

Divided advantages

Michael R. Hanley

Molecular Brain Research. Editor-in-chief D.P. Purpura. Elsevier. 4/yr. Dfl 299, \$145.75.

Molecular Neurobiology. Editors Nicholas G. Bazan and David C. U'Prichard. Humana. 4/yr. \$100.

THE term 'molecular neurobiology' first became respectable following the 1983 Cold Spring Harbor symposium of the same name. Before that, anyone who put the two words together was treated as being a little weird and clearly out of touch with reality. But times have changed, and neurobiology, like much of biology as a whole, has 'gone molecular'. The boundaries of this hybrid subject are not well defined, but generally it subsumes much the same material to be found in the table of contents of Cold Spring Harbor's book-of-the-meeting, technical innovations in molecular genetics, cell culture, developmental biology and electrophysiology included.

Molecular Brain Research is another addition to Elsevier's *Brain Research* stable. The idea of splitting *Brain Research* into smaller operations, although motivated by the expansion of neuroscience, clearly has the benefit of bringing the price down to a terrestrial level. The voluminous parent journal is incredibly expensive — whether or not the publishers realize it, they are performing the experiment of finding out just when their journal will be priced out of viability. *Molecular Brain Research* is altogether better value.

Biologists like the notion of finding a speciality to call their own, and most journals have to do so if they are to survive. Sometimes it happens spontaneously, as publications with a particular title inexplicably become the favoured setting for a subset of manuscripts that might suggest another title. Thus, *Molecular Brain Research* is in fact the *Journal of Neural RNA*. Much of the early content has focused on Northern blots, *in situ* hybridization and expression of mRNA in oocytes. Although not deliberate, this is clearly emerging as the journal's special province, and, on the whole, the published material is of a high scientific standard. Another hallmark of the parent journal is the long lag times between submission and appearance of contributions. A quick survey of the papers in *Molecular Brain Research* suggests that the editors are doing rather better here, with delays of 4–7 months between submission and publication.

Molecular Brain Research is unlikely to appeal to those outside the neuroscience community. But it is a modest and

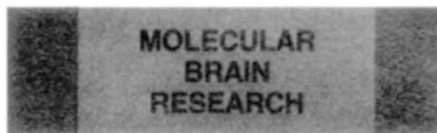
sensible addition to an already successful group of journals.

Molecular Neurobiology, a review journal, is a different proposition. I was only too well aware of its impending arrival, having been inundated with announcements addressed to Dr Hanley, Nhleny, Hanely and every other permutation of my name. This is a publication which has the stated goal of becoming "the leading intensive review journal in the field" — which should not be hard to achieve as it is the only such journal in the field.

First impressions are unfavourable. The cover carries not the usual natty photo or simple graphics job with soothing colours, nor even a run-down of authors and contents. Rather we have a stark list of members of the editorial board printed on a lurid red background, suggesting that this is what the journal is really about — putting one's name before the public. As there are twice as many editors as papers appearing in a given year, it seems more appropriate to see the list on the cover as a list of those who get the journal free.

The cover could be forgiven as a sign of insecurity, but second impressions are no better. The inaugural editorial states that the journal will encompass, "at the molecular level" (of course), "physiological processes", "integrated functions" and "behaviors". This sounds a lot like plain old everyday neurobiology, and encapsulates the main difficulty this journal will

experience — how to get enough material for review and yet be 'molecular'. The contributions themselves are predictable in content and are of varying quality. The opening review, "Molecular Neurobiology: Past, Present, and Future", is very poor, and looks as if it travelled from author, to typesetter to printer with no editorial intervention. That article



marked a nadir, but although later papers are better in style and content most of them cover familiar ground.

The application of new technologies to the traditionally boggling issues of neuroscience has become a high-profile business, and most good papers are snapped up by prominent journals with a wide circulation. There is enough decent science left over to sustain *Molecular Brain Research* in addition to the broad range of outlets for work in neurobiology and neurochemistry. But, to my mind, there is no need for a publication devoted solely to reviews of the molecular biology of the nervous system, given that there are already plenty of places for such pieces to be published. □

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Aid on AIDS

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AIDS. Editors M. W. Adler, J. Gold and J. N. Weber. Gower Academic. 6/yr. £100, \$170 (institutional); £60, \$90 (personal).

OF RESEARCH on any subject, it is that on the various aspects of AIDS that one would expect to be growing most rapidly. Here, more than in any other area, the launch of a journal is justified, especially when it is of as wide appeal as this one.

The editors' intention is to cover the subject broadly — epidemiology, geographical medicine, immunobiology, virology, clinical medicine and pharmacology — and original papers on these topics have been published from authors in North America, Europe and Africa. There have also been several short but authoritative review articles on such subjects as paediatric AIDS and Kaposi's sarcoma. So far, the scientific standard of the contributions has been high.

The journal has other features which will enhance its chances of doing well over the long term. Each issue contains a bibliography of the current world literature,

over 250 journals being scanned for articles on AIDS. In addition, statistics from the World Health Organization and the Centers for Disease Control are published regularly — readers may be dismayed to learn that Albania is the only AIDS-free spot in Europe; for those seeking more agreeable climes, Montserrat and the Seychelles also are reported to have no AIDS.

Even given that many papers on AIDS and associated topics are creamed off by the more general, fast-moving science journals, it is surprising that more publications have not been started to deal specifically with the subject. *AIDS* does so, and does so well. The editorial board is international in composition, and among its members are prominent figures covering all of the main areas of interest; as long as they stay involved, the journal should continue to provide global coverage of the scientific investigation of AIDS. Scientists, clinicians and public health workers should all consider submitting their papers and subscribing to it. □

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