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Adventures in Librarianship -- The Grand Tour

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Adventures in Librarianship — The Grand Tour

by Ned Kraft (Ralph J. Bunche Library, U.S. Department of State) <kraftno@state.gov>

Hello! Hello! If I can have your attention for just. Thank you. My name is Snoopy Keller. I'm the acquisitions librarian here at the Federal Institute for Departmental Organization, and I've been asked to lead your tour of the library today.

First, I'd like to express my surprise and, well, just my surprise that the Chinese Library Delegation would choose to visit our humble collection while in Washington. Most people think FIDO is just the name of a dog. Ha! Yes, well, okay. I was told you are without your translator today. True? Can I see hands for those who speak English? I see. Can I see hands for those who would rather be anywhere else? Alright then. This should be fun. Please follow me.

This is the Reference Desk. Some call it the beating heart of the library. I don't, of course, but some do. Right now it's staffed by our youngest librarian, Justin Jordan. I'd introduce you to young Mr. Jordan, but as you can see, with his iPad on and his back to us, he's completely unaware of our presence.

Justin! These Chinese people have several reference questions for you! You see? His head bobs, his fingers drum on the edge of the book truck, but otherwise, oblivious.

Now let's move to your right, toward the periodical and newspaper reading area. Here we really do have to keep our voices down. "Shhhhhhhhh," as we say here in the States. Not so much in deference to scholarly focus, but because Dr. Wahlon Maas generally naps in this area. That's him in his favorite chair. Dr. Maas was the Deputy Secretary General of FIDO until 1986. Legend has it that after retirement his wife made a few things crystal-clear. So every day he shaves, he ties his bowtie, he packs his briefcase with snacks and whatnot, and he makes his way here to work on his "memoirs." The good Doctor prefers to nap with either Current History or the Journal of Counterintelligence, depending on which chapter he's working on. Is there a word for pathetic in Chinese? I'm sure there must be.

Back here we have our Directors office. Since it's 10:30, he must be out to lunch. He may be back after 3:00, and if you can return, I'm sure he'd love to say hello and give you his favorite speech about libraries being the last line of defense against international chaos. But I wouldn't recommend it if you have anything spicy for lunch. Can I see hands for those who understand the term "wind bag"? No? That's a shame.

Back in this corner, behind the steel door, is our technical Services area. Step in please. Don't be afraid. You'll get used to the smell. Alright, this is where we sequester the cataloging and acquisitions staff. It's a safe place for them; we've removed all sharp objects; we routinely check for weapons; and a nurse comes around at about eleven with medication for all. They like it here. They may not look it, but we believe they're happy here. No, sir, please don't give them any food. That's number 643, known for her rather sharp elbows. And yes that is crying you hear in the background; usually happens about this time of day. No one knows why. Now let's head out before we attract too much attention.

Finally, these are the Library stacks. They may appear to be a jumbled mess, but let me assure you that our staff knows where everything is. That's a lie, of course. Just seeing if you're paying attention. This is the end of the formal tour, but feel free to wander and explore. I suggest you go in pairs for your own safety. Good luck, and watch your step.

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