Cuthbert Corwin Hurd

Born: April 5, 1911;

Estherville, Iowa
Died: May 22, 1996

Hurd was instrumental in moving IBM's focus away from its punch card business towards general-purpose computers.

In 1949 he founded IBM's Applied Science Department, hired John von Neumann [Dec 28] as a consultant, and began building a team that included John Backus [Dec 3] and Fred Brooks [April 19]. He was also lucky that his push for change coincided with Tom Watson, Jr. [Jan 14] taking on more duties at IBM, and eventually the role of president.

Cuthbert Hurd. (c) IBM.

Hurd's first great success was in persuading the company to build the IBM 701 [April 7], its first commercial scientific machine, but his big commercial hit was the IBM 650 [July 2]. Its low cost (including the option of renting one) meant that almost 2,000 were produced during the 1950's, and it became a popular choice for commercial and academic customers.

In 1955, Hurd broached the idea of building a super-fast machine for the Lawrence Livermore Lab, which would eventually become the ambitious IBM STRETCH project [April 26]. Although it was something of a failure, its innovations had a profound impact of later IBM designs.

Soviet Robot Calculator Order
April 5, 1946

Just two months after the public unveiling of the ENIAC [Feb 15], the US branch of the Soviet Union 's Government Purchasing Commission sent a letter to the Moore School to ask whether they could buy one: "We would appreciate your advising us as to whether you can accept our order for manufacturing the Robot Calculator."

The US Army told the school to turn down the request.

Spyglass Mosaic Begins
April 5, 1994

Spyglass, Inc. was founded in 1990 (i.e. before the Web) to commercialize technologies coming out of the National Center for Supercomputing Applications (NCSA [Jan 15]). However, it's probably best remembered today for the Spyglass Mosaic browser which was **not** the NCSA Mosaic browser [Sept 28].

Eric Sink started work on the Spyglass browser on this day, and was careful not to use any code from NCSA Mosaic, although Spyglass did license various technologies and trademarks from NCSA.

Meanwhile, NCSA's Marc Andreessen [July 9] and James Clark [March 23] had been thinking of forming their own browser company [March 25], and founded Mosaic Communications Corp (MCC) on April 4 (yesterday). However, Spyglass had the legal right to the word "Mosaic", so MCC was forced to change its name to Netscape Communications in November.

Spyglass offered a 30-day trial version of Spyglass Mosaic for download, but didn't sell it outright. Instead, it licensed the browser (e.g., to O'Reilly [June 6]) or its codebase which other companies used as a starting point for their browsers (e.g. as done by CompuServe and IBM).

Microsoft licensed the Spyglass code in 1995 for $2 million, and began reshaping it into Internet Explorer [Aug 16]. However, after an auditing dispute, Microsoft had to pay Spyglass a further $8 million on [Jan 22] 1997.

Another profitable legal battle regarding the NCSA browser patents forced Netscape to hand over $2.2 million in damages and $1.4 million in licensing fees at the end of 1995.

SATAN Unleashed
April 5, 1995

Dan Farmer and Wietse Venema released SATAN, the "Security Administrator Tool for Analyzing Networks". It was intended for network adminstrators wanting to scan their machines to find security vulnerabilities, and gather general network information. Farmer had earlier written the COPS scanner [Jan 31].

For those offended by the software's name, it contained a special "repent" command which rearranged the "SATAN" letters displayed by the GUI to "SANTA".

A humorous e-mail did the rounds on April 6, entitled "Top 10 Ways You Can Tell SATAN Has Invaded Your Network":

- All keys except the '6' are suddenly disabled;
- Your monitor starts spinning around in circles;
- The file server starts emitting pea soup;
- Your router begins sending outgoing packets to hell.org;
- 10Base-T [Sept 28] wires fly up and wrap around roving sysadmin;

- Your bastion host starts smoking;
- Anonymous FTP [Nov 23] rips off its mask to reveal horns and a goatee
- X terminals [June 19] become XXX terminals;
- The standard UNIX [Oct 15] prompt is replaced by an inverted cross;
- Your firewall turns into a ring of flame.

Popular author, Neil Gaiman, drew the artwork for the SATAN documentation.

The program generated controversy over the ethics of releasing such powerful security tools, especially one that could be easily operated by novices. SATAN eventually gained enough notoriety that the US Justice Department became concerned about its possible effects on national security. The department threatened to press charges against Silicon Graphics where SATAN's coauthor, Dan Farmer, worked. After Farmer was fired, the Justice Department kindly dropped its investigation.

HTC Vive Released
April 5, 2016

The HTC Vive is a virtual reality (VR) headset developed by HTC [May 15] and Valve Corporation.

The headset contains two screens, one per eye, and a gyroscope, accelerometer, and a front-facing camera that allows the software to identify and display objects as obstacles inside the VR world. There are 32 infrared sensors on the headset and 19 in each hand controller.

Two "Lighthouse" base stations track you as you leap about inside a 15-by-15-foot space, utilizing the device's photosensors and structured light lasers to sweep the space.

The main competitors as of 2021 are the Oculus Quest Rift [March 28] and the PlayStation VR [Oct 13].