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## The Future's Not What It Used to Be And the Past Is Subject to Change!

We at Team Newsletter have the unenviable task of catching Shaastra in its transition from past to future tense. But then, we have the privilege of writing what will be History in the future to come. So we're not really complaining.

While on history, we wish to quickly announce the introduction of a guest column in this newsletter. Written by Vignesh 'Booze' Nandakumar (B.Tech EE, Class of 2001), Core Group member of the first two Shaastras (2000 and 2001), the three daily installments of **Objects in the Rearview Mirror** shall look at, in turn, the origin of Shaastra, its growth, and where it seems to be headed.

That said, we shall now proceed with our reporting. We make a quick mention of the lecture series that ran up to Shaastra - Dr. Babu Vishwanathan (ME) on *Air Breathing Engines* and Dr. David Koilpillai (EE) on *Mobile Internet - Hype or Reality*, both of which were very well attended and even better received. The first of these, was also rather entertaining, largely on account of the smoking-related examples used (and subsequently

regretted on moral grounds!) by the speaker to illustrate a few points.

Shaastra was inaugurated yesterday evening in a packed IC&SR Auditorium. The compere quite clearly was still in some kind of a Lit-Soc hangover, as he requested the "Respected Judges" to take their "decisions" on stage! That didn't keep the chief guests from taking their positions on stage anyway. The introductions were made, the lamps were (rather painstakingly) lit, and the introductory speeches (as always, Prof. Ananth's speech was quite something) were made.

At every stage, applause thundered like never before. This was not the "*Haha! That was funny!*" or "*Ok, time's running out. Next speaker please!*" or "*Thank God it's over!*" applause. It was the spontaneous, involuntary "**Yes. This is Shaastra. It is worth every superlative you gave it. Shaastra is now. And this is what it feels like!**" applause. It was the spirit of engineering. It was the collective spirit of a whole lot of engineers, asserting its presence.

The lecture, *Demystifying the Human Brain*, by Dr. K. Vijay Raghavan was every bit as entertaining as the Director promised us it would be. Dr. Raghavan spoke on construction of complex brains using simple ones and emphasised the remarkable similarities between the evolution, structure, and functions of the brains, and cells in general, of all organisms. While he couldn't cover all the material he had come prepared with, he did manage to drive some rather crucial points home very effectively. His wit and sense of humour came in particularly handy in this department.

The lecture was followed by a Robotics demonstration held in the IC&SR hut. The crowd was large enough to keep most people from having a proper view of the robots on display. Some visitors claimed to be disappointed in the general quality of the exhibits, particularly those who had seen the Robotics event at IIT Bombay. And finally, *Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines* in the OAT provided the perfect low IQ end to an evening much hyped in the initial speeches as a congregation of "the most brilliant brains in the country!"

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## Unravel the Escher Knot

### But don't get entangled yourself!

*Here's an advertisement of sorts for the benefit of the clueless at Shaastra 2003*

The time has come to separate the geeks from the non-geeks. The geeks can finally get back at all those *pseud* junta for deriding them when they worked all night on their breadboards. All those Gollums who refer to their PCs as "my precious!" can finally unleash the Power of their programs to win all that was to win. Step inside the math modelling and simulation competition and you will find an incredible phenomenon - people actually racking their brains to do problems which they fled from all their life by leaving them out as 'optional questions'. But the geekiest of the geekiest - The Lords of the Nerds - will make

their way to the paper presentation competitions, hoping against hope that their "original" research wins the booty. Now where would the non-geeks go, you ask? Well, take a dozen computers loaded with the most mind blowing games and connect them up. Then throw in some of the most blood-thirsty gamers and you have carnage. Then the non-geeks move on to the Project-X stall where they will try their hand at attaining objectives which need not be attained unless you are an engineer. Quizzes. IIT Madras. No more to be said.

*This is where the ad deliberately gets a little dull. It isn't so much about the revenge of the nerds!*

Lectures, Demonstrations, Workshops, and Video Conferences have a long list of offerings to make as well. Mahesh Murthy of Channel [V] India, and with other credentials way too numerous to enumerate, speaks on *The Bible for Entrepreneurs*. Enfield India conducts a bike stripping demonstration with its Bullet. We video

conference with Nobel Laureate Dr. Martin Perl and Dr. Kevin Warwick - Cyborg. Hafeez Contractor, world renowned architect, rather 'designer', speaks on the thought process in a designer's mind, in *Building Castles in Thin Air*. Vijay Chandru speaks on *The Second Coming of Computational Positivism*.

*Clearly, that isn't all.*

Watch out for The Spirit of Engineering, Informals, The Incredible Machine, Rocketry,

Unconventional Flying Machines. And a whole host of other events.

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# Objects in the Rearview Mirror

Are Closer Than They Appear

by

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*Booze, aka Vignesh Nandakumar, was deeply involved with the first two Cores that coordinated Shaastra 2000 and Shaastra 2001. Currently, after two more years of devotion to Electrical Engineering, he hopes to work on integrating next generation hard disk drives.*

## Part One - Ignition

**2000 A.D.:** *A big step for IIT Madras, a giant leap for Shaastra. Every great journey begins with a small step or so the saying goes. Shaastra, on the other hand, has been literally growing by leaps and bounds - right from the start. Shaastra might be a relatively young festival, but it has a great history so far. This three part series takes a peek at the origins of Shaastra, what motivated its inception, the growth pangs and where it could lead in the future.*

Imagine you are reading this newsletter at a prosaic tech-fest that went by a freakish name like **Pragma** or **Phantasmagoria**; the “fest” itself is nothing more than 2 lectures: one of them on how corporatisation of power transmission in Karnataka was achieved and the second, *abem*, you’d rather sleep through, thanks to the cool environs of the CLT compared to the blazing summer sun. The only “design” competition is where you’d compete with exactly 14 others to make the best bow and arrow, the bow that shoots the arrow farthest wins the design contest!! The entire “tech-fest” happens in one lazy Saturday afternoon, with most of the IIT junta unaware of this stimulating event happening in their own backyard. The OAT movie on later that night is perhaps the only activity they would remember. Oh well, I did forget one detail, for a tech-fest of that magnitude, there wouldn’t have been a newsletter in the first place!

Difficult to visualise? You must be from the *anno-Shaastra* times. However in 1999, a bunch of us found ourselves in exactly the same situation described above. Co-curricular activity or the lack

thereof didn’t seem to affect the average IITian in Madras and the faculty was close to cynical on our enthusiasm to imbibe the spirit of engineering. Anything to do with practical stuff was taught in the labs and what mattered most was to get the readings somehow. That was when the then Academic Affairs Secretary, enthused by a bunch of juniors around him, decided to shake things up a bit...there begins the story of Shaastra. (Had he had his way, you’d now be at *Phantasmagoria* but thank God for some wisdom in collective thought!)

And shake things up a bit, it did. The first Shaastra had to shake off incredible inertia; we had to convince the faculty of our sincerity, students of the utility and sponsors of the publicity. We dreamed big, of equaling the fest put up by students of Nanyang Technology University, Singapore, some day. And we were envious of our peers at IIT Bombay who seemed to have a great tech show going. Our motivation was to get to where they were within 2 years and that motivation gave us incredible energy to keep pushing for Shaastra.

If you are unfamiliar with the IIT setup, a few of the things we did might not sound like great endeavors, but Shaastra 2000 had many firsts to its credit: it was the first time that the Core had members from third year, the first time that the Steering Committee had so many faculty in it, the first time a student activity was held at the IC&SR premises (that added a professional touch to the

whole event), the first time that transparency and meritocracy were actually evident in the financial accounts and selection of co-ords and definitely the first time that IITians had a sense of what a full-scale technical and management festival actually meant. We raised more than Rs. 6 lakhs in sponsorship in just the first year! And we paid for students from other colleges to get to Shaastra. But this leap was not without its problems. Poor scheduling forced events to be rescheduled at will, there weren't enough mikes, the food sales weren't what we promised the vendors (we

actually reimbursed their loss, which was a first time too!) and the hard-core cynics had a field day laughing at our efforts. The 2 day 3 night event would have died almost as quickly as it started, if not for the feedback we got from the faculty, coordinators and our guests outside of IIT Madras. They had fun, because they had something to take away from that Shaastra. That was enough for the Core (many of whom were around for the second Shaastra) to give it another shot. Money was not a problem, consolidating Shaastra was.

*to be continued...*

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## Sign the Shaastra Guestbook

**Unless You Prefer the Wild Natural Way!**

The population of students on campus has swollen considerably. The visitors are in – numbering around 500, we're told. They have been sufficiently forewarned by the Dean Students, in his inaugural address, of the water and space problems they may have to deal with. However, like the Dean and Director hoped, the students seem to be quite enjoying the wonderful campus that we have. In fact, one group of students seems to like the trees so much that they were seen marking their territory the way many males in the animal kingdom are known to!

Shaastra's first day seems to have drawn mixed reactions. Team Newsletter caught up with some

new faces on campus and asked them what they thought of what little they had seen. On one hand, one group of students had only one answer to every question – "Wow!" Strangely, a lot of people loved the food in the Mega Mess, and actually "felt lucky to have it!" On the other hand, students of IIT Bombay asked us, "Is this the first Shaastra? We accidentally found your website while searching the net for technical festivals. We didn't see a single poster of yours on our campus. Anyway, while our Publicity Core is here to publicise our own Tech Fest, we're here for timepass!" That was quite deflating, actually, but on the bright side, another 100 students from the same "Wow!" college will be coming here today!



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