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Adventures in Librarianship-To Be or Not To Be

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Adventures in Librarianship: To be or not to be.

by **Ned Kraft** (Smithsonian Institution Libraries) <NKRAFT@sil.si.edu>

A young, para-professional colleague just mentioned starting library school. When I hear that my mind starts whirling. The enthusiastic, helpful, supportive self wants to tell him all the reasons why he should do it, why it's a grand profession. Then, creeping close on all fours, comes the cynical, cautious, doubtful self that wants to bite that young man's ankle, show him the error of his ways.

"You think I should matriculate? Is it worthwhile?"

He should know better, talking to me so early in the morning, before coffee and email. Not too bright. Wonder what his GREs were? But look at that fresh, hopeful face, that innocent grin ready to organize and classify the world. What should I say?

"Sure, it's a great job ... and every town on the map needs at least one librarian," I say this while my demon reminds me that many staffs are shrinking. Much of what used to be done by librarians is now done by lower paid clerks. And many libraries are selling chunks of their work to private companies with rootless, drifting, temporary help.

Then I add, getting into the swing of it, "You're, you know, part of this great academic mission." Uh-huh. The noble cause. Picking, parsing, providing the world's intellectual riches. That's true of course, but when you've just spent your day so glued to your screen that your eyes feel mummified, you might

have to squint to see the noble cause. When you're hired in acquisitions to spend your days claiming overdue sci-tech titles (claims that the publisher will likely ignore), or in cataloging to code serial holdings, or in the stacks to shelve AR through EC, you might define your place in the world with a little less enthusiasm.

Just to torment myself, I blurt out: "It'd be great to have you as a fellow librarian!" Right. One more competitor in an overfull field. Just what I need. A young competitor at that, no mortgage, willing to work for peanuts and a pat on the back.

I'm starting to twitch. I need my coffee. "You uh, you work hard, work smart, and move right up the ladder!" And the demon asks, ladder? Is there still such a thing? Aren't promotions mysterious things, often unrelated to talent, work ethic, and IQ?

"And, and...there's no stopping me now: I'm stuck in the war between the good librarian and the bad...and it's a steady job, you know, calm, contemplative." Oh now you've done it, the bad one says. You've crossed the line. You're spouting outright lies. Librarianship is a field changing so fast you have to run to keep up. And if you don't run, you're dead.

The hair on the back of my neck is standing up as I say, "Books. We're all book lovers here. That's why we g-g-g-go into this profession." That's right. And if in a few years,

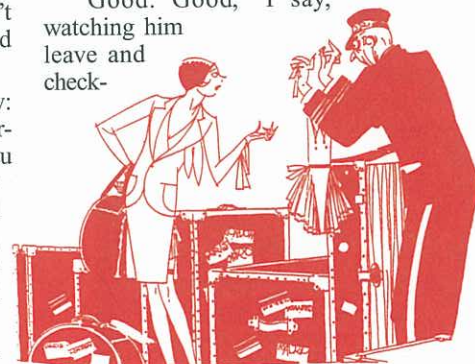
libraries no longer care much about books, would you still want to be a librarian? Hmm? Or would you end up counting yourself among the many lost and disappointed souls?

The kid perks up and says, "But it's so expensive," just as my left eyelid begins to twitch.

"Well worth it," I insist. "Worth every penny." Have you done the math? Have you? Do you know how long it will take to pay for a graduate education on the average starting salary? Can you spell 'eternity'?"

Maybe sensing my condition, the young man smiles his innocent, sympathetic smile and says, "Thanks. I think I'll take an intro course this summer. Just try it out."

"Good. Good," I say, watching him leave and check-



ing my forehead for perspiration. Where is that coffee? ☕

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are for site licences, where the staff and students of the institution may use the products covered at no charge other than a single, fixed annual fee. Over the last few years CHEST has considerably increased the scale of the contracts it has signed with database service providers.

Professional networking

As with any active professional area there are many groups representing people with common interests. The **Standing Conference of National and University Libraries**, under its Secretary Toby Bainton (<http://www.sconul.ac.uk>) acts as the main focus for both academic and national libraries in the UK. Another important group is the **Consortium of Research Libraries** (<http://curl.ac.uk>), which consists of twenty university libraries with the mission to promote, maintain and improve library resources for research in universities. All the members of **CURL** are

also members of the **Research Libraries Group** in the USA. Issues relating to serials management are well represented by the **UK Serials Group** (<http://www.uksg.org>) though membership of **UKSG** is not confined to the academic centre. Similarly the **National Acquisitions Group** has a broad-based membership with a strong academic constituency. (<http://www.nag.org.uk>). The **UK Office for Library and Information Networking, UKOLN** (<http://www.ukoln.ac.uk>) under the direction of Lorcan Dempsey and funded by the **Joint Information Systems Committee** of the higher education funding councils and the **British Library**, is the national support centre for research and information on networked applications. For general information on the higher education sector the **NISS** gateway is quite outstanding (<http://niss.ac.uk>) and this site will take you to any university site in the UK (remember we use ac, not edu, for educational sites) and also link you to just about any related higher education resource in the UK. ☕

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MCB University Press allows our subscribers to choose the method of access they prefer. In the process of coordinating electronic access to our titles for many university libraries over the past eight months, I have come into contact with only a few that prefer customer identification and password access. Since access to our electronic journals is available on a campus-wide basis and not restricted by geographical location, our technical staff recommends a combination of IP addressing access for those "on campus" and password access for "remote" users.

To answer your question, a handful of libraries have distributed the password to faculty and students via email and some have used "hardcopy" memos to do so. In most cases, institutions have used their Web pages to publicize and link users to e-journals. Web page links seem to work well as long as there is some provision made to ensure that only authorized users have access.

As a publisher, our main concern is to be certain that our system works and that we can provide you with the support you need to make that happen. Technical support, librarian workshops, and end-user workshops are part of our effort to help. ☕