

# Trooping the harem

F.J. Bollum

*Molecular and Cellular Biology*. Editor-in-chief Aaron J. Shatkin. 12/yr. (American Society for Microbiology.) \$84. *Comments on Molecular and Cellular Biophysics*. Coordinators Burt V. Bronk and J.W. Longworth. 6/yr. (Gordon & Breach.) \$114, £63. *Bioscience Reports*. Chairman editorial board C.A. Pasternak. 12/yr. (Biochemical Society, PO Box 32, Colchester, UK.) £95, \$215. *Biochemistry International*. Editor-in-chief A.W. Linnane. 12/yr in 2 vols. (Academic.) £121.60, \$225. *The Journal of Biosciences*. (Indian Academy of Sciences.) Subscription rate not known.

WHEN it comes to innovation in publishing, Johann Gutenberg did it all. Many scientific publishers have reduced the time lag between manuscript submission and hard copy circulation from Gutenberg's 15-year schedule, but the importance of the time factor is mostly in the eyes of certain beholders and not all beholders are looking at the same end of the elephant. An old friend of mine feels that those with important things to say should be allowed to chisel their words on stone tablets and carry them to the library! This crop of new journals in biochemistry and molecular biology provides time-tested solutions to these age-old arguments, some with better style than others.

*Molecular and Cellular Biology* (MCB) is a hard-science, hard-print, hard-reviewed journal sponsored by the American Society for Microbiology. It has a formidable list of editors to ensure quality and the science is the eukaryotic molecular biology of microbial and higher organisms. Established journals with similar words in their titles seem more pretentious (*Cell*), more stodgy (*Journal Molecular Biology*)

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or too classical (*Journal Cell Biology*). Publication time in MCB sets no new records, but reasonable price — especially low (\$18) for ASM members — and high overall quality make it an outstanding new publication.

*Comments on Molecular and Cellular Biophysics* (CMCB) is of interest for quite different reasons. This journal proposes to publish the thoughts of working scientists on subjects ranging from molecular motions to the social fallout from technology. Topics appear to be unrestricted, wide ranging and open-ended. Thus, Rosalyn Yalow disputes the interpretations of K.Z. Morgan on the risks of low-level radiation, published in a previous issue. Coordinators (editors) add footnotes to explain unusual English

usage, reviewers' questions are addressed by the author at the end of some papers and letters from readers in the "Comments Roundtable" round out the lively interchange. Brief conference reports are also included. The articles seem to emanate



from working scientists, not scientific journalists, and the views expressed appear to originate from the personal experience of scientific life.

Scientists are frequently criticized for their inability to communicate. But the rigidity of standard scientific publications puts severe limits on that. And what a thinking scientist has to say may appear too technical or limited in scope for the *Times* or *Post* space commitments. *Discover*, *Science* '82 and similar magazines written by journalists for lay consumption are based on limited interviews with designated scientists. Perhaps CMCB (which has companion publications covering inorganic chemistry and geochemistry) will provide new source material for scientific journalists and encourage scientists at this level of communication. The journal is "coordinated" by Burt Bronk and John Longworth with an international list of correspondents; price is fairly stiff, but the performance here is enticing.

Several members of the troupe seem less attractive, having off-colour complexions, questionable credentials, missing fangs or show signs of dissipation. *Bioscience Reports* is sponsored by the Biochemical Society in the UK and claims to publish short papers and reviews in molecular and cellular biology. It is stated that publication will be rapid and the articles of high quality. However, I fail to see the urgency of Nobel Laureate autobiographies or most of the other papers published in the issues I reviewed. The fangs are missing, but if you are tired and want to reminisce you will probably find this trouper at the rear of the caravan.

*Biochemistry International* (BI) is an Academic Press expansion into down-under rapid publication of technical papers. Published under the aegis of the International Union of Biochemistry, BI has the format and content of *Biochemical and Biophysical Research Communications*. Papers are reviewed and publication is rapid — manuscripts received October 20 (from Australia) are published in the November issue. The international flavour is reflected by papers from Moscow State (USSR), Montana State (USA), Valdivia (Chile), Nigeria, India, Japan, Taiwan and so on. This is a well-worn performance.

You pay your money and you get your pick.

*The Journal of Biosciences*, formerly the experimental biology section of the *Proceedings of the Indian Academy of Sciences*, publishes original papers of rather uneven quality in a variety of biological disciplines. The complexion of the journal, hard print on pinkish paper, is unusual. At \$10 per year, it is selling below the cost of postage. Both this publication and BI do fill a need for Southern Hemisphere and Australasian scientists. I expect that these journals should be available in your institutional library.

Novelist-playwright Brendan Behan compared book critics to eunuchs in a harem; knowing everything of the craft but incapable of the performance. In the scientific publishers' caravan, new journals are the harem troupe, subject to the whims of fellow-travelling authors, editors and readers. Some of this year's selections will be next year's dung sweepers.

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# Impure thoughts

Christopher R. Lowe

*Applied Biochemistry and Biotechnology*. Executive editor H.H. Weetall. 6/yr. (Humana.) \$125 US, \$132.50 elsewhere. *Journal of Applied Biochemistry*. Editor-in-chief P.N. Campbell. 6/yr. (Academic.) £39, \$60.

It is apparent that the continued development of biotechnology will be contingent not only on advances in basic biological science and the technology of handling biological materials, but also on the efforts of those lateral thinkers able to apply such basic knowledge across the boundaries of established scientific areas. Not surprisingly, therefore, journals which bridge the gap between the underlying pure science of several disciplines and the more applied aspects are essential ingredients in the healthy growth of biotechnological enterprise.

Both the *Journal of Applied Biochemistry* (JAB) and *Applied Biochemistry and Biotechnology* (ABB) are broad-spectrum journals dedicated to presenting innovative concepts in the emergent and highly interdisciplinary field of applied biochemistry. To my mind, ABB (formerly the *Journal of Solid-Phase Biochemistry*) fulfils more nearly the promises of its editorial manifesto; the journal contains a veritable treasure-trove of novel ideas that would ignite the imagination of even the most languid post-graduate. Its scientific