

December 2001

Adventures in Librarianship: Not Very Smart

Ned Kraft

Ralph J. Bunche Library, kraftno@state.gov

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Kraft, Ned (2001) "Adventures in Librarianship: Not Very Smart," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 13: Iss. 6, Article 40.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.3673>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

Adventures in Librarianship — Not Very Smart

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

For most of my life I've wished I were smarter. When other boys were crafting models of B-29s and battleships, I was trying to stare down the neighbor's cat. When my friends were obsessed with learning the constellations and spotting meteorites, I was enumerating the many ways one could kill a vampire (I came up with seven, but because I'm not very smart, I didn't write them down, so they are forever lost). When homework time came around and the neighborhood grew quiet, I wandered through the back yards kicking the heads off dandelions. Study didn't suit me.

In college, when the topic of conversation turned to Immanuel Kant, I couldn't. I learned to nod my head knowingly, rub my chin, and squint as if trying to untwist the complexities of pure reason, all the while wondering whether the cafeteria might be serving fish sticks for lunch.

But all adults grow to know their strengths and weaknesses. We learn to build on our strengths (mine are small talk, and an almost encyclopedic knowledge of local brew-pubs) and turn our weaknesses, wherever possible, into assets. For me, ignorance has become my premier negotiating device. Let's say Vendor X calls and wonders if we'd like to order the new edition of the International Directory of Hokum.

"Hmm, the IDH," I respond, "can't say as I've ever heard of it."

"Well," Vendor X insists, "we see that your library bought the 1999 edition and we just thought..."

"Couldn't a' been us," I tell him. "There's not much call for Hokum here."

Vendor X is desperate at this point. He recites the shipping address, billing address, account number, and the contact name on file

and asks if they are correct. I wait a few moments, then respond with "Hello?"

"Yes, I'm still here. Is that information correct?"

"I thought maybe you were talkin' to someone else."

"So that information is NOT correct?"

"Which information is that?"

Vendor X and I go around this way for a few more minutes until I hear his voice begin to tremble and I know that both of us will be just as happy if the line inexplicably went dead. Though playing the ignorance card is not the quickest way out of a sales call, I do find that investing the time now will reduce the number of future calls significantly.

Yes, I wish I were smarter. As I age I wait patiently for the wisdom they say will come.

I imagine that certainly the sheer accumulation of experience, the insight gained from time's perspective will put me in the know. Someday I'll be able to name Beethoven symphonies, rather than recite

the lyrics from television theme songs. Someday I'll know the best years for California cabernets, not just the best bus line to downtown. But in the meantime, one must use one's lack of talent to the best of one's ability.

"Mr. Kraft, Emma Johnson here from Vendor Y."

"Why?"

"Uh, yes, Vendor Y. Listen, I'm going to be in town next Thursday and I was hoping to come by to meet with you."

"Why?"

"Well, just to discuss business, make sure all is well."

"I'm fine. And you?"

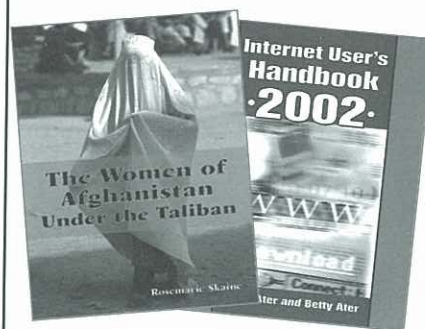
"I'm fine, too, Mr. Kraft. Just hoping your calendar was free and..."

"Oh yes. My calendar was free. I picked it up at ALA from Vendor Y."

"That would be us, Mr. Kraft."

"You and me?"

I still hold out hope that my mind will ripen with time. Perhaps someday *New Yorker* cartoons will make sense to me. Maybe I'll reach that mental pinnacle where one can intuit the source of system error messages and not just attribute them to goblins and such. One day, with any luck, I'll understand the difference between "capitol" and "capital." Until then I must use what I lack as well as I can.



The Women of Afghanistan Under the Taliban

Rosemarie Skaine

200pp., \$29.95 softcover, appendices, tables, notes, glossary, bibliography, index, ISBN 0-7864-1090-6 2002

Internet User's Handbook 2002

Mark P. Ater and Betty Ater

[128]pp., \$22.50 softcover, illustrations, screen captures, appendix, glossary, index, ISBN 0-7864-1326-3 2002

The United States Flagbook

Everything About Old Glory

Robert L. Loeffelbein

247pp., \$35 softcover, photographs, bibliography, index, ISBN 0-7864-0156-7 1996

Daily Life in the Middle Ages

Paul B. Newman

301pp., \$38.50 softcover, photographs, appendix, bibliography, index, ISBN 0-7864-0897-9 2001

Shoeless

The Life and Times of Joe Jackson

David L. Fleitz

320pp., \$29.95 softcover, photographs, notes, bibliography, index, ISBN 0-7864-0978-9 2001

ATG Report: 21st Charleston Conf. from page 42

"Electronic Archiving: The Mellon Grants," presented by **Ivy Anderson** of **Harvard**, **Craig Van Dyck** of **Wiley** and **Victoria Reich** of **Stanford** and the **LOCKSS** project.

The **Charleston Conference** heightens our awareness that Acquisitions and Collection Development librarians are, *nolens volens*, making decisions that will shape the future of Higher Learning and the Sociology of Knowledge in hitherto undreamed of ways—an exciting and terrifying prospect!