saw the light of day. After all, who among us doesn't want to be acknowledged during his or her own lifetime?

The issue of peer review came up at a recent meeting of the International Academy of Astronautics, on whose SETI Permanent Study Group your Editor and Publisher both proudly serve. Every year, the best of the papers presented at their annual SETI Review Meeting will be earmarked for inclusion in a Special SETI Issue of the IAA journal *Acta Astronautica*. But with these Special Issues coming out only about once every five years, papers so selected can be a very dusty indeed when finally committed to print. What can be done, IAA SETIzens want to know, to ensure that peer-reviewed SETI papers will be published before they've become obsolete?

One answer to that question appears on the screen of your computer at this very moment. The web-based academic journal is a recent phenomenon, rapidly gaining popularity. Immediacy is its chief advantage over print media. Thanks to the magic of the Internet, we can now expedite worthy academic papers through the peer-review process, and out into cyberspace at warp speed.

Contact in Context is poised at the vanguard of this publishing revolution. We may never replace *Acta Astronautica* (nor should we). But, with your participation, we can usher your papers through the review process, and bring them to the attention of your colleagues, while the ideas are still fresh. What better mode is there to disseminate ideas in a discipline that's all about communication?

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