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Back Talk -- The Library Hotel: Sweet Revenge

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Philip Wong’s wrecked neck would have been painful, except for the sedatives he received every four hours. Of course he could end the pain by not twisting his neck to catch a glimpse of the person or persons watching through the little window in his door. He was under suicide watch, he was diagnosed as dangerously paranoid delusional because he “imagined” the guests at the Library Hotel, where he was the General Manager, were out to drive him crazy or worse.

Philip himself didn’t know who to blame most. The biggest fault, no doubt, was the 2nd District Court judge who dismissed as frivolous OCLC’s suit to stop the owners of the Library Hotel from using the Dewey Decimal System to number its rooms and various other services given to guests. But the next greatest object of blame was his own company’s “the customer is always right” management principle—a point hammered into his head at TQM management training sessions, to which Philip had to submit himself in order to rise to the exalted position of General Manager.

The Library Hotel had quickly recovered from the initial negativity surrounding its lawsuit by OCLC which claimed the hotel had infringed its trademark for the Dewey Decimal System name. The Hotel now had a nice 70–80% occupancy rate and the customers seemed to be pleased with the nostalgic associations produced by having rooms and tables classified using book call numbers. They also seemed to get a kick out collecting (sometimes even paying for) the drink coasters, tea towels, ashtrays, etc., that were all inscribed with call numbers. Finally, they enjoyed going to the library where they quickly figured out where to find books in which they were interested.

But disaster struck Philip when the owners of the Library Hotel decided to try to make it up to the librarians whose call number system they had misappropriated. On the occasion of the meeting of the American Library Association management reduced its prices by 50% to only $90 per night in order to do something nice for the librarians.

Philip had a premonition that something was wrong when the reservation desk was barraged with email requests for room reassignments. When guests were told the call number for their room, some immediately asked for a different room and some even specified the call number ranges that would, or would not, be acceptable. In general, these requests could be accommodated, but it was apparent that no librarian was willing to take some rooms because of their call numbers. This was solved by filling them with people attending a reunion of old South African settlers who had emigrated to America after the fall of Apartheid.

On the eve of the librarian’s conference, the front desk was reduced to total chaos. No one seemed to be happy with their room assignment. A contingency of French book dealers refused to settle down in the rooms with the history call numbers and a German bookseller threatened to sue the hotel unless he was reassigned from a room with a holocaust call number. Some gay librarians refused rooms with numbers representing lib-  
   ration call numbers while others demanded the same rooms. But these semi-understandable re-  
   quests were only the beginning of the problem.

A whole other contingent of librarians objected to the numbers and the subject headings that accompanied them. For example, the 306.872 room was wrongly labeled as the Animal Husbandry room. Then, the coater sets at the bar, which came in sets of ten, were found to have all sorts of mis-

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