

Back Talk — The Library Hotel: Sweet Revenge

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Philip Wong's wrenched neck would have been painful, except for the sedatives he received every four hours. Of course he could end the pain by not twisting his neck to catch a glimpse of the person or persons watching through the little window in his door. He was under suicide watch, he was diagnosed as dangerously paranoid delusional because he "imagined" the guests at the **Library Hotel**, where he was the General Manager, were out to drive him crazy or worse.

Philip himself didn't know who to blame most. The biggest fault, no doubt, was the 2nd District Court judge who dismissed as frivolous **OCLC's** suit to stop the owners of the **Library Hotel** from using the **Dewey Decimal System** to number its rooms and various other services given to guests. But the next greatest object of blame was his own company's "the customer is always right" management principle—a point hammered into his head at **TQM** management training sessions, to which **Philip** had to submit himself in order to rise to the exalted position of General Manager.

The **Library Hotel** had quickly recovered from the initial negativity surrounding its lawsuit by **OCLC** which claimed the **Hotel** had infringed its trademark for the **Dewey Decimal System** name. The **Hotel** now had a nice 70-80% occupancy rate and the customers seemed to be pleased with the nostalgic associations produced by having rooms and tables classified using book call numbers. They also seemed to get a kick out collecting (sometimes even paying for) the drink coasters, tea towels, ashtrays, etc., that were all inscribed with call numbers. Finally, they enjoyed going to the library where they quickly figured out where to find books in which they were interested.

But disaster struck **Philip** when the owners of the **Library**

Hotel decided to try to make it up to the librarians whose call number system they had misappropriated. On the occasion of the meeting of the **American Library Association**, the management reduced its prices by 50% to only \$90 per night in order to do something nice for the librarians.

Philip had a premonition that something was wrong when the reservation desk was barraged with email requests for room reassignments. When guests were told the call number for their room, some immediately asked for a different room and some even specified the call number ranges that would, or would not, be acceptable. In general, these requests could be accommodated, but it was apparent that no librarian was willing to take some rooms because of their call numbers. This was solved by filling them with people attending a reunion of old South African settlers who had emigrated to America after the fall of Apartheid.

On the eve of the librarian's conference, the front desk was reduced to total chaos. No one seemed to be happy with their room assignment. A contingency of French book dealers refused to settle down in the rooms with German history call numbers and a German bookseller threatened to sue the hotel unless he was reassigned from a room with a holocaust call number. Some gay librarians refused rooms with numbers representing liberation call numbers while others demanded the same rooms. But these semi-understandable requests were only the beginning of the problem.

A whole other contingent of librarians objected to the numbers and the subject leadings that accompanied them. For example, the 306.872 room was wrongly labeled as the Animal Husbandry room. Then, the coaster sets at the bar, which came in sets of ten, were found to have all sorts of mis-

takes: a coaster with a 289.3 call number was labeled as Marxism. Each of these discoveries resulted in noisy harangues at the front desk, in the bar, and in the corridors. These complaints were finally quieted down with promises of reclassification and the use of black markers by the librarians who simply crossed out the wrong subject heading or call number. However, the librarians, unfortunately then discovered the **Library Hotel's** own library. Of course none of the call numbers were right and protestations that the **Hotel** had used the **Library of Congress** numbers inscribed on the verso of the title page were met with either shocked silence or an angry rebuke.

Philip thought that once the librarians self organized into teams that would reclassify everything in the Library, they would be happy. However, the self organized teams then moved on into the **Library Hotel's** offices. Archivists from among the guests inspected and reorganized all their records. **Philip** at that point had summoned the police, but when confronted by the bespeckled army of librarians, the police had simply bowed their heads and backed out of the hotel. The experience seemed to have reduced one officer to a blubbing mass of sobs because he then recalled a long suppressed childhood experience when his hand shut in a card catalogue drawer because he dared use it without supervision.

While all of this was going on inside, outside the **Hotel** the sidewalks were full of protesters. There was a steady line of **OCLC** employees who were delivered daily by a fleet of **Lincoln Continental** limousines which got in the way of similar vehicles sent to retrieve a few **Elsevier** apologists. There were joyful anti-Apartheid protesters who had gotten wind of the presence of the old settlers. And there seemed to be an endless train of risquely dressed men and women who seemed to be friends of the librarians.

Philip's employees had reacted to this mob of insane librarians in one of three ways. Many were seen filling out applications for work in libraries or, in the case of the college graduates, for library school. Others had quickly fled for greener pastures even if it meant lower salaries. Finally, another group called in sick until the librarians were to depart on Tuesday at noon. The end result for **Philip** was, in the face of so many defections, he was forced to deal with outraged individual librarians and unruly groups of them. They felt that since the **Library Hotel** had invaded their space, they were fully justified in returning the attack.

Philip had first tried to dull it all with an occasional drink. He had then followed that up with a few pills when he needed to go to sleep or wake up. Phone calls to his friend **Tony**, back in Hong Kong, while helpful in the beginning, ended when his librarian friend had his phone number changed.

But now it wasn't so bad. He was safely protected from all harm and danger in a nice pale green room and daily received a nice new straight jacket to take away the chill. And every hour or so, in deference to his native origins and tastes, someone would let him drink through a straw from a carton of soybean milk specially delivered from Chinatown. 

