changed after the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, and that only then did we realize the possibility of terrorists using weapons of mass destruction, Chapter 8 will be enlightening reading. It details the escalation of high-level US concerns over this issue in the 1990s and the ever-increasing budgets allocated to deal with it. The al-Qaeda attacks and the subsequent anthrax postal attacks "intensified Clinton-era policies already in place" for national security and defence against bioweapons, says Guillemin. What did change, of course, was the scale of the budgets — including those for biodefence.

Given that the Bush administration has rejected the decade-long effort to strengthen the BTWC with a verification protocol, and that some US biodefence projects could be perceived by others as crossing the boundary between defence and offence, the vastly increased US budgets for technological solutions provoke some awkward questions. The book does not dodge them. Guillemin notes, for example, that Project Bioshield, "a biomedical equivalent of Reagan's Star Wars" defence programme, promised "universal protection from biological weapons" but was faced with the uncertainty of the threat, the technology, and the organization of national vaccinations or other campaigns. Such budgets necessarily draw more and more of the biological community into biosecurity, placing them under the restraints on openness and the free exchange of information that this work involves.

Not surprisingly, this sane and sensible book ends by arguing for a more balanced approach in which the United States joins again with its international allies to redevelop a multifaceted, integrated set of policies against the malign misuse of life sciences. ■
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The view from Budapest

Our Lives: Encounters of a Scientist

by István Hargittai

Akadémiai Kiadó; 2004. 264 pp. €30

Henryk Eisenberg

When asked whether he believed in extraterrestrial beings, physicist Leo Szilard replied that they were already in our midst: they were called Hungarians, and he was one. The implication was that they had colonized our planet. Readers of István Hargittai's *Our Lives* will certainly be left with the

Leo Szilard led the Hungarian invasion of the scientific world.

impression that they have, or the scientific world, at least.

Hargittai is a professor in Budapest who works on symmetry in chemical reactions. He has written some 25 books, many of them devoted to conversations with prominent scientists. In his latest book, *Our Lives*, each of the 19 chapters is centred on a Nobel laureate he has met. Interspersed with the stories of their lives and work are his own reflections and reminiscences of an eventful life spent with a wide range of friends and acquaintances. Hargittai was a child during the tragic years of the Second World War in Hungary, and his family, being Jewish, suffered persecution and endured life in a ghetto and a labour camp. His father was conscripted and was killed on the Russian front. From these circumstances arises one of the themes that permeate the book: several of his chosen Nobel laureates also never knew their fathers, or lost them in early childhood. This, Hargittai believes, may have been a formative factor in their lives.

Another recurring theme of the book is the experiences of Hungarian Jews during the war and in its aftermath. Hargittai and his mother were saved from deportation to Auschwitz by a deal that rescued many Hungarian Jews at the eleventh hour. They were given shelter until Hungary's leader, Miklós Horthy, belatedly changed sides. Hargittai's brother and other members of the family were less fortunate, and their sufferings are movingly described. One of Hargittai's Jewish friends who was deported to Auschwitz and survived was the chemist László Kiss;

the story of his experiences at the hands of both the Nazis and their Hungarian epigones, the Arrow Cross, never previously related, is well worth the telling.

Hargittai's encounter with the chemist Gertrude Elion led him to describe another illustrious Jewish woman, the Hungarian mathematician Vera Sós, who was also persecuted, and her friend, Paul Erdős, who got away. Other Hungarian scientists whose early lives were marked by harrowing experiences were George Olah and two who settled in Sweden. One was Hargittai's friend and patron, the biochemist Lars (previously László) Ernster; the other was George Klein, the distinguished tumour biologist, who arrived fatherless in Sweden.

Roald Hoffman, the focus of another of Hargittai's chapters, was born in Poland, not Hungary, but the story of his survival as a Jewish child in occupied Europe is one of the most remarkable.

He made his way to the United States with no money and after a

late start emerged as one of the outstanding chemists of our times.

Many remarkable characters flit through these pages. Hargittai finds the human side of another Hungarian Jew, the abrasive and much disparaged Edward Teller, and discusses the political influence of Arthur Koestler. Hargittai has interesting things to say on science in the Soviet Union, which he experienced at first hand as a graduate student in Moscow, where he became acquainted with several distinguished chemists. He recounts the remarkable episode of the denunciation on ideological grounds of Linus Pauling's theory of resonance. He also seeks to right the injustice done to his compatriot Árpád Furka, who received too little credit for his central contribution to the conception of combinatorial chemistry. In 1967, Hargittai married the chemist Magdolna Vámbídy, who became his co-author on several books.

Many more scientists appear in *Our Lives*. Hargittai's aim is to blend the achievements of modern science with his own life in this turbulent period, taking in his family, the special place of Jewish and Hungarian scientists and thinkers in twentieth-century history, anti-Semitism and the terror of Nazi persecution. This is not an easy task in such a short book, and the components are sometimes difficult to disentangle. But the stories he tells have a great deal to offer to anyone interested in the broader aspects of science in our time. ■

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