



Saturday 11th October 2003

The Way Things Go And Other Short Stories!

The day definitely belonged to How Things Work. And How Things Work definitely belonged to the 'surprise video', a German film called *The Way Things Go*. For those familiar with the Honda Accord advertisement, this video, which in fact predates it by about twenty years, is a good half an hour scale-up of the same concept. Though it is way more complicated than the Honda ad, it isn't nearly as slick, and occasionally gets repetitive, slow, and even boring. However, the less occasional applause indicated that the experience was on the whole among the most unforgettable that IITM has seen in a long time, quite comparable, in proportion, to the pro-shows at Saarang! The actual event, as always, was very well conducted, and the questions were clearly well-researched. Notably, for the fourth Shaastra in a row, the prelims carried a question on the red eye effect in flash photography! The finals was an all IITian affair.

The other events of the day probably don't merit a dedicated paragraph each, but they went quite well too. The day began with what may best be generally termed a question paper shortage. The coordinators of most events grossly

underestimated the number of participants they would see, and as a result, substantial inconveniences crept in. While the Programming Contest coordinators were able to rectify the problem in time, teams participating in Math Modeling had to deal with a paper supply nearly as erratic as that of water in the hostels – one of the coordinators said, "There were papers at eleven o' clock da! You missed them again!" However, we refrain from beating this point to death, lest the rather angry coordinator live up to his name and start a Baba Counting to our destruction! The questions in the event were rather well appreciated, however.

Mahesh Murthy's talk on *25 Commandments – The Bible for Entrepreneurs* as well as the Video Conference with Dr. Martin Perl proved that Shaastra is slowly outgrowing the IC&SR Auditorium, and we shall soon need a multiplex (and we suppose in the not so distant future, a separate entity called Shaastra may actually be able to afford it!) Mahesh Murthy's talk was extremely well received for its rather bold and somewhat revolutionary outlook, as well as the speaker's wit. It seems, however, that many of us would not

have the guts to put his principles into practice. They seem more for the kind of people brave enough to drop out of college for a cause!

The Video Conference, most people feel, was a total yawn, and a rather distinguished section of the audience was caught sleeping on camera! The audio quality was very poor, and even the actual content of the talk left many disappointed. The Q&A session was a little better – one question from the audience that went, “Who’s that babe sitting with you?” couldn’t quite make it, though!

The Enfield Bullet Stripping demo turned out to be more a stripped bike exhibition. A huge crowd gathered around the stall, only to be shown an engine already removed from the motorcycle. The people weren’t too disappointed, though, and a long energetic volley of questions and answers from the PA system filled the KV grounds for a major part of the afternoon. And speaking of long energetic bouts of PA usage, we come to touch upon The Incredible Machine! One of the coordinators, already famous for monopolising the microphone at last year’s Bullseye, went on and on entertaining the audience with his hints, and PJs, and of course, his trademark accent!

This year’s Bullseye too delivered on its tradition of promising to be yet another step closer to reality, and further, on the unpromised but inescapable tradition of failing on the first day! AI Bots, also held in the Dining Room, managed to get itself quite laughed at. In what was probably the work of a faultily coded Artificially Intelligent Tournament Arbitration Program, the losers progressed to the second round, while the winners of the first round chased the human coordinators demanding justice. Human intervention could only provide a solution as good as “direct finals!”

Paper Presentation was held in two installments, and the event progressed much as one may

expect. We did have some good old dirty IITian tricks being played (rather successfully) by a very vociferous ESB sinner presenting a paper on Bioinformatics, and answering the questions which some of his friends (all gathered in the same row) evidently read straight out of a piece of paper, and further in a tone that totally betrayed their total ignorance of the meaning!

Other events included Master Builder, held, of all places, at the fitting workshop, where the towers built by participants will be eccentrically loaded. Unconventional Flying Machines and Aeromodeling got as far as funda sessions and distribution of materials. Project X did its job very well, engaging the masses in building towers with playing cards – no, not card pyramids that you can blow down, but structures meant to take loads. Rocketry was among other events to get itself laughed at, with the coordinators inviting participants to register in their hostel rooms!

Moving away from the events, and to the Shaastra area, close examination reveals that the total number of stalls in Shaastra has remained constant across the years – the more the sponsors, the fewer the food stalls. And the worse too! We wish to say no more about the food at Shaastra.

And finally, the Ambience coordinators have gotten to work. They’ve done an admirable job with Dr. Einstein and Mr. Albert, and the cartoons at the entrance which are highly reminiscent of a Tanenbaum book cover! At the time this newsletter went into press, a huge Escher Knot was yet to be installed near the Hospitality Desk. Speaking of the Hospitality Desk, a neutral mention must be made of the crossword with the coordinators’ names on it. Quite a number of names have been left out, including that of one of the coordinators of this newsletter! No complaints seem to have been made by neglected parties, however.

Low Rent Bulletin Board (Unlit) aka Lectures and Demonstrations for the Day!

Raymond Stata on *Digital Signal Processing*; Vijay Chandru on *Use of Algorithms to Solve Complex Problems* (with Illustrations from Biology); *Evolution Engineering Demonstration* (for the first time in India) by Students of IITM

Objects in the Rearview Mirror

Are Closer Than They Appear

by

Vignesh Nandakumar
B.Tech EE, Class of 2001
nvignesh@rediffmail.com

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 Two – Growth Pangs

Having started a big event, it was more important to prove that it could be conducted year after year and that we could learn from our mistakes and set them right. It was not lost on the Core of the second Shaastra that getting the show going right the second time is what was needed to make Shaastra a permanent feature.

Our driving force was the support we received from the Steering Committee. But the comparisons with other festivals had already begun. That was when the Core went on an ambitious project, video-conferences during Shaastra, not one, but three! It is quite possible that after yesterday's video-conference, one would think it to be an easy affair, just plug the video cameras, and get the show going! But in 2001, the institute did not have the necessary bandwidth, the equipment was unheard of, and we were constantly asked the question if we were going to tape someone from the US and play the tape here!

When we approached VSNL with our idea, they jumped at it. After long hours of getting the necessary equipment, working on setting up the connection and simultaneously corresponding with distinguished scientists in the US to consent for the video conference, we were confident we could do it. The D-Day arrived, not without its nail-biting moments. To us, the success of Shaastra was hinged on pulling off the video conferences. And when the screen lit up with the live video of Dr. Raj Reddy from CMU, the mood was euphoric to say the least!

Did Shaastra 2001 have anything of more significance than that it was the second Shaastra? The event scheduling was definitely a lot better, the co-ords worked harder to improve the quality of events, the publicity was wonderful and Shaastra attracted a lot more crowd. In my opinion, these were a consequence of a bigger change that was happening within. While our ambition was to have a big technical and management event, organizing the event per-se was not an end by itself for the Shaastra team. Our motivation had been to improve the level of co-curricular activity on campus; our motivation was to make an opportunity for ourselves to learn outside of the classrooms. On a subtler level, it was to get a spirit of engineering, a spirit of taking on challenges and a spirit of learning greater than just grades electrifying the campus. For too long, the average IITian entered the institution as a science enthusiast, learnt the ways to handle the system, equated being a good engineer to having good grades and left the institute blue-eyed of pursuing further studies. In my opinion, Shaastra changed all that. It was necessary to have a good understanding of the subject, but not a sufficient condition to be an engineer. Shaastra presented an opportunity to be fascinated by the art of engineering. And it enabled the IITian not to be ashamed of being geeky. Shaastra brought out the entrepreneurial talents in many an IITian. Entrepreneurship is not just about start-up ventures, it is taking charge of an event or facility, working to deliver the best on it and in turn mentoring for the next Shaastra. The Core

allowed that kind of freedom to experiment and encouraged co-ords and volunteers to be entrepreneurs in their right for Shaastra. And though not explicitly evident, that spirit in a Shaastra team is what has powered the subsequent teams to take Shaastra to heights greater than that imagined by the initial teams.

Reflecting on those times, I perceive another subtler change... Shaastra was a way for us IITians to use the platform of a widely recognized institute to facilitate a meeting of minds from colleges all over India, to spread the benefit of the

resurging spirit of engineering amongst IITians to students from other engineering colleges too. It was a way for us to connect to students and ideas from outside of IIT, to overcome accusations of being insular to peers from other colleges.

These changes weren't easy to come by, but the Shaastra 2001 team had started the work on it. Why? Not for glory, not for fame, but was posterity, 'twas worth the pain.

to be concluded...

Poking the Invincible Achilles Tandon

And His Band of Sponsored Devotees!

We at Team Newsletter wonder how exactly we should be playing this game. Do we let him win? Do we let him think he's winning?

On the face of it, Team Sponsorship is a bunch of media shy, modest people just doing their job with diligence and caring little for recognition. Yeah right! Preceding the release of our Zeroth Issue, rumours were floating all around the institute that the Dilbert strip to appear in our newsletter the next day was, of all people, about good old Achilles here. Further investigation revealed that everyone had heard about this rumour from Achilles himself! Similarly, a lot of you may have heard from him that there is a rumour that he is planning to stand for Cultural Secretary next year!

Last evening, one of the coordinators of this newsletter found himself mobbed by Achilles and gang. Gang was trying hard to get dirt on their beloved leader to be published in the newsletter. Achilles (with an injured arm and not foot, for a change!) was trying hard to deny it all on grounds of "lack of proof". Newsletter consented to hear them out and even recorded the whole staged drama, which was largely a lot of private humour. Interested readers may contact us for the audio recording. We're flattered that a mention in our newsletter means so much to Achilles and his band. So we'll give them only the pleasure of the mention, and not the gratification of getting famous through those tonnes of dirt! All this apart, kudos on the great sponsorship effort!



Team Newsletter are

Akhilesh P.
Kunal Kumar

Bharathwaj R.
Pradeep S.

Dhanya P.
Prashanth S.

Karthik B.
Rahul Pratap M.

Krishna Raghavan
Vipluv Aga