



The SPEISENSTEIN Files

1. Voyeurs for Windows®

I find Speisenstein in the locker room of the Club practising martial arts.

“Be careful with that thing,” I shout. “You might harm somebody.”

He runs his forefinger along the edge of the sword.

“You’re darn right, I might,” he mutters.

“Hey Spicy, what’s got into you?”

“You know Witherington?”

“You mean KI? The sub-molecular clinical biologist?”

“Yeah. That’s the guy.”

“So what’s he done to you?”

“Just what hasn’t he done! He’s bitched me again.”

“How come?”

“Our paper on channel structure compatibility in the toadfish atria. You heard my presentation at the ISHR meeting? They liked it, didn’t they? Crapaud said it introduced a whole new era of toadology, remember? Now that ass-hole Witherington has turned it down for the yellow journal.”

“But he’s not the editor.”

“You’re darn right he’s not the editor. But sure in hell he’s one of their reviewers. And he’s dumped me in the shit.”

“But, Spicy, how can you be sure its him? Security’s pretty tight over there.”

A crafty look comes into Speisenstein’s red eyes. “Look, I’m not that innocent. You know how one knows these days. PEERFIDY and all that?”

“You crazy or something?”

“You not heard of PEERFIDY2 for WINDOWS? I can’t believe it! How in the hell do you ever know who your anonymous reviewers are?”

“I remember Ludwig once rang me mad as hell because he recognized my typewriter on a rather damaging comment I wrote for the journal.”

“Typewriters? Look, we got out of the ark last week. Nobody uses typewriters nowadays. It’s all PCs and you switch the fonts with that randomized switching software FONTFINT.”

“So how do you track down your reviewer?”

“That’s PEERFIDY. It registers the vocabulary, verbal frequencies, preferred terms and idiosyncratic phraseology of any referee; and then it analyses the text of the referee’s comments you get back and tells you who wrote it. Fifteen seconds flat.”

“And that’s how you knew it was Witherington?”

Speisenstein picks up his sword again and flashes it round his head. “Sure was.”

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A transatlantic call comes from Audley in London on Tuesday. He wants info on the new structure compatibility analyzer.

“By the way,” I say. “Have you heard of this system PEERFIDY or something for finding out who your referees are?”

“That’s history you know.”

“What do you mean, Bill?”

“You haven’t heard of PEERVERT?”

“Don’t know what you are talking about.”

“If you have bought PEERFIDY you’ve wasted your money. With PEERVERT you can register the vocabulary, verbal frequencies, preferred terms and idiosyncratic phraseology of any referee and then you can copy-edit your own comments to simulate a report written by him. Fifteen seconds flat.”

“You do this thing?”

“We all do over here.”

“Give me an idea how it works.”

“Well, to take an example, suppose I have a paper to review on channel structure compatibility, I could, for instance, automatically output it in the Witherington format. Splendid isn’t it?”

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Witherington is chairing the Peer of the Year Nominating Committee. A tricky job. I corner him in the coffee interval.

“Hello KI, you heard about all this software that’s going around - PEERFIDY, PEERVERT, that sort of thing?”

“That’s all history,” he snorts. “You didn’t know? Microcrap’s just come out with PIER-GLASS. You can register the vocabulary, verbal frequencies, preferred terms and idiosyncratic phraseology of any author and then you can copy-edit your own comments to simulate a report written by the author himself. Fifteen seconds flat.”

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Most of us try to escape from Florida during the Summer. Returning in the fall from that dude ranch up in Colorado, I once again find Speisenstein at the Club. This time he is sitting beside his locker, his head in his hands. Could be something’s wrong.

“Hi Spicy. Howya doin?”

Speisenstein takes his head out of his hands and looks straight through me.

“By the way, Spice, what wordprocessor do you use? WORDPEERFECT?”

“Yeah right. Very funny. I bet you worked on that one all Summer.”

“So how’s the PEERFIDY doing these days?”

“If you bought that rubbish you wasted your money. You know something? That program’s plumb crazy. Keeps telling me I wrote all those stupid reviews myself. Would you believe it?”

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All the characters of this projected series of scenes from academic life are entirely imaginary - including the first person. P.H.