however, is the way it underscores how the leading characters in this study constituted a community of believers, a diverse and changing group of physicians and scientists tightly bound together over time and across disciplinary boundaries by their pervading faith that an unfaltering commitment to science would overcome all social, technical and political obstacles to a rational therapeutics. This approach also underscores the usually unacknowledged political nature of this community, and helps to explain what Marks identifies as the problematic conviction of therapeutic reformers that their allegiance to science should make them alone the arbiters of clinical trials and clinical care.

No breezy narrative, this is a challenging historical study, sophisticated in its research and justifiably confident in its analysis. Marks has given us the best study we have of the shifting place and meanings of science in the culture of twentieth-century American clinical medicine. And as the field of medical history increasingly turns its attention to the twentieth century, this work is both a model and a springboard for future scholarship. No one who wishes to understand the world of therapeutic investigation, regulation and practice that doctors and patients live with today can afford to miss this important and engrossing study. □

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Molecular thriller

Principal Investigation

by B. B. Jordan

Berkley: 1997. Pp. 305. \$5.99 (pbk)

Maxine Clarke

Merging scientific with criminal detection, the pseudonymous B. B. Jordan provides an entertaining couple of hours in which to learn the basics about infection and allergy. As a crime thriller, *Principal Investigation* holds its own, at times precariously close to, but just about avoiding, standard genre clichés of mad scientists, WIJ (woman in jeopardy) and 'Nam flashback syndrome.

The energy of the main character, lab chief Celeste Braun (equal parts PC and PI), is daunting: travelling to Japan to become security consultant to a global biotechnology corporation, writing a grant proposal, supporting an ex-colleague through accusations of scientific fraud and a congressional investigation, jogging round the park, giving three lectures in three different places, constructively combating Japanese sex discrimination, flirting with a man at the airport — all within the first 13 pages of her appearance.

The exhausting pace doesn't let up for the rest of the book. Although this makes for a racy read, too much is piled in and left hanging: US-Japan relations; an attack on the

(slightly disguised) Office of Scientific Integrity; a Watergate-style investigation; the ethics of the military's vaccine trial programme; the financial struggles of the publicly funded medical school of the University of California at San Francisco (again, thinly disguised) compared with commercial research; an assessment of the peer-review system; and so on.

Far too many coincidences are invoked to weave in all these plot strands: ex-colleagues crop up as TV interviewees, air-crew, journalists, in queues at foreign libraries, or walking in the street, naturally always at crucial times to keep the plot moving.

Jordan would have done better to have limited the scope of the book to the (complicated enough) story about a rogue scientist's evil plans, woven in with the explanations of pollen allergy, HPLC and so on. The added complications, together with the non-existent characterization, result in a confusing whole; indeed, some subplots are logically inconsistent. (And rather too much depends on an otherwise supercharged heroine not having e-mail or checking her phone messages.)

This is a pity, because the factors leading to the dénouement are neatly done, depending on both the basic biology explained earlier in the book and the wits of the protagonist(s). Basic immunology could never be so engagingly described in a textbook, or be so digestible. □

Turning back the tide of destruction in the world's forests

Commercial logging operations and clearance for agriculture are wreaking havoc in forests around the world, as conservationists frequently remind us. So it is refreshing to come across a book that presents positive stories of forest conservation. *Forests of Hope: Stories of Regeneration* by Christian

Küchli (Earthscan/New Society, £19.99, \$29.95, pbk) describes communities caring for trees. We read, for example, of the residents of Hu Zhai, China, who are planting trees in a battle against erosion; and of the women of Kitui in Kenya whose tree planting is crucial to the community's livelihood.