threw out the case on the grounds that although McGreal's letter "might well have been damaging to Immuno, the facts she stated were 'evidently true'... [and] did not justify a libel suit". Meanwhile, all but one of the original defendants had settled out of court. It would make a great movie — but those cast as villains are still around.

There is more: the accounts, with names, of those who own chimpanzees as pets or use them as comic entertainers. All these people insist that they love the animals they keep. For some this is clearly true, for others, less so. But what emerges even more clearly is that no adult ape is a trustworthy pet — a chimpanzee is far stronger than a man, and has its own lusts and violent outbursts. One of the happiest captive chimpanzees may be Mr Jiggs, a female who works at birthday parties and bar mitzvahs with her jaws wired shut and an electric prod strapped to her back. The fate of a chimpanzee that is shut in a cage without social contact is far worse.

Goodall has sometimes been criticized for campaigning to help chimpanzees in captivity rather than addressing the destruction of wild populations; Peterson, however, has interviewed African hunters, traders and breeders and has located grisly trophies in the Brazzaville market. Of 25 countries that recently held wild chimpanzees, extinction of the species has now occurred in at least four and seems imminent in five more. All populations are declining in number — world totals may be 150,000 to 250,000. Goodall, on seeing the eroded smallholdings and dwindling fisheries of Lake Tanganyika, laments that "It would be a happy consolation to imagine that such is the price of 'progress', that the human inhabitants of Africa are somehow better off today than they were not so long ago when chimpanzees were a common species — but that is not the case. [Environmental] loss affects us all; human and animal alike."

Africans are responsible for most of the loss of chimpanzees and will be ultimately responsible for saving the wild habitats of these creatures; but Peterson and Goodall choose to play down the mote in the African subsistence farmer's eye and concentrate on the beam in our own. Western nations set the trend for the ever-increasing gobbling of resources — and it is up to us to decide whether chimpanzees should be owned, used and used up. Let it be a reasoned and clear-eyed choice that respects these animals as conscious beings, our sibling species, the demi-humans in our power. □

Alison Jolly is in the Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey, 08544-1003, USA.

Pole polemic

Derek Fordham

The Myth of the Explorer: The Press, Sensationalism and Geographical Discovery. By Beau Riffenburgh. *Belhaven: 1993. Pp. 226. £37.50.*

"A FEW toes aren't much to give to achieve the Pole!" So wrote Robert E. Peary, no doubt with the front page in mind, when several frost-bitten digits fell off in his sock after a disastrous winter journey. This was some years before his last attempt on the North Pole, following which he dispatched the apocryphal cable from Newfoundland: "Stars and Stripes nailed to the Pole". The fact that they were not and that at that moment Frederick Cook was claiming to have reached the Pole a whole year before Peary were issues that whipped the press, which had been supporting Peary, into a state of near apoplexy.

Riffenburgh's scholarly and detailed account of the emergence of the press as a player in the exploration game covers the period 1855–1910, when there were two main arenas in which heroic battles of exploration were fought — Africa and the Arctic. Increasing press interest in exploration ensured that explorers became seen as nationalists fulfilling ideologies, promoted mainly by the press but often, it must be said, by themselves.

This link between press and exploration was forged in the nineteenth century by the James Gordon Bennetts, father and son, of *The New York Herald*. The father claimed to show the world how to obtain news, the son how to create it — a philosophy nowhere more apparent than in the arguments that raged over whether Stanley had actually met Livingstone. This debate became one of the first sources of competition between the American and British press.

Bennett Jr then discovered the Arctic and history might have been quite different had he felt his wallet equal to Stanley's "readiness to undertake the discovery of the North Pole" in 1878. Bennett realized that the public was captivated by reports of struggles to master nature, and he saw that concentrating on the blanks on the map afforded exhilarating possibilities of

establishing man's role as 'Master of Nature'. National heroes were created by means of journalistic hype and thus was established the role of the press in the creation of the modern image of the unknown world, helping to change it from the picturesque vision of the eighteenth century to the sensational perspective that still prevails.

In a manner not unlike that favoured by the press today, the achievements of Amundsen, Nansen and Stanley, among many others, were manipulated and misreported in different but no less effective ways. But of all the issues, African and Arctic, that Riffenburgh examines it is the Arctic and the Cook–Peary con-

IMAGE UNAVAILABLE FOR COPYRIGHT REASONS

French cartoon of the Peary–Cook fiasco in the Arctic, 1909. The caption reads: "Well, if someone's beaten me to the North Pole, I'll have a go at the South. . .".

trovery in particular that is the paradigm of the intrusive role of the press. Such contests as that which arose between Peary and Cook have traditionally been seen as struggles between explorers, but they were in reality equally struggles between their patrons, the newspapers, and were therefore dictated and shaped by the commercial interests of the proprietors.

Peary was a bold, impassioned and eminently dislikeable man who in 1909 set out on what he knew would be his last attempt to reach the North Pole. On this occasion, as in his previous 22 years of polar activity, he was vigorously supported by the press in the form of *The New York Times* and the *National Geographic*. At 87° 47' North, Peary's last supporting party turned back, leaving him as the only capable navigator. Failure now was unthinkable, with

only some 151 nautical miles to the Pole. Peary claimed that daily mileages from this point increased by a factor of four. This outrageous claim has been the focus for the doubts expressed as to whether he reached the Pole (see my reviews in *Nature* 339, 435 (1989); 344, 902 (1990) and 348, 590 (1990)).

Meanwhile, supported by *The New York Herald*, Frederick Cook, Peary's erstwhile colleague, had a year earlier set off on a different route to the Pole. The stage was now set for the controversy that broke when Peary found on his return that Cook claimed to have reached the Pole a year earlier.

This was the sort of issue for which the papers had been waiting. They plunged into the role ascribed by Charles Reich to the modern corporate state: "Utterly out of human control, wholly and perfectly indifferent to any human values". Combat was joined, no holds were barred, nothing was too sensational, and extensive campaigns were mounted to discredit the opposition and increase circulation. Cook was more gentle than Peary and a much more likeable character, 'the Prince of Losers' as he became known. He was unable to produce indisputable evidence of having reached the Pole, but neither could Peary, although with the help of the aggressive campaign against Cook and *The New York Herald* by *The New York Times* and the *National Geographic*, Peary emerged as the victor. Peary understood the press and how it generated images and could deliver fame. He exploited the press as it usually exploited explorers and became established as the hero of an American myth. The general rejection of Cook's claims seriously injured the credibility of *The New York Herald* while Peary's short-lived recognition helped establish *The New York Times* as a journalistic force.

Riffenburgh believes that the image of the explorer has retained a strong hold on the public imagination. The fact that this image has in the main been constructed by the press and often bears little relation to the reality owes more to the public's general preoccupation with tragedy and controversy than with scientific achievement or geographical discovery. The public wanted adventure, not, Stanley claimed, the truth.

The press undoubtedly became expert at manipulating readers' perceptions of explorers. But perhaps explorers since the heyday of the nineteenth century have also been concerned to project a romanticized image of themselves: a recent conqueror of both poles claimed it was all worthwhile, "because it impressed girls at parties!". □

Derek Fordham is at 66 Ashburnham Grove, Greenwich, London SE10 8UJ, UK.

Gallic gloss

Peter Coles

La Science au Présent. Edited by Y. Gautier, D. Laverne, M. Delplanque, F. Gil and J.-L. Verley. *Encyclopaedia Universalis*: 1992. Two-volume set. Pp. 600. FF630.

HERE is a paradox: this two-volume reference should be translated, because it is meant only for French eyes. Aimed at the reader with a good scientific base, it gives a fly-on-the-wall insight into what French scientists worry about. Naturally, this is not what the publisher intended and, I suspect, a French reader would be unaware of how culturally bound the book is. But this is where its real interest lies.

La Science au Présent masquerades as an encyclopaedia of contemporary science and, in a chaotic way, it is. The book covers in detail a range of contemporary issues from high-temperature superconductivity, through cognitive science, to global warming and scientific fraud. Each chapter is written by a specialist, chosen from an army of more than 200 scientists, nearly all from French institutes. But few are well-known outside France, although Axel Kahn, Jean-Marie Lehn and Pierre-Gilles de Gennes make brief appearances.

The quality of writing is uneven. The first chapter of Volume 1, on the search for absolute zero, gets bogged down quickly, whereas much of the second volume has the limpity of good science journalism. Graphs, photographs and diagrams are put to good use and pithy captions mean one can dip into the book at random, then roam into the text itself for more detail. After all, this is not a book to be read from cover to cover. There is a useful but fairly arbitrary glossary at the end of the second volume, with entries asterisked in the text as they appear. There is also an index to around 1,200 keywords.

So far, nothing surprising. But it soon emerges that *La Science au Présent* is also about French science, with plenty of rallying calls for Gallic researchers 'trampled underfoot by Anglo-Saxon journals' (to paraphrase a statement by the French Science Minister, Hubert Curien, on page 486).

The first signs of idiosyncrasy appear in the way the book is structured. Text-book headings suggest that the gamut of science today can be rendered coherent by the verbs: "observing", "visualizing", "understanding", "questioning", "managing", "producing", "publishing" and "debating". This is the sort of didactic approach exhibition designers use. But the structure is spurious and arbitrary.

And it hampers other kinds of organization, making it difficult just to look something up. To add to the confusion, each author tackles his subject in his own way, so there is no basic grid to fall back on.

Then there is the choice of entries themselves. Of course, there is a good chunk of what preoccupies people at the cutting edge of science worldwide. There is also a large helping of what French scientists — read 'engineers' — are good at: high speed trains, telecommunications, nuclear energy, aerospace, agriculture. A disarming chauvinism creeps in occasionally. Half a page of the glossary is devoted to a list of train speeds, only, one suspects, because France holds the record.

Yet, if the flag-waving is irritating to an English or American reader, this is surely because he or she is unaware of how invasive the equally restricted Anglo-American world-view can be. On close reading, especially of Volume 2, traces of bitterness bubble to the surface. Dominique Stehelin, the Frenchman 'forgotten' from the 1989 Nobel prize for medicine, is reinstated. Montagnier versus Gallo is there (and on page 524 not 526 as N. Witkowski's chapter on fraud says). The glossary contains the esoteric entry "Benveniste (affair)", albeit with a candid description of the debacle that preoccupied *Nature* in late 1988.

The bitterness turns into wishful thinking in what must be a Freudian typographic error. According to a table in Hubert Curien's chapter (page 486), there were exactly as many French biomedical publications (124,096) as American, out of a total of 307,027 in the National Library of Medicine. If this is not a slip, French should be obligatory in all US universities.

But it is chapters like Curien's on the language of science, Martine Barrère's on scientific secrecy, and Geneviève Teil's fascinating analysis of the way in which the style of learned journals promotes an image of the scientist as modest, disinterested and doubting, that should be translated. The general public could be forgiven for thinking the opposite is true today. And — probably no more than paranoia — several French researchers believe American or British reviewers turn down papers because of poor English, then steal the ideas.

Between the lines of this book lie several thought-provoking messages. Flipping through the pictures in the two volumes, one finds *La Science au Présent* to be largely about computers and industrial-scale apparatus. But two-thirds of the world have access to neither. □

Peter Coles is a freelance science writer at 13 rue Titon, 75011 Paris, France.