

Design Day Looms

by Erik Goodman

On Sunday afternoon the lab was full
Of students whose poor brains had turned to mush.
They'd struggled all night long to try to pull
Their circuit boards together, in a rush –

To show off on Design Day, Thursday morning.
Their circuits were assembled, but not working.
Team Three was frantic, heeding Goodman's warning,
But the NASA robot's arm moves still were jerking.

They'd replaced some servos with a worm gear box,
And added new capaciflectors, too.
“We think those gears will help it when it docks,”
They said, “But there's still lots of work to do.”

The lab was buzzing like that all week long –
I marveled every day at such a sight.
The impression that work made on me was strong –
I couldn't get to sleep on Wednesday night.

Perhaps it just was sympathy for all
The students who were sleepless with their teams,
But, as I lay there staring at the wall,
I began to have some horrifying dreams.

It started with me walking through a gym,
With people wearing headphones working out.
I saw Mike Hudson running, went to him –
“What ya' listenin' to?” I had to shout.

He handed me the headphones, with a smile.
I put them on, and soon was grinning, too...
A robot voice was droning, all the while,
“My grandmother can run as fast as you.”

It told me, then, his heart rate and his pace,
And just how many miles he had to run
On the torture treadmill that our teams had built,
Before his daily workout would be done.

The scene jumped to the new livestock pavilion,
Where a vat contained what looked like Mountain Dew!
A little robot fish was swimming in it,
And students were all drinking from it, too.

And as I watched, in horror, someone caught
The robot fish, and hung it, still alive,
On a huge device with “Fulcrum” written on it!
It’s the Team Eight load cell for Impression Five.

The scale read just “One pound.” They threw it back.
They said a fish so small was not impressive.
“You should have seen the one that got away –
It weighed much more, though wasn’t so aggressive!”

And just as I’d got over that poor fish,
And thought I might endure my nightmare’s force,
I saw a deed that I would never wish –
A student intubation by a horse.

The horse was pawing madly at a hose --
A three-foot segment, with a little light.
He was trying to shove it up the student’s nose
Saying, “Take this, Team Ten, and it serves you right!”

Across the floor, an SUV appeared;
The driver had a belt, but didn’t latch it.
A voice was warning him to buckle up,
Responding to some RFID gadget.

It hit the wall, and in the parking lot
A hundred cars’ alarms began to blurt,
“Slow down! There is an accident nearby!”
Responding to their Lear Safe-Warn Alert.

The NASA robot zoomed by in my dream,
Its lidar system barely missed a cow!
The members of the NASA beacon team
Had the robot saying, “Can you hear me now?”

The robot’s moves were made with great precision,
With Team Two’s feedback keeping it on course.
Encoders kept good track of its position,
But several times, it ran into the horse!

I heard a noisy buzz from way up high,
And as I turned my face upward to heaven,
I saw a lighted banner flying by,
With a sign that said, “I’m powered by Team Seven.”

And right behind the banner, there exploded
A brilliant flash of fireworks in the night.
The pattern in the evening sky encoded
A simple sentence – “Team Four does it RIGHT!”

My nightmare peaked and I woke up – alarm buzz –
Fearing I’d forgot to order all the food.
My wife woke with a jerk – as she so often does –
And helped restore my waking attitude.

I realized that I was not in trouble –
The judges would show up, the food was set.
And Channel Six would tape us for their news show
And I would not be fired, at least not yet.

‘Cause our team had all come through on their assignments –
Garth and Vanessa had done their parts, too.
And Brian and Roxanne and Kyle and Kent had
Worked to help make sure your projects worked for you.

But you’re the ones who really make it happen!
You can be proud of what you all achieve!
We’re proud of you – now go and find employment!
We love you all, and now it’s time to leave!

But keep in touch, and tell us your adventures –
And when you want to earn your next degree,
Don't forget your loving alma mater,
There's plenty more to learn here – wait and see!

And now it's time to see who's won the prizes!
The judges have decided – it was tough.
So much good work, it really emphasizes
That three awards are never quite enough.

So this year, there's one more – a new creation:
The Professor's Choice Award – no cash to spend –
But a plaque with the department's recognition
Of outstanding teamwork, right up to the end.

It's been a lot of work for every student –
My thanks to the facilitators, too!
I give you students warm congratulations –
We're proud of what each one of you could do!