

Cellular communication

John Armstrong

Trends in Cell Biology. Editor Carol Featherstone. Elsevier. 12/yr. All countries £239 (institutional); US and Canada £92, UK £59, elsewhere £63 (personal).

If any readers still need to be convinced that cell biology is a trendy subject, this latest addition to Elsevier's stable of popular review journals should do the trick. *Trends in Cell Biology* follows the general format established by *Trends in Biochemical Sciences (TIBS)*, offering a monthly collection of reviews of hot

biology is no better endowed than any other scientific discipline with practitioners who view the written word as a means of communication rather than an obstacle to it. In some of the early issues there are hints of too gentle an editorial hand: who needs "Experiments have shown that", or wet-blanket conclusions such as "The combination of . . . techniques should continue to provide new insights into the molecular basis of . . ."? Fortunately, the journal's confidence seems to be growing; as well as attracting good authors, perhaps it may embolden others to write imaginatively.

Identity crisis

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Cellular Physiology and Biochemistry: International Journal of Experimental Cellular Physiology, Biochemistry and Pharmacology. Managing editor F. Lang. Karger. 6/yr. SFr334, \$223, £145 (institutional); SFr223.80, \$156.10, £101.50 (personal).

ALTHOUGH physiology is classically an integrative discipline, many of its current success stories are in work at the cellular or molecular level, at the interface with molecular biology, biochemistry and biochemical pharmacology. Work on ion channels, with single-channel recording and other molecular approaches, is an obvious example. A journal dedicated to this interface and committed to publishing original papers of high scientific quality "pertinent to cellular function and its regulation" should, then, be a real success story. This might be expected all the more when the journal has an editorial board that varies from the merely excellent to the Nobel prizewinning. Yet *Cellular Physiology and Biochemistry* has not really established itself at the forefront, let alone entered the consciousness of many scientists at all.

This is not to say that the papers published have not been good; often they have come from outstanding laboratories. The journal also publishes useful brief reviews, and one issue (combining numbers 3 and 4 of volume 2) was composed of a series of reviews on ion transport in the regulation of cell proliferation and published in memory of the late Ephraim Racker, one of the journal's most distinguished original editors.

The quality of publishing is also high, with double-column format, clear printing free from typographical error, elegant production of diagrams, often in an outlining box on a grey background, and excellent colour printing within the text of papers.

With so much going for it, why is the journal not better known? Part of the reason may lie in simple technicalities, such as not yet appearing in *Current Contents*. Part may be the expense at a time when library budgets are being squeezed. But perhaps in generously drawing wide boundaries in defining its scope — publishing cellular work irrespective of "the questions asked, the methods applied or the tissues analysed" — the journal has failed to find a clear identity. □



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False colour SEM of hair cells (yellow) in the organ of Corti in the inner ear ($\times 6,747$).

topics and developments, all of readable length, embellished not only with figures but also with the distinctively baroque scientific cartoons pioneered by *TIBS*. From the first issue in July 1991, the aim of conveying the excitement of the field has been apparent, with the promise of centrefold spreads and even a "Forum" section. Only the small print on the last page appeared to dampen the atmosphere, with its statement that the journal is "apolitical", threatening to exclude many distinguished potential contributors. Happily, this does not seem to have been the case.

Review journals have a range of target audiences, among them advanced students, hard-pressed teachers and researchers. The *Trends* journals aim to cater for all these groups, and in its first year *Trends in Cell Biology* has done well in achieving its goals. Perhaps the hardest task in editing a review journal is finding the right contributors, given that cell

In this respect the "Headlines" feature can only be a good thing: single-paragraph summaries of particularly important papers are individually contributed by cell biologists from the younger end of the age spectrum, but authors are credited as a group.

Several other review journals have appeared in recent years, but, curiously, the biggest competition to *Trends in Cell Biology* might be from within. It is not hard to think of articles that could fit into this journal, *TIBS*, *Trends in Genetics* or *Immunology Today*, for example, and the publishers may eventually decide that not every field remains equally trendy. It must surely be in the interests of cell biologists to ensure that their subject is more equal than the rest. □

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