

Oct. 29th

## Fredric Brown

**Born: Oct. 29, 1906;**

Cincinnati, Ohio

Died: March 11, 1972

Brown was a science fiction and mystery writer known for his use of humor (e.g. in "Martians, Go Home" (1955)) and his mastery of the (very) short story with clever plotting and surprise endings. He appears here due to his story "Answer", in which computers from different planets are linked together, and asked if God exists. It first appeared in "Angels and Spaceships" (1954).

## First Computing Conference

**Oct. 29-31, 1945**

The first computer-related conference, the Conference on Advanced Computation Techniques, was held at MIT, to coincide with the first public demonstration of MIT's new Differential Analyzer built by Vannevar Bush [March 11] and Samuel Caldwell [Jan 15]. The conference chair was Leslie Comrie [Aug 15], and speakers included John Brainerd [Aug 7], J. Presper Eckert [April 9], John von Neumann [Dec 28], and Howard Aiken [Jan 17]. There were only 84 attendees, few enough to be fully listed in the conference report in "Mathematical Tables and Other Aids to Computation", Vol. 2, No. 14 (April 1946).

The next gathering of computing pioneers occurred during the Moore School Lectures [July 8].

The first large conference (a massive 250 people) was held at Harvard on [Jan 7] 1947. The influential series of Cybernetic conferences had already begun by then, starting on [March 21] 1946, but they were more orientated towards human cognition.

## James Robert Williamson

**Born: Oct. 29, 1949;**

Castroville, Texas

Williamson is a member of the proto-punk rock band "The Stooges" formed by Iggy Pop, but, between his stints as a rock legend, he also found time to work in Silicon Valley.

He co-wrote all the songs with Pop and played all the guitar parts on the album "Raw Power" (1973), and worked with Pop frequently until the album Soldier (1980), when he decided to leave the music business to concentrate on his studies.

In 1982, he received an electrical engineering degree from California State Polytechnic University. He later remarked that, "coming from being a Stooge to doing differential equations and calculus was a tough deal, let me tell ya, but I did it."

For the next fifteen years, he worked for AMD [May 1] in San Jose, designing products around its chips. Apparently, his co-workers never inquired about his earlier career as a rock musician; in a 2010 interview, Williamson stated that many of his colleagues were "nerds and geeks ... they don't listen to The Stooges much."

In 1997, he became Sony's vice president of technical standards, and helped to codify several industry protocols, most notably the Blu-ray Disc [Nov 18]. Under Williamson's direction, the standards team was awarded the IEEE Standard Association's Corporate Award in 2004.

After retiring from Sony in 2009, Williamson rejoined The Stooges, and in March 2010 the group was inducted into the Rock & Roll Hall of Fame.

## James Edward Allchin

**Born: Oct. 29, 1951;**

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Allchin is perhaps unique in being both a blues rock guitarist, and a (former) Microsoft executive. In the latter role, he led the Platforms division overseeing the development of Windows 98 [June 25] through to Windows Vista [Nov 30], Microsoft server products, and the Windows CE [Nov 16] and Windows Embedded lines. Memorably, he once denounced the Open Source [Oct 3] movement as being contrary to the "American Way" of free enterprise.



Jim Allchin (2005). Photo by Gregor Hochmuth. CC BY-SA 2.0.

Allchin was a member of the Senior Leadership Team at Microsoft – a small group responsible for developing Microsoft's core direction, along with Steve Ballmer [March 24] and Bill Gates [Oct 28].

His 2017 album, "Decisions", stayed in the "10 Top Blues Rocks" album list for 14 weeks. The track "Bad Decisions" starts with the lines:

Got my windows rolled down  
And the sky is so blue  
I ain't your fool no more and I  
don't need this town

## TECO 6

### Oct. 29, 1964

TECO-6, the first version to support on-screen editing, was described in the Project MAC memorandum (MAC-M-191) written by Daniel J. Edwards which appeared on this day.

TECO (short for "Tape Editor and Corrector", and later "Text Editor and Corrector") had been developed by Dan Murphy in 1962 for the PDP-1 [Nov 00] in MIT's Research Lab for Electronics). Murphy came up with the name while eating at "Ye Hong Guey", his favorite restaurant in Boston's Chinatown.

TECO was modified and extended by many people during the 1960's and early 70's, and was a direct ancestor of Emacs [Oct 2] which was first implemented as TECO macros.

A classic essay on computer programming, "Real Programmers Don't Use Pascal", [July 00] suggested that a common game for TECO users was to enter their name as a command sequence, and try to work out what had just happened. The same article coined the acronym YAFIYGI, meaning "You Asked For It You Got It" (as a response to WYSIWYG [Sept 17]).

TECO wasn't the first text editor for MIT's PDP-1; that was the "Expensive Typewriter", a line editor coded by Stephen D. Piner. Its name was chosen as a reference to John McCarthy's [Sept 4] "Colossal Typewriter" which may have been the very first line editor.

## Lo, the Internet

### Oct. 29, 1969

The first ARPANET [July 29] message was sent at 10:30pm from room 3420 of UCLA's Boelter Hall. As a consequence, today is generally marked as the birthday of the ARPANET, the precursor to the Internet [Jan 1].

The message was delivered over a 50kbps AT&T phone line linking a SDS Sigma 7 operated by a team led by Leonard Kleinrock [June 13] at UCLA, and an SDS 940 [Nov 30] operated by Douglas Engelbart's [Jan 30] team at the Stanford Research Institute (SRI). Each computer was connected to the phone system through an Interface Message Processor (IMP [Aug 30]), acting as routers.

UCLA student Charles S. Kline had meant to send the text "login", but after the transmission of the letters "l" and "o", the system crashed. Nevertheless, "lo" is a perfectly viable message, and its biblical overtones perhaps makes it a more suitable chose.

About an hour later, the full text was successfully transmitted.

29 Oct 69	2100	LOADRD OP. PROGRAM	CSK
		FOR BEN BARKER	
		BBV	
	22:30	Talked to SRI Host to Host	CSK
		Left up program running after sending a host send message to imp.	CSK

The First ARPANET IMP log. The initials "CSK" stand for Charles S. Kline.

The first permanent ARPANET link, between UCLA and SRI, was established a month later on Nov. 21.

Today, the room and its IMP are preserved as part of UCLA's Kleinrock Center for Internet Studies. However, the room's Sigma 7 is a prop replica.

When the ARPANET was formally shut down in 1990, distinguished poet Vint Cerf [June 23] wrote the following:

It was the first, and being first, was best,  
but now we lay it down to ever rest.  
Now pause with me a moment,  
shed some tears.  
For auld lang syne, for love, for years and years

of faithful service, duty done, I weep.  
Lay down thy packet, now, O friend, and sleep.

## Genesis of the Mega Drive

### Oct. 29, 1988

Sega released the 16-bit Mega Drive (known as the Sega Genesis in the US), featuring a 68000 CPU [Sept 26], 64 KB of RAM, 2 KB of ROM, and a Zilog Z80 [March 9] for sound processing. It heralded the beginning of the fourth-generation of video game consoles.

The commercial aim was to "crush" the 8-bit NES [Oct 18], which it pretty much did in North America, Brazil, and Europe, selling over 30 million units during an unrivalled 14 year lifespan.

Contributing to the Mega Drive's success was its large library of arcade game ports, Sega's Sonic the

Hedgehog series [June 23], several sports franchises, and some clever marketing including the ad slogan "Sega does what Nintendo n't".

It took two years for Nintendo to respond to this existential threat with the release of its Super Nintendo Entertainment System (SNES [Nov 21]), which marked the start of the "console war".

## JavaStation

### Oct. 29, 1996

Sun Microsystems [Feb 24] unveiled the JavaStation-1, a Network Computer (NC) that could run only Java applications [May 23]. The NC was hailed by Sun's marketing team as "the next big thing" in computing, and conventional PC's, disparagingly called "fat clients", were expected to be quickly supplanted by thin-client NC's.

The JavaStation's hardware was based on the Sun SPARCstation series [April 9] (and hence the similar name) but, being a svelte NC, lacked a hard drive, floppy, or CD-ROM drive. It also differed from other Sun systems in having a PS/2 keyboard and a VGA monitor connector. Its codename during development was "Mr. Coffee", and later models were called "Krupps" and "Espresso".

The JavaStation came with JavaOS installed in flash memory, but it was also possible to install Linux or NetBSD [May 19], which was probably just as well since JavaOS was one of the slowest Java VMs of the time. Other disappointing software included the Hotjava browser, and GoJoe for accessing X applications.

Disappointing sales revealed that most customers either preferred to buy a low-cost PC from vendors such as Compaq [Feb 14], or were happy to use a traditional dumb terminal. The JavaStation was discontinued in March 2000.

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## Pixelon iBash '99 Party

Oct. 29, 1999

Pixelon was a flashy dot-com company founded in 1998 that promised unprecedented high-quality video streaming over the Internet. Its lavish product launch, called "iBASH '99", was held on this day at the MGM Grand Las Vegas, at a reported cost of \$16 million. The entertainment lineup included Natalie Cole, KISS, Tony Bennett, and a reunion of The Who.

Of course, the event was streamed over the Internet using the company's iBash software, but technical glitches meant that only error messages were received by users. Indeed, most of Pixelon's signature technologies seemed to have problems working.

Later it was discovered that CEO and founder "Michael Fenne"

(not his real name) had spent the majority of his investors' money on the launch party. Also, just prior to starting Pixelon, he had pleaded guilty to swindling friends and neighbors out of \$1.5 million, and was on the run, living out of his car. Pixelon's revolutionary new streaming technology never even existed.

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## Wreck-it Ralph Released

Oct. 29, 2012

"Wreck-It Ralph" is a 3D computer-animated fantasy-comedy produced by Walt Disney, and directed by Rich Moore. The eponymous "Wreck-it Ralph" is an arcade game villain who dreams of becoming a hero.

As you might expect, the movie contains many video game references. For example, the "game-villains support group" features Bowser from the Mario franchise [Sept 13], Kano from Mortal Kombat [Oct 8], Clyde from Pac-Man [Oct 26], and Doctor Eggman from Sonic the Hedgehog [June 23].

The graffiti in Game Central Station includes "Aerith Lives," in reference to Final Fantasy VII ([Jan 31] 1997). Another says "All your base are belong to us," [May 31] from "Zero Wing" (1989).

This was the third Disney film set inside a computer after TRON ([July 9] 1982), and its sequel, TRON Legacy (2010).

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