opinion

A journey beyond the fringe

The Ashdown desk worker was reluctant to even talk about the undergraduates camped out in the basement. He finally pointed in the general direction of downstairs and we went off in search of the undergraduates.

Unfortunately they were. We passed two as we entered the game room, but they popped back in later to talk to us when we promised them anonymity. We leaned against the pool table and sweat as we discussed their plight.

Stan (his real name was angry, resentful, and very talkative. "They got some kind of nerve," he told us. "They're breeching some kind of promise. They said we'd have housing by Thursday. I don't think you could call this housing."

I looked around as his friend pushed a ball around the pool table. I had to agree. Twelve beds clustered around a medium-sized room, with a communal shower a few steps away and no furniture at all in sight seemed hardly plush for $10,000 a year.

"I spoke to Barbara Clack in the Deans' Office," Stan told me. "She was sympathetic. Sympathy is well and good but where are we supposed to live?"

Stan grappled to find words as his friend continued to bounce a S-ball off two cushions and back. "My Dad will be here tomorrow. Won't he be happy about all this but what the hell can he do?"

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Stan slammed the brown door to his temporary home—"it sounded paper thin. This is not an activist or a militant by nature," he pointed out. "I'm just upset about all this."

The seven freshmen upstairs in Ashdown have it a bit better. Still worse, but not quite as much bashing. No signs of any semblance of furniture, and no signs of any freshmen either. We jogged over to NRSA and peered curiously through the front door.

The House Manager in the kitchen stared blankly at us. "Can you help us?" he asked coyly. "Fearing we'd discover some more freshmen to be housed."

He let out a chuckle when we told him we wanted to see the freshmen's accommodations. "They took us upstairs, past the renovations and beside the stairway, into the basement. It would have been better if they had shown some intent."

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"They said we would definitely have a permanent address today. They told me that as late as 1:30 today. All week there was a day we could shoot for. Now the impression is gone. Don't know when they'll call us."

At that very moment, the entire Deans' Office, especially Sherwood, was trying to weather a storm of phone calls from angry students and distraught parents. It was not a good day for anyone.

"It seems like it just keeps dragging on," whined one of the freshmen sitting next to a Trek which bearded "Record Crowding to Greet '84."

One Californian freshman looked up and shook his head, "I think if my mother was coming she'd take me home."

Another added, "If I would have known about this beforehand it might have changed my decision to come to MIT."

Still another, sitting beside an unstrung harp, "If I'd known it was this much hassle to get a dorm I wouldn't be able to take living out of a divorce for two weeks."

They started to joke about drying their laundry out on the sidewalk. Then the room quieted down for a second.

"I just can't believe they screwed up this much." from one. They then all went out for Chinese food.