



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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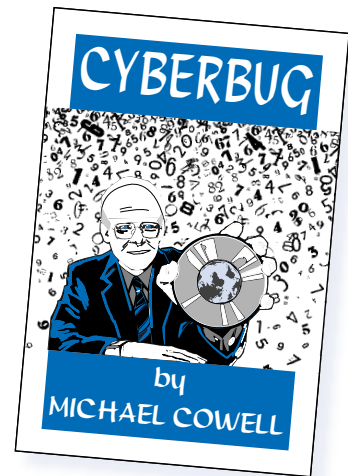
The Actuary

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Book reviews

Two views of *Cyberbug*

Cyberbug, a novella written by Michael J. Cowell, is being published by the Society of Actuaries. The story follows an imaginary actuary and his family into the 21st century and tells how the dramatic changes around them alter their lives. Here, two actuaries offer their reviews of the novella (a work of fiction between a short story and a novel in length and intricacy). The book was the topic of Cowell's May 22 address to the general luncheon during the SOA's 1997 spring meeting in Palm Desert, Calif., and was a seminar topic of the Bowles Symposium, September 26-27, 1996, at Georgia State University. Cowell is vice president and corporate affairs actuary, UNUM Life Insurance Co. of America, Portland, Maine. *Cyberbug* is available for \$10 from the SOA Books Department (phone: 847/706-3526; fax: 847/706-3599).



Fine storytelling dramatizes future whirlwind

by James Toole

C*yberbug* by Mike Cowell is the book that might have resulted if Marcel Proust had been sitting in a pub eating bangers and drinking stout with Blaise Pascal and Steve Jobs instead of eating madeleines at his aunt's. An arcing tale of careers, generations, and geopolitical conflagrations, *Cyberbug* is perhaps the most creative work by an insurance executive since Wallace Stephens, vice president of Hartford Accident and Indemnity, published the American masterpiece *Harmonium* in 1923. The resulting kaleidoscope of landscapes, dreamscapes, and netscapes are seamlessly (and shamelessly?) tied together by a natural catastrophe that would dwarf the real world's top 10 natural disasters.

Our protagonist, Bill Wainwright, is first seen struggling with a knotty health care modeling problem late in his career. We then return to see the events leading up to this moment, and an eventful life it is. From the formation of the North American Institute of Actuaries to changing global weather patterns to the insurgency of the "New Lions" of the Southern

Hemisphere on the world economic stage, Bill Wainwright is an active, if sometimes unwilling, participant on the world stage. His home life is equally tumultuous, with multigenerational influences pulling at his heart and his purse. The challenge and importance of continuing education in a rapidly changing world is also well presented.

Cyberbug is not afraid to tackle head-on the thorny issues surrounding the aging population of the industrialized nations, introducing some very interesting ideas. The actuarial issues are couched expertly in the development of the story through the main character and his family and friends. In this age of political correctness, Cowell is not afraid to present a culturally and religiously diverse group of characters, alternately discussing sex, politics, and religion, and also engaging in some serious fly fishing.

Take the opportunity to read *Cyberbug*. You will be glad you did. **James Toole serves in the SOA's Ambassador Program as its representative in Mexico, and he was the editor of *Actuarial Speculative Fiction*, published in 1996 by the Computer Science Section. He is a consulting actuary with Tillinghast-Towers Perrin, Mexico City. He can be reached by e-mail at toolej@towers.com.**

Retirement shown in its complexity

by Anna Rappaport

Mike Cowell, a Fellow of the Society of Actuaries, is to be congratulated for an excellent piece of work. *Cyberbug* helps those of us studying the aging society to focus on some major issues. By showing how these issues impact the lives of one fictional family, Cowell has pointed out the interconnectedness of many of these issues and vividly demonstrated that we cannot deal with them in isolation.

The themes that his book discusses include:

- Globalization and its impact on us
- Implications of discontinuities
- Changing health care practices and ethics, and resource constraints
- Retirement ages
- Implications of different family structures and multiple families
- Competing demands for resources (for example, for retirement and education)
- Maintaining skills in a changing world
- Multiple careers

Actuaries are challenged by the need to weave together these diverse topics. Often we look at each in isolation and miss much of the richness of the total picture.

(continued on page 8)