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Back Talk -- RFID

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Books Are Us

by Anne Robichaux (Professor Emerita, Medical University of South Carolina) <awkr772@charleston.net>

Column Editor's Note: This column covers fictitious accounts of people in our industry—librarians, publishers, vendors, booksellers, etc.—people like us. All contributions, comments, suggestions are welcome. —AR

Last month I checked out a book on tape from the local branch of our public library to keep me company on a car trip, later checking out a copy of the book to finish the story, based purely on the title and this column. *The Burglar in the Library: A Bernie Rhodenbarr Mystery* (E. P. Dutton, 1997, ISBN 0-525-94301-3) is the eighth title in the *Burglar* series by writer **Lawrence Block**. I should have qualified the word writer with the adjectives prolific (he's published more than forty books) and renown (he's won almost every mystery award and is a best selling name in mystery fiction), and definitely entertaining.

For those who may be unfamiliar with this particular series, the main character, *Bernie Rhodenbarr*, is an antiquarian book dealer by day and a burglar by night, or as the book jacket describes him: burglar extraordinaire and bookseller ordinaire. He apparently is also an amateur sleuth. This mystery involves: books, in particular a first edition of *The Big Sleep*, supposedly inscribed by **Raymond Chandler** and given as a gift to **Dashiell Hammett** (which *Bernie* hopes to find and steal); an old English style inn called *Cuttleford House* somewhere in New England, in particular the library in the inn (where *Bernie* believes the rare edition might reside); and several murders that take place, including one within the inn's library.

The book early on includes mention of a "very helpful librarian" at *Columbia University* (when *Bernie* was researching **Chandler** and **Hammett**). More writing is devoted to the description of *Cuttleford House's* "classic formal library," an enormous room, with built-in shelves as high as the twelve-foot ceiling, running the length of the room, with a wall of windows on the opposite side. A fireplace was at one end, with "various savage-looking tribal weapons mounted above it and a bookcase on either side. At the room's other end, a carved Jacobean table held magazines and newspapers; above it, a Mercator-projection map was mounted on the wall. It showed all of Britain's crown colonies and dominions and protectorates in pink, and it dated from a time when the sun never set thereon." Lecterns held copies of the *Oxford Universal Dictionary*, and a *National Geographic* atlas a half-century more recent than the map. A copy of the eleventh edition of the *Britannica* resided on a two-tiered bookcase. Tables, chairs and sofas were strategically positioned, with good reading light wherever you might sit. *Bernie* had already seen a picture of the library in the inn's brochure, "but you know what they say about the Grand Canyon. Nothing prepares you for it." He wanted to steal the whole room, to "wrap it up in a magic carpet...and whisk it back to New York." He felt he would need nothing more than that room to be perfectly happy.

The parlor of the inn also has floor-to-ceiling bookshelves, and books abound on nearly every surface and in every guest room. The whole description depicted *Cuttleford House* as an appealing place, especially to bibliophiles, though *Bernie* initially made a reservation to go there to please his girl friend, a lover of "all things English."

Then, of course, the novel turns dark, not the least reason being a snowstorm that strands all the guests and staff at the inn. The library is also dark, when *Bernie* sets out at night to find the rare copy of *The Big Sleep*. He hears furtive whispering coming from the library, his plans are foiled, he retreats to his room, and the next morning, a body (the first victim) is found in the library. At one point, *Bernie* even quotes **Emily Dickinson**: "there is no frigate like a book" which leads him back to the library on more than one occasion. He eventually solves the crime(s) and we discover "who-done-it" in the library, where the mystery had its beginning.

There are also descriptions of *Bernie's* bookstore in NY, of book selling and collecting, and several references that assure the reader of *Bernie's* expertise in book dealing. Of course there are many more characters that lend interest to the story, among them *Bernie's* good friend, *Carolyn*, his cat, *Raffles*, his former girl friend who has shown up at the inn with her brand new husband, a precocious 10 year old, a pompous British colonel, and many more. The story reminds one of **Chandler**, and in some cases **Hammett** (*The Thin Man*), and gives more than a nod to **Agatha Christie** (*Bernie as Hercule Poirot?*). *Bernie* is quite a likeable character (in spite of one of his more dubious professions) and I plan to read more of the *Burglar* series by **Block**.

Check out <http://www.lawrenceblock.com> for an entertaining Website and to learn more about the author.

On a quite different level, a couple of years ago I was introduced to *Arthur* through a memory card game by two of our grand-children, and learned more recently that a television show of the same name is broadcast on ETV. For those who aren't familiar with the show, *Arthur's* last name is "Read" and the show, among other things, emphasizes the pleasures of reading to children. The one show I watched had characters reading books, and ended (as many PBS shows do) with the suggestion that more stories like these can be found at the local public library, the difference being that an animated library was depicted at the end of the show!

On a recent trip to Reno to visit the just mentioned kids, we discovered one of the *Arthur* books, *D. W.'s Library Card* by **Marc Brown** (Little, Brown and Company, 2001, ISBN 0-316-73820-4 paperback). Given the title, I had to read it, and was immediately pleased to note that the book is dedicated to a "very special librarian." I learned that **D. W.** is

Arthur's younger sister, and she has her eye on a frog book in the library. *Arthur* won't check it out for her (he doesn't want "baby" books on his record), so she needs to get her own library card. The librarian tells her she has to be able to write her full name in order to get a card. This news upsets **D. W.** since she can hardly even say her full name (**Dora Winifred Read**), much less write it. Of course she eventually learns to write her name, even practicing one evening in mashed potatoes! **D. W.** is thrilled to finally get her own card, only to learn the book

she wants is checked out and she has to wait for it. (This story didn't include the joys of randomly searching shelves and picking out other possibly interesting books!) When the book is returned and she is finally able to check it out, she is told (not by the librarian but by the boy who returned it) that she has to treat the book very carefully, because "they take away your library card forever" if you hurt a library book!

Thus she is afraid to even touch the book, much less read it, until *Arthur* comes to her rescue. **D. W.** enjoys the book so much, she is sad when its time to return it, until she learns about the practice of "renewing." This book has wonderful illustrations and is a great book to use to introduce libraries to young readers.

Creator, author and illustrator, **Marc Brown**, published the first *Arthur* book in 1976 and has published more than thirty books for children, including another "library" title in the *Arthur* series: *Locked in the Library*. For more information about **Marc Brown**, check <http://www.twbookmark.com/children> and http://www.pbskids.org/arthur/grownups/marc_brown.

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So, where are we in our world of intellectual content and services? Are the security concerns significant enough to prevent librarians from using them in libraries? Part of me wants to simply observe, it is already too late and with the advent of penny tags, tags in books may be the least thing we have to fear. The other part of me is a bit worried about the invasion of privacy issue—but with the high price of today's tags, I don't need to stay up at night trying to make a decision of whether to use this technology in my library.

Of one thing I am sure, investing in a company that successfully develops a low cost blocking device is probably a good idea. Maybe a bunch of us about to retire could form a small business that sells such devices at political rallies and marches. Maybe I could wholesale them to the ice cream truck and bagel/hot coffee drivers (US), BBQ chicken wings and soy milk (Asia) that always show up at such events!

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paste, or printing. **xreferplus** also automatically adds a bibliographic citation to identify the source of the reference. **MARC** records are also available for download free of charge. Catalogers can select all the records, created by **DGI (Donohue Group Inc.)**, or a subset which they can select by title.

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Wandering the Web — Portals & Politics: Federal Government Gateways

by **Rosemary L. Meszaros** (Coordinator, Government Information & Law, Western Kentucky University)

Column Editor: **Jack G. Montgomery** (Western Kentucky University) <jack.montgomery@wku.edu>

What's this? Has the federal government become **Google-ized**, **YAHOO!-like**? In a word, yes! The government megasearch engine of them all is **FirstGov.gov**. Launched in 2000, **FirstGov.gov** works with federal agencies to encourage them to create portals organized around customer groups and topics, instead of agency names. It is much better organized and complete than a later White House initiative, the disappointing, **E-gov.gov** <http://www.egov.gov>. With **FirstGov.gov's** nudge, federal government portals have proliferated. You can see some of your federal tax dollars at work by visiting these gateways to government information. The best point about the "official government Websites" is that they are official. That is, the information comes right from the spigot. Here are a few of the best.

Matthew Lesko, watch out!

FirstGov.gov: <http://firstgov.gov/> — The megasearch engine of them all, **FirstGov.gov** seems to fly in the face of the **USA Patriot Act** by styling itself as "the official U.S. gateway to all government information. . . transcend[ing] the traditional boundaries of government. . . vision is global — connecting the world to all U.S. government information and services." Searches federal, local, tribal, state, the District of Columbia, and U. S. territorial governments' Websites.

FedStats: <http://www.fedstats.gov/> — Gateway to statistics from over 100 U.S. Federal agencies plus all of the states. Search by topic, keyword, or state. **FedStats** also includes links to statistical collections like Statistical Abstract of the United States, State and Metropolitan Area Data Book, National Transportation Statistics, and Health, United States.

FedWorld: <http://www.fedworld.gov/> — Find a federal job — updated daily. Search by geography, adjacency search a position by keywords; you can exclude military jobs.

GovBenefits.gov: <http://govbenefits.gov/index.jsp> — This is a free, confidential tool that

searches for government benefits. It does not require name, phone number, Social Security number, or any other identifying information. A series of questions narrows the retrievals to pertinent federal or state government benefit programs along with information about how to apply.

Grants.gov: <http://www.grants.gov> — Unearth and apply for competitive grants in 900 programs from 26 major Federal grant-making agencies.

Medicare.Gov: <http://medicare.gov/> — In English, Spanish and Chinese, this Website features drug pricing comparisons and other up to the minute information on Medicare.

Regulations.gov: <http://www.regulations.gov/> — Locate, review, and submit comments on federal regulations that are open for comment and published in the *Federal Register*, the Government's legal newspaper. As a member of the public, you can submit comments about these regulations, and have the Government take your views into account.

Recreation.gov: <http://www.recreation.gov/> — Auto touring, biking, hiking, boating, camping, fishing, lodging, water sports, winter sports, and more for every state, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico. For those of us who, like **Daniel Boone**, never really get lost but may become confused, there are maps and maps and maps, from simple outlines to ones with complicated overlays.

And, finally, a megaportal to search:

Cross-Agency Portals: http://firstgov.gov/Topics/Cross_Agency_Portals.shtml — Gateways that bring together federal information and services from multiple agencies about a particular topic or for a particular customer group. An alpha index navigates the page. A click on College Students brings you to <http://www.students.gov>. There are links to testing sites (GED, ACT, GRE, TOEFL, CLEP and others), preparing for college, choosing a school, details on financing an education, a parents' guide, and much more. Click on Seniors <http://firstgov.gov/Topics/Seniors.shtml> and an array of services

for Seniors appears, everything from Consumer Protection to Education, Volunteerism to Retirement & Money to Travel & Leisure. Interested in After School Programs? Click on it and connect to **Afterschool.gov** <http://www.afterschool.gov> for sites for kids, planning activities, and how to get money.

Cross-Agency Portals is an innovative site which draws together government resources and reveals a new way to research the treasury of government Websites.

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eral Motors to implant tags during manufacturing process to help them recover stolen cars — that data could be misused.

- Governments in search of terrorists could search for everyone.
- Insurance companies could place sensors near cancer treatment, AIDS clinics, hospitals, pharmacies, etc. to gather data and run it against the records of those seeking new policies.
- Libraries/publishers place tags in books and all sorts of bad people and organizations collect the information on the readers and use it for their purposes. (I'd like to know what books **GWB** reads — if any).

Give yourself a few minutes; I'm sure you, like me, have sufficient paranoia/malicious intent in you to think of a few more fearsome scenarios.

But as with everything, one person's problem is another's pot of gold. **Karen Dearn** in the 6 April 2004 edition of *The Australian* reports on a new product being developed by **RSA Security**. The product is seen as useful to both individuals and companies who don't want to be spied upon. Presumably people will one day be able to carry blocker devices around with them to prevent close by or remote scanners from reporting on them.

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Back Talk — RFID

Column Editor: **Anthony (Tony) W. Ferguson** (Library Director, University of Hong Kong; Phone: 852 2859 2200; Fax: 852 2858 9420) <ferguson@hkucc.hku.hk>

Does **RFID** stand for really father, I didn't ... leave the house last night, go to the movies without your permission, etc.? Some believe it might as well mean this because the detractors from **Radio Frequency Identification** technology fear monitoring by more than family fathers who believe they know best.

The idea of an **RFID** tag seems quite innocuous: little computer chips that tell about the object to which they are connected/related: book, clothing, pallet, steer, car, and possibly even people. While **Homeland Security** has not suggested everyone have a surgical implant, **Jay Cline** in a 15 March 2004 *Computerworld* article designed to allay **RFID** fears, notes "In Mexico, some children have reportedly had **RFID** tags implanted under their skin so that they can be tracked if they are kidnapped."

In Hong Kong **RFID** tag like devices are a part of our daily lives. We have "Octopus" cards that use the similar wireless technology on which we can download money and then use them for eight arms plus types of transactions: transportation on buses, subways, ferry services, and trains; purchases at 7-11's, supermarkets, cafeterias; parking meters; and of course at the copy machines at the University of Hong Kong's library. Although I normally chide my wife for the size of her purse, I look enviously when she simply rubs her bag against the reader when jumping on a lurching mini bus. I could even buy a watch for about \$30 with an Octopus tag built into it. Putting money on the Octopus card is easy; you go to a special machine that allows you to transfer money from your debit card onto your Octopus card, and of course you can do it with cash at the local 7-11.

There are other related uses of the same or related technologies here as well. Hong Kong people, I read, sport the most cell/mobile phones per person than any other group on the planet. These phones use a related technology to "broadcast unique identifiers by radio all day" (**Bruce McCabe**, 3 February 2004, *Australian IT*). Of course we, like others worldwide, have radio tags in the windows of our cars to pay bridge, tunnel, and road tolls and these of course track our movements by car.

So we can be tracked everywhere in any case.

Hong Kong's permanent residents are just now in the process of switching from the traditional plastic encased ID cards with criminal looking mug shots to smart ID's with name, birthdates, ID number, a digital photograph, and thumbprint (**Stella Lee**, 13 November 2003, *South China Morning Post*). People are expected to carry these cards with them at all times. Carrying ID's with you has long been the case in China. In Taiwan in the early 1960's, as a boy from Idaho and raised to distrust all governments, I would give the police a hard time when they periodically came to our apartment and ask to see our ID booklets. But normal people just accept the need to show their identity cards whenever asked. This new system simplifies the whole thing. The Government sees the new system as important. Those who fail to exchange their cards get to pay a US\$641 fine. It will also be used to facilitate border crossings into neighboring Shenzhen in China. Truck drivers with smart cards and whose trucks have tags will be able to swiftly cross the border (with a thumb print check) in minutes, instead of the current hours it takes to wait at some times of the day (**Stella Lee**). The rest of China is following suit with all billion plus residents to use them by 2008 (**Bill Salvadore**, 30 March 2004, *South China Morning Post*).

So when I read about **San Francisco Public Library's** problems about using **RFID** tags (**Bill Flagg**, December 2003, *American Libraries*) I wondered, "what is all the fuss" (he said with a wink and a wry smile)?

Libraries have been using bar codes for years and issues of privacy only came up when **FBI** agents wanted to check for code-enabled computerized circulation records of suspected criminals/terrorists. **RFID** tags are, however, as salesman **Steve Hall** has called them, "bar codes on steroids" (**Chris Conrath**, 6 February 2004, *Canadian Business and Current Affairs*). These tags, like the different varieties of smart cards prevalent in Hong Kong and other parts of the world, promise to do all sorts of things that libraries now do more expensively/awkwardly: patron self checkouts, shelf reading, inventory-

ing, lost book finding, returned book sorting, etc. At the moment, at least at my library, the threat is more theoretical than real because at a dollar a tag only the richest/most visionary libraries are clamoring for this technological experience. I would love to do it, but with 1.2 million volumes I can think of many other more attractive things to do with the money: buy more books, buy new furniture and carpets, switch from **Dewey** to **LC** to get shorter call numbers, and of course send all my staff to the **Charleston Conference** annually.

But technology will soon reduce the price considerably and force the privacy issues to the front burner. Consider some of the following bits of news gathered from a fast tour through **ProQuest** and **LexisNexis**:

- Tags employ not only a chip but an antenna that pick up energy from the reading devices. These antennas (metal coils) account for much of the cost and bulk of the **RFID** tag. A collaborative project between **Motorola** and **MIT** has found that the antennas can be replaced with "conductive carbon ink" and this, combined with a 3 millimeters square chip, may one day conquer the one "penny" a piece **RFID** barrier (**Charlie Schmidt**, March 2001, *Technology Review*). At which point my \$1.3 million dollar problem will fall to the cost of sending just myself to Charleston (+/-).
- Cheaper tags will be great, but the range and difficulties of the reading (energizing) devices is still quite limited. New developments in ultrawideband and 802.16 WiMax, "a point-to-point multipoint broadband wireless access standard which allows data rates of up to 70 Mbits per second at a range of up to 30 miles," will revolutionize the whole enterprise (**Joseph F. Kovar**, March 31, 2004, *Financial Times Information*; **LexisNexis**).
- Earlier thoughts that the chips in the tags would have to not only be further miniaturized but also have increased memory may prove incorrect since all that is needed is a simple ID number that is correlated with all the information about the item in a database (**Schmidt**).

But it is of course this new level of radio frequency data gathering capability that bothers everyone. Potential misuses of the technology include

- Companies placing readers near their products to count how many people look at their product, but presumably could also record who looked at their product when and where and with what other person.
- Other companies could put up readers to spy on other products.
- Companies could track where their consumers go — which data could also be misused.
- Insurance companies get **Ford** and **Gen-**

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