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Books are Us

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Blogging for Yourself

The best thing about trying to blog regularly on a particular subject is that it offers the opportunity to learn about that subject. Cory Doctorow, science fiction writer and European Affairs Coordinator for the Electronic Frontier Foundation, says of editing his popular blog:

...[O]perating "Boing Boing" has not only given me a central repository of all of the fruits of my labors in the information fields, but it also has increased the volume and quality of the yield. I know more, find more, and understand better than I ever have.

Through blogging about issues in scholarly communication, we have learned not only a good deal about scholarly publishing but also about copyright, institutional repositories, and digital information. The exercise has allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of many of the factors at play in the world of scholarly communications. Moreover, since our blog is a searchable database, the information we have posted is always available to us, ready to be retrieved when the need arises.

Access Statistics

Although word-of-mouth reaction to the blog has been overwhelmingly positive, we would like to have an idea of the number of people the blog reaches. Unfortunately, even though we read monthly statistical reports, this can be difficult. For the first few months, the number of requests made to our server nearly doubled monthly. Since March 2004, the number of requests has been consistent, averaging around 800 per month. So what does this tell us? As Jeffrey Goldberg explains in his somewhat overwrought "Why Web Usage Statistics are (Worse Than) Meaningless," no inference about the number or identity of people reading the site can be gleaned from these numbers.

What we can tell is that that most of the requests being made are consistently coming from the Georgia State University domain.

Conclusion

In today's environment, it is not enough for acquisitions librarians to manage the day-to-day business of acquisitions. The ever-increasing costs of library resources combined with current budgets have brought the process by which libraries acquire materials to the fore. This new attention has created an atmosphere of change, and acquisitions librarians with their unique perspective can be a part of that change. Communication is the first step in any successful change process. Users must be educated and staff must be made aware. Here at the Georgia State University Library the initial communication phase has taken the form of the "Issues in Scholarly Communications" blog.

Endnotes

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Books Are Us

by Anne K. Robichaux (Professor Emerita, Medical University of South Carolina) <awkr7721@sc-online.net>


That didn't entice me to check the book out of our local library as much as the title and the thought this would be great for this column. But the book is entertaining, a thriller, and the descriptions of four librarian characters, including our action hero (not just "the keeper of the flame") did not disappoint.

One character, Elaina Whisthoven, is described continued on page 89
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scribed as a lover of books, who wanted to serve humanity, thus she became a librarian. She "wore large glasses and had large curls that were always clean." She "lived like a nun on her meager starting salary" in a rented room. Thus we are introduced to the poorly paid angle, often paired with our profession. This same chapter goes on about the current political climate, decreased budgets that impact library services, and a chancellor of the university who thinks all volumes can be replaced "by a great cyber-library, one library for all, accessed from our home and office PCs," cutting down on the need for almost all librarians. Sounds more like truth, than fiction, actually. We learn this from our hero, David, as he is firing Elaina, feeling that she's "broken some delicate flower, snapped its stalk, and crushed its petals."

Both Elaina and David end up working for Stowe, a wealthy, powerful, politically connected man, who has a wonderful private library. Elaina starts there first because she's lost her job, then David, who takes Elaina's place, when she realizes her life is in danger. Stowe has Elaina's place, when she realizes her life is in danger. Stowe, who has feelings for her but also believes that she has put a curse on him. Dowdy librarian, with bewitching powers?

Our hero, David, informs us that "A librarian's job is to preserve and disseminate information." But he also sees himself as others some times see him, as "one of the spinster women," a "lowly librarian." Even so, David attracts the eye of a flirtatious beauty, Niobe, married to one of Stowe's henchmen, who sees the intelligent spy persona side of him. She asks him to tell her about being a librarian. David complies by comparing the profession with communism: "We're in the business of giving away knowledge. For free. Come in, please come, and take some knowledge for free, no, no limit, keep going, gorge on it if you want, no, it's not a trick... Librarians don't have a lot of status and we don't make a lot of money... so our ideals are important to us and the love of books and the love of knowledge and the love of truth and free information and letting people discover things for themselves and... giving poor people Internet access." Whereupon Niobe softly replies "You're a good man."

David is depicted as mild mannered, computer savvy (among other things, he uses a Palm Pilot), crafty in using other's passwords and addresses to access electronic information, a thorough researcher, reputable, harmless, a man who "lives for records and documents." Other descriptions include David's desire to become "a man of action, of encounter, of wild face-to-face interactions, instead of a filler, a sorter, a reader, a keeper of the records of other people's deeds... a keeper of order." As the story unfolds, however, David becomes just that, a man of action, almost a swashbuckling hero, though afraid for his life: a "librarian on the run."

Another librarian in the story is Susanne Cohen-Miller, employed at the Library of Congress, whose voice is grating, whose life is an "opera of angst," who seems to be involved in one dastardly relationship after the other. She becomes a hero of sorts in the book, assisting David in his escape, escapades, and encounters with the bad guys.

From the product description at Amazon.com, "The Librarian is a frenetic, scary and hilarious thriller that goes deep into the dark heart of election year politics." Barbara Bibel in a Booklist review (also on Amazon) compares author Beinhart with Carl Hiaasen and Elmore Leonard, effectively employing "a combination of dark humor and frightening, outrageous plot twists that strike close to home in the era of the Patriot Act. Although the novel falls prey to some traditional stereotypes, especially in the portrayal of Goldberg's female colleagues, it is refreshing to encounter a political thriller with a librarian hero — not coincidentally a librarian, either, but one who uses his information skills to save the day."

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