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| Public-Access Computer Systems Review 1, no. 1 (1990): 56-57.
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| Reviews
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Bova, Ben. Cyberbooks. New York: Tor, 1989.
ISBN: 0-812-50319-8. Price: \$4.50.

Reviewed by Charles W. Bailey, Jr.

In this satiric science fiction novel, an idealistic MIT professor invents a light-weight electronic book that employs a high-resolution display, simple controls, and small, inexpensive electro-optic storage wafers. Best of all, bookstores or customers can download the books they want, eliminating the need for a complex book distribution system.

Filled with visions of saving the world's forests and bringing cheap electronic books to the underprivileged, the professor journeys to New York to sell his invention to a publisher.

Alas, the professor soon learns the harsh realities of publishing, which is thoroughly lampooned as an avaricious and anti-intellectual enterprise. Although the publisher is interested in the electronic book, everyone else involved in book production, sales, and distribution, from paper industry magnates to book store owners, is opposed to it. Ultimately, the electronic book triumphs by bypassing the publishing industry. Toy stores, which are used to selling electronic gadgets, peddle the "Cyberbooks" to children, and the funeral knell of conventional publishing is sounded. Fifty years later, the Library of Congress displays the last book to be published in paper form.

Bova shows no mercy to publishers, and his acerbic treatment of them does wear thin at times. Nonetheless, Cyberbooks is an amusing cautionary tale that deserves to be read by those interested in the future of electronic publishing.

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