

Modified: March 17, 2024 08:55

Opening Story

In the third century before the common era there was a great library in the city of Alexandria, Egypt. Seriously, if you don't know this, we request that you hand in your library degree at the door as you leave. Many tales have been told about this library and some of them are even true. One thing that isn't talked about as often as it should be is the Alexandrian Acquisitions Department. Yes, I know, thrilling stuff *mes amies*, but hang on, we're going someplace beyond an ancient library. See, there was a decree by Ptolemy II Philadelphus that, among other things, ordered agents of the library to search the ships flowing into and out of the busy port of Alexandria. This city was one of the biggest centres of trade in human history so we're talking about a *lot* of ships. These agents borrowed any books they found and brought them back to the library where they would be copied and added to the collection. It was often the case that the ships sailed away with the copies while the library kept the originals.

This was the first large scale version of an modern adage that "information should be free and it should belong to me." In the year of our goddess, 2024, can you imagine doing *anything* like that today? You'd have more lawyers at your front door than you have kids attending the herpetologist event at your summer reading programme.

Introduction

Oh yes, some introductions. Hi! I'm Dan. I've been working in libraries for almost 30 years from the front desk to ILS administration with a few stops in between. As a systems librarian I specialise in Polaris ILS administration, SQL hacking, data analysis and storytelling, library technologies, and circulation methodology. If you listen to library related podcasts you may also know me as your little free Cyberpunk Librarian. And with a name like that, it shouldn't be a big surprise that I'm fascinated by shadow libraries.

I've researched shadow libraries for around ten years. I can't be precise on that because I don't really know when I started approaching the topic as an area of study. My research has taken me not only through the outside usage of shadow libraries, but also through some of the internal aspects. As a shadow librarian I've worked mostly in cataloguing and interlibrary loan. But I've also worked in acquisitions and as a systems admin and software developer. And while it may sound strange to refer to departments within shadow libraries, believe me, we'll talk about that in moment.

Overview

Maybe first and foremost, what in the hell is a shadow library? I mean, some of you know but hey, some folks may be here because the name sounds *freakin' radical*, right? So, a shadow library is a collection of content and materials that aren't readily

accessible that are then made available to wider audiences despite any previous access limitations. There's an important word in that definition and another important word that *isn't* in the definition. The word that *is* there is "collection." A collection implies curation and just as a pile of books in the middle of a room doesn't make a library, a bunch of random materials doesn't make a collection. The word that's missing, the one that some of you may have expected, is "digital." While most shadow libraries deal in digital content like eBooks, video files, audio files, and so on; a shadow library doesn't need to be digital at all. I've seen online libraries, working with *physical* items, that are absolutely shadow libraries. The methodology is almost exactly the same, the only difference is the nature of the media.

Another aspect that may surprise some people is that a shadow library doesn't have to be someplace that offers pirated, illegal content that flies in the face of international copyright laws. I grant you, that's the norm, but it doesn't have to be that way. For the most part, a physical shadow library is perfectly legal. Then again, as Chris Hayes said, if libraries didn't exist we could probably never invent them now.

Today I'm going to talk mostly about digital shadow libraries, and what we can learn from them. Now, because of the nature of this topic I am absolutely going to be talking about breaking the law but I'm *not* going to talk about *how* to break the law except to say that the *how* is almost trivial. To focus in just a bit more, I'm sticking to browser based systems and services; specifically Anna's Archive, Library Genesis, Sci-Hub and Z-Library. We

won't get into the realm of chatroom based shadow libraries that you can find on IRC, Discord, and Matrix servers. And we won't get into massive collections delivered through torrents and other peer-to-peer systems. What I mean to say by telling you all of the things that I *won't* be talking about is that the world of shadow libraries is vast and there are many ways in which they operate.

The Flow

You might be surprised that shadow libraries have a very similar structure and flow to traditional libraries. Or maybe not, because after all, like that anti-drug commercial that was all over the TV in the 1980s, they learned it by watching us. The flow of materials into and out of a shadow library looks almost exactly like what you'd find in your own libraries. Materials are:

- Acquired - Through scanning, copying, etc.
- Catalogued - Metadata makes the materials findable
- Presented - We might call this an OPAC
- Distributed - Circulation, kind of
- Statistics - Shadow libraries love stats too

There's even a similar architecture to the collections that we find in our integrated library systems like:

- Material Types - ePub, mobi, pdf, azw
- Collections - mostly user generated, but librarians are users too
- Series - Good news! They have trouble with this as well!

And, as I mentioned, there are departments, even though they're not as well defined and, take note, one person can literally

work in all of these departments at the same time. Within a traditional library, you might find common departments like:

- Acquisitions
- Administration
- Cataloguing
- Circulation
- Information Technology
- Interlibrary Loan
- Outreach & Community Services
- Patron Services (Adult, Teen, Youth)
- Reference

But not all of those departments exist within a shadow library. You can pretty much eliminate Circulation since all of the circ is patron initiated. You can also take out Reference and Patron Services. There aren't many shadow libraries that offer services that match traditional online reference nor do they offer programming for adults, teens, and children.

Removing Barriers to Access

At its heart, the core motive of any shadow library is to remove barriers to access. And they start by dropping one of the key barriers that you will find at any library, one that I'm almost positive that 100% of all of your place in front of your patrons.

The library card.

The first obstacle that anyone walking into a library today will face is the fact that they cannot fully use the library unless they have a card. And while some of y'all may have things set up so

that all of those wonderful databases and third party services work on your in-house public computers, I'm willing to bet a crisp dollar to a delicious donut that that's not the case for everyone in this room.

As things go, most shadow libraries don't use anything so limiting as a library card. Z-Library is an exception here in that Z-Library wants you to create an account and, by doing so, you'll be able to download more items per day. But the others, like Anna's Archive, Sci-Hub, and Library Genesis don't care who you are and, in most cases, they have no desire to know *anything* about you.

Now, am I advocating dropping library cards? No. Of course not. Unlike shadow libraries, we have to abide by these pesky things called "laws" and "contracts." If we want to offer legal access to services, we need to have rules in place as to who can access them and the overarching rule is that whoever pays for them can access them. Which is why libraries tend to be local organizations bound up in tax laws. However, have you really taken a good look at what you offer *everyone* who walks through the front door? Are you allowing as much as possible to as many as possible? Anyone walking through your door is a patron, whether they have a card or not. Maybe you are, but I urge you: take an honest look at your services and see if there's any barrier you can remove.

For instance, I have access to some pretty awesome databases, and this is the biggest public librarian flex in the world right here. I can use JSTOR, EBSCO, Gail, and a lot more like them and,

believe me, I did exactly that while working on this presentation. If you have anything like this, can anyone who sits down at a public computer do the same?

I also used Sci-Hub and Anna's Archive because they have a far better selection, they're easier to use, everything is in one place, and it seriously helps me prove a point here: It is often the case that you are treated better as a pirate than you ever will be as a customer. Gabe Newell, the guy behind Valve video game studio and Steam online gaming said that piracy is a service problem, not a price problem. I can probably get most of the papers I read for free from plenty of libraries, but either I couldn't find them as easily or they didn't have them at all.

Now, let's explore the common departments between shadow libraries and traditional libraries. While there are plenty of differences, there's also many similarities and, I believe, lessons we can learn.

Acquisitions

I will be perfectly honest, acquisitions is not my specialty at all. However I think I have a decent grasp on the concept of buying things for the library and I've worked with plenty of acquisitions librarians and collection development specialists over the years that I kinda see how this game is played. Like any game, there are rules and sometimes the rules are the problem.

What's your collection development policy? Some libraries are unlikely to touch anything unless its popular and/or has a positive and starred review in a library periodical. I've seen

libraries that will pass on buying books from local authors because that author isn't popular enough yet, or they're "just" a local author, or their work doesn't seem to fit within the collection.

That in mind, let me tell you a quick story about a movie called *Terminal City Ricochet*. This is one of the most independent of indie films that came out in 1990. This is a punk rock, counterculture, cyberpunk cult masterpiece featuring Jello Biafra of the Dead Kennedys and Joe Keithley of DOA. It was shot entirely in British Columbia and has a soundtrack featuring some raging Canadian punk bands. It also, as of late 2023, was almost entirely unobtainable. They probably printed such a small quantity of DVDs that they're just strewn to the four winds. You couldn't buy it anywhere, not even on eBay. You couldn't even pirate the movie because one of the first steps in pirating anything is obtaining a copy of it. Someone reached out to me on Mastodon and asked if I knew of anyplace that might have it. They'd checked some libraries but came up empty.

They had not, however, checked WorldCat.

I found a single copy, *one freakin' copy*, my friends. You know where it was?

Greater. Victoria. Public. Library. In British Columbia.

Is this an important piece of media? Well, maybe. We could say it was very important to this person who reached out to me. I believe some guy named Ranganathan wrote something about that, something like every book its reader or, in this case, every DVD its viewer? But leaving that aside, we were able to work

with a local in Victoria who literally lived down the street from this library. They were able to check out the DVD and rip a digital copy for this person who was doing everything possible to obtain it legally. I mean literally, they were talking to a source in Germany who *might* have a copy. Coincidentally, you can watch it on the Internet Archive these days.

The acquisitions and collection development policies for a shadow library are easy to understand because, they want everything, everywhere, all at once. For the most part, they do not discriminate against anything. If you want to see a modern, technological realization of the Five Laws of Library Science, you don't need to look any farther than a shadow library. They passionately adhere to all five laws.

Have you looked at your collections development policies recently and asked yourself, are we excluding anything that might be important to the library and our patrons simply because the policy says we should? You see, the thing is, people have lots of choices right now and your library is simply *one* of them. And for all your stats on what's popular, what's circulating, and what's important there is a critical stat that's almost impossible to get: What is that people *aren't* checking out because the library won't order it? Another critical stat that's almost impossible to obtain? How many people *aren't* coming back the library because they've come to expect that you don't have the things they want?

Y'all are a bunch of librarians, so I know that some of you have heard of the survivorship bias. This is something that came out of World War II when a bunch of researchers working for the Centre

for Naval Analyses were looking over some aircraft that made it back from various engagements and sorties. These aircraft, man, they were shot full of holes. Some of them barely made it back. So these researchers, they looked at all these bullet holes and said we gotta reinforce these sections, look at all these bullet holes! But one guy, a Jewish Hungarian mathematician named Abraham Wald said no. We need to put the armor where the bullet holes *aren't*. See, these planes made it back. So their damage?

Apparently it wasn't catastrophic to the pilot or the aircraft.

But you see these voids where the holes *aren't*? Very few of the planes that made it back had significant damage to these areas. That means that, if a plane was shot here in, say, the engines or the rear fuselage, it didn't make it back to the airfield. You want planes and pilots to come back and fight another day, *that is* where you put the armor.

Okay, so what?

Well, be very careful about what you dismiss from your collection and your collection development policies. Sure, you gotta have the latest James Patterson, J. D. Robb, and John Grisham. You need to get that celebrity biography that's going to be a movie in the next six months starring at least one British person and directed by someone with a shelf full of Oscars. But don't discount that paperback urban fantasy romance that's *just* bordering on erotica in much the same way that Saskatchewan borders on Canada. You might not get a lot of people who are directly asking for sleazy mysteries, light-hearted romance, goofy science-fiction, or dark fantasy... but believe me, *they want it*.

What I'm trying to say is make sure that you're covering your weaknesses just as much as you're enhancing your strengths.

I'm going to do something really weird and put some Polaris SQL code up on the screen. Don't worry, this stuff is on the website so you can just go and snag it there. What you're looking at here is a query that will pull a list of everything that was checked in as an in-house circulation. In other words, this tells you what patrons pulled off the shelves but *didn't* check out for one reason or another. What those reasons might be? Who knows? But if you look, you might spot some of those things that bring people to your library, but they can't check out. Materials about LGBTQ+. Books about Wicca. Maybe something about how babies are made. At the very least, this data is just one thing that might help you put your armor in the right places.

Administration

Any organization is made of hierarchies, the clue is in the word "organization." And shadow libraries are no different. Sure, almost everyone involved is an unpaid volunteer. People come and go. There is no HR. But you know what's still really important?

Communication.

Without communication all is chaos and irresponsible redundancy. As one of those rare nerds who enjoys watching sports, allow me one football metaphor here when I say that you're not gonna score a lot of touchdowns if your entire team isn't involved with moving the ball down the field. In almost 30

years of library work, I've seen some things go horribly awry because someone didn't make a phone call, send an email, message someone on Slack, or just have a conversation.

Within a shadow library, flexibility is a top priority. One person can fill many roles and there's no problem with that because the organization will utilize expertise wherever they find it. So yeah, that one person who basically does nothing but scan books sticks their hand up one day and says "Hey, a certain process might be better if we did X or Y." For the most part, someone with access to change that process will look at that idea and evaluate it on the basis of its own merit. They don't care that it came from a person who normally scans books.

Now, within our library organizations we have rules about who can do what and where. If a front desk circulation person turns up in children's services, putting on an impromptu storytime that isn't on the event calendar, there will be some questions. But don't be so quick to dismiss someone's ideas simply because they don't work in your department. An outside perspective can be helpful and occupational position is not a statement of expertise. When I was an assistant circ supervisor, I had a page who reported to me.

Yeah, she had a master's degree and spoke three languages. She was looking for work in her field but it was highly competitive and she was getting bored sitting at home. Needless to say, if she had an idea, I listened to it. Ideas, help, insight, and innovation can appear from anywhere. Don't get so hung up in your org chart that you dismiss something just because it wasn't

invented in your department.

Cataloguing

So I hope some of you are old enough to remember this. I've found that, as I've progressed through my career, everybody seems to be getting younger. Yeah, it's weird, I know. I mean, there are library directors who are much younger than I am and I have feelings about that, ya know? But some of you might remember October of 2002 and a little article, only a bit over 1,100 words, that was the talk of the library world for the better part of a year if not longer. It was written by Roy Tennant and it was titled "MARC Must Die."

As you can see, one morning back in 2002, Roy woke up and chose anger.

Now, Roy made a lot of good points in that article, but I'm going to focus on two of them. The first one is that there are two kinds of people who *believe* they can read a MARC record without referring to a stack of manuals: a handful of top cataloguers and those on serious drugs. But the more important point he discussed is that no other profession uses MARC or anything like it.

And over the intervening two decades between then and now we've struggled to replace this... with this. Now, I know what this looks like to those of you who aren't cataloguers, but heroes within the cataloguing world are working hard to convert libraries to BIBFRAME, a format that, while it's solidly geared towards library work, would also make sense to an outsider...

provided they can read XML.

Sure, I grant you, we're looking at XML in the age of JSON, but conversions can be made.

But all that work and all that said, guess what? Almost nobody outside of the library world is using BIBFRAME either! I mean, beloved, there are plenty of entities *in* the library world that aren't using BIBFRAME. So no surprises that shadow libraries don't use anything like this and they use nothing like Dewey or LCC cataloguing. Instead they tend to use descriptive, user generated tags and a cataloguing system more akin to BISAC than anything else. I'm going to say something unpopular here but the difference between Dewey, LCC, and BISAC is that two of those systems were created for librarians and the third one was created for people.

There are no authority records to speak of. Within the metadata, the *database* is the authority and bibliographic record. If you've ever used the Calibre eBook management system, you'll find that, if you add an item by Melissa Scott, her name becomes part of the database. If you manually add something by her later on, her name will auto-populate as you type. There's already a Melissa Scott in the database and we assume her name is spelled properly. And, as I said, MARC, and even BIBFRAME aren't used anywhere outside of the library profession and yet, *and yet*, people are still able to find the things they want on Amazon, Bookshop.org, a dozen other content services, and within shadow libraries.

The sad thing about MARC records is that, for many libraries,

their records are also proprietary — because they came from OCLC. They can't even freely share the metadata because, ya know, copyright and such. No other field has hamstrung itself quite like this one. If only there were other ways.

As you can see, this morning *I* woke up and chose anger.

Interlibrary Loan

Now, beloved, we come to something special. Because this is a backchannel in the backchannels. ILL within shadow libraries really isn't much of a thing. After all, if Z-Library doesn't have a book you're after, you can go try Anna's Archive. There's no need, really, for one shadow library to transmit an item to another because you can just get it from the other place as easily as you could any other shadow library.

But that doesn't mean that shadow ILL isn't a thing. In fact, a case could be made that it's *the* thing because, in many cases, people aren't looking for pirated eBooks.

They're looking for *articles*. If you're a student working on your master's thesis or your doctoral dissertation, then you are likely working at the edge of your field. You're going to need academic papers and journals that your university may or may not have access to. And, given the raging hellscape that is the *legal* world of academic journals and articles, the shortest distance between the masters and the doctorate could be Reddit...

Or it might be Sci-Hub, Discord, Matrix, or social networks.

There are librarians and students out there keeping tabs on a couple of subreddits or they're watching for messages on various

chat systems and social networks. Specifically they're watching out for calls for help when a student needs something with a title like *An Effective Description of Laniakea: impact on cosmology and the local determination of the Hubble Constant*, which, yeah, it's out there somewhere but maybe they can't put their hands on it. The process is simple: A request is placed. Few, if any, questions are asked. Someone responds with a link to an open website where the paper can be acquired. And everyone moves on. Depending on the norms and mores of the group, the original request might be deleted after the paper is secured.

It's not always papers, mind you, though that's a significant portion of the requests. Here in the United States, we enjoy a fair use law that allows us to do things like make photocopies of textbooks. Granted there are problems that arise from *sharing* those photocopies. But in places like Uruguay, the act of photocopying textbooks is, in itself, a violation of copyright law and no exceptions are made for educational purposes. So much so that, in 2013 there was a raid at the copyshops near the University of the Republic in Montevideo. A raid that Interpol was involved with. They were there to shut down these copyshops because students were using them to make and share photocopies of textbooks and assignments. So please, enjoy the fair use doctrine we have here in the United States and hey, maybe share it aboard too if someone needs it.

The thing is, interlibrary loan can be your library's killer app. Think about this, you *could* be telling all your patrons that you can get almost anything they need. Almost anything they want.

Doesn't matter if it's in *your* library's collection, you can get it. Folks, that's one of the most powerful things about modern libraries, the fact that we can get almost anything from anywhere. And with that in mind, how heavily are you marketing your ILL programme? And never mind the marketing, how *restrictive* is it? I've worked as an ILL coordinator three times over my career and, each time, there was always something we weren't allowed to order. Can't order anything released within the last 365 days. We can't order media or maybe we can, but we can't order Blu-Ray DVDs. We can't order new media. We can't order mass market paperbacks. And so on and so forth. You turn more people away with every restriction that you add.

And that includes processes. I've placed ILL requests at lots of public libraries and no one seems to do it the same. For some libraries, requesting an ILL is as easy as placing a hold on the latest Patterson novel. At other libraries.... This is a sanitized copy and paste, because I'm not here to name and shame. This comes from an actual library website and that library uses Polaris. Tell me you don't want me to use ILL without actually telling me that you don't want me to use ILL.

Meanwhile, I can place a request on Reddit and have a response back, well, sometimes in minutes and certainly within 24 hours. An ILL should be one of the easiest things for your patrons to use.

Information Technology

I'm absolutely convinced that IT has one of the most frustrating

jobs in the world. Because when everything is working and nothing is wrong, people are wondering why we need all these IT staff members. And then, when something goes wrong, they blame IT for doing nothing to prevent it. It's an invisible job until it's thrust into the spotlight and then everyone is throwing tomatoes at it. If there is a valid criticism of IT it's that it tends to move very slowly and, for a department so invested in technology it's sometimes difficult to obtain an investment in new technology.

That makes sense, to some extent. We are absolutely invested in our systems and if you don't believe me, I invite you to look around and remember that you're listening to this at a national conference surrounding very specific library software products. Even if something came along tomorrow that's so much better than what we have now, to where the benefits are obvious and the price is comparable, how quickly would you switch? A better question is how quickly *could* you switch? I've been involved in eight ILS migrations, seven of which as a Polaris admin. They never go smoothly, and that's not throwing shade at Polaris or the previous ILS. It's just that these are highly complex systems and there are a lot of moving parts. It's like trying to swap engines from one Volkswagen Microbus to another while the engines are *still running*.

And none of this stuff is cheap. I mean, even if you're running something that's free and open source, that only means the *software* is free. You're still on the hook for hardware, and you're still gonna need to pay people to keep it operating.

The problem I've seen is where that attitude carries over to things that aren't so involved or require such a high level of investment, especially when it's something new that no one in IT understands. That's nothing against IT either, because face it, there are plenty of CIOs who don't have an MLIS. Chances are good that many of you work for someone who fully doesn't understand what you do.

So if a new idea comes along, it can be set back or outright denied with the words "We can't support that." Years ago I attended a talk by Dr. Michael Stephens where he said something along the lines of, back in the 90s librarians gave a lot of power over to IT and we've been trying to get it back ever since. There's an inherent conflict between keeping up with changes in technology while maintaining a secure digital system. And, in many ways, the philosophy of librarianship is diametrically opposed to cybersecurity in that we want to give things away while it's IT's job to lock stuff down.

But, as I said, innovation can come from anywhere and, unfortunately, there are few libraries that have an R&D department. So chances are, when it comes to new library technology, it's going to come from outside any library IT department. Computers are ubiquitous. They're literally everywhere and they have been for years. There are X number of people in this room and I can give you pretty good odds that means there are X number of computers in this room, either in your pocket, your bag, or in your hotel room. Don't know about you, but I'm standing up here with four of them and that's just

me. So if anyone forgot theirs, I've got part of that statistic covered.

What I mean here is that, you've got people who grew up with computers who are *really* good with them, and they *do not* work in IT. So there's a good chance that, somewhere, in your organization, there is someone who knows more about some facet of computers and technology than anyone in IT. And in some cases, that person will be considered a threat. I've personally been singled out twice simply because I know how write code.

On the dark side, that person can be an asset. Because you wanna hear a secret? Lots of people working in shadow libraries don't have an MLIS either. But if something new arises, whether it's a new idea or a new technology, it'll be evaluated on its own merit without a whole lot of squabbling over "where did *this* come from?" If you're involved in IT, be on the lookout for Not Invented Here syndrome and please, be open to trying something new. There's nothing wrong with running a pilot project, seeing what happens, looking at the results, and then making an informed decision. If it doesn't work, then you can stop doing it.

Outreach & Collaboration

I put these two concepts together because, while they're not the same thing, they will hold hands while crossing the street. And while many libraries will have an outreach department that deals with community events and involvement and might encompass, say, a books by mail programme — one of the first points of outreach and community involvement is your OPAC. Whether

you're using Vega, PowerPAC, Sierra Web, Encore, Aspen, BiblioCommons, or you've rolled your own; your OPAC, or your discovery interface, is likely to be the first point of contact with many of your patrons today. Assuming your catalogue is accurate, and I know, that can be a big ask, you've got two big questions that pop up immediately: "How fast is your OPAC?" and "How easy is it the first time?" Yeah yeah yeah, I know, you've got a lot of cool features in your PAC and there are so many things it can do, right? But for a new person, hitting your website for the first time — a new person who thinks Vega is a star and Polaris is a snow mobile — how easy is it for them to run a search and find what they're after?

Because now, you're not just competing with Amazon anymore. You're competing with this. And folks, that's pretty easy to figure out. And look at all the options you have to obtain this book, which brings me to a quick point about branding.

It's not so bad now, but I sometimes run into a relic of years past where librarians, especially marketing focused librarians, are absolutely hung up on their library's brand. I've seen instances where librarians are pushing third party vendors like Kanopy or OverDrive, or Hoopla to minimize their own brand in favour of the library's. The idea being that patrons may get confused by starting at Anytown Public Library's website and suddenly finding themselves on a new website called Hoopla. Now, while there is some wisdom there, I firmly believe that this is an attitude from an increasingly bygone era. People bounce all over the web all day long and if you think they're going to be confused by your

various services, may I point you to this helpful diagramme that explains how one would go about watching all of *Pokemon* in order.

Thanks to streaming services reinventing cable TV, people are more used to jumping from service to service while looking for the thing they want. I'd advise you educate your patrons rather than minimizing or maximizing anyone's brand. Because folks, patrons want a thing, and if you don't have it, they'll find it somewhere else. This is what you're looking at here on Anna's Archive. There are multiple places to get this book and no one using this shadow library cares where it comes from. Honestly, Anna's Archive... if it's not the biggest union catalogue in the world, it's gotta be in the top three.

Moreover, shadow libraries tend to freely share their data. In the case of Anna's Archive, they also tend to freely share other's data too but we'll leave that aside for now. Rolling back to cataloguing for a moment, how shareable is your data when its locked up in MARC and BIBFRAME? But even if you could just wholesale drop your MARC exports online for anyone to see and use, could you? Did you get any of those records from OCLC? Then I have bad news for you.

Within shadow libraries, interoperability is a priority. As I said, Anna's Archive is a union catalogue and I wasn't joking. They have their own collection but they also reference, mirror, and enhance the collections of Z-Library, Sci-Hub, Library Genesis, and the Internet Archive. They can do this because the data is incredibly portable. Sure, the databases are huge in and of

themselves, and it's not a trivial process to share the databases between systems, at the very least they aren't hindered by standards utilized solely by a single institution.

Now, this is a library conference in 2024 and I think there was something in the speaker's agreement that stated that I had to mention AI. Funny thing about AI and generative pre-trained transformers, and I don't mean my friend Rewind here, who by the way, is a librarian and so is Optimus Prime. No I'm not making that up, read the lore.

But isn't it a funny thing that, if you and I were to download copies of the entirety of season one of *Halo*, Microsoft would call us criminals. But, when Microsoft secures a massive investment in OpenAI, a company that trained its models on everything it could get its hands on, regardless of copyright let alone permission, oh that's fine! That's just technological innovation and disruption! Yani here laid it out beautifully in a single Mastodon post. This duality doesn't fall on deaf ears in the shadow libraries. Anna's Archive is looking for someone to partner with to, basically, ya know, introduce 25 and a half million books and almost 100 million academic papers to an AI.

Now, think about that. If you had access to an AI that's read through the entirety of that many books and papers and could generate even halfway decent answers to your questions? I mean, there are probably millions of MARC records out there that don't even include a decent summary, nor do they have anything from the description on the book jacket or the back of the box — never mind the *entire contents* of the book. You'd be looking at a holy

grail for the weary reference librarian. Because finally, after five thousand years of library history, they have a chance to find that book, about that one guy, with the hair, and the cover was blue. That kind of innovation is just as likely, and I honestly think it's *more* likely, to come from the realm of shadow libraries than it is from OpenAI or its "legitimate" competitors.

So what can we learn here in traditional library community outreach and collaboration? Well, the first thing I want to point out is that shadow libraries, for the most part, don't compete amongst themselves. Anna's Archive is well aware that you can get something from any other shadow library and you'll get it for the same price. So much so that Anna's Archive is willing to direct you to that other location to get the item you're after. Funny that, because the same is true among various perfectly legal libraries. Yet, I've seen competition and even animosity among different library systems operating in the same geographic areas.

Stop that. Seriously, knock it off. No one has to lose for anyone to win. Everyone can win. You have an obligation to serve the public. Anything that can be done to further that goal, should be seriously examined and evaluated and, if it looks good... implemented. Anything you can share; data, expertise, collections, services, facilities, it doesn't matter. The ability to work with other libraries, building and enhancing services, that's powerful. Shadow libraries excel at being more than the sum of their parts, and so do we. But sometimes, we forget that's a core strength.

This right here. This is one of my favourite shirts. For those that

might not be able to see it, it says “What’s more punk than the public library?” It was designed and sold by the Mount Pleasant Library Friends. I actually own a couple of these shirts because I believe in backup copies. See, the weird thing is, punk is often entirely misunderstood. People think of punks as a bunch of weirdos with spiked hair, multiple piercings, tattoos, and wild attitudes. And if you’ve ever met some of these Polaris admins around here....

But the thing is, the actual ethos of punk revolves around ideals that have been a foundation of the public library for a long time now, and they’re just as present in shadow libraries. Ideals like sharing, non-conformity, openness, direct action, and a strong undercurrent of anti-consumerism. We believe that knowledge... should be something for everyone.

I dunno, man, that sounds pretty damn punk to me.

Rock and roll, and thanks for listening.