March 22nd

PDP-8 Introduced
March 22, 1965

The DEC PDP-8 was the first successful commercial minicomputer: small(-ish), relatively cheap, and fast. The chief designer was Edson de Castro [Sept 14], who later co-founded Data General.

The PDP-8 was actually about the size of a large fridge, but still much smaller than typically room-sized mainframes. It cost $18,500, one-fifth the price of a cheap IBM System/360 mainframe [April 7]. Improvements in its core memory technology made it slightly faster than the IBM 7090 [Nov 30], and four times faster than the CDC 160 [June 00].

A PDP-8. Photo by Hellisp. National Museum of American History.

An estimated 300,000 PDP-8's were sold, many to research labs and businesses that couldn't afford mainframes. However, its sales were dwarfed by its hugely popular successor, the PDP-11 [Jan 5].

Anthony Michael Fadell
Born: March 22,1969;
Michigan

He worked at General Magic [May 1990] for three years, where he helped develop PDAs based on the company's Magic Cap OS. He got his start at the company by turning up early one morning unannounced, before the receptionist had arrived. He walked around the building, résumé in hand.

In 2000, Fadell designed a small, hard disk-based music player that could be loaded through a simple content-delivery system. He initially approached RealNetworks [April 3] and also Philips, but they both passed on his idea.

Fadell started working for Apple in Feb. 2001, where he helped design the iPod [Oct 23] in just six weeks. He is now known as "one of the fathers of the iPod".

He rose rapidly through the ranks, but resigned from Apple in Nov. 2008. Rumors suggested that it had something to do with politics in the iPhone group. At the iPhone launch [Jan 9], Jobs' demo involved deleting a name from the iPhone's contact list – the contact was "Tony Fadell".

In May 2010, he co-founded Nest Labs with Matt Rogers. and on [Oct 25] 2011, they announced the Nest Learning Thermostat, a sensor-driven, WiFi-enabled, programmable thermostat.

A quote: "If you don't eat your work, someone else will eat your work."

RCA Selectavision
March 22, 1981

The RCA Selectavision was the first videodisc player to go on sale in the US, and the company carried out a $20 million media blitz to promote it.

The videodisc's big advantage over videotapes and cable TV was better picture quality. One disadvantage was the high cost, of both the disks and the Selectavision system. Also, let's not forget that there was no way to record onto a videodisc, and videotapes had higher storage capacities, were smaller, lighter, and easier to handle.

Another mark against the technology was perhaps its name, with the public often unsure about the difference between videodiscs and laserdiscs [Dec 11].

RCA only sold around 550,000 Selectavision systems, and discontinued the product in 1984, with a write-off of several hundred million dollars. The losses crippled the company, allowing General Electric to take it over in Dec. 1985, and thereafter sell off most of its assets.

Intel Pentium
March 22, 1993

Intel shipped the first Pentium microprocessor, the fifth generation of its x86 line (hence the chip's nickname: P5). The P5 used a superscalar architecture that gave it the ability to execute several instructions concurrently, and included a faster FPU, wider data bus, and better caching.

John H. Crawford, chief architect of the original 386 [Oct 17], co-managed the design, along with Donald Alpert, who led the architectural team. Work on the chip began in 1989, with Intel planning to announce it in Sept. 1992, but design problems forced that back. Even after the delay, the P5 still had some issues; perhaps the most famous being the Pentium FDIV bug [Oct 30].

Originally the CPU was expected to be named the 586 or i586, to follow the naming convention of previous generations. Intel went with a name instead in order to prevent competitors from branding their own processors with similar numbers (as AMD had done in the past [Oct 12]).

"Pentium" was derived from the Greek word pente, meaning "five", another reference to it being the fifth generation of the x86 series. Not everyone liked the word. For instance, AMD chairman Jerry Sanders thought it better suited "a name for toothpaste", and insightful columnist John C. Dvorak [April 1; Sept 27; Dec 26] declared, "One thing's for sure, *nobody* is going to call it the Pentium." "Weird Al" Yankovic chipped in with the song "It's All About the Pentiums," a parody of "It's All About the Benjamins" by Sean "Puff Daddy" Combs.

The P5 faced some stiff competition including from the Motorola 68060, the PowerPC 601, and the SPARC [July 00], MIPS [Jan 00], and Alpha [Feb 25] families. Nevertheless, it survived a bumpy introduction to become a mainstay of Intel's mid-range processors, positioned between the Celeron [April 1] and Core series.

Encarta
March 22, 1993

Microsoft Encarta for Windows 3.1 [April 6], wasn't the first digital multimedia encyclopedia on a CD-ROM, but it did become the best-selling one. It included 14,000 media items, with 5,000 photos, 100 animations, and seven hours of 16-bit sound. The text contents were licensed from Funk & Wagnalls, Microsoft's third choice. They had first contacted Encyclopedia Britannica [Dec 6], then World Books.

The project began with high hopes – in 1985 Bill Gates believed a CD-ROM encyclopedia would be "a high-price, high-demand" product with the potential of becoming as profitable as Word [Sept 29] or Excel [May 2]. As a consequence, Encarta cost $395 at launch, but soon dropped to $99, and was thereafter often bundled for free with new computers.

Then everything changed when Wikipedia was launched on [Jan 15] 2001. In Oct. 2009, Microsoft discontinued Encarta, reporting that "people today seek and consume information in considerably different ways." By the end, Encarta had about 62,000 articles, while the English version of Wikipedia hosted over 3 million.

The first digital multimedia encyclopedia is generally considered to be "Compton's Multimedia Encyclopedia" which was released on [Sept 20] 1989, although Grolier's and Gary Kildall [May 19] released the "The Electronic Encyclopedia from Grolier" in 1985, but it lacked multimedia extras.

Microsoft's first ever CD-ROM was Bookshelf in 1987. Its other multimedia offerings included "Magic School Bus" ([July 16] 1994) and "Microsoft Dogs" (1995). One probably untrue story was that managers of the Windows 95 [Aug 24] development team would often threaten to transfer weak programmers to work on "Microsoft Dogs".

Resident Evil Released
March 22, 1996

"Resident Evil" (aka Baiohazādo? in Japan) is a horror game created by Shinji Mikami and Tokuro Fujiwara at Capcom [May 30]. It debuted on the PlayStation [Dec 3] and was later ported to the Sega Saturn [Nov 22]. In its first year, it sold over a million copies.

Shinji Mikami (2013). Photo by Antonio Fucito. CC BY-SA 2.0.

Game play was located in a mansion overrun with zombies and monsters, and dubbed "survival horror" since each player only has a limited amount of ammunition and health. Many commentators point to the franchise as sparking the revival of the zombie genre.

The first "Resident Evil" movie was released in March 2002, directed by Paul Anderson (who also directed "Mortal Kombat" [Aug 18]) and starring Milla Jovovich. The then-presidents of Capcom Japan and America had cameos as zombies, as did the film's producer.

A limited edition of "Resident Evil 4" came with a game pad in the shape of a bloodstained chainsaw.

Friendster Launched
March 22, 2002

Jonathan Abrams' Friendster was the first big social networking hit, long before the rise of MySpace ([Aug 1] 2003) or Facebook ([Feb 4] 2004). But there had been earlier social networks, such as Classmates [Nov 17] and SixDegrees [May 00].

Friendster gained 3 million users within the first few months of operation, and Google tried to buy it in 2003 for $30 million. Abrams turned them down, and in April 2004 he was removed as CEO.

Friendster's massive popularity caused a few technical hiccups, which caused frustrated users to begin migrating to its rivals. In May 2011, the site abandoned user profiles and transitioned into social entertainment. At the end of 2015, it closed.

Friendster was a portmanteau of "friend" and "Napster" back when Napster [Nov 22] was a cool, household name.

In 2014 Abrams reported that he had accounts on Facebook and Twitter, but rarely used

either. Mostly he preferred email.

FBI vs. Apple
March 22, 2016

The FBI–Apple dispute concerned the extent to which the government could compel manufacturers to unlock smartphones whose data was cryptographically protected

In particular, the FBI wanted Apple to create software that would allow them to unlock a iPhone 5C [Jan 9] recovered from the Dec. 2015 terrorist attack in San Bernardino. The phone was locked with a four-digit password, and was set to delete all of its data after ten failed password attempts.

Apple released a statement on Feb. 16 opposing the court order. It argued that the request set a precedent that would let the government force any technology company to write software to undermine the security of its products.

A hearing was scheduled for March 22, but the government obtained a delay, saying they had found a third party able to assist in unlocking the phone. On March 28, the FBI announced that the phone had been successfully hacked, and withdrew its request.

General Michael Hayden, former director of the NSA [Oct 24] and CIA, stated in an interview, "this may be a case where we've got to give up some things in law enforcement and even counter terrorism in order to preserve this aspect, our cybersecurity."

Left-pad Fail
March 22, 2006

On March 20, Azer Koçulu deleted more than 270 of his modules from NPM, the popular package manager for open source JavaScript [July 4] projects.

This followed a disagreement with Kik, a messaging app, over which of them could use that name. The e-mail discussion between Koçulu and Kik's legal council, Bob Stratton, had broken down, and Stratton turned to NPM to point out that his company owned the kik trademark. NPM dutifully reassigned the name, which greatly upset Koçulu who found such an action hard to believe of a champion of open source.

On this day, JavaScript programmers around the world started receiving error messages when they tried to run their code. One in particular stood out:

```
npm ERR! 404 'left-pad' is not
in the npm registry
```

left-pad was one of Koçulu's modules, a simple 11-line function that padded out the left-side of strings with zeroes or spaces.

It was used by many, many Javascript packages, including React and Babel, which now stopped working. NPM later reported that left-pad had been downloaded 2.5 million times in the previous month alone.

A subsequent investigation of other dependencies by David Haney turned up many basic modules used by other projects. For example, the package isArray had been downloaded 18 million time in Feb. 2016 and was listed as a dependency by over 70 NPM packages. It consists of one line:

```
return toString.call(arr) ==
'[object Array]';
```

James Tiberius Kirk
Birth: March 22, 2233;
Riverside, Iowa
Died: ?? 2371

Kirk was the only student at Starfleet Academy to defeat the Kobayashi Maru test, garnering a commendation for reprogramming the computer to make the "no-win scenario" winnable.

Kirk subsequently became Starfleet's youngest captain after receiving command of the USS Enterprise (NCC-1701) for a five-year mission [Sept 8].

On at least four occasions, Kirk displayed his skill in inducing self-destruction in computers and androids by confronting them with paradoxes. One example was the M-5, an advanced multitronic computer prototype created by Richard Daystrom.