

Editorial

Anyone who has seen the long-running musical, *Cats*, will remember Mr Mistoffelees, the original conjuring cat, and the chorus which goes:

*"And you'll all say, oh,
Well I never
Was there ever
A cat so clever
As magical Mr Mistoffelees."*

It seems the world of serials now has its own conjurers at work.

One of the great intractable problems for librarians with reducing budgets has been the relentless increase in the cost of serials, for very good reasons we are told.

Suddenly, through a scheme devised by the Higher Education Funding Council for England and three publishers, a magical solution appears to have been found. Expensive journals have become affordable. The money saved is available for other purchases and academics enjoy a reduction in the unit cost of knowledge. All is revealed on page 247.

The side effects will be watched with great interest, not least by the non-academic librarians who may wonder what will happen to the prices they are charged.

Another well-known magician, Richard Rowe, late of the Faxon Company and now of RoweCom, with one wave of his magic wand appears to be able to eliminate all the traditional subscription agents and create an environment where librarians will lock on to publishers direct. See this issue for full details.

It is perhaps not surprising that subscription agents feel, if not endangered, at least beleaguered (see Letters to the Editor). Do they have their own friendly magician with a benign

wand? The answer, it is hoped, is yes, in the form of David Brown of DJB Associates, who is planning an indepth study which will be an "Assessment of the present and future roles for serials subscription agents and other intermediaries in the distribution of electronic documents - a multi-client study."

This survey could have far-reaching effects on the future role of subscription agents, and establish a clear path through the present jungle.

On a totally different topic, it may seem a bit soon to be thinking about the UKSG Annual General Meeting next April, but by the March issue it will be too late. Unfortunately AGMs have a bad image, being seen as boring and a place where you may be landed with a job you really do not want. Sensible people stay in the bar.

In fact, the AGM is very important, as it is the forum where the officers and committee are answerable for their stewardship. Our recent AGMs have been noted for being quiet and uncontroversial, plus the fact that very few members have come forward to stand for election. Silence at an AGM may indicate complete satisfaction, or complete inertia. Either way it is very disappointing for the hard working officers and committee.

It is unhealthy for an organisation to become cosy and complacent. I hope these few words will galvanise more of our members to desert the bar and attend the AGM, ask questions and make suggestions, and particularly to stand for election to the committee.

John Merriman