

Book review

The Nucleic Acid Protocol Handbook.

Rapley R, ed. (\$149.00 and \$110.00.) Humana Press, 2000. ISBN 0 896 03459 3 and ISBN 0 896 03841 6

This is not a book for light bedtime reading but it is none the worse for that. It is a multi-author tome packed with technical details. With such works one asks several questions, such as "are the details up to date and relevant?", "are they set out in a way that is easily accessible?", and "are they accurate?".

Faced with a book of over 1000 pages, dealing with more than 100 methods, and covering many aspects of molecular biology, a reviewer could spend several years checking out the answers to the above. Clearly, that is not going to happen, and it would be unreasonable to expect it. So how does one tackle a book like this? One could rely on years of past experience and sagely pronounce one way or the other, and there is an element of that in this review. However, in answering the last question first, because this is a practical book, intended to give guidance to the uninitiated, I gave it to two young researchers who were having difficulties with different problems and asked for their verdicts. Both came back with very positive assessments. In one case (in situ hybridisation) the details of the protocol had to be modified to a fair degree, but the

outcome was successful. In the other case (protein refolding) again the advice proved useful. One cannot say with hand on heart that just because two out of two were fine, the rest are also. Nevertheless, in the several areas where I feel that I know how to proceed, the details look sensible.

With regard to the first two questions one must give a qualified yes to both, recognising that the pace of development is so rapid in molecular biology that some sections in any such book are likely to be superseded quite quickly. Also, the hardback format is not the easiest to use on the bench. Nevertheless, the last is a minor quibble. On the whole, this is an excellent book and worth the money for any busy research group. The editor is to be congratulated.

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