



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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on the  
lighter  
side

## Speculative fiction contest is back

by Carol Marler

**B**orgs, morphs, and clones return. The Computer Science Section is again sponsoring its “almost annual” Actuarial Speculative Fiction Contest.

This is the second competition, following the first held in 1995-96. The guidelines are the same:

- Stories must center on actuaries and the use of technology.
- Entries must be 10,000 words or less.
- Illustrations/fanzines are encouraged.
- Entrants must have passed at least one actuarial exam. (College courses, GMAT, etc., don’t count.)

The contest not only offers a creative outlet for actuaries but also grants prizes. The first prize is valued at \$250. Other awards may be given to runners-up, depending on the quantity and quality of entries received.

Once again, contest entries will be judged by Bob Mielke, Ph.D., associate professor of English at Northeast Missouri State University. He is a creative writing instructor and the author of monographs on J.G. Ballard, British writer of “new wave” speculative fiction.

Winning stories will be published and made available to SOA members in printed form and on Actuaries Online, as was done in the first contest. They also will be posted on the SOA Web site.

The deadline for entries is August 31, 1997. Entries should be submitted in duplicate and include an IBM-

compatible diskette with the entrant’s word processing file. (Entries created in unusual programs should be converted to ASCII.) Entries should be sent to me, Carol Marler, 9815-J Sam Furr Road #205, Huntersville, NC 28078. Questions may be directed to me also (phone: 704/344-2821; e-mail: carol.marler@transamerica.com).

**Carol Marler is a member of the SOA’s Computer Science Section. She is director of actuarial research for Transamerica Occidental Life, Reinsurance Division, Charlotte, N.C.**

## The actuary as guiding star

by Marc Twinney

**W**hen you go sailing or boating this summer, you may navigate by line of sight or by satellite. In fact, you can navigate just about anywhere if you have the right new digital device in your car or in hand-held form.

Navigation is one of the many applied sciences that has undergone profound change. Shortly after Lewis and Clark returned from their journeys, the great navigator and actuary Nathaniel Bowditch reformed the field of navigation. Captain Lewis navigated brilliantly across the North American continent, but his trip would have been a lot easier with Bowditch’s tables.

Bowditch developed his new approach in the first decade of the 19th century. In an article for the June 1979 issue of *The Actuary*, Dwight Bartlett III wrote:

Bowditch was undoubtedly the leading American mathematician of the early 19th century. He was primarily known for his work in celestial navigation and celestial mechanics. The volume of tables he produced for celestial navigators is still in use today in much revised form and is familiarly known as “Bowditch’s.”

In due course, the U.S. Navy would use Bowditch’s slim volume and precise tables to train civilians (not to mention Annapolis midshipmen

for early engagements) in navigation sufficient to cruise through two World Wars and the Korean conflict.

In 1823, Bowditch accepted a job as actuary with Massachusetts Hospital Life Insurance Company, one of the state’s original insurance companies — primarily to obtain the financial resources needed to publish his scientific works. His earlier jobs give hints of adventure: serving on merchant vessels (including a stint as ship’s captain), clerking in maritime stores, and even being president of a maritime insurance company.

In his job as actuary, according to Bartlett’s research, Bowditch “was responsible for the entire management of the company in a way that would be characterized today by the title of chief executive officer.” While his actuarial and management work were solid, Bowditch directed his innovative and scholarly mind to mathematics and navigation. However, wrote Bartlett, “I concluded that Bowditch had left an even more important inheritance to the life insurance business and the actuarial profession than any original scholarly work he may have done in actuarial science. This inheritance is the absolute integrity he demonstrated in the conduct of his office.”

More about Bowditch is presented in the books *From Actuarius to Actuary* by Robert C. Mitchell and *Yankee Stargazer* by Robert C. Berry.

Bowditch memorabilia is being assembled in a library in the community where his family summered: Islesford, Maine, on Little Cranberry Island. Visitors to Acadia National Park can take a ferry boat to this small, timeless place next door. The Bowditch collection is a salute to our forefathers, their precision and discipline, and their willingness to conquer the next unknown. As actuaries face diverse futures in new directions, they can remember Bowditch and keep his adventurous spirit alive.

**Marc Twinney is an associate editor of *The Actuary* and served on the U.S. Advisory Council for Social Security.**