

/CORRESPONDENCE

Entering the fray

To the editor:

I have just read the article by Peter Duesberg in the August issue of *Bio/Technology* (The Last Word, 11:955, "The HIV Gap in National AIDS Statistics"), along with your accompanying editorial. I am very pleased that you came to the conclusion that the important thing is to concentrate on the scientific issues, rather than upon whether Duesberg has always argued his case with appropriate tact and restraint. Research into the mechanism by which HIV supposedly destroys vast numbers of cells, most of which it never infects, seems to be going nowhere. Chimps who are infected with HIV do not get AIDS. In the absence of direct evidence of causation, correlation is everything. In these circumstances the CDC ought to be meticulous about epidemiological controls and unbiased analysis of the data offered to show correlation. Instead, the authorities are trying desperately to keep up the fiction of a nearly perfect correlation, while

maintaining records in such a manner as to make it as difficult as possible for negative evidence to come to light. I am very glad that you are giving a hearing to Duesberg and others who want to protest this shockingly unprofessional conduct.

Science is self-correcting, although the process may take a long time. In the end, therefore, the enormous power of Fauci, Gallo, Jaffe, et al. to suppress unfavorable evidence will not be able to prevent the truth from

emerging. When that eventually happens, you will be very glad to have been on the side of allowing the dissenters to be heard.

Thanks again for having the courage to "enter the fray," however reluctantly.

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Screening misrepresentation

To the editor:

Having read your article in the June issue ("Pharmaceutical Screening: From Off-the-Wall to Off-the-Shelf," *Bio/Technology* 11:683), I feel that Amersham's strategy for the exploitation of its scintillation proximity assay (SPA) is slightly misrepresented.

It is true to say that Amersham is bringing advanced screening techniques to a wider public by offering SPA screening assays as "catalog" products. However, your article missed one important point. For those companies that are heavily committed to SPA as part of their screening strategy, Amersham offers Technology Trans-

fer agreements—transferring both the SPA technology and Amersham's expertise, to allow companies to develop their own range of assays in-house. In this way, companies can take full advantage of the SPA technology for their own high priority primary screens.

Amersham's strategy is therefore twofold: to work in confidential partnership with pharmaceutical companies offering Technology Transfer agreements, and to offer catalog-based SPA assays to the industry as a whole.

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Sic remarks

To the editor:

Jan Witkowski reviewed in your May issue (*Bio/Technology* 11:620) *The Uses of Life: A History of Biotechnology* by Robert Bud, in not ungenerous terms; and my thanks for his kind remarks about my foreword. But reviewers who work on proof copies should beware of remarking on misprints. As in any sophisticated organism, Cambridge University Press has systems to catch and correct errors of transcription, and the mutant that attracted his *sic* comment didn't make it through replication.

More importantly, Witkowski's throwaway lines seem to suggest that (1) he doesn't think biotechnology has lived up to expectation, (2) that it hasn't met Third World needs, and (3) a couple of project failures (gasahol, SCP) amount to a "terrible indictment of political and economic processes." To which I'd reply on (1), it has already in a few cases (hepatitis-B vaccine, EPO, IFN for hairy-cell leukemia) and will in many more; (2) please review the ATAS (Advanced Technology Alert System) of the UN, Issue 9 on Biotechnology, for countless examples of biotech moving into obviously beneficial applications all over the developing world; (3) 'Pruteen' may not be competitive with soya, but is the availability and cheapness of soya a matter for regret? Or the doubtful economics of government-subsidized ethanol programs (in Brazil, Louisiana, or wherever) a matter for surprise? The market economy isn't a god, but attempts to buck it or improve on it haven't been conspicuous by their success.

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Conformation assay

To the editor:

The paper "Effect of Culture Conditions on IgM Antibody Structure, Pharmacokinetics, and Activity," by B.L. Maiorella et al. (*Bio/Technology* 11: 387, March) raises at least two important issues: First, that conformational changes in genetically engineered monoclonals do occur as a result of culture conditions, and second, that these differences need to be identified.

The authors present the methods able to identify

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REASONS

"You've
come a long
way since
MIT, Harry."