

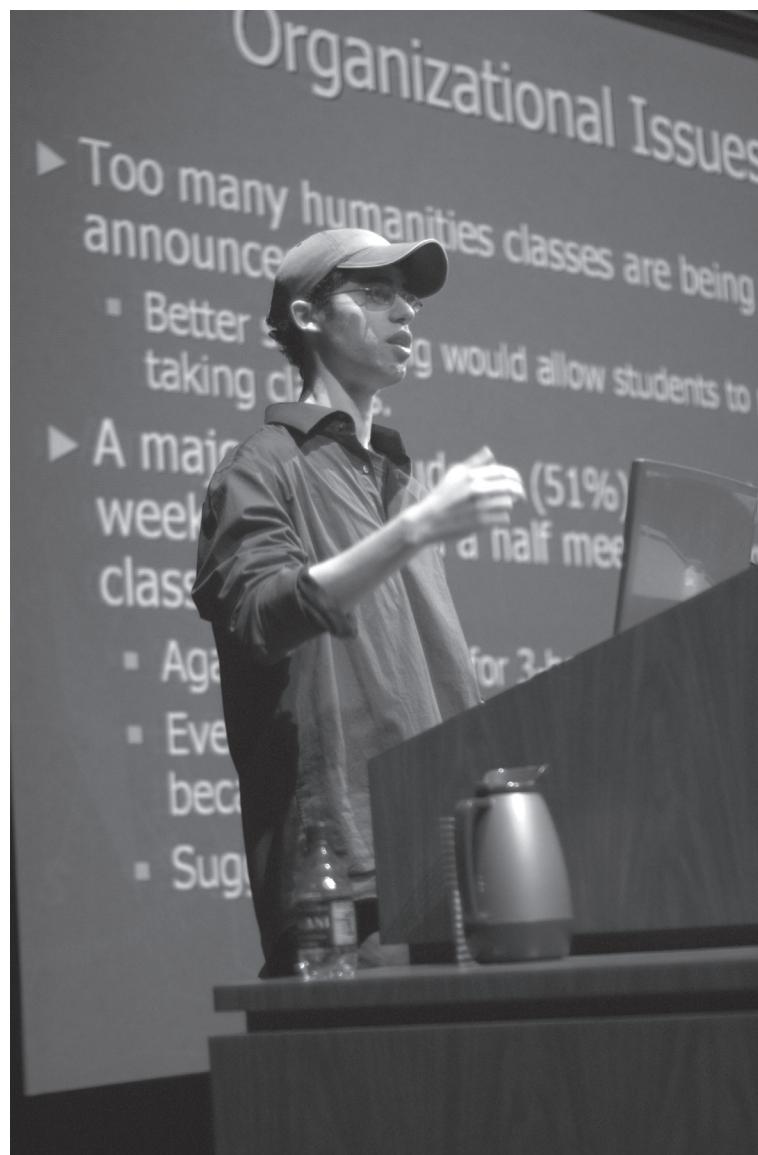
THE CALIFORNIA TECH



VOLUME CVIII, NUMBER 23

PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

APRIL 9, 2007



Junior Youssef Moussaoui presents the findings of the Humanities and Social Sciences committee at the Student Faculty Conference last Thursday

NEWS BRIEFS

Actor coming to Caltech

BY JEFF KRANSKI

Actor/Director Roger Guenveur Smith will be on campus Tuesday, April 10 for a screening of Spike Lee's *Do The Right Thing* at 7pm in Baxter Lecture Hall as part of Professor Rosenstone's course, HUM136: Ethnic Visions.

An award-winning actor, Smith has been active in the film industry since 1988 and has been involved in several of Spike Lee's

films. He is also known for writing and starring in the one-man play *The Huey Newton Story*, which was based on the life of Black Panther's co-founder and leader Dr. Huey Newton. The play won a Peabody Award and a Banff Rockie Award in 2002, and was nominated for an Image Award in the same year.

Smith will be available following the screening for questions from the audience.

Quantum Hoops to show Tues

BY MARISSA CEVALLOS

The first public screening of the men's basketball documentary *Quantum Hoops* will be this Tuesday, April 10 at 4 PM in Beckman Auditorium. The screening will be followed by a barbecue.

The film was first debuted at the Santa Barbara Film Festival in January, when both the men's and women's team traveled to see it.

Rick Greenwald's film received the Top 10 Audience Choice Award when at Santa Barbara, where it was so popular it ran more than once.

The film documents last year's men's basketball team as it struggled through its no-victory season, especially the seniors who were playing their last season. The film delves into the history of the basketball team, including interviews with the last basketball team to win a SCIAC game.

SFC brings new ideas to table

Biannual conference addressed classes, honor system, student life

BY RAM KANDASAMY

Addition of a third Honor System top student officer, design of an undergraduate bioengineering major, and creation of student-run classes were some of the many ideas proposed at the biannual Student-Faculty Conference last Thursday. Co-chair of the Undergraduate Education Committee Christine Tung said, "SFC was well-organized as a whole. It was great to see the faculty involved."

A major part of SFC presentations in general was survey results collected over the year on undergraduate education, the honor code, and various options. The results often prompted lengthy discussion between students and faculty, with the focus on what changes can be made to better the Caltech experience. Tung said that it was important for survey results to be communicated, simply because it encourages students to give their thoughts and shows their opinion matters.

One of the best-attended sessions of the SFC was the Honor System conference, at which plans were unveiled for major changes in Honor Code implementation. Honor Code surveys revealed that 63% of students feel that collaboration policies are unclear. To remedy this problem, collaboration policies are planned to be put on websites, and divisions are planning on having separate collaboration policies.

There was much discussion on how to get the faculty BoC representative to become more involved. According to ARC Chair Caleb Ng, "the representatives were approved by the Faculty Board in 2005, but since have gone nowhere." Other discussion centered around a proposed plan to institute a new elected ASCIT position, the Honor Chair, who would take up the burden of representing and explaining the Honor System, relieving the BoC chair to focus on hearing cases.

Another major proposal covered was the establishment of a bioengineering option for undergraduates, discussed at the Undergraduate Education session. Although a graduate bioengineering program has already been completed, it appears bioengineering will not be an undergraduate option until a few years from now. Bioengineering would be in the Engineering and Applied Science Division, and students currently interested in bioengineering can still customize their own plan of study.

Research continues to be one of the biggest interests here at

For more SFC coverage, please see editorials on Page 2:

Cancelling classes too unrealistic for SFC

SFC repeats history

Caltech, surveys from the SFC confirmed. Committee for Undergraduate Research member Anna Hiszpanski said, "About 81% of students have sought research opportunities and 95% of the faculty respondents had mentored summer research." However, she felt there was certainly room for improvement, considering Caltech's 3 to 1 student ratio.

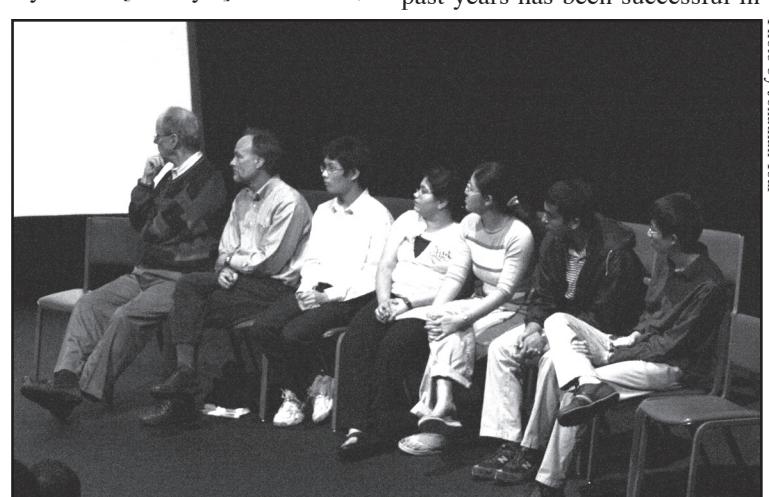
However, not everyone is guaranteed a summer at Caltech doing research. The survey indicated that "24% of students who looked for research opportunities were unsuccessful in finding them." But despite the grim statistic, Hiszpanski and others are optimistic that action will be taken. "I was very excited and encouraged by their [faculty's] comments,"

at MIT. Although concerns were expressed that there was no time for such a break in Caltech's already tight academic schedule, the proposed addition of more non-academic or even student-run courses met with more favourable responses.

Chair of the UG Research committee and member of the EE/CS committee and HSS committee Radhika Marathe felt that the committee meetings were useful.

"It seems important that faculty and students continue to work together on these issues," Marathe said, "as the conference day requires a follow-up schedule to check if the proposed changes will actually happen."

However, although the SFC in past years has been successful in



Students and faculty watch a presentation at the SFC on Thursday, which attracted more than 100 students.

said Hiszpanski.

The presentation on Quality of Life generated quite a stir, attracting around 120 people. One especially popular statistic was in an exit survey for the class of 2006, 66% of seniors would go to Caltech again if they had the chance to go back and choose what college they want to attend.

Although this was a majority, there were many remarks made that the statistic also meant 34% would choose to go elsewhere. Suggestions to improve this figure ranged from having an extra week for spring break to having a few weeks to take non-academic courses, much like IAP

making some changes, such as the revamping of the Bi 1 curriculum, said Marathe, "in essence, I believe this process needs to continue somehow beyond the scope of the SFC, which is a biannual event." She cited a halted HSS proposal for courses in linguistics from a few years ago as an example of a topic that would have benefited from student-faculty discussions outside of the SFC.

Although no conclusive changes have yet resulted from last Thursday's meetings, the topics discussed in SFC can lead to further discussions between faculty and students, which help to bring about significant changes.

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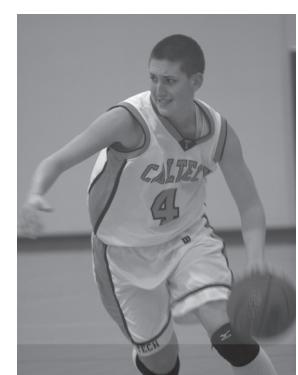
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From the Editor

Cancelling classes too unrealistic for SFC

To be honest, I'm not sure what all this hype about SFC is about.

I went to class and worked on problem sets.

Though the students were promised class-free days, the message apparently didn't get across to the faculty. Most of my professors were surprised that class would be cancelled on Thursday. So they did what any professor would do: they either ignored the mandate, or rescheduled the class.

I don't know if the ARC can conjure 25-hour days, but the promise to cancel classes without considering the affect is a bit short-sided. Many classes voted whether to keep the class at its normally-scheduled time. The lab classes didn't even ask. This majority-rules scheduling hurt the minority of students who left for the conference, or discouraged those who might have attended.

If you're anything like a last-

minute Techer, you might have skipped the conference to finish a problem set due Thursday afternoon. If the ARC wants to be thorough about preventing academic time conflicts, they should consider that problem sets, as well as classes, take up the better part of a non-nocturnal Techer's day.

But I can appreciate the problem the ARC must have faced in scheduling this, because it all comes down to juggling finite time. Can you make a professor reschedule his problem sets? No, and it's probably not worth it. Any commitment involves some sacrifice, and with the SFC, the sacrifice was hidden beneath a bribe to avoid class. There's no way to create free time, only ways to prioritize your own schedule.

*Marissa Cevallos
Editor-in-Chief*

Write for the Tech!
(or take pictures,
or play with the website)

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Prefrosh Weekend: "Their (almost) Here!"

BY CRAIG MONTUORI

Prefrosh Weekend is in a week and a half. We're expecting somewhere between 250 and 270 prospectives to arrive between Wednesday afternoon and Thursday morning and stay until Sunday morning. Unlike last year, we're returning back to the regular length Prefrosh Weekend, which carries over into the Weekend. It should be a lot of fun.

While last term, I briefly looked at the Honor Code and some of its history, which I'll probably return to in the weeks leading up to the Honor Chair amendments, with Prefrosh Weekend imminent, I wanted to go into some of the traditions and expectations that I've seen from Techers over the years. I'll start with a quote from Ted Jou in a memo that he sent to former President Baltimore prior to Prefrosh Weekend 2002:

"I have an urgent concern about Prefrosh Weekend that I felt should be brought to your attention. Recently, I have been hearing more and more rumors among the undergraduate student body that there will be a movement to negatively influence the newly admitted students who will be on campus Prefrosh Weekend, which is scheduled for April 18-20. I personally feel such action would be counterproductive, and the Associated Students will not organize or condone any of these activities."

Over the past few years, it seems to me that it is common for us to try to scare away as many prefrosh as possible while the visit. As a result, other schools win many students that might have otherwise chosen to attend here, such as MIT or Stanford, which put a big emphasis on recruiting admitted students to accept their

offer. Looking at the Cain Report from 1985, a report on undergraduate admissions procedures and policies, it says, "In addition, whereas Caltech used to get 60% of those students who got into both Caltech and either MIT or Stanford, it now only gets 40%." From 1985 to today, that number has continued to decline.

While we continue to win the majority of students from second and lower-tier schools, like Mudd or Georgia Tech, we need to do more to compete with our major competitors, generally considered to include Princeton, Harvard, and Yale, as well as MIT and Stanford.

A recent BEM 106 (Competitive Strategies) student report on admissions practices summarizes in saying that we win people against schools where we clearly have

an academic edge, while we lose against schools where we have no edge and their students have a more active social life.

To me, this says that year after year, we're failing to convince people to enroll here that are as academically qualified as anyone here but have different social standards and expectations. The result is a school that most of us consider to be lacking socially diversity, and most high school and college students that have heard of us agree. The Cain Report says, "We also found that in many areas of the country Caltech [...] where it is known, we have acquired a reputation for being a grim, narrow school." I would argue that this reputation still exists today.

Looking at the title of this

"When Prefrosh Weekend rolls around, I'd say think very carefully about what your feelings are about this school and tell that to the prefrosh."

SFC repeats history

Caltech ignores its greatest strengths: small classes, potential for interaction

BY DANIEL POON

Last Thursday we had a day off for the SFC. Initially I went for the food, but I remember walking out of the meetings thinking the situation was symptomatic of a worrisome lack of follow-up.

When I asked one of the committee members what was going to be done about the ideas that had been raised at the public SFC hearings, I learned much to my own chagrin that many of the SFC committees would probably not be meeting again until the next convention 2 years later. Instead, a report "would be written," and the matter of exactly who would be reading it, if anyone, was blissfully unclear.

I gathered a few fellow distressed students to contact alumni, one of whom had notes and reports from SFCs dating as far back as 1986. Many recurring issues were raised even then and have still not been resolved as of now. Caltech's HSS division is the most glaring repeat culprit in this particular aspect.

All of this points to something fundamentally wrong with relations here at Tech. The cohesiveness of the Caltech community, between faculty and students, undergraduates and graduates, and administration and student body alike has been steadily declining over the past decade, if not the past few.

Students in many departments

have grown more distant from one-on-one interaction with the faculty that provide them with their best opportunities, and students' input in Institute-wide academic decisions is losing more and more of its already meager efficacy.

We are collapsing toward a culture that makes it increasingly difficult for Caltech to utilize its greatest logistical advantage, its small size.

Smaller divisions have resisted

There is just no good way for our feedback to reach the decision-makers without a better defined and streamlined structure.

this deterioration better than large divisions have; for example, the GPS division, in which there still runs a strong culture of every student getting to know practically every professor and vice versa, can manage to react to student demand for courses and research that indulge individual interests via person-to-person coordination alone.

Even a slightly larger department like biology has to manage its culturally weaker student-faculty rapport through mediation of an student advisory commit-

tee, BUSAC. Lastly, of course, in large universities, almost all courses are offered all of the time, and student body and interest are both large enough and diverse enough that the only issues reside with faculty availability and teaching interest.

In contrast to both extremes, HSS is stuck at the precariously inefficient boundary between these two economies of scale. HSS is the smallest division at Caltech in terms of personnel, yet it must simultaneously cater to the interests and academic requirements of the entire undergraduate population.

The undergraduate population itself also sports extreme diversity even in its small volume in both interest and proficiency in the humanities. There are to my knowledge no permanent student committees responsible for communicating with HSS faculty.

It is therefore unsurprising to me that HSS's capability to react to diverse student interests and needs fails to make par. There is just no good way for our feedback to reach the decision-makers without a better defined and streamlined structure.

As a result, we are stuck with a byzantine system of requirements and an unsatisfactory selection of courses to fulfill them that contributes so much to the rampant bitterness that we all find ourselves exhibiting at times regarding our proud, little institution.

The California Tech

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ASCIT Minutes: April 4, 2007

Social team discusses upcoming events

Officers Present: Chris Gonzales, Mike Grinolds, Andrea Dubin, Angela Zah, Ekta Bhojwani, Mike White, Caleb Ng, Patrick Herring, Daryl Coleman, Zack Higbee

Guests: Russell McClellan

*Budget stuff

-The receipts Angela put in on Friday weren't processed on the old budget, so all submitted receipts were charged to the new budget. Everything needs to be resubmitted, so it might take a little while. Jon Senn is looking into what happened to money charged to students for ASCIT Formal

*Social team

-There will be a midnight donuts during prefresh weekend, and we want to have fireworks during this. It will probably be on Thursday night. Ekta wants \$1500 for the prefresh weekend carnival. The cost will cover equipment rental (such as a dunk

tank and sticky fly wall). The admissions office is subsidizing some of it, but they are paying for a bus to send prefresh off campus for dinner so they don't have the budget to pay for it.

-The ASCIT amplifier disappeared during the move from the mods to the houses. A high quality amp will cost around \$2500. There's a MHF funding deadline coming up, so we will try to apply for funding. Someone on social team will write it.

-The date for interhouse next year will be on December 1st. Each of the 4 parties will get \$7500 each, but we want to increase the amount of money. The party will cost around \$35k. Tom Mannion will give us \$10k, another alum will give us \$10k, but we still need to raise quite a bit of money. We have \$4000 set aside for it. We need to start thinking of avenues to raise more money. We will still have a barbecue in the late afternoon. The idea was brought up to raise ASCIT dues.

Another idea proposed was the possibility of getting sponsorship by having company names on shirts. Ekta, Gonzo, Mike, and Tom will have a meeting to discuss this.

-ASCIT Formal: A place hasn't yet been found to have formal at. Ekta suggested that we should start booking places for future years because most places require to be booked years in advance. Formal will be May 26th. We want to keep cost to students to around \$35, which means that we have about a \$20k budget.

*Funding Request

-Russell requested funding for a Yuri's night party on April 12. They want to turn Ricketts TND into a Yuri's night party. They will make up a budget, then ask

ASCIT, GSC, Alumni foundation, and the Y for money.

*Walking at commencement

-John Hall will give a presentation at the faculty board meeting on Monday.

-Currently the feeling is that students who wish to walk will need to graduate within one term (36-45 units)

-Survey results were overwhelmingly supportive of the change

*Club funding meeting

-The Club Funding meeting will be this Sunday at 11am

*signups

-Signups for committees will be coming down on Sunday evening most likely

-IHC signups will go up some-

time soon.

-Interviews for BoD appointed committees will be on Tuesday the 10th at 10:15pm.

*Directory emails

-There have been complaints that the BoD is sending out to many emails to ug-list.

-The BoD should make sure what they are sending out is relevant to their position, and limit the emails to one per week.

--Andrea Dubin
ASCIT Secretary

The Tech prints the ASCIT minutes every week as a service to ASCIT.

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Rene Davis an inspiration to basketball team

BY ANNA HISZSPANSKI

After a season in which the women's basketball team turned so many heads by winning their first SCIAC games ever, one player achieved another honor that had never before been bestowed: junior Rene Davis was named to the SCIAC All-Conference Team.

In the history of the Caltech athletics program, the honor has been given to only two women in other sports.

In addition to making the All-Conference 2nd Team, Davis finished the season with a double-double, averaging double digits in two categories: rebounds and points scored per game.

However, in speaking with the 5 foot 9 inch junior point guard with hair shaped into a Mohawk, one perhaps would not realize the magnitude of her accomplishments. Humble about her achievements, she says she's "not that great of a basketball player" and credits her team with her success. When told that The Tech wanted to write an article about her accomplishments, she asked that it be about the team instead.

"It's a team sport. I know that during the game I got a lot of rebounds, but rebounds don't happen unless people box-out others," said Davis. "So even though I get the stat, it's really a whole team thing."

Davis' coach, Sandra Marbut, says Rene's team player attitude is apparent whenever she is on or off the court:

"Rene should be a role model for a lot of the professional athletes out there," said Marbut. "She's very aware she can't do it by herself. I think she's very appropriately humble, and that defines great leadership on her part... Rene is such a great example that will benefit players for years to come."

While winning the award is an achievement for Davis, she interpreted the recognition in a different way:

"[Receiving the award] was kind of bittersweet. A lot of people have deserved it in the past, but [the conference] never acknowledged us until the year



Rene Davis dribbles around her defender.

we won," said Davis. "For me, it didn't change how well my season went, what I did, or what the team did... It's so obvious that the award wasn't about me. The biggest thing is that they finally put someone from our team on [the All-Conference Team]. That's really what the award was."

While Davis' season was the best of her career, it was not without struggles either. Davis played with a shoulder injury—a torn labrum—nearly the entire season.

"She really played through some adversity," said Marbut. "Everything she did was incredible and when you realize she had a shoulder injury on top of that, it's even more incredible."

How was Davis able to accomplish such feats as she did while being injured?

"She epitomizes hard work," said Coach Marbut. "If you watch her play, she doesn't do anything fancy. She's not the most athletic person in our program, but she just works hard."

"Rene has such a drive on the court during practice and games... its incredible," agreed teammate junior Meghan Kelleher. "She always gives 110% and in turn inspires everyone else on the team to work just as hard as she does. It's so nice playing with someone who is such a great leader and who you trust to guide the team."

Keeping herself active in and out of the basketball season, Davis has been involved with the volleyball and the track and field teams since her freshman year. She competes in over ten track and field events, ranging from

discus and high jump to running the 200 meter and the 4x4. Davis is currently rehabilitating her shoulder, which is keeping her from many field events like shot put this year and will keep her from playing volleyball next year, as well.

But, according to Davis, basketball is where her true passion lies. She's already looking forward to next year to show the other teams in the conference that Caltech's two SCIAC game wins this season were not a fluke.

"It's really frustrating for our team... We work really hard—probably harder than everyone in conference—and then even when we show them that we're good enough to play with them, they still don't believe it," said Davis, referring to the fact that other teams are still scheduling a third game during the weeks they play Caltech for next year's season. Typically, two conference games in a week is considered a full week.

However, Davis uses the disbelief of other teams as a motivator to succeed even more next season:

"Being an underdog and knowing you can shock people is motivating. Our team is working hard right now—everybody is going to the gym. We're all so excited... Being able to prove everyone wrong is just amazing," said Davis. "It's easy [to be so passionate] because we're all so invested in it now. Last year we lost every game. You'd think we would get frustrated, but we didn't just because we were all aware that we would eventually win."

According to Davis, the team's collective dedication is a key to their success.

"Our team is very different than almost every other sport team here," said Davis. "The girls on the team are my best friends... We are very close-knit. Every class that has come in has fit in very well."

Davis largely credits her coach

for the team's cohesiveness.

"I think a lot of the reason our team is so close is because of our coach. She's amazing," said Davis of Marbut. "She's there for us whether we're upset about school or boys or anything. If I was ever arrested—I don't know why I ever would be—I would probably call my coach. That's the kind of person she is... She will never ask us to work harder than she's working."

The respect Davis has for Marbut appears to be mirrored in Marbut and her respect for Rene:

"Ninety-nine percent of the rest of the college athletic scenes out there are not experiencing a Rene.

Athletes in general tend to get to believe their own propaganda, and I don't think that's the case with anyone on our team, especially Rene," said Marbut. "I am incredibly honored and feel like it is a gift to get to work with her, as well as with all the ladies on the team."

Both Davis and Marbut are looking forward to Rene's next season as a senior. Marbut says losing Davis when she graduates will be difficult. Her class currently includes three of the five starting players. But for now, both are simply enjoying the success of this season and looking to prepare for the next.

"What makes Rene Rene is her grit. Rene knows that the odds were not stacked in her favor... There are just a lot of things that Rene's come through that other people without Rene's strength and character would not be able to," said Marbut. "She volunteers her time every summer to go work with foster children at a camp. She's so humble; she doesn't do it for herself. She grew out her hair to donate it to Locks of Love even though she hates having long hair... There are a lot of really cool things about Rene. The greatest thing about Rene is that she doesn't even know how great she is."

Women's Basketball '07 The start of a winning tradition?

BY HANWEN YAN

In some ways, the Caltech Basketball reminds us of basketball programs at bigger, elite schools, where players are so transient that the teams often change dramatically from year to year. (Well, maybe not the Florida Gators, with their hacked championship starting lineup returning.)

But at the beginning of the 2006-2007 season, the Caltech Women's Basketball team had four returning juniors and a returning sophomore, bringing much needed experience to a program at a school where most students would rather do math than play or even watch basketball.

This year, the Tech women's team had a real goal that they could finally achieve through the hard work put in over the last couple years: it was time to win. With team captains Lindsay King, now Caltech's all-time leading scorer,

and Rene Davis, Caltech's career leader in double-doubles paving the way, the Tech girls made history on January 13, 2007, only a week after the Men's Basketball team shattered their 207 losing streak.

The girls won their first NCAA Division III game, as well as the first SCIAC game in history over Pomona-Pitzer Sagehens in a nail-biting 55-53 victory. When we take a moment to recall that the women's team lost by an average of 70 points only about four years ago, we can really see how far the program has come along.

As the fans erupted and hysterical mayhem and awesomeness ensued, Caltech had something to cheer about. At a college where school spirit is sorely lacking, the Women's Basketball team gave everybody who doesn't stay in their rooms all day something to cheer for.

Those who continued or just began to support the women's

team were rewarded again only a month later on February 10th when the Women's team won their second SCIAC game by defeating Whittier's Lady Poets in another tight game, 54-52.

The difference between the 0-25 seasons and this the past season's 3-22 ending is simply phenomenal. Although not exactly a 22-3 record that large schools come to expect with their enormous basketball programs, we should keep in mind that any one girl on the Women's team is probably smarter than the entire Ohio State team combined, including Greg Oden, whose 40+ years of knowledge and experience probably still pales in comparison to the hard-working girls.

And the best part about the women's team? There were no seniors so basketball fans have much more to look forward to in next year's 2007-2008 campaign.



Lindsay King, co-captain, drives the ball up the line against Cal-Lutheran

Photo by Mathew Glassman



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MOVIE REVIEWS

Namesake: better not judge the book by its movie

BY RADHIKA MARATHE

A common saying goes 'Never judge a book by its movie'. But in the case of *The Namesake*, the opposite may be hold true.

I must say I wasn't too impressed by Jhumpa Lahiri's Pulitzer prize-winning novel when I read it last year and I was initially somewhat reluctant to watch the movie for the same reason. However, I must say that the movie exceeds all expectations and takes the characters and the story to an entirely different level.

This film by Mira Nair is a heart-warming story based on two generations of an Indian-American family. It portrays the cultural conflicts faced by immigrants to the US as well as the generation gap between the first generation and the next. The movie starts off in Calcutta, India and moves to the US with the central characters.

The unlikely pairing of Tabu (Ashima) and Irfan Khan

(Ashoke) in the film, as the Indians to New York in the 1970's contributes to making the film realistic rather than proving a disadvantage. They fit perfectly into the role of two strangers who are introduced at their parents' discretion for an arranged marriage.

Soon after their wedding, they move from the busy and noisy streets of Calcutta to the silent snow-covered landscapes of New York. Their feeling of isolation in a place quite unlike home helps in bringing them closer to each other.

Years later, when the character Ashoke asks Ashima why she married him, she replies mischievously, "Because I liked your shoes (made in the US) and you were the best of the lot!" Theirs is not a love-at-first-sight but rather a relationship that has been nurtured over years.

However, the central character of the film is Gogol (Kal Penn). Growing up as a teenager in the US, he is perplexed by his par-

ents' apparent backwardness and orthodoxy and resents them for naming him so awkwardly.

As he is describing an 'interesting encounter' to his friends, he says "Just as I am about to kiss her, she looks at me, 'What's your name?'" "Gogol Ganguli".(laughter follows) End of Seduction 101!".

At a point in the film, he even brings up the issue of changing his name and his parents, although unhappy, do not try to stop him from doing it. They do not question his decision to major in architecture (although Ashoke's first reaction is "Architecture? Why not engineering?") or his white girlfriend Maxine (Jacinda Barrett). In many ways, Ashoke and Ashima give their children a lot more independence than most Indian parents in the US would.

It is perhaps for this reason that Gogol decides not to change his name when his father explains what a profound influence the author has had on his life and what made him name his son the same.

The scene shows the beautiful bond of father and son forming between Ashoke and Gogol for perhaps the first time beyond the latter's childhood.

It's the death of a close family member that brings Gogol even closer to his ancestral heritage and takes him farther from Maxine. His next and final romantic interest in the film is a girl from the same Bengali background, Moushami (Robinson) who has grown up with Gogol from an aloof young girl to a sensual and smart woman.

The performances have been excellent all through the movie. Tabu is wonderful in the role of Ashima, whose life takes a number of unexpected and mostly unwanted twists and turns. Irfan and Sahira, who plays Gogol's sister, are extremely convincing in their roles as well. However, Kal Penn as Gogol undoubtedly steals the show. It is his heartfelt performance that endears the character of Gogol and makes it extremely

easy to identify with. Apart from the acting, the soundtrack is commendable as an integral part of the movie and the blend of Eastern and Western styles makes it suitable for the general theme of the movie.

Although this theme of cultural and generational conflicts is common to most films based on immigrant families, *The Namesake* is definitely not cliché in this sense. Nair allows the characters to go beyond the American Born Confused Indian stereotype and develop their own distinct personalities.

The film depicts the struggle of the central character Gogol to accept his cultural heritage as well as the awkwardness of his name. It shows his growth from a rebellious, pot-smoking, shaggy-haired senior to a confident young architect who has a strong sense of values by the end of the film. Ultimately, *The Namesake* is a film about finding one's identity and coming to terms with it.

Tarantino and Rodriguez team up for indulgent experience

BY KYLE LITTLER

A lot of the talk I'd heard leading up to the release of *Grindhouse* was about how Quentin Tarantino didn't hold up his end of the bargain. The idea was to make a trashy, overindulgent double feature as a tribute to the exploitation films of the '70s, but apparently Quentin failed to stick to the premise because he decided to make a good movie instead. Robert Rodriguez's *Planet Terror* would be a fun little snack before the meal that was Tarantino's *Death Proof*. But upon leaving the theater, I found out that the opposite was true: Rodriguez created the real movie that could stand on its own, while Tarantino made the gimmicky flick that fills out the whole experience.

Planet Terror is more inherently likeable because we all know what to expect from a zombie movie. During both the exploitation era and Hollywood's recent resurgence in the genre, filmmakers have rarely strayed from the standard zombie plot and concept. The only variable is whether the characters matter or are just there to blast undead bodies apart, and this is where *Planet Terror* makes its mark. It's got every cliché you could want: the damaged relationship reinvigorated by crisis, the sheriff with a chip on his shoulder, the group of military commandos saving themselves at mankind's expense, the fiercely independent redneck providing the heroes with some badass hardware – everything.

But the film also nudges your elbow and hints that it realizes nobody cares about the quality of the story. We find out that we missed learning some secret of the male lead's past that was exposed during a supposed missing reel of film. The revelation of the cause of the zombies' existence is revealed in a rushed dialogue

that crams all the intrigue of the back story into a few seconds. I couldn't hear half of it over the audience's laughter at whatever amusingly violent event happened a moment before, and I'm pretty sure Rodriguez planned on that. In any other movie I'd wonder what I missed and wish I could rewind it, but part of the fun of the experience *Grindhouse* recreates is that you can't make

here, they may never speak to you again. By contrast, the sexual content (of both *Planet Terror* and *Death Proof*) is pretty tame compared to the typical trashy films of today.

The fake trailers by Rodriguez and three guest filmmakers are a real treat. "Machete" is as much of a continuously escalating spectacle of action and insanity as *Planet Terror*. "Werewolf

title at the very end.

After that wonderful string of trailers, we have a killer stunt car driver story called *Death Proof*, and things start getting serious... or do they? A few minutes into it, I began wondering, "Is Tarantino making a Tarantino film or an exploitation film?" As I tried to answer it, I became amused, bored, angry, blown away, angrier, bored again, on the edge of

his stylistic trademarks of any thematic intent. A group of girlfriends spend an ungodly long time chatting in a verbose build-up to nothing. Links to his other films and parallels to *Planet Terror* abound for their own sake. A history lesson on an old British rock band that even I have never heard of is the immediate precursor to a brutal death scene that renders the film's painstaking exposition completely moot. If *Planet Terror*'s link to the exploitation era is its sensational over-the-topness, *Death Proof*'s link is its failing to use any sort of reasonable storytelling framework and forcing you to wait for the thrills you were promised. But since it begins with a huge chunk of trademark Tarantino dialogue, it makes you think it has a story, then crashes your expectations as hard as it crashes Stuntman Mike's death proof car.

Ultimately, the genius of the *Death Proof* is that the final, ridiculously long action scene does something more fundamentally bestial than anything an exploitation film could ever do: it turns your frustration with the film into anger toward Stuntman Mike and makes you hunger for the same vengeful satisfaction that the characters seek. And let me tell you, satisfaction is delivered together with the best flash of the words "The End" in movie history. After realizing that the whole movie was justified, my only complaint is that Mary Elizabeth Winstead has far too small a role for being the hottest actress in the whole three-hour event. That may sound superficial, but given *Grindhouse*'s basic premise, which makes it immune to real criticism anyway, how can an opinion on it amount to more than an expression of indulgence? The *Grindhouse* experience is the kind of opportunity for blissful indulgence that hasn't been offered to the cinema for a damn long time, so dig in.



Cherry (Rose McGowan), a go-go dancer without a leg, poses menacingly with her new prosthetic in "Planet Terror," the first feature film in the double feature "Grindhouse"

sense of everything.

Anyway, the real meat of any zombie movie is, of course, graphic violence and death. If you think that regular theatrical release films have reached their limit of disgustingness in this day and age, you're wrong. *Planet Terror* almost peaks in nastiness fairly early in the movie, but for a while, as the sensational moments get less gruesome and less directly visible on camera, they actually become more disturbing. Then when Tarantino makes a cameo appearance, the film outdoes itself as his body suffers the worst thing you could never imagine. If you bring even a slightly sensitive person to this film and do not cover their eyes

"Women of the S.S." is the weakest of the bunch, but its inexplicable Nicolas Cage cameo is a priceless moment. The remaining two look more like authentic B movies than either feature film. "Don't" is an outright parody of a horror trailer that had me laughing so hard as the title was endlessly repeated I had to gasp for air. I half expected the voiceover to say, "If you're thinking of seeing this movie... DON'T." "Thanksgiving" is the best of all, especially if you're familiar with its classic trailer conventions, which are way different from the now-universal practice of cutting a scene off after a tenth of a second of a shocking moment and dramatically revealing the

my seat, and finally filled with a deep, sick sense of satisfaction. Having no idea what to expect was central to the experience. In fact, even if I mention nothing about the plot, I'd feel like I was spoiling it, so if you're planning on reading the rest of this review... DON'T. It turned out to be half a Tarantino film and half an exploitation film – without the slightest attempt to make the two fit together. It's true that his movies have always been full of exploitation references and long, carefully crafted dialogues about banal subjects, but they usually serve some purpose in the end. In *Death Proof*, Tarantino has thrown that method out the window, completely stripping

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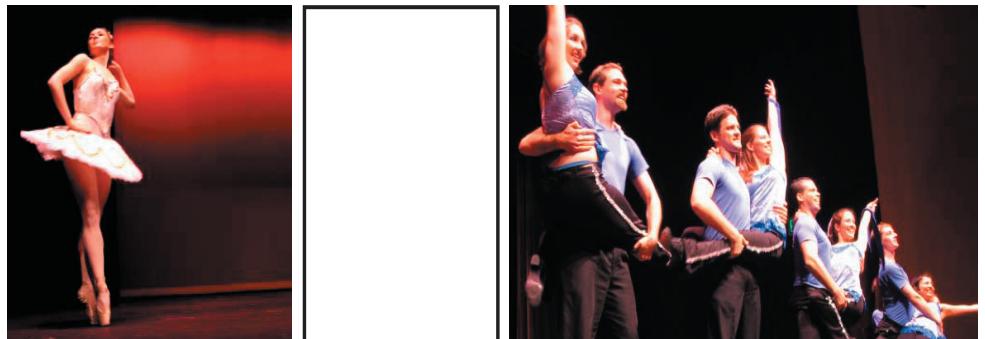
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Lessons in hobo etiquette

BY HAMILTONY FALK

So, you think you're pretty cool, know what to do at a fancy dinner, how to perform vital first aid, and maybe you've learned how to hotwire a car, just in case. However, despite all your superficial knowledge of the world, I'll be there's one thing you don't know enough about, and that thing is Hobos. Often referred to as "the homeless" or "them magical people what live in shanties" this mysterious group is usually just considered to be unhygienic non-contributing members of society¹. Therefore, to keep you safe and out of danger of hobo attack, I'll tell you how to recognize and deal with the Hobo. I should note that I am referring to the modern Hobo, not the ancient hobo referred to in John Hodge-man's book "The Areas of My Expertise" as those have been extinct since the 1940's. This new breed of Hobo is believed to have arrived aboard balsa wood rafts from Canada during the Ford administration.

First of all, Hobos are not homeless people, and rarely are they actually magical, but rather are vagrants that move from town to town stealing and glaring and boxing without a proper license. Homeless people and magicians are for the most part harmless, while Hobos can ruin your life, eat your children, bring about a darkening of the sun and urinate on your car door without you even realizing it. While a homeless person or magician will often have a shopping cart, bulky sleeping bag, wand and bag of cans or bottles, Hobos rarely carry more than a bindle², the skeleton of a cat and a jug full of 250 proof liquor. Additionally, Hobos will have a look of world-weary rage upon their faces and are never more than six feet tall, as their religion forbids great height and those exceeding six feet are thrown from moving trains and forced to live as accountants. A final way to discover if a strange is a Hobo is to search for a scar around their stomach and extra lumps in that area, as all Hobos have one or more additional liv-

ers, usually stolen from their victims.

If you do find yourself face to face with a Hobo, don't fear. There is a good chance that the Hobo is more scared of you than you are of it. This is because the government pays a bounty for each Hobo head delivered to the door of the capitol building, which has caused the rise of a guild of Hobo-hunters. These hunters dress in the clothing of the regular people although the great majority are at least six feet tall and either kill the Hobos right away, or throw poison darts at them that cause them to die when they drink their precious whisky.

Hobos fear these hunters to the extant that some of the once crowded Hobo trains ride empty except for a few of the less clever Hobo hunters. So if you can simply make yourself look larger by standing up tall and spreading your arms, and make the call of the Hobo hunter³ you should be able to scare a Hobo off with little effort.

If you are forced to deal with

a Hobo who doesn't believe that you are a trained Hobo hunter, your best plan is to be a trained Hobo hunter. If you don't have time to accomplish this, it may be sufficient to know karate or be a professional boxer, as Hobos are very protective of their faces, which they believe to be the key to all their powers. Additionally, Hobos fear any height greater than the distance from the bottom of a cargo container in a train to the ground⁴ and are thus unlikely to follow you to the second story of a building or up a ladder. Finally, if all hope seems lost, if you can convince the Hobo that you have no spare change, turnips or liver, they will likely lose interest in you and merely mark you with urine before seeking out other prey.

The final and perhaps most important way to stay safe from Hobo attacks is to stay out of the areas they are likely to inhabit. As mentioned earlier, Hobos fear heights and Hobo-hunters, so tall buildings and Hobo-hunting clubs are generally safe from their wandering menace. In addi-

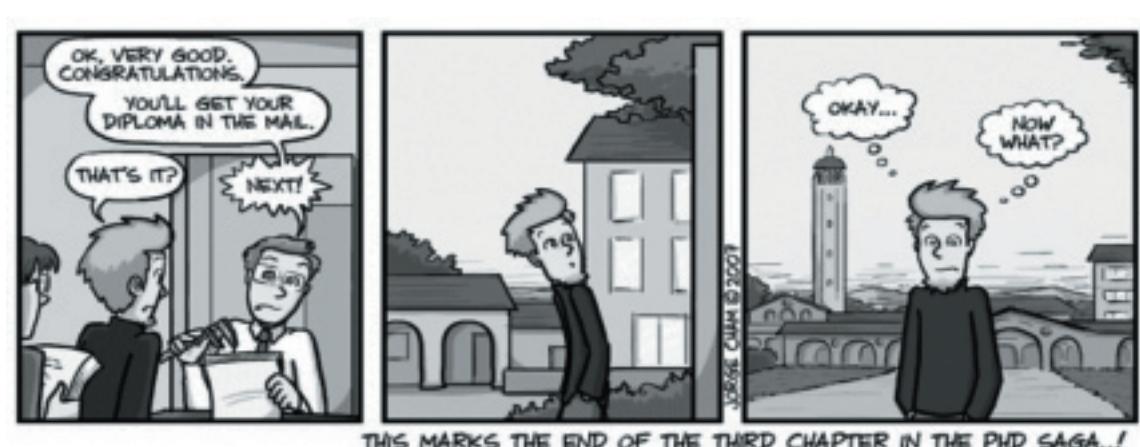
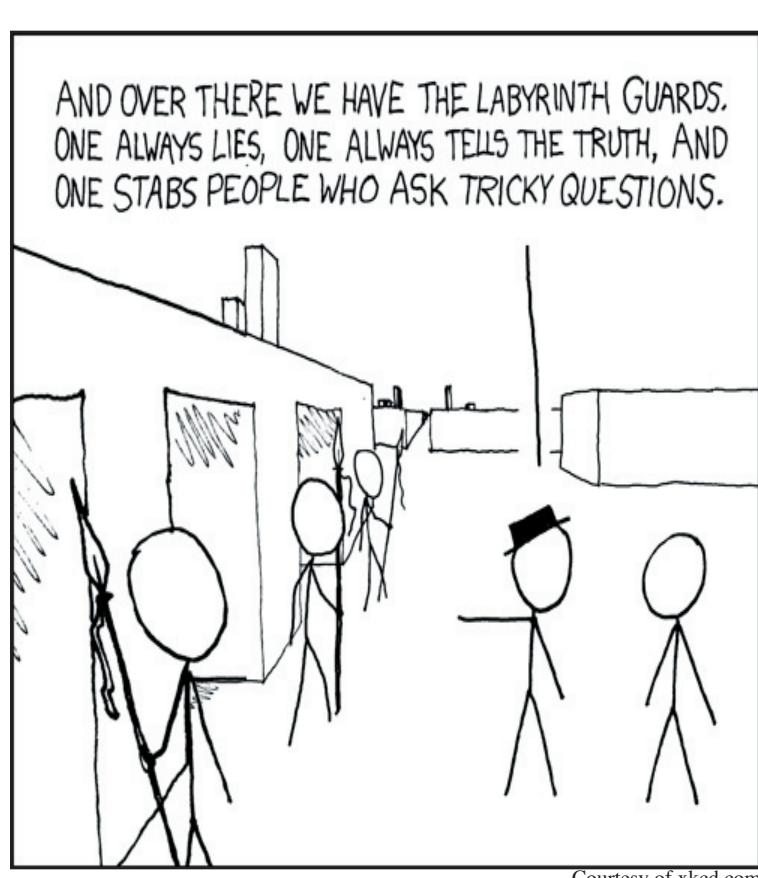
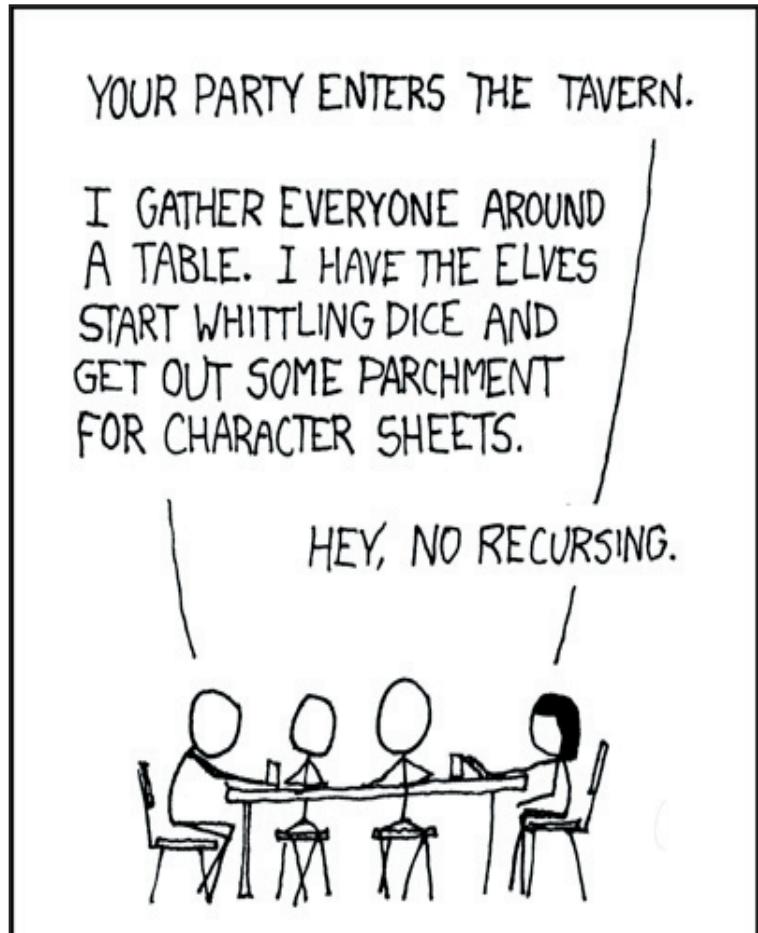
tion, Hobos cannot cross running water, hate homeless people who do not wander from town to town and will die if kept out of contact with a train for more than a week. Thus any place with lousy train service and large numbers of homeless people, such as LA, are pretty safe, and surrounding your home with a moat is an excellent way to keep your liver safe, your children un-urinated-upon and your whisky un-stolen and un-re-distilled.

¹Without the law degree what would make them unhygienic, non-contributing and mean members of society.

²A bindle being the bag and stick in which a hobo keeps his belongings such as boots, false mustache and jet-pack.

³The Hobo-hunter call is a rising "Here Hobo, heeeere Hobo, comere, come here Hobo" repeated several times.

⁴This height, six feet, comes up repeatedly in Hobo lore, and is greatly feared.



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