The indexers in Orson Scott Card's shortish (76-page) story, 'The originist*', are on a metal-covered planet several thousand years in the future, with an Imperial Library staffed by more than five thousand. Its Indexing Department occupies four floors of this. The story's hero, Leyel, is led there by a librarian. This is the way it is to be:

`Here's the Golden Archway into Indexing. The Land of Subtle Conceptual Connections.'

Through the arch... all pretense at symmetry was gone. The ceiling was at different heights, almost at random; on the left and right there might be doors or archways, stairs or ramps, an alcove or a huge hall filled with columns, shelves of books and works of art surrounding tables where indexers worked with a half-dozen scriptors and lectors at once.

'The form fits the function,' said Zay. 'The architect was the daughter of an indexer, so she knew that standard, orderly, symmetrical interior maps are the enemy of freshly connective thought. The finest touch... is that from day to day the layout is rearranged.'

'Rearranged? The rooms move?'

'A series of random routines in the master calculator. Some days only one room is changed, moved off to some completely different place in the Indexing area. Other days, everything is changed. The only constant is the archway leading in.'

'But—the indexers must spend the whole morning just finding their stations.'

'Not at all. Any indexer can work from any station.'

'Ah. So they just call up the job they were working on the day before.'

'No. They merely pick up on the job that is already in progress on the station they happen to choose that day.'

'Chaos!' said Leyel.

'Exactly. How do you think a good hyperindex is made? If one person alone indexes a book, then the only connections that book will make are the ones that person knows about. Instead, each indexer is forced to skim through what his predecessor did the day before. Inevitably he'll add some new connections that the other indexer didn't think of. The environment, the work pattern, everything is designed to break down habits of thought, to make everything surprising, everything new. 'To keep everybody off balance.'

'Exactly. Your mind works quickly when you're running along the edge of the precipice... Indexers, when they lose their balance, fall into wonderful discoveries. That's why the indexes of the Imperial Library are the only ones worth having. They startle and challenge as you read. All the others are just—clerical lists.'

... The indexers they passed all looked up—some smiled, some frowned.

'Doesn't it interfere with things?' asked Leyel. 'All this shouting?'

'Indexers need interruption. It breaks up the chain of thought. When they look back down, they have to rethink what they were doing.'

... 'Are indexers often hospitalized?' Leyel asked.

'For what?'

'Stress.'

'There's no stress on this job,' said Zay. 'Just play. We come up here as a reward for working in other parts of the library.'

[Well, I love indexing, but please, don't anybody take all that trouble on my account... Ed.]

Much complex hyper-indexing—or retrieval—is done in the rest of this piece of science fiction, to arrive at Leyel's splendid conclusion:

'If it's our capacity for storytelling that makes us human, then perhaps our capacity for indexing will make us something better than human.'

—Now there's a motto all societies of indexers might fitly adopt!

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