The Mansfield Amendment
Nov. 19, 1969

The Mansfield Amendment to the 1970 Military Procurement Authorization Bill was signed into law. It stated that the Pentagon could only fund basic science if it would contribute directly to specific military needs.

The impact was potentially enormous, and Senator Mike Mansfield (D-WA) estimated that research projects costing some $300 million all told might be dropped or picked up by other agencies. Fortunately, the bill's actual effects turned out to be limited, and the amendment was further toned down in the following year.

Nevertheless, several key universities (e.g. MIT, CMU, Stanford, Berkeley, UCLA, Utah) had felt they were at risk because their work was almost entirely funded by the Defense Department's Advanced Research Projects Agency (ARPA [Feb 7]). This uncertainty may have contributed to the rise of Xerox PARC [July 1] at around this time, since researchers from many of those universities ended up moving to PARC.

Banning the Electrical Bandit
Nov. 19, 1981

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos banned video games, citing insidious examples such as "Space Invaders" [June 5] and Asteroids [June 17], calling them a "destructive social enemy, the electrical bandit." Filipinos were given two weeks to hand over or destroy their game consoles.

The Cupertino Effect
Nov. 19, 1996

The Cupertino effect is the tendency for a spell checker to replace misspelled words with ones that are correctly spelt but humorously incorrect.

This proclivity was named because MS Word '97 [Sept 29] (released on this day) suggested "Cupertino" when it encountered "cooperation" (co-operation without a hyphen). At the time, Cupertino was best known for being the home of Apple. This meant, for example, that a 1999 NATO report referred to the "Organization for Security and Cupertino in Europe," and a 2003 EU paper described the "scope for Cupertino" in a project.

Of course the propensity wasn't limited to "cooperation". Other examples include the replacement of "definately" (misspelling of "definitely") with "defiantly", and "Voldemort" for "Voltmeter" (as occurred in a piece published in the *Denver Post*).

In 2008, the Middletown Area High School's yearbook in Pennsylvania renamed several students due to the Cupertino effect: Max Zupanovic became "Max Supernova," Kathy Carbaugh was christened "Kathy Airbag" and Alessandra Ippolito earned the nom de plume "Alexandria Impolite."

For related problems, see [Jan 24], [April 9].

Half-Life
Nov. 19, 1998

Half-Life (commonly written as HλLF-LIFE) is a FPS developed by Valve, and released by Sierra Studios for MS Windows; it was Valve's first product.

Players assume the role of Dr. Gordon Freeman, who must fight his way out of a secret research facility after a teleportation experiment has gone terribly wrong.

The game won over 50 awards and went on to influence the look of many other FPS's. In particular, it dispensed with cut scenes since Valve's co-founder Gabe Newell [Nov 3] said the team wanted an immersive world rather than a "shooting gallery".

The game's engine, GoldSrc, was a heavily modified version of the Quake engine [June 22] from id Software.

Several of the security doors featured in the game are labeled "Security 7G". Homer Simpson is the safety inspector for Sector 7-G of the Springfield Nuclear Power Plant. For more Simpsons, see: [Jan 12], [Feb 15], [Nov 8], [Nov 13] and [Nov 30].

Wii
Nov. 19, 2006

The Wii was released by Nintendo to compete against Microsoft's Xbox 360 [Nov 22] and Sony's PlayStation 3 [Nov 11].

The Wii console with a Wiimote. Photo by Evan-Amos.

One novel feature was the Wii Remote controller (or Wiimote, for short), which could be used as a handheld pointing device and also detect motion in three dimensions by employing a combination of built-in accelerometers and infrared sensors when pointed at the LEDs in a separate sensor bar. It could also could vibrate and play

music through an internal speaker. Gyroscopes were added later to allow for finer motion detection.

The controller meant that games could now respond to a wide range of physical movements, and several took this even further by including their own Wimote hardware add-ons. For instance, the "Wii Fit" game featured a balance board, while "Wii Tennis" could be purchased with optional tennis rackets. "Wii Boxing" inevitable led to the release of Wii-capable boxing gloves.

The Wii was assigned the codename "Revolution" until April 2006, which was changed (according to Nintendo) because "Wii sounds like 'we', which emphasizes that the console is for everyone." However, the BBC reported that "a long list of puerile jokes, based on the name" appeared on the Internet after its announcement. The same thing occurred for its successor, the Wii U [Nov 18].

Second Life Grey Goo
Nov. 19, 2006

Second Life [June 23] was attacked by a worm that created self-replicating rings, similar to the ones found in "Sonic the Hedgehog" [June 23].

When touched, the rings multiplied, eventually clogging the game world with what Linden Labs termed "Grey Goo" (even though they were gold in color, and not sticky.) The service was closed down for two hours to clean things up.

Linden's choice of name was probably a reference to the nanomachine end-of-the-world scenario described by Eric Drexler in his book, "Engines of Creation" (1986).
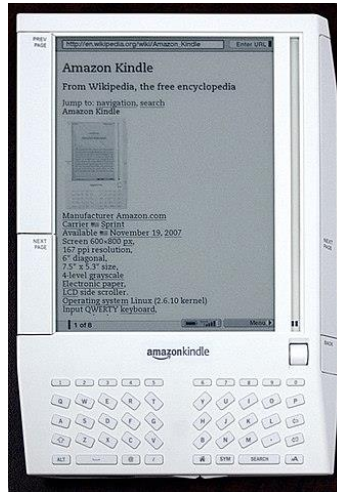
This was the third major attack on Second Life that had involved quickly reproducing digital objects. In Oct., it had been bouncing beach balls.

For more digital diseases, see [Sept 13].

Kindle
Nov. 19, 2007

Amazon [July 17] released the Kindle, its first e-reader. It sold out in five and a half hours, and remained out of stock for five months even though sales were initially restricted to the US.

The Amazon Kindle. Photo by Jon 'ShakataGaNai' Davis. CC BY 3.0.

The device featured a six inch 4-level grayscale display, and enough storage for approximately 200 non-illustrated titles. E-ink displays were only introduced with the second generation Kindle DX, released on July 1, 2010. This first Kindle was also the only one with expandable storage, via an SD card slot [Nov 15].

The Kindle pioneered the availability of free US-wide 3G access, albeit only to download e-books from Amazon (and limited Web content). Its "Whispernet" network was co-designed with Qualcomm, and provided by AT&T.

Originally, Whispernet imposed no limits on the amount of data that could be downloaded, but Amazon had under-estimated the hacker ethos. Users soon learned that they could 'modify' their Kindles to turn them into wireless hotspots for other devices. The increased data consumption led AT&T to place limits on the system.

The device's codename was "Fiona", but "Kindle" (meaning "to light a fire") was felt to be a more apt metaphor for the intellectual excitement of reading.

Agent.BTZ
Nov. 19, 2008

Wired magazine [Jan 2] broke the story of a major cyber-attack on US military computers.

A flash drive had uploaded malicious code, called Agent.BTZ, that added an AUTORUN.INF file to the root of each drive, scanned the drives, spread to other machines on the network, and sent data via a backdoor to a remote command and control server.

The Pentagon banned USB drives, and disabled MS Window's autorun feature to try to stop the worm's spread. Nevertheless, it spent nearly 14 months removing the thing from its systems. It was suspected to be the work of Russian hackers because they had used similar code in previous attacks.