As a publisher at Allen Press, I have been aware of predatory publishers for some time, but hadn’t encountered them until a few months ago. Fortunately, the half-dozen society-owned journals I work with had avoided this pernicious, growing problem. But my days were numbered, and, coincidentally, I encountered my first two predators on the same day.

One morning, I received an e-mail from Dr. Jack Yu, editor of The Cleft Palate–Craniofacial Journal. He was forwarding a message from Alice Wills of the American Society of Science and Engineering. “The purpose of this e-mail is to inquiry about the possibility of cooperation with your journal,” Alice wrote. “In the mutual-benefit cooperative relationship, we can do publicity, promotion and collect papers for your journal, and we can guarantee the quantity and quality of the papers we provide. Moreover, we will also pay the publication fee if any.”

Huh? What exactly was Alice saying? Was she offering to publish the journal? Well, the journal already has a publisher—Allen Press. While we promote the journal, we don’t provide papers to the editorial office. Moreover, anyone who guarantees the quantity or quality of manuscripts is claiming some remarkable powers. Is there a manuscript broker out there hustling to meet a quota? And isn’t peer review the quality-control process for journals? Who can guarantee the results of peer review? I also had to wonder what’s in this for Alice—presumably she wants something in return, right?

Suspicious, I referred to Beall’s List, the compilation of predatory publishers created and maintained by University of Colorado librarian Jeffrey Beall.¹ The society’s name was on the list, among many other...
Author Beware…

As someone who spends my days steeped in the eccentricities of STM publishing, I’m well aware of the existence of predatory publishers. In fact, I’ll confess that I found it difficult to imagine that many authors are duped by what seemed to me to be obviously fraudulent or at least dubious promises to publish papers in high-quality journals. But then I started working with a recent PhD grad (who happens to share my last name) to identify the best journals to which he might submit his work, and I was forced to reevaluate.

“What do you mean you’ve never heard of an Impact Factor,” I asked, as I patiently (yeah, right) explained what factors might contribute to his choice of journal. It turns out that the things I thought were pretty basic weren’t on his radar at all. Granted, we’re talking about someone with a PhD in Philosophy, so his instruction didn’t include some of the co-authoring opportunities that are common in many other disciplines and serve to educate students on the publishing process. Still, it occurred to me that I may have been expecting too much of inexperienced researchers to assume that they would be able to recognize a predatory publisher as readily as you or I might.

So, when you read our feature article, “Adventures With Predatory Publishing: A Tale of Two Journals,” and think, “Impact Index! Do these people think we are stupid?” remember that those of us who work in the publishing community, though clearly distressed by them, are not the target of these farcical schemes. Furthermore, many researchers, especially those who are early in their career or for whom English is not a primary language, aren’t likely to recognize slightly altered publishing jargon for what it is. This inexperience, coupled with the pressure to publish often, means researchers may be far more likely to succumb to predatory publishers than I ever imagined.

We’re interested in your feedback about the newsletter and any ideas you have for future articles. Please e-mail comments, suggestions, or ideas to frontmatter@allenpress.com. ★
groups that at least appear to be scam artists. This almost certainly meant that the society existed in name only, and the proposal was fraudulent.

I told Dr. Yu to ignore it, and “Alice” has left us alone since. But the predators weren’t done with me yet. Later that afternoon, I encountered the Photon Foundation.

Photon was sending its own brand of spam to members of the American Society of Parasitologists, or ASP. One of these e-mails made its way to me via Dr. Michael Sukhdeo, editor of The Journal of Parasitology, which Allen Press co-publishes with ASP. I quickly found Photon on Beall’s List. But looking more closely at the message, I saw a new twist: Photon was actually soliciting manuscripts on behalf of the journal, claiming to be its publisher.

The e-mail included a link to “Journal of Parasitology” (with “The” omitted from the title) on Photon’s website. One of the first things I noticed was the journal’s “impact index.” Elsewhere on Photon’s site, I found an explanation: “Impact Index is new generation impacting system… Impact Index ensures multi-fold peer reviewing and meritorious research articles… Impact Index provides strong weightage to quality of research articles published in a journal.”

The journal’s aims and scope are brief: “Journal of Parasitology accepts manuscripts dealing with advancement of Parasitology to serve the domain better.” Submission instructions are even more concise: “Attach your word file with e-mail and send it to [e-mail address].”

While the Photon site doesn’t use the term “open access,” it does say that articles will be published online “as absolutely free access to readers.” It provides “useful links” to resources such as PubMed, The International Plant Name Index, and the United States Patent and Trademark Office. Readers who scroll down will see solicitations for papers, books, and submissions to various awards programs before finally, about three-quarters of the way down the page, some articles appear. Only two PDF articles were available when I first checked the site; a recent visit to the page showed eight articles, although only five would download. The other three links go to other pages on the site.

I sent an e-mail to the foundation, asking that it stop using the journal’s name. Not surprisingly, I received no response. Then an alert society member noticed that Photon’s website was hosted by Google Sites. Aha—surely Google would remove the site once we explained the situation, right?

No. In response to my e-mail, Google asked me to “please identify the exact content that you claim infringes upon your copyright.” Well, the Photon website was deceptive, but didn’t exactly infringe on our copyright. The two articles that were posted at the time were not taken from the real journal. Presumably, they were submitted to Photon directly or they were not legitimate manuscripts to begin with.

I tried to explain that Photon was infringing on the journal’s title, but that didn’t sway Google. After my appeal, I received the last word from above: “At this time, Google has decided not to take action. We encourage you to resolve any disputes directly with the individual who posted the content.” The problem, presumably, is that Photon didn’t meet the legal definition of infringement. None of the journal’s content was being used, only the journal’s title. Copyright doesn’t apply to a publication’s title, however, and offers no protection. A title can be trademarked, which may offer some protection, but likely not much.

And of course the “individual who posted the content” could not be found. The website lists only an e-mail address. No physical address, phone number, or even country of origin is available. The individual is almost certainly beyond the reach of U.S. authorities.

What exactly is going on here? Why would someone go to the trouble to create an impostor journal, and how can they get away with it?
The project incubates milestones & cutting edge research and discoveries for the year 2014 which have potential to catalyze the domain.

Some elements on the site seem to have a random or indeterminate purpose, like scrolling text and images that don’t link anywhere.

The list of issues and articles is hard to find, haphazard, or non-existent.

No statement about ethics or affiliation with industry organizations such as COPE, CSE, ICMJE, etc.

The journal website is hosted by an unknown source or free platform that allows users to design their own site.

Text is often full of errors or questionable grammatical choices and may lack context.

Amateurish page design: clashing colors and graphics, distracting background images, scrolling links, clip art, etc.

Lists of seemingly arbitrary keywords are often used as an ill-advised attempt to boost search engine optimization.

False metrics or identifiers such as Impact Index, ISJN, or CiteFactor*

Guarantee of manuscript acceptance and publication or unrealistic turn-time

* See http://scholarlyoa.com/other-pages/misleading-metrics/ for a list of misleading metrics that are commonly used
Still having doubts? Check out other articles published by the journal, review submission and peer review guidelines for additional information, or contact authors or editors listed on the site to ask questions. A little extra time and attention can save you the hassle and embarrassment of getting tangled up with a predatory publisher.
“With this latest trend of predatory publishers who exist only on the Internet, we are dealing with a phantom and any sort of closure proves elusive.”

Like most scams, the motivation is money, in this case exploiting the gold open-access model in which authors pay to have their articles published. Internet technology enables the fraud, both in extending the reach of the deception and in cloaking the identity of the deceivers.

These folks prey on researchers in several ways:

- By creating new open-access journals, but conducting little or no peer review. These “journals,” then, are nothing of the sort as there is no quality control. They simply publish whatever manuscripts they receive from authors, after also collecting their fees. Publication fees are often not publicized, so authors may not be aware of the charges until they receive an invoice.
- By impersonating a legitimate journal with a fake website and solicitous e-mails.
- By compounding the fraud with false journal metrics and stats, such as an “impact index” or an “ISJN,” as opposed to the real-life impact factor or ISSN.
- By making up names of editors and editorial board members, or using names of actual people without their permission.

Similar scams focus on conferences instead of journals, with scientists being asked to present their research at low-quality or even non-existent meetings, as reported in The New York Times.²

Fraud in scholarly publishing is not new, of course. But at least when an author is found guilty of plagiarizing, we can be reasonably sure that he or she will suffer consequences: a retracted paper, a sullied reputation. With this latest trend of predatory publishers who exist only on the Internet, we are dealing with a phantom and any sort of closure proves elusive.

After being rebuffed by Google, I sought out people who would at least want to hear about the problem: Jeffrey Beall, who offered to post about it on his blog; ASP officers, who agreed to publish an article in the society newsletter; and other editors whose journals were being targeted. I worked with my colleague Lindsey Givens to comb through the list of Photon journals for other probable cases of impersonation. We found 28, and contacted the editors of the actual journals to inform them that they also appeared to be Photon victims. The journals were a diverse group, from fields such as ecology, health, language, botany, and engineering. Several of the editors said they would alert their publishers about the scam and otherwise do what they could to spread the word.

One does have to sympathize with scholars most likely to be taken in by the scam artists: young scientists for whom English is not a first language and who are not sure where to submit their work. There is no “white list” to serve the opposite purpose of Beall’s “black” list, but Thomson Reuters does provide a list of all 10,000-plus journals that are included in its Journal Citation Report, or JCR.³ That means every journal on this list has an impact factor. This list is not the only measure of authenticity, or even quality—some good, legitimate journals do not have impact factors. Maybe they are too young, their acceptance to the JCR is pending, or they are considered “professional journals,” aimed more at practitioners than researchers. But if a journal title is unfamiliar, finding it in the JCR is reassuring.

Other web-based tools can help confused authors narrow the range of publishing possibilities by recommending appropriate journals for their work. JournalGuide and JANE (Journal/Author Name Estimator) are among this group of tools. Edanz and Editage are editing services for authors that also offer
journal selection tools. Elsevier and Springer offer something similar for journals in their collections.

All these tools are based on the same concept: authors upload an abstract, manuscript title, or even keywords. Within seconds, the tool responds with a list of journals based on similarities between the submitted text and articles that have already been published. Jeffrey Beall reviewed several of these services on his blog earlier this year.4 As his article and several readers’ comments show, each service has its limitations. Elsevier and Springer offer only their own journals as options. Other tools may differ based on the number of journals in each database, the type of matching mechanism being used, or the field of study represented. At any rate, authors can be relatively certain that any journal recommended by these services actually exists.

We may start seeing more of these services, because the problem of predatory publishers appears to be getting worse. I contacted Jeffrey Beall again for this article, who agreed. “Yes, the problem is growing rapidly,” he said. “There is a flood of predatory journals occurring.” His list of predatory publishers began in 2011 with 18 names; it now has 477, and he receives new tips regularly. He has also begun new lists of misleading metrics, hijacked journals, and predatory stand-alone journals.

Further acknowledgment of the problem came recently from the Directory of Open Access Journals (DOAJ), which directs readers and authors toward journals that exclusively publish open-access articles. The listing has grown from about 300 titles in 2003 to more than 10,000. Many, if not most, are legitimate journals, but some have been found lacking in their peer-review process, as brought to light by journalist John Bohannon’s “sting” operation in 2013,3 and some are included on Beall’s List as predatory operators. Now, every journal on the list has been asked to reapply for inclusion, a step that DOAJ hopes will eliminate the predatory journals.6

And journals aren’t the only targets—some predators are now holding themselves out as membership organizations. As an example, Beall cites the Council for Innovative Research. “Its journals are born with an impact factor (which is impossible), and it aims to rip off scholars any way it can. It purports to be a research society, but it’s really just another predatory publisher.”

The Council’s website lists 36 journals, 16 of which appear to have an impact factor. None of the 36 is listed in Thomson’s Journal Citation Report, however. As for membership, individuals may join for $100 annually or $200 lifetime. Six benefits are listed, including a 50% discount “in” all CIR journals, though it’s unclear whether this refers to access to articles or publication fees. Members’ articles “would be reviewed on a fast track basis without any additional charges” (benefit number 3) while a separate benefit states “fast publication for your articles” (number 5). Oh, and “you will be provided with a certificate for your membership in CIR.” Suitable for framing, no doubt.

Much has been made lately of the issue of trust in scholarly publishing. With the growth in predatory publishers, the best advice is to follow the age-old dictum: trust, but verify. ♦

Allen Press Partners With ReadCube for Discovery of Pinnacle Content

Allen Press recently announced an agreement with Boston-based publishing technology company ReadCube to enhance content hosted on its Pinnacle online publishing platform.

ReadCube is an application that helps researchers to discover, read, and manage scholarly literature. ReadCube is gaining popularity, with more than 5.7 million researchers worldwide using the application. Users include individuals at academic institutions, government agencies, and corporate research facilities.

The ReadCube toolkit includes a search engine and contextual marketing for content indexed by ReadCube Discover. ReadCube Discover also optimizes content discovery through references, reverse citations and mentions, and recommended articles, driving referrals directly to the full article on the publisher's website.

More than 66,000 articles from Allen Press' platform have been indexed by ReadCube's Discover service and enhanced for discoverability on ReadCube's web, desktop, and mobile reading portals, plus search engines and recommendation feeds.

"ReadCube's creative approach to discoverability and interactive reading aligns with our goal of bringing our publishing partners' content to scholars within an interface that adds value to the experience," said Melanie Dolechek, Director of Publishing and Marketing. "We are excited to continue offering our clients innovative options for increasing visibility—and ultimately usage—of their content online."

In addition to enabling Allen Press publishers to more easily connect with the researchers who consume their content, Discover enhances that content with ReadCube's Enhanced PDF technology. ReadCube's unique reading experience includes interactive features such as hyperlinked in-line citations, annotations, clickable author names, direct access to supplemental content and figures, social sharing, and Altmetrics.

"Allen Press offers a valuable service to niche publishers, and we are thrilled to be working with them to support the discovery of all their hosted content," says Robert McGrath, CEO of ReadCube.