

Dec. 15th

Project Lincoln Begins

Dec. 15, 1950

General Vandenberg, the US Air Force's chief of staff, wrote a letter to James Killian, Jr., president of MIT, requesting that the university set up a lab devoted to air defense. It was prompted by a recent report that had concluded that the US was unprepared for the threat of a Soviet air attack [Aug 29].

Project Lincoln was born; the site chosen for the new lab was the Laurence G. Hanscom Air Field, where the towns of Bedford, Lexington and Lincoln meet. Two of the towns' names were already in use: Project Bedford (on antisubmarine warfare) and a Project Lexington (on aircraft nuclear propulsion), so Major General Putt, who was in charge of drafting the lab's charter, had little choice left.

The lab became the home for work on the Semi-Automatic Ground Environment (SAGE [June 26]) Air Defense System, and innovative hardware such as the Whirlwind [April 20] and TX-0 [Nov 20].

The Island of Kesmai

Dec. 15, 1985

The ideas behind "Island of Kesmai" began forming in the summer of 1980, when University of Virginia classmates John Taylor and Kelton Flinn wrote "Dungeons of Kesmai", a six player Z80 game inspired by Dungeons & Dragons [July 27].

On this day, they launched the MMORPG version, "Island of Kesmai", on CompuServe [Sept 24], capable of supporting up to 100 players. It wasn't the first MMORPG (which was probably MUD [April 6]), but it was the first one published

commercially, and it had a major influence on later games. For example, it introduced the idea of awarding players for performing quests.



Screenshot from the "Island of Kesmai"

"Island" utilized a 2D scrolling grid made up of colored ASCII graphics. However, an inspired hacker later created a mod that replaced the ASCII with bit-mapped color graphics on Macs.

Game play was through simple phrases and abbreviations (e.g. "n nw n" to make your character move north, then northwest, then north again).

Flinn and Taylor were also responsible for 1986's "Air Warrior", the first multiplayer game combining 3D graphics and real-time combat. It was initially offered through GENie [Oct 1], and later CompuServe.

Dungeon Master Released

Dec. 15, 1987

"Dungeon Master" was a real-time role-playing game featuring a pseudo-3D first-person perspective. The real-time element meant that your game character had to eat, drink, and sleep at regular intervals, or suffer the consequences. The game also had a notably complex magic system – players cast spells by stringing together runes, but only certain sequences produced results. Players could also set how much magical energy was expended on a spell.

The game was developed by Doug Bell and Andy Jaro, and

published by FTL (Faster Than Light) Games for the Atari ST [Jan 10]. It sold 40,000 copies in its first year, becoming the ST's best-selling game. It heavily influenced the design of several other 3D dungeon crawlers, including "Eye of the Beholder" and "Hired Guns".

The Wizard Released

Dec. 15, 1989

"The Wizard" is a comedy-drama directed by Todd Holland, and starring Fred Savage, Christian Slater, and Beau Bridges as three friends who hitchhike across the country to compete in the Nintendo World Video Game Championships.

The movie is primarily remembered for its extensive product placement of NES [Oct 18] games, especially Super Mario Bros [Sept 13], and its prominent use of the Nintendo Power Glove [Oct 00]. For example, at one point one of the kids boasts, "I love the Power Glove. It's so bad." Some 15 years later, this saying (briefly) became an Internet meme [Nov 15].

On the movie poster, Savage can be seen wearing the Power Glove on his left hand, but only right-handed versions were ever made.

HyperText '91 on the Web

Dec. 15-18, 1991

The first academic presentation about the Web was given by Tim Berners-Lee [June 8] at Hypertext '91 in San Antonio. The conference had actually rejected the paper, but had offered Berners-Lee a timeslot to demonstrate his new-fangled Web foolishness. Unfortunately, there was no Internet connectivity, so the demo was limited to his NeXT computer, which Berners-Lee had brought with him from CERN [Sept 29].

The demo page included the disclaimer:

"We will show you hypertext which we brought on an optical disk, but not the large range of information on the "web" across the world."

On his way to San Antonio, Berners-Lee stopped off at UNC Chapel Hill to visit Paul Jones, who happened to have his own NeXT machine. Berners-Lee set up a copy of his page on Jones' machine, which can still be accessed at <http://ibiblio.org/pjones/old.page.html>. In May 2013 when CERN was restoring its first website, Jones' pages turned out to be the oldest surviving source.

Although, Jones' page went live in the fall of 1991, the Stanford Linear Accelerator Center [Dec 12] (SLAC) website is usually labeled as the first outside Europe.

Meridian 59

Dec. 15 1995

Meridian 59 (M59) is considered the first 3D graphical MMORPG. (Habitat [June 23] was the first 2D MMORPG.) The name refers to the fifty-ninth provincial colony of the ancient sword-and-sorcery empire depicted in the game. It was launched in beta on this day, and attracted some 25,000 players; it was released commercially by 3DO [Oct 4] on Sept. 27, 1996.

Andrew and Chris Kirmse started coding M59 in the basement of their parents' house in Virginia. Later they were joined by John Hanke, who subsequently went on to co-develop Google Earth [June 11] and Pokémon Go [July 6].

The term "massively multiplayer" and the acronym MMRPG (Massively Multi-Player Role-Playing Game), emerged from brain-storming sessions held at 3DO (beating out other ideas such as "large-n game"). However, the Kirmse brothers preferred MMOG (massively multiplayer online

game). The concept of a monthly game subscription was also invented by M59.

In 2012, the brothers released M59 as open source.

AltaVista

Dec. 15, 1995

Researchers at DEC, led by Paul Flaherty, Louis Monier, and Michael Burrows, released the AltaVista search engine. The name was chosen because all the developers were based in Palo Alto.

The software was primarily created to test one of DEC's new supercomputers, the AlphaServer 8400 TurboLaser, particularly its ability to rapidly search very large databases.

Monier created AltaVista's web crawler tool, Scooter, which completed its first scan in August. It added around 10 million pages to the AltaVista index, which was implemented by Burrows. His indexer was the first to catalogue the full text contents of web pages.

AltaVista's superior coverage made it the first really popular search engine. On the first day, it received over 300,000 search requests, and a year later, it was serving 19 million visitors every day. By 1997, it was attracting 80 million daily. For other early search engines, see [June 30], [Sept 00].

Google was born on [Sept 7] 1998, but didn't overtake AltaVista in popularity until 2001. AltaVista was purchased by Yahoo! in 2003, and sold and resold a few times before being closed down in 2013.

Zafi.D Reported

Dec. 15, 2004

The "Zafi Merry Christmas" worm (aka Zafi.D) distributed its code in an email attachment. The English version of the message bore the subject line "Merry Christmas" and the words "Happy Hollydays" but

there were versions in Italian, Spanish, Russian, Swedish and several other languages.

Zafi.D, modified the Windows' registry so the virus would automatically start when the computer was rebooted. It also overwrote antivirus and firewall applications.

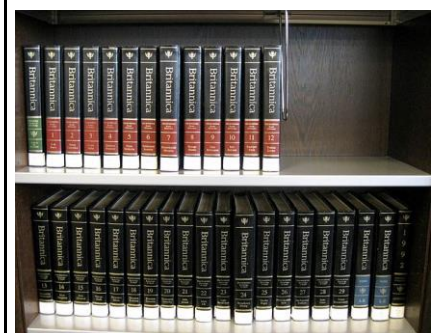
Its main aim was to turn the system into a zombie for sending spam or launching distributed denial of service attacks. It created a backdoor at port 8181 so it could upload and execute files.

The first version of Zafi had been discovered back in April, and it only tried to send itself to addresses inside Hungary. Zafi.C, from October, was programmed to launch DDOS attacks on several web sites, including the Hungarian Prime Minister's page.

Wikipedia vs. Britannica

Dec. 15, 2005

A report by Jim Giles published in the journal *Nature* compared the accuracy of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* [Dec 6] with that of Wikipedia [Jan 15] by examining 42 articles on scientific topics which appeared in both.



Encyclopædia Britannica. Photo by Ziko. CC BY-SA 3.0.

Giles found just eight serious errors (i.e. a misunderstanding of a vital concept), four from each source. In the category of factual errors, omissions or misleading statements, Wikipedia had 162 problems, while *Britannica* had 123.

Giles had been prompted to write the report after several *Britannica* officials criticized Wikipedia's quality. For example, Robert McHenry had written an article entitled "The Faith-Based Encyclopedia".

On March 13, 2012, *Britannica* announced it would scrap its print edition after sales had fallen to just 25% of their 1990 peak. It refocused on digital media and rebranded itself a "learning business".

In Aug. 2012, the Wikimedia Foundation released its own study which compared a sample of 22 English Wikipedia articles to equivalent ones in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, and also compared the Spanish version of Wikipedia to *Enciclonet*, and the Arabic Wikipedia to the *Arabic Encyclopaedia*. The Wikipedia articles scored higher in each of the three languages, and fared particularly well in terms of accuracy and references.

In Dec. 2020 Wikipedia contained more than 50 million pages across 300 languages, with over 6 million in the English Wikipedia.

ZZZ-Mailing

Dec. 15, 2008

According to a report by University of Toledo researchers in the journal *Sleep Medicine*, a 44-year-old sleepwalker logged onto her computer and emailed out party invitations to friends. Each message was written in a random mix of upper and lower case characters, was badly formatted, and containing odd expressions. One read: "Come tomorrow and sort this hell hole out. Dinner and drinks, 4.p.m. Bring wine and caviar only." The woman had no memory of sending the messages when she woke up the next day.

The researchers dubbed this kind of sleepwalking 'zzz-mailing'. Other reported cases of sleepwalking activities have included driving a car, cooking,

playing a musical instrument, and painting.
