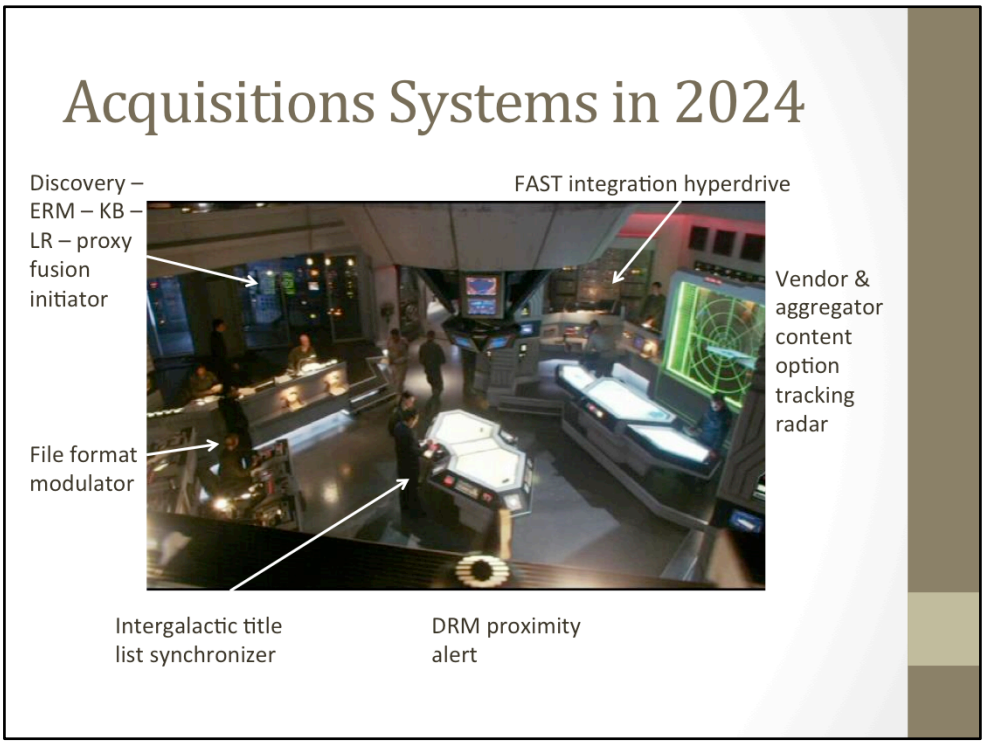
I've been asked to go first because this is one of those "big picture" talks – there won't be any images of code in this presentation – I'll be talked about some of the larger issues that I think the mostly techie audience of code4lib should be paying attention to

The background to this talk – this is actually a job talk I did – Simon Fraser University posted the Head of Acquisitions & Serials position last summer – I applied and I made the short list – as part of the interview I had to do a presentation to library staff – with some modifications, that's the talk I'm doing today – I would never have thought about recycling a job talk for code4lib BC, but Mark Jordan suggested it – of course when I did it as a job talk, the title didn't mention Battlestar Galactica – the real title was …

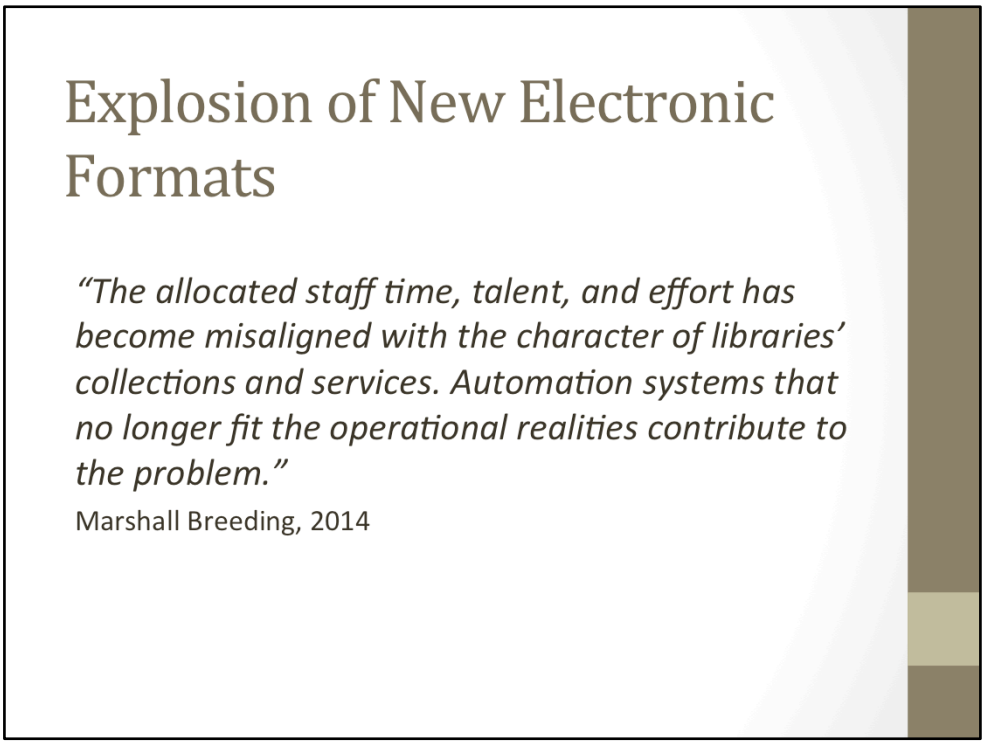
Of course if I'd submitted the talk to code4lib with this title, it never would have been accepted – so I did that old trick where you submit a fake title and then do a different talk – you can blame Mark Jordan for making you sit through this – but there will be Battlestar Galactica, I promise that

So I started the job talk with a science fiction scenario – I asked the audience to cast their minds forward to an imaginary future in which all the challenges in collections management in academic libraries have been solved – a future when there's one unified system which manages everything – it might look something like this …

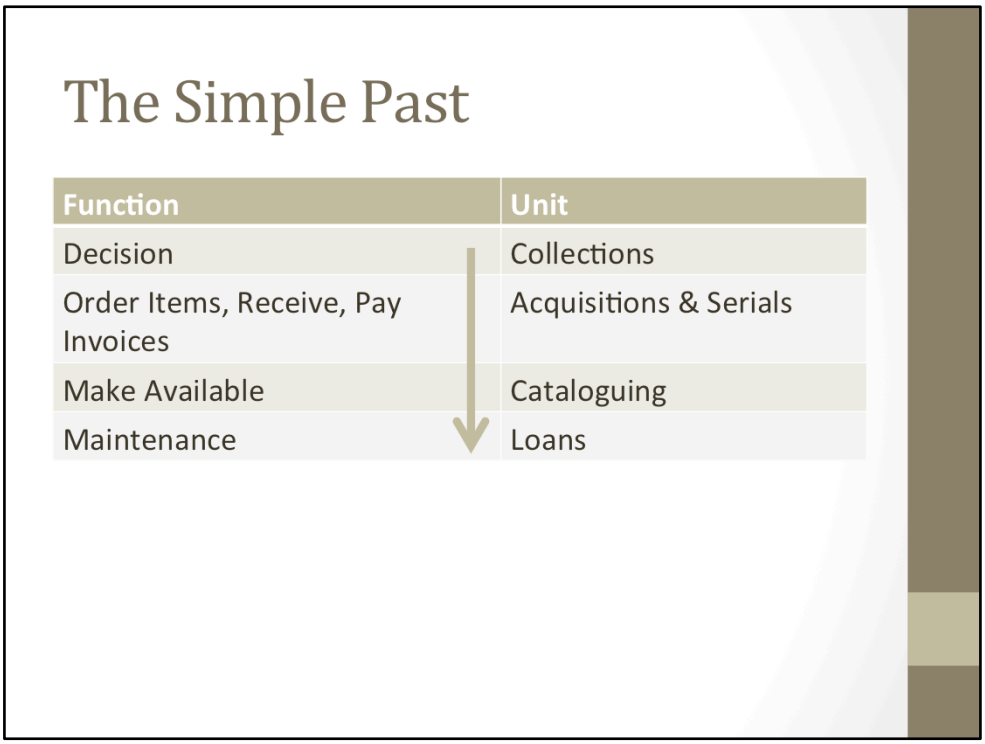


[point out the various features of the collections command post – also mention the Demand Driven Acquisition Budget containment field]

How does this system work? – imagine a request for an ebook is placed by a librarian – the system knows all the options: lease from vendor A, purchase individual title from source B, it's in aggregator package C, or available at DDA title in package D, or a partner library has the ebook with ILL rights, or it's available open access from Hathi Trust – ordering is a simple as clicking a button – fully integrated with library's monograph vendor – available on preferred platform as well as all appropriate file formats and for all ebook reader devices, with reasonable DRM – proxy server configuration is automatic, as is integration into the discovery layer – the MARC record is imported – I know this is science fiction, but I'm pretty sure we'll still be stuck with MARC hundreds of years in the future – licence details are added to the ERM – routine maintenance includes automatic checking to make sure access hasn't been lost – there's automatic linking with other university systems such as finance to pay for the item and the learning management system



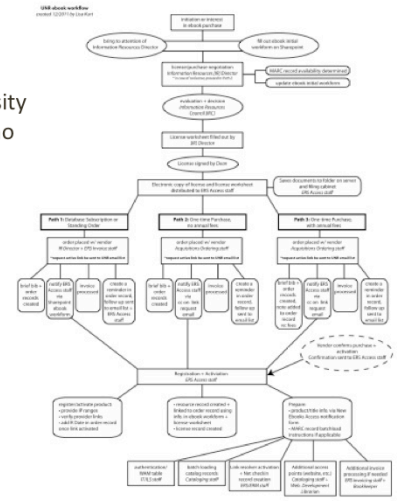
Many of the features I've mentioned are obvious – that's how it ought to work - but the scenario definitely was science fiction – why aren't we there yet? – we're witnessing an explosion of electronic formats, first ejournals and now moving to ebooks and streaming media and data sets and everything else – most academic libraries spend 70-90% of their budgets on electronic resources – meanwhile library systems and workflows and organizational structure are struggling to adapt – [read MB quote]



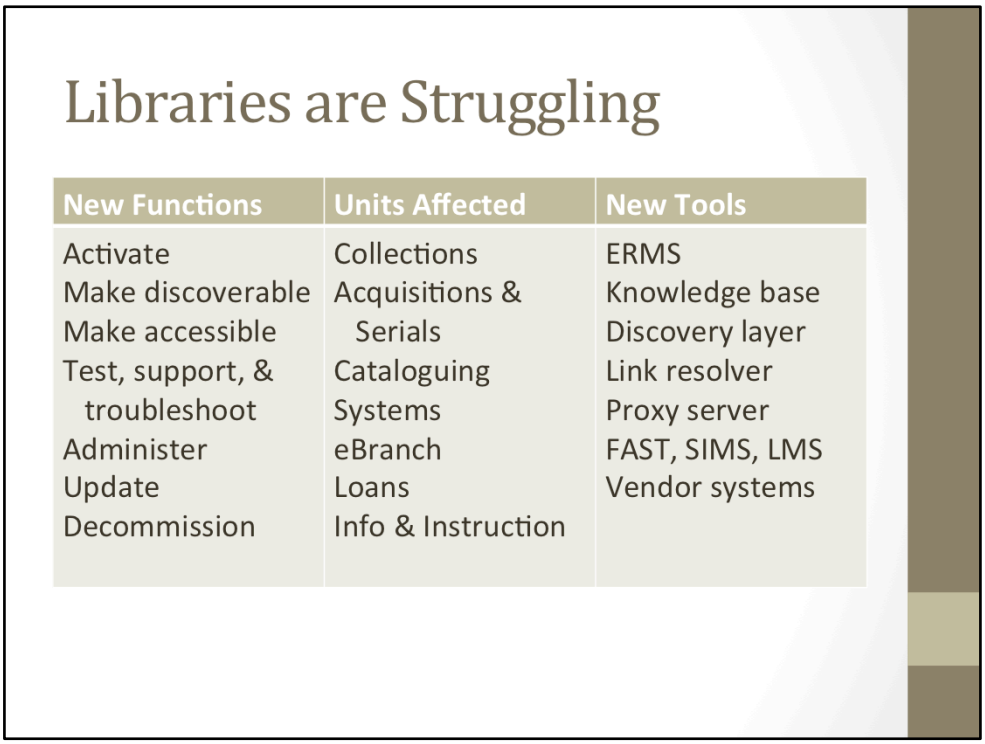
So how did we get here? – how did it work in the past? – this diagram is simplified, but it's basically correct – in the print world the functions and who was responsible for them was clear, the workflow was straightforward – decisions came from Collections & subject librarians, Acquisitions handled the monographs, Serials did the continuing resources, they passed items to Cataloguing for inclusion in the ILS, then Loans looked after them – each unit had its own module of the ILS – there was a physical item to pass along, so you knew where everything was in the workflow – it was a simple linear flow, almost silos – "you do your bit, I don't need to know, just pass it to me when you're done with it"

The Confusing Present

Ebook Workflow Diagram, University of Nevada at Reno

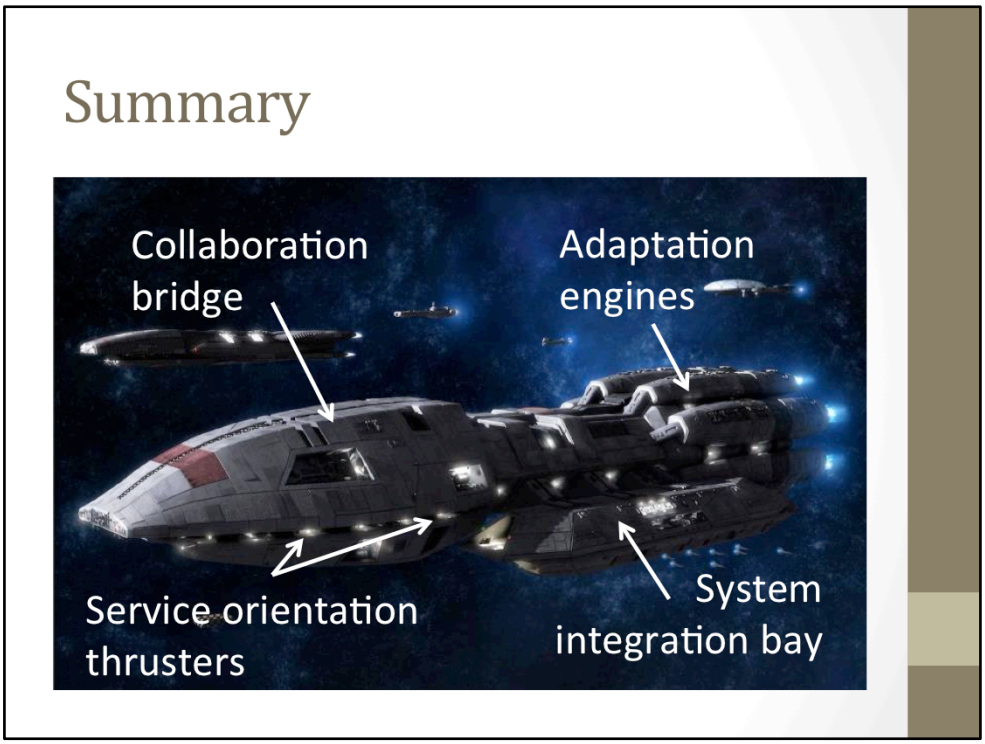


Compare the workflow of the simple past to the confusing present – this is the ebook acquisition workflow at the University of Nevada at Reno – just ebooks mind you, not other types of electronic resources – look at the branches, the options, the decision points – and this doesn't even include downstream maintenance



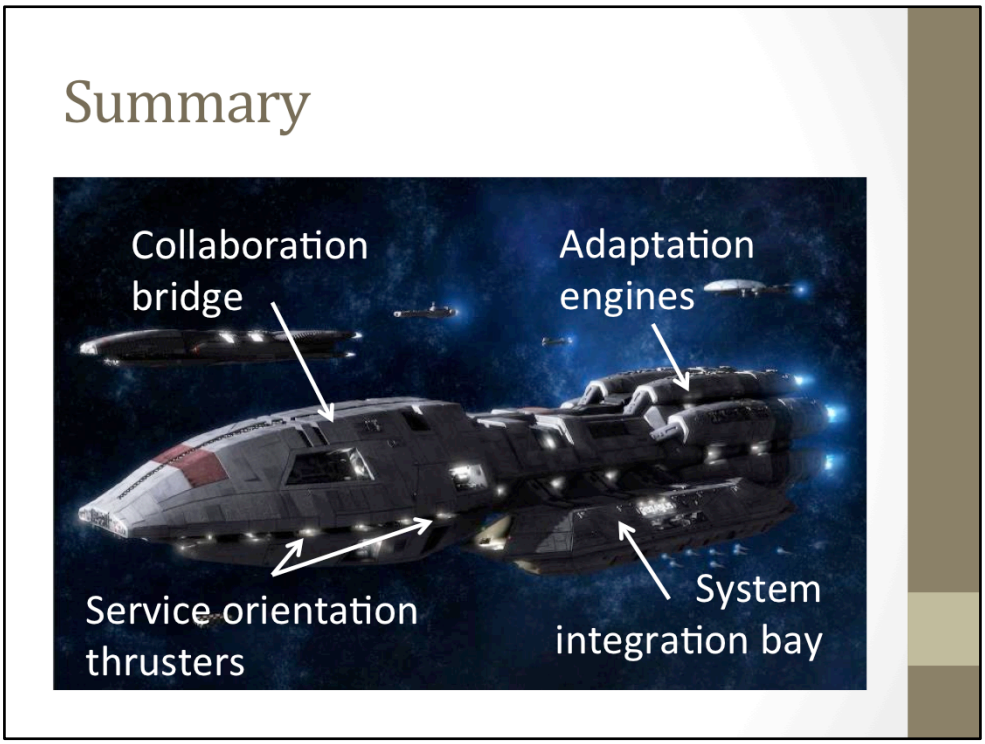
So libraries are struggling to figure out how to handle electronic resources – first there are the new functions that need to be carried out – rather than receive, resources have to be activated – access must be tested – discovery is huge, what system or systemS will the records be in – and then administering, keeping up to date, making sure the links aren't dead – this means many new workflows – the silo approach completely breaks down – decisions in one area can impact many units in the library – I tried to make a list of all the units at SFU Library that are impacted and it's basically all of them, right out to the public service side who care about usability of interfaces – therefore collaboration between units is essential – and how do you pass and share information about a resource between all these units? – and then there are the tools – there is no one system which does everything, so systems integration is vital – and this means tradeoffs – choosing discovery layer X or ERM Y might make the work of one unit simpler, but more complex for some else – and there's a need to synchronize across multiple systems – how to do this isn't clear – libraries are struggling, trying different solutions, and there's no consensus

In the original job talk I had more slides at this point to talk about the impacts of all this on staff – in the interests of time for this lightning talk I've left the slides out



Back to the BG theme for the summary – over the coming years what we'll need to do in libraries to handle the new e-formats is the following – we'll need to adapt continuously, because the next quirky ebook model or whatever will come from vendors and we'll just have to deal with it – we'll need to work constantly on systems integration and tool integration – we'll need to collaborate across units in the library – and we'll need to retain a service focus, and remember that this is all about the user – collections are a service for the user – we need to acquire and manage those collections in such a way that users can discover and access and make use of them

This is where the job talk ended, but I want to say a little more for the code4lib audience – it's easy to pay lip service to ideas like collaborate and integrate, but we need actually do it too, and this stuff isn't easy – it's rather grotty – one of my favorite sayings is that technology is 10% of the challenge and people are the other 90% - and by people I mean all the things that go along with people: workflows, procedures, policies, history, organization structure, personalities – you may be great coder, you may have worked out a brilliant and elegant solution to a technical problem, and congratulations, I'm sure you've got a great solution – but you've only dealt with 10% of the challenge, and the other 90% is this stuff - like, your system needs to work well with some unit elsewhere in the library, and you have to fit into their workflows and tools, and they probably use some 15yo third party commercial proprietary system, black box, no APIs, written in C or Java – basically something that epitomizes everything you loathe – and you have to work with it – and if you don't, your brilliant solution will



… go nowhere – ditto with workflows – we all know libraries have workflows that would make you pray for a swift Cylon death – and you don't want to go near this stuff, you don't want to try to understand it – but you have to "go there" – because your technologically brilliant idea won't be successful if it doesn't acknowledge your colleagues, this thing they do, the way they do it

Today the talks may seem mostly about the coolness of the technology – you'll ouuu and ahhh over someone's great code or app or whatever – but I want you to remember that it's only 10% of the challenge – the other 90% is this grotty stuff like collaboration and integration, and if you want to be successful in your organization you need to not just pay lip service to this stuff but to really actually accept it is part of the problem space too.

THANKS!

P.S. I got the job.