

Jan. 20th

Edward Albert Feigenbaum

Born: Jan. 20, 1936;
Weehawken, New Jersey

Feigenbaum is often called the Father of Expert Systems. In 1960, he developed EPAM (Elementary Perceiver and Memorizer), which modeled elementary human symbolic learning, one of the first systems of that kind.



Edward A. Feigenbaum (1994). Photo by the US Air Force.

However, he's probably best known for DENDRAL, usually credited with being the first expert system. It was developed at Stanford between 1965 and 1982 by a team led by Feigenbaum, Nobel Prize winning geneticist Joshua Lederberg, and chemist Carl Djerassi. By applying a range of if-then rules it could identify the molecular structure of organic compounds, in some cases more accurately than experts. Its successor, Meta-DENDRAL, discovered new results in mass spectrometry

Feigenbaum's lab went on to build a range of expert systems for medicine (MYCIN [Aug 28], PUFF, ONCOCIN), molecular genetics (MOLGEN), X-ray crystallography (CHRYSALIS), and the analysis of pulmonary function (PUFF). The lab also

created the first general-purpose expert system shell, called EMYCIN.

For even more expert systems, see [Aug 18] and [Nov 8].

Feigenbaum's 1983 book "The Fifth Generation", co-written with Pamela McCorduck, had an enormous influence on research funding for AI, notably persuading the US government to pour money into DARPA's Strategic Computing Initiative (SCI) [Oct 28].

One of his favorite childhood science books was "Microbe Hunters" (1926) by Paul de Kruif, which describes medical heroes of the 17th century, progressing up to the present day.

Daniel Grimaldi

Born: Jan. 20, 1952
Brooklyn, New York

Grimaldi is known for his acting roles as the twins Philly and Patsy Parisi on the HBO TV series "The Sopranos".

He's often cast in "tough-guy" roles, but also has a Ph.D. in data processing from the City University of New York, and worked for Bell Labs [Jan 1] in Holmdel.

He left Bell after he appeared in his first play, off-off-Broadway, in 1972, but remained an academic, teaching in the Dept. of Mathematics and Computer Science at Kingsborough Community College in Brooklyn for over 30 years.

A quote: "If you're an actor and you tell producers you're a college professor, they think you'll treat acting as just a hobby. If you're a college professor and you tell the administration that you're an actor, they'll think you're out of your mind."

William Ralph Wright

Born: Jan. 20, 1960;
Atlanta, Georgia

Wright is a game designer, known for SimCity [Feb 2] (1989), and many other titles that built on that game's simulation model (e.g. SimEarth, SimAnt, and "The Sims" [Feb 4]). His Spore [Sept 7] (2008) featured gameplay utilizing evolution, and sold 406,000 copies in the three weeks after its release.

Wright is the co-founder of the game company Maxis with Jeff Braun, and formed the "Stupid Fun Club Camp", an entertainment think tank in 2009.

Wright collects memorabilia from the Soviet space program, including a seat from a Soyuz spacecraft, and control panels from the Mir space station.

The Super Fight Jan. 20, 1970

"The Super Fight" was a fictional boxing match between Rocky Marciano and Muhammad Ali filmed in 1969, and scripted by an NCR 315 computer.

Its FORTRAN software employed punch-by-punch details of the boxer's records, their fighting styles, strengths, and weaknesses. It took 45 minutes to generate an imaginary match between the two, as a series of coded punches and moves.

Ali and Marciano were also filmed sparring for 70 rounds, which involved Marciano preparing by losing over 50 pounds and wearing a toupee.

The film clips were edited together according to the program's output, and the outcome kept a closely guarded secret until the release of the film on this day.

So who won? It depends on where you saw the movie.

American and Canadian audiences were shown a version where Marciano knocked Ali out in the 13th round. However, European audiences saw Ali win by a KO, also in the 13th round.

The idea for the film grew out of an earlier set of fictional boxing matches that had been staged as radio plays in 1968, and had also been scripted by NCR 315 software. Radio producer Murray Woroner organized the involvement of 16 heavyweights, including Ali and Marciano. On the radio, the final was between Dempsey and Marciano, with Marciano winning.

Apple Lemmings Jan. 20, 1985

A year after Apple's successful "1984" Super Bowl commercial [Jan 22], a new advert was prepared by the same agency, Chiat/Day, to be aired during the 1985 event. A full-page newspaper ad on the preceding Sunday attempted to build anticipation by warning, "If you go to the bathroom during the fourth quarter, you'll be sorry."



North American Brown Lemming (*Lemmus trimucronatus*). Photo by CambridgeBayWeather. CC BY 2.5.

The commercial was based around the urban legend that lemmings periodically commit mass suicide by jumping into the sea.

Instead of lemmings, the ad showed a line of blindfolded business people walking over a precipice. Just before the last

person is about to leap, a serious voice intones "Macintosh Office, you can look into it". There's a cut to a second line of people preparing to jump, as the voice continues, "or you can go on with business as usual".

When this jolly advert was shown on the stadium's display during the game, there was a dead silence. After this debacle, Apple didn't air another commercial during the Super Bowl until 1999.

The lemmings legend dates from scenes in "White Wilderness", Disney's 1958 Academy Award-winning "True-Life Adventure" nature documentary. It was filmed in Alberta, which is not a native habitat for lemmings, and is not on the coast. Through careful camera angles, a few dozen lemmings placed on turntables, were made to look like a much larger number. Apparently, they were also given a "helping hand" to dive into a river.

Happy99 Jan. 20 (or 27), 1999

The Happy99 worm was the first virus to spread itself as an attachment in emails, and served as a template for many later viruses. Unfortunately, those viruses decided not to emulate Happy99's fairly innocuous behavior, which was to display an animated firework display inside a window with the title "Happy New Year 1999 !!".

The worm modified the Winsock communication library in MS Windows 95 [Aug 24] and 98, to attach itself automatically to all emails and newsgroup posts sent by the user. It also changed a registry key so it would automatically start when the computer was rebooted.

For more holiday greetings, see [Dec 9].
