

Candid chemistry

Harold Kroto

The Chemical Intelligencer. Editor-in-chief István Hargittai. Springer. 4/yr. \$69 (institutional); North America \$29, elsewhere \$33 (personal).

"INTELLIGENCER"? What does this word mean, I wondered. Perhaps the editor, István Hargittai, had actually got hold of the (in)famous Hungarian-English phrase-book (famous at least among Monty Python aficionados) that was originally used by John Cleese to buy matches — among other things. It turns out to mean 'bringer of information', in this case chemical (or chemistry?) information. But why, one might ask, should chemists, who already have a plethora of specialized publications catering to their professional interests, need yet another periodical?

The niche exists because chemists are a peculiar lot. For one thing, I know few who have not developed expertise in some other field, whether the arts, cooking, sport or what have you. I often wonder why so many became chemists when they could have been equally, if not more, successful pursuing their alternative passions — they would almost certainly have been richer.

Chemists also suffer from a curious professional form of schizophrenia: their thoughts are a mixture of abstract and hyper-realistic concepts at one and the same time; they are always subliminally aware that the intrinsic quantum properties of atoms and electrons govern all aspects of our everyday world in a way hidden from others. So the formula of benzene or its smell automatically triggers access to banks of information about the chemical and physical properties of this compound. Yet the general public may be only vaguely aware that benzene is an additive in petrol, if they have heard of the term at all.

There is one other important factor. It is the chip that rests on our communal shoulder: the fact that no-one has done more than chemists to improve the quality of everyday life and yet this contribution goes virtually unrecognized even though it daily stares everybody in the face. We chemists crave belated recognition of our modern Renaissance role.

Chemical Intelligencer covers this idiosyncratic range of interests. There are articles, interviews, notes, book reviews and letters on food, chemistry in Kuwait after the Iraqi invasion, the arts (writing, music, painting, sculpture), symmetry, postage stamps with chemistry themes, molecular models, the laboratory environment, historical articles, famous and infamous chemists (dead and alive), violins, photography — indeed anything that chemistry influences, which does not leave out much in the final analysis.

The quality of the articles is inevitably uneven, but the content is never dull. The magazine is well illustrated and includes a wealth of excellent photographs, diagrams and historically valuable archival material. As it makes its mark — as it undoubtedly soon will — it cannot fail to attract high-quality material. The unmistakable spirit of the editor, who has the charm to extract material — including frank interview revelations — from the busiest of scientists, pervades the pages.

There are as many different types of chemist as there are chemists, but I suspect that most would enjoy subscribing to this inexpensive, idiosyncratic but invariably fascinating publication. □

Harold Kroto is at the School of Chemistry and Molecular Sciences, University of Sussex, Falmer, Brighton BN1 9QJ, UK.

Rising to the top

David A. King

Current Opinion in Colloid and Interface Science. Editors E. W. Kaler and B. H. Robinson. *Current Science*. 6/yr. \$612.50, £370.50 (institutional); \$212.50, £130.50 (personal); \$98.50, £63.50 (student).

Adsorption: Journal of the International Adsorption Society. Editor-in-chief K. S. Knaebel. *Kluwer*. 4/yr. Dfl456, \$319 (institutional).

It is a rare pleasure to be able to give an unqualified welcome to a new journal. I am delighted to be able to recommend research students and their senior colleagues working in colloid and interface science to subscribe to this new *Current Opinion* journal. The format has proved very successful in the biological and medical sciences, and there is clearly no reason why this should not also be the case in the physical sciences.

The formula is relatively simple. The whole subject matter covered by the journal is divided into 12 sections, and each section is to be covered once a year by short "subjective" reviews by experts working in the field. These reviews are usefully supplemented by bibliographies of relevant papers in the published literature, with the papers "of special interest" awarded one star (or bullet point) and those "of outstanding interest" two. I can think of no easier way of keeping abreast of the whole field than to browse through each issue, but the journal has archival value too. These reviews and the bibliographies will become indispensable to all future writers of reviews, chapters or monographs in colloid and interface science.

The true measure of the success of the

journal, and hence the editors, lies in the status of the reviewers who have been attracted for the first volumes. The list of section editors and their reviewers reads like a *Who's Who* of the field.

The topics have been well chosen, too. So far this year the following sections have been covered, each consisting of an overview by the section editors followed by between 8 and 12 subject reviews: scattering and surface forces; experimental self-assembly; imaging and other techniques; material aspects; theory of self-assembly; and thermodynamic and theoretical aspects. In the remaining three issues this year we are promised: rheology and rheological techniques; applications in chemistry and chemical engineering; surfactant science; colloidal aspects of biotechnology, biochemical engineering, pharmaceuticals and synthesis; dynamic aspects of colloids and interfaces; and food colloid emulsions, gels, foams and aerosols. The journal is well produced, in a good, easy-to-read format, and the editors, who must be working overtime to keep their deadlines, must be congratulated on the overall high standards they have established.

Adsorption is quite another matter. I have worked in the field of chemisorption for some 35 years, and so was surprised to discover that there is an established International Adsorption Society of which I knew nothing. This is the new house journal of the society, and, looking through the first few issues, I was unable to discover a distinctive flavour; is it trying to cover too much?

Most of the papers are from researchers in chemical engineering, dealing largely with the macroscopic properties of adsorption phenomena. This is clearly an important area. It bears little relationship to the detailed studies using spectroscopic and imaging techniques on well-defined single-crystal surfaces, with which I am more familiar, and this clearly explains my lack of familiarity with the society. A "Special Issue" does however cover molecular modelling of adsorption, indicating a wish to spread from applied to fundamental science. But there are good, well-established specialist journals that deal with these areas of adsorption studies, such as *Langmuir* and *Surface Science*. I am not convinced that the case is made for this addition.

I found the presentation irritating, even childish: oversized figures, many with the appearance of overheads prepared for seminars, with grossly oversized printing. Some good papers have been published in the first four issues, but I am not convinced that leading scientists in the field would send their best work here. □

David King is in the Department of Chemistry, University of Cambridge, Lensfield Road, Cambridge CB2 1EW, UK.