

Cast: (in order of appearance...)

Newscast Announcer
Newscaster Tom
Newscaster Joe
Regis Philbin
Contestant Jerry
Bob Constable
Students -- everyone except Got Faculty Announcer
Got Faculty Announcer
Johnny Gomez
Neil Diamond
Ringside Ref
Virtual Fish Announcer
HSN Joan
HSN Bill
David Schwartz
Honey I Shrunk the Dept. Announcer
David Letterman
Paul Shaeffer
Star Wars Announcer
Yoda
Anakin Codewalker
Rod Serling -- Kevin
HD Crash Victim Student -- James
Fox Mulder
Dana Scully
Ken Birman
Jerry Springer
Phil (PhD student)
Professor Gehrke
Two Security Guards

Props: microphone, phone receiver, wallet, a very large hat, a VHS tape & DVD disc (?)

Sounds: School bell, Boxing ring bell, Twilight Zone Theme followed by X-Files Music

Newscast:

Tom, seated. Joe standing off to the side.

Announcer: AND NOW! A FOX NEWS SPECIAL REPORT!

Tom: We interrupt this regularly scheduled broadcast of "Duffield of Dreams" to bring you the following Y2K Advisory Update. We are pleased to announce that, due to the diligence of many hard-working COBOL programmers, this station is now Y2K ready! Unfortunately, our station managers inform us that some of our programmers have gone a little bit too far in their pursuit of Y2K bugs. For more on this late-breaking story, we bring you live to Joe Smith in the field.

Joe: Thanks Tom. Apparently several disgruntled programmers here at the station managed to hack into the script databases and recordings of various television shows. They've updated the content of our shows to better suit their own humorous tastes. Remember, these are COBOL programmers we're talking about, Tom. The results haven't been pretty. Viewers should be forewarned that until these changes have been corrected, programs on this channel may randomly interrupt each other and many broadcasts may exhibit unexpected deviations.

Tom: That's right, Joe. In fact I've just been advised that "Duffield of Dreams" is now being relocated to a new timeslot. Instead we now return you to an in-progress episode of our new hit game show, "Who Wants To Be A Millionaire?"

Who Wants To Be A Computer Scientist:

Regis and Jerry, seated face to face. Bob standing off to the side.

Regis: Hello and welcome back to America's favorite show, "Who Wants to be a Computer Scientist!!!" ... where we ask, "who wants to be a computer scientist, anyway?"

Now as you all know by now, the game is played by asking questions. There are fifteen multiple choice questions. After five you get a bachelor's degree. After ten you get a master's degree. And after all fifteen you win the fabulous prize of a PhD in computer science! You can stop at any time, and once you get to any of the degree levels you are guaranteed to get at least that prize. Also each contestant gets three "lifelines." There's 50-50, where two answers that are wrong will be eliminated for you. There's "Ask the Audience," where the audience votes for the right answer. And there's "Phone a Friend," where you can ask anyone in the country for help.

Now yesterday we had a contestant go almost all the way to the top but we didn't have time to ask the last question. Jerry here has answered 14 questions correctly. Here's how he got his bachelor's degree:

<FLASHBACK>

Regis: OK, Jerry, you're doing well so far. Now... for the BS... Which of the following people is *not* a famous numerical analyst? (A.) Bill Clinton, (B.) Bill Gates, (C.) Billy the Kid, or (D.) Bill Arms.

Jerry: Hmm. I'm not sure. I think I'm going to use a lifeline. I want to use the 50-50.

Regis: OK. The only choices left are: (B.) Bill Gates or (C.) Billy the Kid.

Jerry: I think my answer is going to be... (B.) Bill Gates.

Regis: And that's your final answer?

Jerry: Yes.

Regis: You're absolutely sure?

Jerry: [wipes sweat from brow] Well I... Yes, I'm sure.

Regis: OK. (dramatic pause) Bill Gates... is... ABSOLUTELY RIGHT!

[APPLAUSE]

<FLASHFORWARD>

Regis: And here's how Jerry got his Master's degree...

<FLASHBACK>

Regis: Well, Jerry, you've worked all the way up to the master's level, and so if you get this right you get a master's degree in computer science. Are you psyched?

Jerry: Sure am, Regis.

Regis: All right then. Jerry... for the MS... how many years has Microsoft been in business? Is it: (A.) 5, (B.) 10, (C.) 25, or (D.) 50 ?

Jerry: [thinks] Well... I think I can narrow it down to two of those... I think I'll phone a friend.

Regis: Who do you want to call?

Jerry: I think I will call my advisor, Bob Constable.

Regis: All right. Our friends at AT&T are making that connection right now.

Bob: Hello?

Regis: Bob? Hello, it's Regis Philbin. I'm here with your student Jerry on "Who Wants to be a Computer Scientist." Your student Jerry needs your help to get to the MS level. In a moment Jerry will ask you a question that he needs to answer correctly.

Bob: OK.

Jerry: Bob, listen carefully: How many years has Microsoft been in business? Is it... (A.) 5, (B.) 10, (C.) 25, or (D.) 50?

Bob: It's 12.

Jerry: That wasn't one of the answers... Are you sure?

Bob: I think it's 12. Maybe longer. In fact I was just saying the other day that right now we're standing on the threshold of a revolution in the computing and information sciences. And companies like Microsoft which in only 12 years...

Regis: [interrupts] OK times up. Well, Jerry, what's your answer going to be?

Jerry: Well, I guess I'll just go with (C.) 25.

Regis: Final answer?

Jerry: [thinks, then nods] Final answer.

Regis: 25 years.. hmm. well let's see... 25 years is **ABSOLUTELY THE RIGHT ANSWER!**

[APPLAUSE]

<FLASHFORWARD>

Regis: And now we're ready for the final question... Jerry, are you ready to face the last question and earn your PhD?

Jerry: I'm ready!

Regis: This should be easy. We took this question from your Systems Q-Exam. The question is... What kind of Web server am I thinking of right now?

Jerry: [frowns, confused] How am I supposed to know that?

Regis: Well, maybe you could draw a picture or something...

Jerry: Do you even know what a web server is, Regis?

Regis: [still cheery] Hey remember, I'm the one who asks the questions on this show!

Jerry: [frets and pauses to think; finally looks up] This wasn't on the syllabus...

Regis: [turns to audience] Why don't we take a commercial break to give Jerry some time to

think.

"Got Faculty" Commercial:

Everyone except Announcer brings chairs up to stage, face them in same direction, and sit in them. Announcer is off-stage.

<SCHOOL BELL>

Students: [enter classroom, take seats]
[wait quietly, get notebooks out, etc.]
[become more restless, sigh, look at watches a lot, look around the room]

Announcer: [ominously] GOT FACULTY?

Celebrity/Advisor death match:

John and Neil both seated facing audience. Ref calls from off-stage.

John: And now everybody get ready to rumble for another episode of FACULTY DEATH-MATCH! I'm Johnny Gomez.

Neil: And I'm Neil Diamond. Today we bring you an exciting death-match between two faculty members new to the CS department. There they go into the ring now...

Ref: [from offstage] In the far corner... clothed only in the untyped lambda calculus...
ANDREW MYERS!

John: Now as you know, Andrew is a programming language researcher. So he's strong in the weapons of type theory. But we've been informed that he has a tendency to lose track of time..

Neil: I think you mean, he seems to lose things, Johnny... like watches, and palm pilots and other time-telling devices.

John: Right you are, Neil. We don't know how much of a disadvantage this will be for Andrew, but you never know.

Ref: [from offstage] And in this corner... all the way from Israel... RON ELBER!

Neil: Now Ron Elber on the other hand works in computational biology. So we can't rule out the possibility of biological warfare. Andrew will have to watch out for that.

John: Even some of those slides he puts up during lectures can be pretty disturbing...

Neil: [nods] Should be an exciting match, John. Oh, it looks like we're about to get started!

<BELL SOUNDS>

[Both announcers lean forward as if intently watching the fight.]

Neil: [pauses as if watching for a few seconds] Well it looks like Myers is starting with a simple string of definitions. I don't see how he's...

John: [interrupts] WOW! Did you see that? That body slam came out of nowhere! Was that the method of logical relations he used there?

Neil: I don't know, John, but whatever it was, it sure confused Elber and half his class besides! I don't see how Elber's ever going to get out of that headlock.

John: [pauses to watch] Wait, Neil. Elber seems to have some objection to the notation and it's really throwing Myers for a loop. Look at that! Elber is out of the headlock and Myers is completely disoriented by his own proof!

Neil: Amazing!

John: Uh oh. Elber seems to have pulled out some kind of weapon. What is that, a chain of some kind?

Neil: It's an amino acid chain, John. Myers needs to stop looking at that proof and move on, or he's in for a world of hurt!

John: Elber's coming up from behind, closing in for the kill... Gahh!

[Both announcers cringe and shield their eyes.]

Neil: That's GOTTA hurt... Well, folks.. While they're cleaning up the mess in the ring, let's take a moment to hear these important messages from our sponsor.

"When Virtual Fish Attack" Commercial:
Announcer stands facing audience.

Announcer: We've all seen virtual fish on screen savers and at CS colloquia. We've watched them, learned about them, even admired them. But what most people don't realize is that these fish have a dark side... Sometimes virtual fish can be just as ravenous for flesh as their real world counterparts. Tonight Fox brings you some incredible footage showing the mayhem that can result... WHEN VIRTUAL FISH ATTACK!

Home Shopping Network:
Joan and Bill stand talking to each other and facing audience. David Schwartz offstage.

Joan: Good evening everyone, and welcome back to the Home Shopping Network's "Techno hour." We've got a lot of great products for you tonight that we know you're really going to love, so keep that phone handy. Bill, what do we have to start off?

Bill: Well, Joan, tonight we have an absolutely top-notch line of Faculty Research Advisors straight from Cornell University, and absolutely every last one of them is on sale.

Joan: That sounds great, Bill! But you know, I bet there are a lot of people out there wondering, "Why do I need an advisor?"

Bill: I'm so glad you asked that question, Joan. Let me ask you this: Have you ever had that uneasy feeling that you just don't have enough to do?

Joan: [nods emphatically] Of course! I think we've all had that feeling.

Bill: And what about that gnawing suspicion that your thesis work is going a little *too* smoothly.

Joan: Ugh. I can't stand that feeling.

Bill: Then a Faculty Research Advisor is the answer to ALL your worries, Joan. But don't take my word for it. Look at the magic that a Faculty Research Advisor can do. [pick a grad student from audience and stand him up in front] Excuse me sir, could you stand up and face the audience? Thank you. [to the audience:] Would you believe that not half a semester ago this young man got all his work done on time and was making steady progress on his thesis. Now look at him. He's got dark patches under his eyes, he obviously hasn't slept in over a week, and notice the dull look of a trapped animal. A Faculty Research Advisor made all the difference. Let's give him a hand. [show student to seat as audience claps] Let's hear what other people have to say about Faculty Research Advisors.

David: [enters] Hi, I'm Professor David Schwartz. I'm not a computer scientist, but I play one at Cornell. I find that when my research is going poorly and nothing seems to work, there's always one thing I can rely on: Interval Analysis. But if you can't do that, then I recommend a Faculty Research Advisor who can. [exits]

Joan: [claps] Wow, I don't see how grad students survive without a Faculty Research Advisor. But for something that can work miracles like that, there's no way I could afford one, right?

Bill: Don't be so sure, Joan. I bet you'd be willing to pay a cool million for a Faculty Advisor who could do something like that, right?

Joan: [nods] Without hesitation.

Bill: But it's so much simpler than that. You can get your very own Faculty Research Advisor... ABSOLUTELY FREE!

Joan: [disbelievingly] No...

Bill: It's true, Joan. All you have to do is sign this simple form which gives Cornell University

the rights to every creative idea you'll ever have, and a Faculty Research Advisor can be yours today.

Joan: Well you heard it, folks. You'd have to be absolutely crazy to pass up a great opportunity like this. So dial the number on the bottom of your screen while we take this short station break.

"Honey, I Shrunk the Department" commercial:

Announcer stands facing audience holding VHS tape and DVD disc.

Announcer: What happens when wacky computer scientist Wayne Zalinski is forced to choose between an innocent CS Department and a ruthless multi-million dollar software company? Don't miss the laughs! Get "Honey, I Shrunk the Department." Available soon on video and DVD.

Letterman:

Letterman sits facing audience. Paul stands off to his right.

Letterman: And now from the Home Office in Yahoo, Nebraska... Tonight's Top Ten List! ... Tonight we have the "Top 10 reasons for not being in the skit." Paul, have you heard about this? Apparently every year the second-year grad students in the CS Department at Cornell University put on some crazy skit to roast the faculty and poke fun at events that have happened in the last year.

Paul: I hadn't heard about that.

Letterman: Really? Where have you been, Paul?

Paul: Well I did make a quick trip out to Harvard to give a graduation speech.

Letterman: Ah, well that explains it. Harvard isn't a "real" graduate school, you know. Anyway, here we go. Remember, these are the "Top 10 reasons I couldn't be in the skit..."

<TABLETOP DRUMROLL>

- 10) Skit? What skit?
- 9) Still trying to figure out how those weird smile faces got into my PowerPoint slides
- 8) Still taking last year's AI Q-Exam
- 7) Advisor went to Microsoft and now my thesis is a mess.
- 6) Advisor left to form his own *start-up* and now my thesis is a mess.
- 5) Advisor left to form his own start-up and *I'm going with him.*
- 4) Still in a coma after an extremely boring colloquium.
- 3) No free pizza? Count me out.
- 2) Too busy building my Y2K bunker.

And the number one reason why I couldn't be in the skit ...

I'm still standing in line for Star Wars tickets.

Letterman: Speaking of Star Wars, Paul, have you seen the new commercial they're showing for Star Wars: The Phantom Menace?

Paul: Actually, no, Dave, I haven't.

Letterman: Biff, do we have a clip of that? Go ahead and roll that.

Star Wars - the Phantom Department:

Announcer, off to the side, facing audience. Yoda sitting, Anakin standing, facing each other; both at right angle to the audience.

Announcer: Can an unlikely young hero, Anakin Codewalker, two Jedi CS faculty, and an irritating CGI save the small, peaceful planet of Upson from the evil machinations of the Engineering Federation, and sway the corrupt Faculty Senate? Watch as Yoda leads the mysterious council of the Jedi in its search for the truth...

Yoda: Yes.. Qui-Gon was right.. strong in the reductions is this boy. Test him, we must. What's this? [makes shadow puppet of a bunny]

Anakin: It's a bunny rabbit.

Yoda: And this [making a butterfly]

Anakin: Ooo pretty... a butterfly.

Yoda: And what kind of Web server am I thinking of right now?

Anakin: [pauses, thinking] It looks like the CS Department web server... but I'm not sure – it seems to be down.

Announcer: And will evil triumph and the power of the dark side creep over the face of the university?

Scene change while announcer speaks: Queen stands at right angle to audience, wearing large headgear. Bob approaches from behind her from offstage.

Bob: Queen Amidala?

Queen: Yes, Professor Constable? What is it?

Bob: Good news, your highness! I have just been elected Dean of Computing and Information Sciences, second only to the Provost! A surprise to be sure, but a welcome one. As we stand here on the eve of a revolution in the computer and information sciences...

Queen: [interrupts] I fear by the time you have control of the Faculty Senate, Dean, there will be

nothing left of our courses, our students, our way of life... There is nothing more I can do here. Dean, this is your arena. I feel I must return to mine. I have decided to go back to hacking. My place is with my code.

Announcer: Don't wait to find out! See Star Wars: The Phantom Department.... STILL in theaters!

Twilight Zone:

Student, facing audience, sitting with notebook writing. Serling approaches student from behind while talking. Student does not give any sign of awareness of Serling until the second paragraph of his speech. Serling always addresses audience, not student.

<TWILIGHT ZONE MUSIC>

Serling: There is a fifth dimension beyond that which is known to computer science. It is a dimension as vast as cyberspace and as frustrating as Windows NT. It is the middle ground between light and shadow, between systems and theory, and it lies between the pit of a programmer's fears and the summit of his knowledge. This is the dimension of research... It is an area which we call... THE ACADEMIC ZONE.

Enter PhD student ???, mild-mannered research assistant at Cornell University... Blissfully unaware that soon his comfortable world of theory and intellectualism will be turned upside down by hard drive crashes and total system failures.

Student: What?

Serling: All his research will be lost, and he will be forced to begin his career anew...

Student: But... but what if I just change my bios settings...

Serling: Changing the bios settings will be useless. Call it destiny, call it doom, call it what you will. The unexplainable and the unavoidable are just part and parcel of the unpredictable nature of... THE ACADEMIC ZONE.

The X-Files:

Mulder and Scully are standing together facing Ken, also standing. All are at right angles to audience.

<X-FILES MUSIC>

Mulder: Professor, Birman?

Ken: Yes, I'm Ken Birman. How can I help you?

Mulder: [flashes wallet] I'm agent Mulder and this is agent Scully, FBI. We're here to investigate the disappearance of several faculty members from your department.

Ken: FBI? Is this really an FBI matter?

Mulder: Absolutely. Now I understand that these faculty members just disappeared one day?

Ken: Well I don't know if I would say that they just "disappeared" exactly...

Scully: Well what *would* you say then, professor Birman?

Ken: Well some of them left to form start-ups, or to work in industry research labs. The others are just on sabbatical. Really, I don't understand why you need to investigate this. There's nothing mysterious about this disappearance.

Mulder: [incredulously] You're not just a little concerned that all these faculty supposedly left around the same time and in pretty much the same manner?

Ken: No. They all left for perfectly good reasons. And in fact the department is stronger now than it's ever been. We believe that this situation represents an opportunity for growth.

Scully: We're going to have to ask you not to leave town without contacting us, professor. That's all for now, but we'll have more questions later.

Ken: [nods and exits]

Mulder: Well.. What do you think?

Scully: No sign of forced entry. Offices look carefully cleaned out... I see no reason to doubt his claims.

Mulder: Scully, are you sure you've been getting enough sleep? You don't look too good.

Scully: Look, Mulder.. In today's world of booming software markets and lucrative research positions outside the academic community, isn't it reasonable and even plausible to assume that these faculty simply left of their own accord, drawn to the world of industry and big money?

Mulder: Come on, Scully. You're not going to buy that flimsy story about this being an "opportunity for growth" are you?

Scully: Okay, what's your theory?

Mulder: Well.. you know I'm not one to jump to conclusions, but look... These crashed hard drives here.. They've obviously been exposed to dangerously high levels of radiation -- probably extraterrestrial in origin. And look at the system clock on this machine. Set to the year 1900? Unexplained radiation exposure and missing time are all classic indications of alien abduction.

Scully: Aliens again, Mulder?

Mulder: Okay, I admit there's also a small chance that Bigfoot is involved. Either way we've got an X-file on our hands.

Scully: [sighs] Mulder, have you ever been on one of those daytime talk shows, by any chance?

[both exit]

Jerry Springer:

Jerry standing with microphone standing in the audience. Two empty chairs facing audience. Phil and Prof waiting offstage.

Jerry: Hi folks, and welcome back to the show. I'm Jerry Springer. Tonight's show is about "CS Grad Students and the Advisors who Love to Leave Them." My first guest tonight is Phil, a grad student right here at Cornell. Can we bring in Phil?

Phil: [enters and sits; audience claps]

Jerry: How you doing, Phil?

Phil: Good, Jerry.

Jerry: So... Tell me about your work, Phil. How's it going?

Phil: Well, as you know, Jerry, I'm a databases researcher here. It's been going really well so far. I've been meeting with my advisor, Professor Seshadri, every week and making a lot of progress on my thesis.

Jerry: Every week, huh? Well it sounds like you and your advisor get along pretty well.

Phil: [nods innocently] Yes. I'm very happy to be working with him.

Jerry: Alright, well let's bring in your advisor. Professor Seshadri?

Gehrke: [enters and sits down; audience claps] Hi, Jerry.

Jerry: Hi, Professor. So you've been advising Phil here for the past couple of semesters, right?

Gehrke: Well actually I've been wanting to talk to Phil here about that.

Jerry: Oh okay. Well why don't you go ahead then.

Gehrke: [takes Phil's hand] Phil... I know you've been working really hard on your thesis...

Phil: [nodding] Yes. In fact I've been meaning to tell you that last week I think I really made a breakthrough on that problem we were talking about...

Gehrke: [interrupts] Phil.. I have something to tell you... I'm not who you think I am.

Phil: [frowns] What?

Gehrke: I... I'm not Professor Seshadri. Professor Seshadri went to Microsoft. My name is Professor Gehrke.

Phil: [pulls hand away and looks tearful] I don't understand. You graduated from Wisconsin, right? For years you and I have met every week in your office to talk about databases research.

Gehrke: Phil, you've been coming to the same office for years, but back in August Professor Seshadri moved out and I moved in. I guess you just didn't notice.

Phil: [stands up, now angry] No! You're lying!

Gehrke: I'm sorry Phil, but it's the truth.

Phil: No!!! [suddenly lunges for Gehrke's throat. Two security guys pull them apart and hold them back as they continue to try and attack each other. Throughout, the two utter random threats of violence.]

Jerry: [steps in front and faces the audience; security guards drag Phil and Gehrke offstage] As the show, and the skit, draws to a close, we should ask ourselves, "What have we learned here this evening?" First, I think we should be sure to remember that violence is never the answer. Secondly, when violence *is* the answer, make sure the computational biologist is on *your* side. And finally and most importantly, never entrust anything -- even a yearly skit -- to second-year CS grad students.

[2 guards chase Phil and Gehrke across stage]

In closing, the writers wish to thank Charlie Van Loan for his immortal and inspirational words, "I was drunk when I wrote that." Without them this skit could not have been possible. As always, take care of yourselves... and each other. Goodnight everyone.