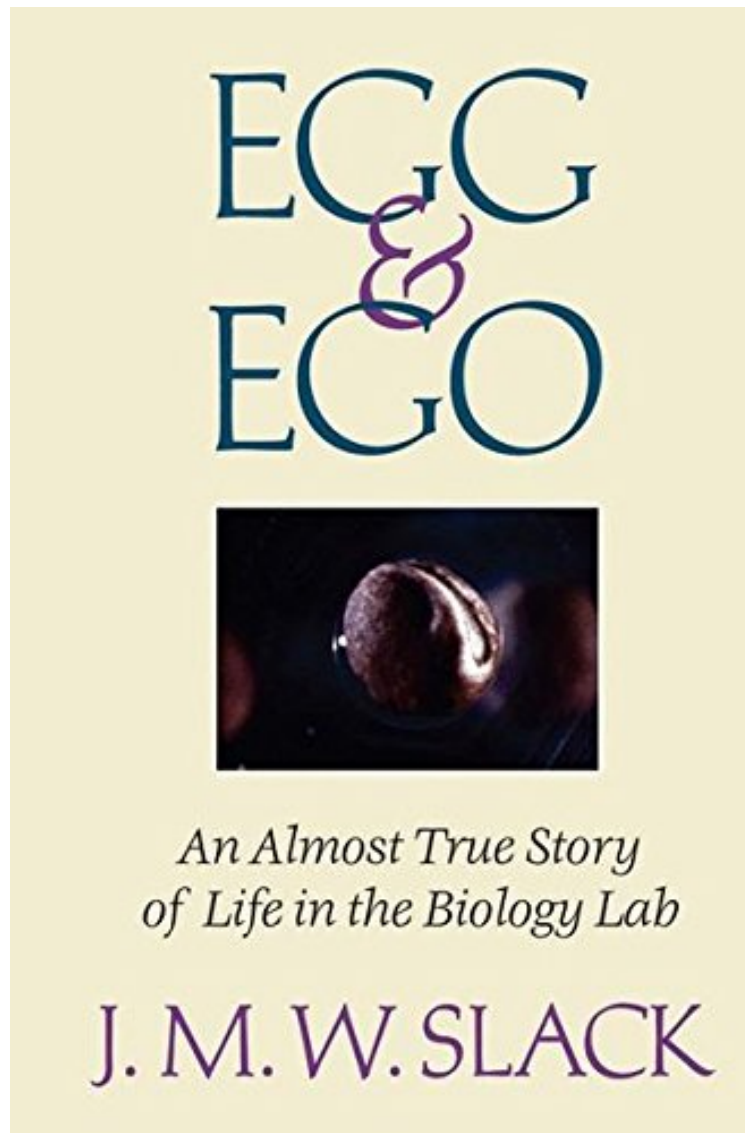


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Egg Ego: An Almost True Story of Life in the Biology Lab

J.M.W. Slack

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J.M.W. Slack : Egg Ego: An Almost True Story of Life in the Biology Lab before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Egg Ego: An Almost True Story of Life in the Biology Lab:

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following review helpful. *The Stresses of Science Before the Onslaught of the Internet and Open Access* By John Richard Schrock Egg Ego by J.M.W. Slack; Springer-Verlag, New York; (c)1999; 195 pages, softcover. Beginning in a slaughterhouse, Slack gives a hands-on perspective of harvesting enough tissue to process and concentrate growth factors. But this first chapter is the only "easy read" for high school students; most of the book requires a college-level or even graduate student biologist to enjoy the recent history of developmental biology as revealed before and after various techniques. Slack may appear irreverent when he describes the realities of appointments, peer review, publishing papers and gaining academic appointments, but he is merely telling it like it is in both the U.S. and U.K. Long ago, Jacob Bronowski warned of the dangers of science becoming dependent on governmental funding. Much of what Slack details is the result of this growing dependency. However, Slack writes of the science climate before the onslaught of open access publication and the resultant gaming-of-the-system that has occurred under the Science Citation Index and Impact Factor bibliometrics which have exacerbated the problems ever more. Slack is clear about science playing on reality. "No biological or medical research would be possible without the use of animals. This is an unpalatable truth to many who would like to believe that there are 'alternatives' that are as good or better. Alas, there are not. Scientists want their experiments to work, and if there exists an effective method that works, and it is legal, then they will use it." "Tissue culture cells are certainly very useful for some purposes; they can often be superior to animal tissues as sources of growth factors. They are also much easier to use than whole animals for a wide variety of cell biology and biochemical work. But there are things whole animals do that tissue culture cells do not do, such as have organs composed from many cell types working together, or show particular types of behaviour, or get diseases. In addition, medications targeting one organ may have unexpected adverse effects anywhere else in the body. These are the factors involved in most investigations, so there is really no alternative to the use of animals. Furthermore, it is often forgotten that the tissue culture cells are themselves obtained from animals and that they in turn need animal products, such as serum, in order to grow in culture." The last chapters give: nuts-and-bolts of getting a job in academia, holding research or teaching posts, the pecking order of institutions and journals, and the involvement of news reporters in breaking science stories. A teacher can have their school library order this book. Some advanced students may enjoy Slack's "voice" and find this a sympathetic support for their own lonely journey into science. It can be read as nighttime reading over a week. Unless you are just graduated with an unusual emphasis in developmental biology, it will also update you in this constantly changing field. In the time period since this was written, the competition for research grants has only become more fierce.

A light-hearted look at the nature of academic science, intended for anyone interested in biology but particularly for biology students who want to find out what the future holds in store. The "Egg" of the title refers to the science of developmental biology, which is the speciality of the author, and which provides the material for many of the anecdotes. The "Ego" relates to the vanity of the scientists themselves. Academic scientists have to struggle to maintain their research funding. To do this they must persuade other scientists that they are very good, and that means working at a good institution, publishing papers in the most fashionable journals and giving lectures at the most prestigious meetings. Success often goes to those with the largest egos and it is their style of operation that is described in this book. The author is a well-known scientist who has worked at both universities and research institutes. He has published over 100 scientific papers and an influential book about embryonic development: "From Egg to Embryo".