Astronaut, Astronaut, Where Is the Astronaut?

By CHARLIE DEMITZ

What happens when an irresistible force meets an immovable object? There is an incontrovertible concussion.

Concussed at present are the Rice Forum Committee and Hanszen's Program Committee. The meeting of the monoliths occurred when both parties decided to invite an astronaut to speak at Rice. Since probably only one astronaut is forthcoming from NASA, he is considered a prize catch for the host.

THE CHAIRMAN of the irresistible Forum, Mike Jaffe, argues that "a figure of such general interest as an astronaut should be a guest of the university, (i.e., the Forum) and should speak at Hamman Hall, where there is sufficient seating capacity.

"Hanszen and Harlan are too concerned with their own prestige. Harlan is just afraid that he won't be able to stand up and introduce the astronaut. A little of that Hanszen gentlemanly spirit of cooperation would go far."

DOUG HARLAN, immovable Program Committee Chairman for Hanszen, holds fast. "Hanszen has temporal and initiative priority over the Forum"—Harlanese for "we asked first"—"The question is whether or not the Forum can horn in on a college's established program.

"After all, the Forum has lots of money to work with. We don't have any. The Forum should spend its time and money getting its own people instead of trying to take away Hanszen's guests. We are willing to have the astronaut speak at Hamman if there is sufficient interest—but not in the name of the Forum."

RETORTS JAFFE, "This is indeed untrue. Hanszen has more money on its books than the Forum ever will."

The conflict broke into the open two weeks ago when Jaffe raised the subject at a meeting of the masters, catching the Hanszen contingent flat-footed.

Harlan, who was not present, says of the meeting, "Several weeks ago Jaffe and I talked this over. We had an apparent agreement that Hanszen would handle the astronaut. And now this."

JAFFE SPIES falsehood: "The only thing apparent to me was Harlan's refusal to cooperate. Can't we approach this like gentlemen?"

Bob Clarke, SA President who sat in on the meeting, commented, "If a college has the incentive to obtain a speaker of real significance, it should not be penalized for it. The speaker should not be transferred from the college to the Forum simply because he is a national figure." But he added that he believed the Forum really had asked first.

HANSZEN PRESIDENT Tilson, a participant in the meeting, described its result: "It was decided that, if an astronaut can speak here only through a university invitation, he will be jointly sponsored by the Hanszen and the Forum.

"On the other hand, if there is an abundance of astronauts and a university invitation is not necessary, then Hanszen will sponsor him alone. Dr. Pitzer has it under advisement now."

"I myself would like to say this—Hanszen College is not a university-wide service organization. It exists solely for the good of its members. If it wants to do something for the benefit of the university as a whole, well and good. But this is not the college's primary purpose."

Hanszen College and the Forum, with battle lines drawn, await President Pitzer's decision and, in the unforeseeable future, the coming of an astronaut.

But there are still Mike Jaffe's last wistful words on the subject: "It seems too trivial an issue to raise such a controversy..."