Book review

The Nucleic Acid Protocol Handbook
Rapley R, ed. ($149.00 and $110.00.)
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 unreas-
sonable 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,
tended 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such book are likely to be superseded quite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.

D B RAMSDEN

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