

ité', 'sélection' and 'génétique' and some familiar formulae. Overall I believe this is a very useful book.

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Genetics for Beginners. By STEVE JONES and BORIN VAN LOON. Icon Books Ltd, Cavendish House, Cambridge Road, Barton, Cambridge. 1993. 175 pages. Paperback. Price £7.99. ISBN 1 874166 129.

This is a very curious little book, whose purpose is, I suppose, to introduce non-scientists to the subtleties, excitements and threats of modern genetics. It consists of a small amount of much-fragmented text by Steve Jones squeezing into the little areas on most pages not taken over by the obtrusive drawings of Van Loon. Steve Jones often gets two lines or less to a page, and rarely more than half the page. These bits of text tend to lack continuity and consist mainly of small nuggets of genetic knowledge which will give the reader a very simplistic view of the subject, though a few impressive sentences may stick in his or her mind for use at parties.

I suppose the drawings are intended to fill in the gaps in the reader's education, but they are really not designed for that purpose. The drawings are clever, often witty, give recognizable portraits/cartoons of Watson and Crick (several of each, which are surely meant to amuse a small elite group of geneticists and molecular biologists), and of past and a few present

important figures. The drawings also get in as many puns and jokes as possible. These can be amusing (Thomas Hunt Morgan, the father of *Drosophila* genetics, is shown beneath a very large front view of the fly, saying 'Time flies like an arrow, but fruit flies like a banana!'. No, he did not really say that!

The trouble with the drawings is that they make very little contribution to the reader's knowledge, and will in many cases mislead or confuse him. They may well, however, help the book to sell more than Steve Jones' contribution will, and it would not surprise me if it became a cult book in a minor way.

However, genetics is a very important subject, and it is vital, in my opinion, that people and children who are acquiring or have acquired a general education should gain an understanding of both the principles of genetics and the problems and opportunities arising from genetic technology. Publishers appear to be unwilling to produce genetics textbooks designed for the uninitiated, though these might sell well and encourage sales of books at an intermediate level. Steve Jones had an opportunity to produce an elementary book which would fire the enquiring readers to further efforts in self education instead of letting them only admire the clever drawings and laugh at the jokes. I think this book is an important missed opportunity.

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