Book reviews

Aspergillus: 50 Years On. Progress in Industrial Microbiology (Vol. 29). S. D. Martinelli and J. R. Kinghorn. Elsevier, Amsterdam. 1994. Pp. 880. Price £210.00, hardback. ISBN 0 444 81762 X.

As one of the few *Aspergillus* workers in the UK without a chapter in this book (doubtless why I was asked to review it!), I am presented with a unique opportunity for either offending or endearing myself to a large proportion of my co-workers and associates. Therefore, it is with some relief that I feel able to congratulate the editors on successfully completing a mammoth task.

The book brings together a host of distinguished authors in a celebration of 50 years of research using *Aspergillus nidulans* as an experimental organism. The sheer size of the book (880 pages) reflects the volume of research that has been undertaken in this field since its humble beginnings at the University of Glasgow in the 1940s. It is a timely publication, arriving during a period of increasing interest in *Aspergillus* species, both as model systems in the laboratory and as tools for the biotechnology industry.

Fittingly, the book opens with a foreword by the recognized founding father of *A. nidulans* genetics, Guido Pontecorvo, and then proceeds into an introductory section which aims to acquaint the reader with both the organism and authors. Although the latter borders on self-indulgence, it was, for a relative newcomer to the field, an amusing account which conveys vividly the atmosphere in the Glasgow laboratories during the early days of *Aspergillus* research. The remainder of the book is divided into a further seven sections, with a total of 28 chapters and four appendices. Topics covered include metabolism, gene regulation, cell cycle and development, molecular tools, applied aspects and a useful final section containing details of media, gene designations *etcetera*.

The general level of presentation is high. Most of the chapters are clearly and concisely written, with good-quality graphical and photographic images and an extensive reference list. The degree of success of a book like this depends not only upon the quality of the individual contributions, but also upon the choice of contributors and their specialities. On the whole, the choice is well-balanced and is a fair reflection of the current state of play in *Aspergillus* research.

The book is certainly a comprehensive treatise of the subject and contains a wealth of core information. Inevitably, it suffers from a defect typical of books of this nature; namely, it has been rather too long in gestation, the most recent references being 1993. Indeed, at least one of the chapters has been published elsewhere (in modified form) in the meantime! Although this does not detract from the general usefulness of the book, the

committed reader would have to consult more recent papers in order to be entirely abreast with the current knowledge.

This is a mighty tome with a price to match (£210). In these times of economic constraint, it is unfortunate that the high price will put the book well beyond the reach of postgraduate students (who would find it invaluable) and will probably stretch the budgets of most researchers in HE institutes.

SUSAN J. ASSINDER
School of Biological Sciences
University of Wales
Bangor
Gwynedd LL57 2UW
U.K.

***Methods in Gene Technology* (Vol. 2).** Jeremy W. Dale and Peter G. Sanders (eds). JAI Press, Middlesex. 1994. Pp. 354. Price £62.50, hardback. ISBN 1 55938 264 3.

This book contains 19 chapters of which 8 cover DNA preparation and purification, 1 RNA preparation, 1 sequencing, 3 pulsed field gel electrophoresis and 1 single stranded conformational polymorphism analysis. The remaining chapters cover topics such as analysis of DNA supercoiling and south-western blotting. Several of the chapters contain very basic instructions, for example 'Don't forget the buffer!' in Chapter 2.

My impression is that about one half of this book is devoted to DNA preparation and purification and much of the material is familiar and can be readily found elsewhere. Obviously, as DNA is the starting material for many experiments involving molecular biology, it is very important to know how, when and why different techniques may provide appropriate DNA. Other chapters also cover familiar topics, for example 'Detection of Mutations by PCR-Single Strand Conformation Polymorphism'. Again, this chapter may prove useful to some but could have been of more value if presented in conjunction with other chapters detailing the practical details for other methods used to identify mutations with perhaps comments on their relative advantages and disadvantages.

The main question to be asked is whether this book would be used by individuals at the bench, in research and diagnostic laboratories. The answer is probably not, although I admit that the book is perhaps not specifically aimed at human genetics laboratories.

Certain chapters, such as that by Drlica *et al* on 'Analysis of DNA Supercoiling', that by Goping *et al* on 'Gel retardation assays and DNA footprinting' and that by Primal *et al* on 'Genome fingerprinting using the PCR-Random amplified polymorphic DNA technique' are