Sept. 24th

Jacques Fabrice Vallée

Born: Sept. 24, 1939;

Pontoise, France

Vallée first job in the US was as a programmer at the University of Texas, where he co-developed the first computerized mapping system of Mars for NASA.

From 1972 to 1976, Vallée, Roy Amara, Robert Johansen, and others from the "Institute of the Future" created the Planning Network (PLANET), the first ARPANET [July 29] chat system. It later evolved into Notepad, a conferencing system.

Vallée is also involved in UFO research (dating from May 1955, when he sighted one over his Pontoise home) but his skepticism has earned him the title "heretic among heretics". He served as the model for the fictional French researcher, Lacombe (played by François Truffaut) in the Steven Spielberg [Feb 7] film "Close Encounters of the Third Kind" (1978).

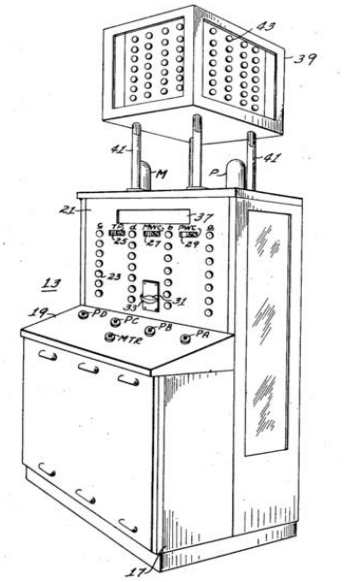
Nimatron Patented

Sept. 24, 1940

The Nimatron, an electromechanical relay machine for playing Nim, was quite possibly the first computer game with a "display". It debuted at the New York's World's Fair in April 1940, in the same pavilion as Elektro and Sparko [April 30] and Pedro the Voder [June 5].

Nuclear physicist Edward Condon, then associate director of research at the Westinghouse in Pittsburgh, received US patent 2,215,544 for the machine on this day, with Gereld L. Tawney and Willard A. Derr, his engineers, also listed.

It's estimated that the Nimatron played around 100,000 games at the fair, winning 90,000. Most of its defeats were administered by Nimatron's attendants to show that it could be beaten.



Nimatron image from the patent (1940). Edward Condon - US Patent 2215544.

Its display consisted of four vertical lines of seven bulbs each. Each game started with different numbers of bulbs lit up, and a player had to turn off one or more lights in a column, before the machine took its turn. The last player to turn off a light was declared the winner.

The Nimatron was artificially slowed down on its turn, so it wouldn't generate seem too omnipotent. Also, when it lost a game it would graciously present its worthy opponent with a coin stamped with 'Nim Champ'.

In retrospect, Condon called Nimatron his "biggest failure", because he didn't think of its digital logic as more than a toy.

Although the Nimatron is often considered to be the earliest computer game with a display, some believe the honor of first-ever game should belong to "El Ajedrecista" ("The Chess Player"), an automaton built by Leonardo Torres y Quevedo [28 Dec] in 1912. Indeed, several chess playing programs precede Nimatron, including ones by Konrad Zuse [June 14] and Claude Shannon [Nov 8].

The Nimatron was the inspiration for the NIMROD [May 5] exhibited at the 1951 Festival of Britain, and also arguably for "Bertie the Brain" at the [Aug 25] 1950 Canadian National Exhibition, although it played tic-tac-toe.

Some other visual game machine of notes, in chronological order: Goldsmith and Mann's "Cathode Ray Tube amusement device" [Jan 25] 1947; Whirlwind's Bouncing Ball, [Feb 6] 1949; Bertie the Brain; NIMROD; OXO [May 21] (tic-tac-toe again, but running on the EDSAC [May 6]); Draughts by Christopher Strachey [Nov 16]; Pool on the MIDSAC ([June 26], 1954); Arthur Samuel's Checkers ([Feb 24] 1956): not visual but it was shown on TV; Tennis for Two ([Oct 18], 1958); Spacewar! ([May 17], 1962); Ralph Baer's [March 8] Brown Box from 1966.

The first arcade video game is usually taken to be 1971's "Computer Space" [Oct 15].

CompuServe Launched

Sept. 24, 1969

Compu-Serve Network, later renamed CompuServe, provided dial-up timesharing to businesses, and was the brainchild of Jeffrey M. Wilkins and John Goltz.

In 1979, it began offering a similar service to consumers through RadioShack [Feb 2] stores, under the MicroNET, name, an amenity which turned out to be surprisingly popular.

On [Aug 25] 1980, CompuServe began working with newspapers to offer online versions of their stories, starting with the *Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch*. By 1982, at least ten major papers were participating, including *The Washington Post* and *The Los Angeles Times*.

However, its most popular service was the Compuserve CB Simulator, a chat system which debuted on [Feb 21] 1980.

By the mid-1980's CompuServe was the largest consumer information service in the world. In 1989, it connected its e-mail system to the Internet, making it one of the first commercial Internet services (MCI Mail [Sept 23] was the first).

CompuServe had more than 1.5 million subscribers by 1993, but during the 1990s, failed to compete effectively against AOL [Oct 2] and other ISPs, and began to lose its dominant spot. AOL bought CompuServe in 1998, and the CompuServe community faded away.

"Three Days of the Condor" Released

Sept. 24, 1975

"Three Days of the Condor" was a political thriller, directed by Sydney Pollack and starring Robert Redford and Faye Dunaway. The screenplay was adapted from the longer novel "Six Days of the Condor" by James Grady. A CIA researcher, played by Redford, discovers a secret section within the CIA, and they attempt to silence him.

A DEC PDP-8/E [March 22] (1970), a DECWriter, and possibly a VT52 terminal [Jan 5] are featured at Redford's CIA office. The PDP-8 is employed for OCR scanning in the movie, which was actually possible at the time, but it's unclear what device was used. The clearest view of it in the film, which includes its operator dead on the floor in the background, suggests that it's manually operated rather than a dedicated book scanner, such as the ECRM Autokon.

Chris Arthur Lattner

Born: Sept. 24, 1978;

Oregon

Lattner is the main author of the LLVM (Low Level Virtual Machine), a collection of components for building compilers. He started designing the system while a student at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign.

He used LLVM to develop the Clang compiler, a front-end for the C, C++ [Oct 14], and Objective-C languages, as well as for the OpenMP, OpenCL, RenderScript and CUDA [June 23] frameworks. Clang can be used as a drop-in replacement for the GNU Compiler Collection (GCC [Sept 27]).

Soon after joining Apple, he created Swift, an open source language for iOS [June 29] and MacOS [March 24] development. It signaled Apple's move away from Objective-C [Oct 12], and has been described as "Objective-C without the C". Of course, Swift use the LLVM framework.

While a student, Lattner was president of the university's Classical Fencing club, and taught an "Introduction to Fencing" class.

Computer Museums

Sept. 24, 1979

"The Computer History Museum" dates from 1968 when Gordon Bell [Aug 19] began collecting computing memorabilia. The resulting DEC "Museum Project", founded by Ken Olsen [Feb 20] and Gordon and Gwen Bell, held its first exhibition in 1975, housed in a converted coat closet in the lobby of DEC's ML-12 building in Maynard, Massachusetts.

On this day, the "Digital Computer Museum" opened in the more spacious lobby of DEC's MR-2 Tower Building in Marlborough. Maurice Wilkes [June 26] gave a talk on EDSAC [May 6] and his play, "Pray Mr. Babbage" was performed on [Dec 10] 1982.

It soon became clear that the museum needed a more public location to attract a wider audience. On May 11, 1984, "The Computer Museum" (TCM) was founded on Boston's Museum Wharf. Bob Noyce [Dec 12] gave a talk on "The Origin of the Integrated Circuit", and the center opened to the public on Nov. 13.

Boston Children's Museum (which co-hosted The Computer Museum in the 1980's and 1990's). Photo by NewtonCourt. CC BY-SA 4.0.

In 1996, TCM moved its unused items to Mountain View, California to help establish Len Shustek's "The Computer Museum History Center" (TCMHC). When TCM closed in 1999, it relocated some of the exhibits to Boston's Museum of Science, and the remainder to TCMHC.

In 2000, TCMHC was renamed the "Computer History Museum" (CHM). CHM now claims to house the largest collection of computing artifacts in the world (e.g. see [Feb 25; March 00; March 5; June 29; Sept 00; Oct 3; Oct 17; Nov 10; Nov 30; Dec 26]). However, the Heinz Nixdorf Museum in Paderborn, Germany, has more items on

display but a far smaller total collection.

Myst Released
Sept. 24, 1993

Broderbund released the first-person graphic adventure game Myst, developed by Rand and Robyn Miller. The Stranger (you) must employ a magical book to track the time traveler Atrus through the ages, to solve puzzles, find clues, and discover the true nature of the island of Myst.

Unlike most other games of the time, the player could not die, there were few rules to follow, and there was a strong emphasis on game visuals. It appealed to gamers and non-gamers, and popularized both the graphic adventure genre, and the CD-ROM format [Sept 1]. The first version was programmed in HyperCard [Aug 11].

Scene from Myst (Cyan Worlds, © 1993) showing the library and ship on the Island.

Myst became the best-selling game of all time until "The Sims" [Feb 4] broke its record in 2002. In 2013, it was added to the collection of video games at the Museum of Modern Art.

The original name of the Myst native inhabitants was spelled "Dunny". This was quickly changed to "D'Ni" when it was realized that the original was a commonly used Australian slang term for toilet.

First Webcomic
Sept. 24, 1993

"Doctor Fun" by David Farley became the first comic on the Web, and would run for 520 strips until June 9, 2006. It's often compared to "The Far Side" because of its fondness for bizarre one-panel gags.

However, there were earlier Internet-based comics, including "Witches and Stitches" (1985), delivered through CompuServe [five entries back], and "Where the Buffalo Roam" (1991), circulated via USENET newsgroups [Jan 29].

For more computing cartoons, see [March 12], [April 16], [July 5], [Aug 23], [Sept 9], [Oct 17].

Ultima Online Launched
Sept. 24, 1997

Origin Systems' "Ultima Online" was the first successful massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG) for MS Windows. The initial development team included Richard Garriott, Starr Long, Rick Delashmit, Scott Phillips, and later Raph Koster, who became the lead designer.

It was built upon previous Ultima games [Sept 2; Aug 24] but its new persistent game world included novel features such as player housing, skill-based character development, and a craft-based economy. It began as just a single world, but later expansion packs added new territories and worlds.

Earlier MMORPGs had allowed hundreds of people to play at the same time, including Habitat ([June 23] 1986), "The Realm Online" [Dec 31], "Neverwinter Nights" [?? 1953] and "Meridian 59" [Sept 27]. "Ultima Online" outdid these games, both graphically and in game mechanics.

"Spy" Satellite
Sept. 24, 1999

Space Imaging Inc. launched the world's first commercial high-resolution photo satellite, IKONOS, which was hyped in the media as the first big-business "spy" satellite. Its name was derived from the Greek word eikōn for image.

The satellite was capable of taking photos at a 1- and 4-meter resolution, and its images started to be sold commercially in 2000.

Two satellites were originally planned, but IKONOS-1 failed to reach orbit, so IKONOS-2 became IKONOS. It was decommissioned on March 31, 2015.

Microsoft's Threat
Sept. 24, 2003

The Computer and Communications Industry Association (CCIA) released a report entitled 'CyberInsecurity: the Cost of Monopoly' which asserted that Microsoft's industry dominance posed a security risk that threatened the nation's infrastructure. The report claimed that reliance on a single technology, such as MS Windows [Oct 25], should be viewed as a flaw in the economy's infrastructure.

The report's authors included a number of respected security experts, such as Bruce Schneier [Jan 15].

Established back in 1972, the CCIA has seem action in a number of antitrust cases involving IBM [Jan 8], AT&T, and Microsoft [Nov 5], and lobbied for net neutrality [April 13], copyright and patent reform and against Internet censorship.

Current CCIA members include eBay, Facebook, Google, Uber, and Microsoft.

From You to Me
Sept. 24, 2007

After Montenegro declared its independence from Serbia and Montenegro on June 3, 2006, ICANN [June 20] allowed it to change its top-level domain name [Jan 1] from .yu to .me. The domain became officially active on this day.

Some other domain names worth remembering:

- `auctionshit.com` - Auctions Hit
- `bendover.com` - Ben Dover
- `bitefartcafe.rs` - Bitef Art Cafe
- `choosespain.com` - Choose Spain
- `dicksonweb.com` - Dickson's Temperature Instruments
- `expertsexchange.com` - Experts Exchange
- `ihavegas.com` - IHA Vegas Holiday Rentals
- `mammotherection.com` - Construction Company
- `molestationnursery.com` - Mole Station Nursery
- `nycanal.com` - New York Canal Region
- `oddsextractor.com` - Odds Extractor
- `penisland.net` - Pen Island
- `powergenitalia.com` - Power Gen Italia
- `speedofart.com` - Speed of Art
- `sydneytherapist.com` - Sydney Therapist
- `viagrafix.com` - Via Grafix
- `whorepresents.com` - Who Represents

Shellshock
Sept. 24, 2014

Shellshock, also known as Bashdoor, is a collection of security bugs in the widely used UNIX Bash shell, the first of which was disclosed on this day.

Bash is often installed as the default command-line interface on computers running Linux [March 14] and OS X [March 24].

Shellshock offered a way for users to execute commands that should be unavailable to them, by abusing Bash's "function export" feature.

Security companies recorded millions of attacks and probes related to Shellshock in the days following the disclosure.

Bash was written by Brian Fox for the GNU Project [Sept 27] as a replacement for the Bourne shell [Jan 7], and first released in 1989. The original Shellshock bug dates back as far as version 1.03 from August 1989.