

May 27th

## ALGOL 58 Meeting May 27 - June 2, 1958

A meeting was held at ETH Zurich (the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology) to combine two language proposals – one from the Association for Computing Machinery (ACM [Sept 15]), the other from the Gesellschaft für Angewandte Mathematik und Mechanik (GAMM). The attendees included John Backus [Dec 3] and Alan Perlis [April 1] from the ACM, and Friedrich L. Bauer [June 10] and Heinz Rutishauser from the GAMM.

The result was ALGOL, although that name wasn't officially adopted for another year. The report produced after the meeting called it IAL (short for "International Algebraic Language"), which Perlis called an "'unspeakable' and pompous acronym".

Notably, the ACM group didn't suggest FORTRAN [Feb 26] as a suitable language, even though FORTRAN's creator, John Backus, was a member. The ACM wanted a language independent of any one company (i.e. separate from IBM in FORTRAN's case).

During 1958 and 1959, proposals for improvements to ALGOL 58 were published in the *Communications of the ACM* journal, and the *ALGOL Bulletin*, and a ALGOL 60 conference was held on [Jan 11] 1960 in Paris.

Most of the American proposals were related to adding more types, and input and output facilities. The European proposals were focused on the procedure concept and the scope of variables.

ALGOL 58 was never used much for actual programming, but its design heavily influenced later languages; it was the basis for JOVIAL (Jules' Own Version of the International Algebraic Language), MAD [Aug 26],

NELIAC, and the much-loved ALGOL 60 [Jan 11]. In addition, *Communications of the ACM* employed ALGOL-like notation to describe algorithms for many years.

Specifically for ALGOL 58, John Backus developed Backus normal form for describing programming languages. It was revised and expanded by Peter Naur [Oct 25] for ALGOL 60, and at Donald Knuth's [Jan 10] suggestion renamed Backus-Naur form (BNF).

## Zork Begins May 27, 1977

Zork was one of the earliest interactive fiction games, inspired by the granddaddy of the genre, "Colossal Cave Adventure" [March 11].

The first version of Zork was written on a PDP-10 [March 22] between May 1977 and Feb. 1979 using the MDL (pronounced Muddle) language. The authors – Tim Anderson, Marc Blank, Bruce Daniels, and Dave Lebling – were members of MIT's Dynamic Modeling Group.

MDL was LISP-based [April 15], and its built-in support for strings allowed for longer and more complex commands than in "Adventure". For example, it wasn't just limited to simple verb-noun commands ("hit troll"), but also recognized some prepositions and conjunctions ("hit the troll with the Dwarf axe").

It was a common practice among the group to name unfinished programs "zork," a hacker word meaning total destruction. So of course they named the game "Zork" thinking they'd change it later; they didn't.

Zork was set in "the ruins of an ancient empire lying far underground", and the player's mission was to "venture into this dangerous land in search of wealth and adventure".

The dungeons featured many novel creatures, objects, and locations, which became famous in years to come, including the ferocious but light-fearing grues, zorkmids, and Flood Control Dam #3.

Ex-members of the MIT group formed Infocom [June 22] in 1979, and their first commercial game was a rewritten Zork [Dec 00], divided into three parts.

## Electronic Arts Founded May 27 (or 28), 1982

William Murray "Trip" Hawkins III left his job at Apple as Director of Strategy and Marketing to found the video game company, Amazin' Software. It later became Electronic Arts (EA), to reflect the idea that its game developers were "software artists".



ELECTRONIC ARTS™

The original Electronic Arts logo (1982), which was often confused for EOA or LOA. In fact, it's meant to be three shapes, not letters.

Hawkins was especially keen on football games, having designed a board game called "Accu-Stat Pro Football" in 1970, and coded a football game in BASIC as a school project in 1973. This led to EA releasing "John Madden Football" in 1988, the first in a very long-lived franchise. However, after nine years as CEO, Hawkins left to form 3DO [Oct 4] to develop console hardware.

In the 1990's, EA was the first publisher to release yearly updates of its sports franchises with new player rosters, including for Madden NFL, FIFA, NHL, NBA Live, Tiger Woods, and others. The company

received some flack for this since the actual gameplay changed little between the releases.

In Nov. 2004, EA came under the spotlight for its work practices. The "EA Spouse" blog, written by Erin Hoffman, claimed that "the current mandatory hours are 9 am to 10 pm, seven days a week, with the occasional Saturday evening off for good behavior (at 6:30pm)."

In April 2012, *The Consumerist* awarded EA the title of "Worst Company in America" along with its coveted "Golden Poo" trophy. Indeed, EA beat out some very strong competition from AT&T and Walmart. In April 2013, EA won the award for a second time in a row, the first company to achieve this accolade.

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## Dragon Quest Released

### May 27, 1986

Dragon Quest was the first title in a series of fantasy role-playing games (RPG) which is currently at version XI, not counting numerous spin-offs, and ports to multiple consoles.

The game was released in Japan for the Famicom, but debuted on the NES [Oct 18] in the US as "Dragon Warrior". The name change was to avoid infringing the trademark of the tabletop game, DragonQuest.

The game's creator, Yuji Horii, took inspiration from earlier RPGs such as Wizardry [Sept 00] and Ultima [Aug 24], and his own 1983 title "The Portopia Serial Murder Case" (which was somewhat like "Mystery House" [May 5]).

One of Horii's aims was to create a RPG that didn't rely on previous experience with Dungeons & Dragons [July 27] which could appeal to a wider range of players.

Manga artist and Dragon Ball creator Akira Toriyama produced the artwork and

Koichi Sugiyama composed the music.

The North American version featured many changes from the original, including RAM save games, different character sprites, and pseudo-Elizabethan English style dialog.

Dragon Quest is often compared with the Final Fantasy series, by Hironobu Sakaguchi [Nov 25]. The two competed for much the same market until the game companies' merged in 2003.

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## The Cathedral and the Bazaar

### May 27, 1997

At the Linux Kongress, Eric Raymond [Dec 4] presented a talk on software engineering methods entitled "The Cathedral and the Bazaar". It was based on his observations of the development of the Linux kernel and his experience managing the Fetchmail project.

In 1999, he expanded the talk into a book of the same name, which has since come to be regarded as something of a manifesto for the open source movement [Feb 3].

Raymond argues that the "cathedral" model of software development is led by a small group of master coders with fixed ways of doing things. By comparison, the "bazaar" involves a decentralized team of programmers whose only qualification is their ability to get the job done.

A thought-provoking alternative model, entitled "The Circus Midget and the Fossilized Dinosaur Turd", can be found at [http://fringe.davesource.com/Fringe/Computers/Philosophy/Cathedral\\_Bazaar/Parody.html](http://fringe.davesource.com/Fringe/Computers/Philosophy/Cathedral_Bazaar/Parody.html)

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## WordPress

### May 27, 2003

Matt Mullenweg and Mike Little released the first public version (v.0.70) of the WordPress

content management system (CMS). It began as a fork of Michel Valdrighi's b2/cafelog, developed in 2001. Christine Tremoulet, a friend of Mullenweg, suggested the name WordPress. Today, its noted for its very large collection of plugins based around the idea of programming hooks, called actions and filters, developed by Ryan Boren in 2004.

The current release is version 5.7 (codenamed "Esperanza"). All the main releases since 1.0 have been named after jazz musicians. Esperanza Emily Spalding is an American jazz bassist, singer, songwriter, and composer.



Esperanza Spalding (2009), Photo by Andrea Mancini. CC BY-SA 4.0

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## DECWAR

### May 27, 2011

DECWAR was a multiplayer real-time space battle game for up to 18 users, coded in a mix of MACRO-10 (PDP-10 [Nov 00] assembly language) and FORTRAN IV [Dec 00] at the University of Texas at Austin in 1978.

It wasn't the first multiplayer game (see PLATO's Empire [May 00]), but it was one of the first, and highly influential. Copies could be purchased on tape for \$50, and it soon started popping up on PDP-10s around the world.

DECWAR was based on WAR, also created at UT Austin, but for

