March 20th

Ralph Roy Barclay

Born: March 20, 1942; Soap Lake, Washington Died: July 10, 2009

According to J. F. Doherty, AT&T's former director of security, Barclay should be credited with inventing phone phreaking and creating the first "little blue box" [Oct ??].

Barclay's phreaking career began when he was a first year electrical engineering student at Washington State. He was browsing in the library one day when he came across Breen and Dahlbaum's article "Signaling Systems for the Control of Telephone Switching" in the Bell System Technical Journal [May 17]. It motivated him to find out more about the phone system, via telephone manuals and discarded equipment, and eventually led to his building the first blue box in a single weekend.

Soon he was able to make free calls to England, but Barclay noted that, "I didn't know anybody in England to call."

Barclay also said that the choice of blue for his boxes wasn't a conscious decision; it was simply a consequence of the standard blue metallic color used for hardware.

REXX Begins

March 20, 1979

Rexx (REstructured eXtended eXecutor) is a scripting and macro language, somewhat reminiscent of PL/I [June 25], which became very popular in the 1980's for generating reports. Rexx can be considered a precursor to languages like Perl [Dec 18], PHP [June 8], and Python [Jan 31].

Rexx was developed at IBM by Mike Cowlishaw to replace the older IBM languages EXEC and EXEC 2 on System/370 [June 30], but its popularity meant it was also ported to OS/2 [Dec 4], MVS, VM, PC-DOS [Aug 12], and AmigaOS [July 23].

In 1995 Cowlishaw created NetRexx, the first language other than Java [May 23] to compile and run on the JVM.

Presidential DICTION

Spring 1984

In 1984, Roderick P. Hart published "The Language of the Modern Presidency" in the journal "Presidential Studies Quarterly" , and subsequently the book "Verbal Style and the Presidency: A Computer-Based Analysis".

Hart had used his DICTION software to analyze the language of 266 speeches (38 for each of the seven post-war Presidents) in terms of six categories: activity (words that imply movement, change); positivity (optimistic language); rigidity (firm beliefs); realism (practical focus); wordiness (lots of adjectives); and patriotism (traditions and values).

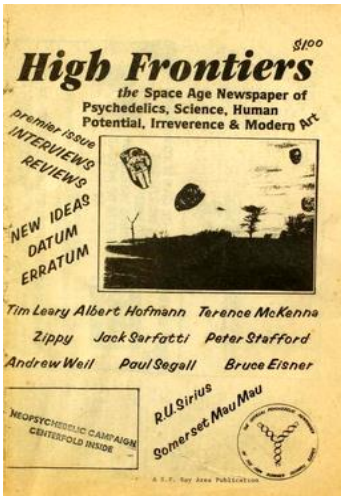
DICTION decided that Nixon was the least wordy, and Carter the most verbose. Nixon was also the most realistic, and Carter the most deluded.

DICTION began its life on a mainframe, but eventually moved to the PC, and became a general tool for analyzing language patterns. The current version (7.0) can search a passage for five general features as well as thirty-five sub-features. Aside from its use in politics, it has been applied to speaking styles in education, diplomacy, religion, and stand-up comedy.

Mondo 2000

March 20, 1984

Mondo 2000 was a glossy cyberculture magazine published in California during the 1980's and 1990's which covered everyday Californian concerns such as virtual reality (VR) and smart drugs. It included interviews with Debbie Harry [July 23], Frank Zappa, Stephen Wolfram [June 23], Genesis P-Orridge [Feb 18], William Burroughs [Jan 28], and more. In retrospect, it was a somewhat more anarchic and subversive precursor to *Wired* [Jan 2].



The cover of "High Frontiers" #1. Online at https://archive.org/details/mondohistory

The magazine was born at the Spring equinox as *High Frontiers*, edited by R. U. Sirius (aka Ken Goffman), and later "Queen Mu" / "Alison Wonderland" (aka Alison Bailey Kennedy).

The magazine transmutated into *Reality Hackers* in 1988 to better reflect its drugs and computing themes, and St. Jude (aka Judith Milhon) apparated to help with editing.

The stars were obviously in alignment that year since *Boing Boing* [Jan 21] also debuted, sharing many of the same interests, and contributors.

In 1989, *Reality Hackers* reached for a new plane of existence as *Mondo 2000*, perhaps to reflect the magazine's move away from techno-utopianism. R. U. Sirius once said that he'd rather watch "Ren and Stimpy" on caffeine

than write about VR and smart drugs another time.

R.U. Sirius, Queen Mu, and assorted kooks ran the magazine from Kennedy's home in the North Berkeley Hills. The 'Mondo House' was legendary for its parties, with guests including the likes of Timothy Leary, John Perry Barlow [Oct 3], Jaron Lanier [May 3], and William Gibson [Sept 3].

Shatter

March 20 ??, 1985

Shatter was the first commercially published comic book where all the artwork was drawn directly on a computer rather than being scanned from inked pages.

Shatter's artist, Mike Saenz, employed MacPaint [?? 1951] on an Apple Mac [Jan 24] using a standard mouse. Each drawing was limited by the machine's 72ppi monochrome screen that could display just 512×342 pixels. It meant that only 2/3 of a comic page could be worked on at a time.

The artwork was printed on a dot-matrix ImageWriter [?? 1983] for the first few months until Apple donated a LaserWriter [March 1]. Adobe PostScript fonts were then used for the text, and the printed graphics became much less pixelated.

The output was colored by Saenz, and then photographed so it could be mass printed using traditional page layout and color separation techniques.

The first shattering episode of *Shatter* appeared in the March 1985 issue of the UK computer magazine *Big K*, which is online at: https://archive.org/details/12-big-k-magazine. The story, by Peter B. Gillis, concerns a 1980's style cyberpunk dystopia.

Shatter ran for 14 issues, finishing in April 1988, but Saenz left after the third issue, and the artwork reverted to the traditional approach until Charlie Athanas was brought in for issues 9-14. He upgraded to a Mac Plus, moved from MacPaint to FullPaint, and started using a graphics tablet and stylus.

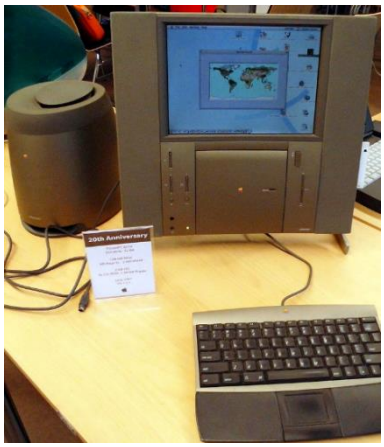
Saenz later developed ComicWorks (1986), the first PC software for creating comics. He also drew the comic book "Iron Man: Crash" (1988), the first computer-created graphic novel, and 64 pages long.

TAM

March 20, 1997

Apple released the limited-edition Twentieth Anniversary Macintosh (TAM) to commemorate the company's 20th birthday [April 1].

"Limited" meant around 12,000 units, which has made the TAM something of a collector's item.



A TAM. Photo by Morn. CC BY-SA 3.0.

The machine was a showcase of Apple's cutting edge technology and design kudos. It was the first to feature a track pad, the first with a flat screen (12.1-inches and in color), the first PowerPC desktop not to be beige (it dressed in metal and leather instead), and the first to feature a vertical CD drive. It had television and FM radio tuners, and a Bose sound system with a sub-woofer.

Each TAM was delivered to its discerning customer by limo, accompanied by a Apple staff member in a tuxedo.

Despite all this, the machine wasn't a big seller, perhaps because of its high price ($7,499). which was soon slashed to as low as $1,999.

Alternatively, the real "interest killer" might have been its appearance in the movie bomb "Batman & Robin" (1997). Alfred magically uses a TAM to burn data onto a CD, a capability the real machine didn't have. For another Apple appearance in that film, see [March 7].

Nevertheless, the TAM announced Apple's move towards more stylish-looking computers, and was one of Jony Ive's [Feb 27] first projects.

After Steve Jobs' return to Apple [Sept 16], he scrapped the TAM which was hardly a surprise since he had previously said that he hated it.

Barron's Burning

March 20, 2000

Barron's, a respected US financial journal, ran a cover story by Jack Willoughby entitled "Burning Up; Warning: Internet Companies are Running Out of Cash – Fast". He reported: "It's no secret that most Internet companies continue to be money-burners. Of the companies in the Pegasus survey, 74% had negative cash flows. For many, there seems to be little realistic hope of profits in the near term."

This article came at the beginning of the dot-com crash [March 10], and was probably a factor in its acceleration. The text of the article is online at http://pages.stern.nyu.edu/~adamodar/New_Home_Page/articles/cashburn.htm