

PRANKS A LOT!

The most killer college capers of all time

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SARAN WRAPPING A toilet? Too easy. Penny-ing a door shut? Kids' play. How about freezing a staircase? Gimme a break. For the most adventurous college pranksters, these classic tricks just don't get the adrenaline pumping. You see, every once in a great while, a true prankster comes along — one who aspires to stunts bigger than ducks in a dorm room, more inflammatory than scaring the freshman orientation tour and more press-worthy than defacing the beloved school monument.

We salute these practical jokers who risk suspension, even expulsion, to pull capers so daring. And although their names may have been forgotten, their deeds will go down in college history. We invite you to relish their ingenuity, admire their audacity and chuckle at their hijinks. And now, without further ado: the most killer college pranks of all time.

To Russia, With Love

In 1953, editors from Harvard's strait-laced *Crimson* newspaper nabbed the 4-foot-tall bronze Ibis statue belonging to their rival, the wacky Harvard *Lampoon*. Thieves took the ugly Egyptian bird to New York City and presented it to a United Nations Soviet delegate. The editors said it was a gift from the Harvard *Lampoon* as a symbol of the friendship among students all over the world. The *Lampoon* had to ask the state government to get their statue back from the Reds — er, crimson, er, whatever.

Check and Mate

Some schools have a tradition of human mascot swiping — like at Utah State U., where the rivalry between the engineering and forestry departments has continued for more than 60 years. During the '60s, each department elected a king and queen for their annual ball. These lucky individuals were guarded like royalty, as the rivals did their damndest to kidnap each other's kings and queens.

One year, forestry's queen was kidnapped on the day of the big dance. But when the kidnappers showed up at the ball to claim their victory, they were in for

a surprise. Unbeknownst to the pranksters, the queen had an identical twin sister who took her place at the dance, leaving the kidnappers more than a little bewildered.

The Lady In the Lake

In the '70s, the Pail and Shovel Party was running the student government at James Madison U., Va., and legislating pranks left and right. The party's *coup de grâce* came in the winter of '79 when the student government made a campaign promise to bring the Statue of Liberty to JMU.

And it did. One morning, students awoke to the incredible sight of Lady Liberty's head and the top of her torch-bearing arm peeking out over the frozen Lake Mendota. How did the Pail and Shovel party do it? The pranksters claimed that the statue was being transported via plane from New York and that it fell from the sky en route.

Truth is, the devilish Pail and Shovel Party had re-created the giant statue on the lake's frozen surface, complete with a 22-foot-wide crowned head. The statue got plenty of attention, so much that an arsonist brought his or her own torch to the site and set the Lady ablaze. But the statue was back the following year — this time in fireproof form.

Erik Rasmussen, who headed the third statue reconstruction a few months ago, notes that the original pranksters were arrested back in '79. Ironically, city officials nominated Rasmussen and his crew for citizens of excellence awards.

"Hopefully we'll get arrested next time," he says. "We get a lot more press from jail."

Glazed and Confused

In 1994, those perpetually pranky perpetrators at the Massa-

chusetts Institute of Technology built a mock campus police car on the top of the Great Dome, a 150-foot-high building on campus. The car's flashing lights attracted attention even across the Charles River in Boston. When maintenance workers climbed to the roof of the dome to disassemble the car, they found a cop mannequin with a box of donuts waiting for them.

The stunt masterminds were rumored to be the Hackers, a long-time shadowy prank organization that, despite being a supersecret mystery, is widely known to meet every Saturday on campus. No action was taken against them.

Real Genius

Elaborate pranks are the consummate time killer at MIT's West Coast counterpart, California Institute of Technology.

Tom "Saxy" Workman, who received his bachelor's, master's and doctoral degrees from Caltech before leaving in 1992, witnessed some of the greatest pranks in his alma mater's history.

"Mostly we liked to do pranks to each other," he says. "As a rule, you would never do a prank to someone you didn't like, and you never do anything that's really going to make them mad."

In 1987, Caltechers decided to have one of California's most famous landmarks reflect the real brilliance of Los Angeles by changing the Hollywood sign to read "CALTECH."

Workman explains that before Caltechers set out to alter history, they carefully measured the letters and planned their actions to minimize their chances of getting caught.

Caltechers didn't have an easy time completing their project, though. "After they did it and were on their way down the hill, the

police were on their way up the hill with sirens," Workman says.

Ruff Break

Not all pranks are well-received. Building statues and kidnapping humans is one thing, but involve an animal — especially a cute one — and look out!

The practice of mascot stealing has a nefarious reputation, and many beloved school icons have ended up in the pet cemetery. But even if you're careful about stealing the school-spirit-on-a-leash, you can still find yourself in the doghouse.

In December 1993, U. of Texas, Austin, student Neil Sheffield dog-napped Texas A&M's collie, Reveille IV. Sheffield was a brave lad: He took the one Southwest Conference mascot that had never been stolen from the most notorious mascot-swipers in the South.

"I was scared shitless," Sheffield says.

The ultimate prankster nabbed Reveille IV when the dog's handlers let the collie out for its morning pee. He kept the dog a week before returning it unharmed.

Unfortunately, UT administrators didn't see the humor in the stunt. Sheffield was disqualified from running in student elections and ultimately pressured into temporarily leaving the university.

"The university president denounced it as 'a puerile act,'" Sheffield says.

But many students stood behind Sheffield, and some even took up a collection to erect a statue to UT's most famous prankster. The statue never materialized, but then again, some prankster probably would have stolen it anyway.

Kirsten Nelson is a magazine journalism major who finds nothing funny about mean pranks. Nothing funny at all.

