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Adventures in Librarianship: Resurrection

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

Ladies and Gentlemen, one and all, are you tired of the Web? Does your face have a cathode tan? Do you find yourself waking up in the middle of the night trying to remember a long forgotten password? Then get ready for the next millennium, my friends! Get ready for a new medium, risen like the legendary Phoenix from its own ashes! Get on board, good people. The train's in the station, waitin' to take one and all to ... Ficheland!

That's right. I'm here to tell the world that it's back and better than ever. You remember how your grandfather talked of sorting microfiche with his Navy buddies? And your great-aunt Sylvia's story about the time she cut her finger searching the county's land title records? Well, sir, those great moments can be yours. The old medium ain't dead yet, not by a long shot!

Can I ask you a question, good neighbors? How much time have you wasted (that's right, wasted) waiting for graphics to load? Uh huh. And do ya also have to sit there like a frog on a rock just to get a connection? Did you know that scientists—government scientists right here in the you-ess-of-ay, makin' their experiments up there in Los Alamos, Nebraska—have calculated that every man, woman, and child in this country now spends enough time waitin' for images to load to go right out and get a Ph.D. in how to wait? I think you'll agree with me when I say: enough is enough.

With fiche, nothin' stands between you and your information source. Only lack of a spare bulb can prevent you from makin' a connection. And these are solid information sources, folks. We got newspapers and magazines from way-back-when. We got dissertations on everything from Picasso's pink period to countin' the bumps on a hog's behind. There's blueprints, government documents, and legal briefs from every city from Paris to Punxsutawney.

Wait. You're askin' "aren't those the same old fiche litterin' Harvard's

land fill?" Well, say hello to the new world of bulbs and viewin' plates. Now there's fiche for every interest! We got romance novels, detective novels, and your how-to's. There's juvenile fiche, anarchist fiche, and fiche for spicin' up your marital relations (if ya know what I mean).

Folks, while the Internet looks squeaky clean and over-produced, fiche readers are down and dirty. If there's a hair or a dust bunny sittin' there on the viewin' plate, well it's gonna show on the screen bigger than a bull in the back yard. Fingerprints? Clear enough to catch a crook. Lint? You betcha. Itty bitty bugs? Lookin' like full grown mammals runnin' across the screen!

Can I ask you another question? Kinda' personal? What can you do with an old Website? I think I know the answer to that one. Nothin'. But with fiche, when they get scratched and useless and out of date, they make fine sun visors. Target practice—there's an idea. My cousin Eustace makes lovely Christmas ornaments out of his old *Soldier of Fortune* fiche. Just use your imagination. Nothin' goes to waste!

Ladies and Gentlemen, if you're ready to make this commitment, to walk with me to the river of transparency, if you're ready to dip your soul in the soft Minolta glow, I'm pleased to tell you I have twenty-five, nearly-new microfiche readers in the back of my truck right now. That's right. And I'd be willing to let you have one for the remarkable price of nineteen ninety-nine. Take my hand and follow me!

No cuttin' in line. First come, first served.

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