The controversial paper

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About half of all papers submitted to this journal are rejected without external review. The other 50 % of submissions undergo review usually by two or three experts, and in most cases their recommendations are not uniform. Among the 252 submissions undergoing review by three referees during the past 12 months, 70 papers (27.8 %) received only positive reviews (accept as is, accept after minor revision, not acceptable without major revision), 21 papers (8.3 %) received only negative reviews (reject, reject but encourage resubmission), while the majority (161 papers, 63.9 %) had both positive and negative reviews.

Acta Neuropathologica does not reject automatically if one review is negative, nor are decisions simply based on a 2:1 majority in favor or against the paper. If three referees disagree, a fourth referee is consulted only exceptionally, because the review process would be delayed and the problem of discrepant reviews remains. In most cases seeming differences can be resolved by carefully reading through the referees' comments. Some referees tend to be hypercritical and turn any paper down, or they may be somewhat superficial and not careful enough in finding the weaknesses of the study—it is the editor's obligation to put the reviews into perspective. Borderline papers represent another type of seeming discrepancy: here one referee may tick "not acceptable without major revision", while another referee suggests "reject", although their views are very similar. Typical borderline papers include those in which nothing is technically wrong and no-one would disagree, while the findings are marginal or just not very interesting. In these cases reaching an editorial decision is often

facilitated by comparing the paper with other papers that are currently under consideration.

However, the editorial decision may be really hard for occasional papers with conflicting reviews. Those papers can be technically excellent and convey an interesting message about a hot topic, while receiving discrepant yet unresolvable reviews by the leading experts. Typically, one expert is enthusiastic and praises novelty and impact, whereas another expert does not see significant novelty and suggests rejection. In my view, those papers might be most interesting, stimulating and relevant for moving science forward. Rather than just accepting or rejecting, *Acta Neuropathologica* will publish occasional controversial papers along with the commentary letters written by the referees. The current issue of the journal includes a paper from the lab of Daniel Altmann on the role of Th1 versus Th17 cells in the pathogenesis of inflammatory demyelination, which is followed by three commentaries by the referees. While the commentaries from the critical referees tend to be more positive than the original reviews, they still outline the strengths and limitations in the paper by Lowther et al. I hope you find this approach useful and enjoy reading the paper and the commentaries.

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