Book review

Struggle of Life, or the Natural History of Stress and Adaptation:

This book is a compilation of complex topics on the genetics associated with stress and adaptation. The book presents a cascade of ideas, data and associations from the vast experience of the authors on diverse topics ranging from DNA structure and function to the dynamics of ecosystems. The purpose of the book is to look for signs of externally imposed stress symptoms on organisms by assembling evidence from the sub-cellular to the ecosystems level.

The book starts with observations indicating that plant cells change their DNA content when dissected from the plant and cultured in vitro. Interestingly these changes appear to be correlated with the lunar cycle. The material is presented in a complex language and much detail of experimentation is given without the benefits of previous structured scientific publications. Thus from early in the book, for both the scientific or general reader, much information is compiled without presenting conclusions in a format that is readily understandable. In the next chapter, the reader is confronted with yet another level of complexity, this time with molecular models of how structural features of DNA can change under different conditions and how this could affect the activity of mobile genetic elements. Here the reader is given many complicated theories and assumptions, but little experimental evidence. The rest of the book is about plant structure and ecosystems being shaped under the influence of external factors, such as the magnetic and gravitational rhythms of the solar system.

The difficulty with this book (and for some readers this will also be a strength) is that it tries to collect relevant information from very different sources to make the point. Further, with each chapter written in a highly specialized scientific language, the book is time consuming to read. It is recognised, however, that the subject is very interesting and as such the book will find a niche readership, and certainly attract diverse interest and comment.

Professor Otto Schmidt
Department of Applied Molecular Biology,
The University of Adelaide, SA 5064,
Australia