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Details, Screw-Ups & Butterfly Effects

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Disney's first three theme parks (California, Florida, Tokyo) were a runaway success. The fourth park in Paris lost a billion dollars in the first two years. Why?

The plan projected 11 MN guests staying for an average of 3 days (average for other parks).

2/

Population density, income levels even weather patterns went into forecasting these numbers.

When the park opened the guests stayed on average for only 1 day instead of 3.

Projections missed to factor in the fact that Paris park had only 15 rides while other parks had 45.

3/

Mars climate orbiter was launched in 1998 but NASA lost the probe during orbital insertion.

It turns out Lockheed Martin (manufacturer) used English units while NASA was using the metric system.

These are rocket scientists. Literally.

4/

Ottomans Turks for about 2 months were not able to breach the heavily fortified walls of Constantinople in 1453 with 10X the force and massive cannons.

Then somebody noticed that one of the gates in the walls have accidentally been left open. The city fell.

5/

Russian Empire sold Alaska to US in 1867 for $7.2MN ($130 MN today) or 2 cents per acre. They didn’t want it to go the British (operating from Canada).

6/

The GDP of Alaska is $50 BN. It’s a resource rich state. The state of Alaska has collected $157 BN inflation adjusted from oil alone since 1960.

7/

In 1964 Donald Curry was studying the Ice Age by drilling into what he thought were old bristle cone pine trees. The drill got stuck in one of the trees and a park ranger helped him cut it down as he would have had to wait for days before getting a new drill.

8/

When the tree (one among 100s of similar trees around) fell and they counted the rings they realised that it probably was the oldest known non clonal organism ever. 5000 years old.

It was aptly names the Prometheus tree.

9/

On 31 January 2009, a Google engineer manually updated its search engine's blacklist of sites classified as malware to include the URL of '/'; this change meant that every organic Google search result for the entire web was incorrectly classified as malware.

10/

In 1997, Mark Randolph paid $40 late fee to Blockbuster after returning ‘Apollo 13’ past its due date. Unhappy he decided to co-found Netflix, allowing customers to keep their rentals for as long as they like without penalty.

Blockbuster declined to buy Netflix for $50 MN.

11/

In 1905-1907 the Academy of Fine Arts in Vienna rejected an admission application. Twice.

The frustrated young artist who earned a living making small oil colour paintings became interested in politics.

He was Hitler.

12/

In 1218 Inalchuq, a governor of the Khwarazmian Empire executed 450 men of a Mongolian trade caravan.

The emperor of the Mongols sent a Muslim (emphasising his secularism) and two Mongols as ambassadors with the message:

13/

“I am Khan of the lands of the rising sun while you are sultan of those of the setting sun: Let us conclude a firm agreement of friendship and peace”.

The Sultan beheaded the Muslim and shaved the beards of the Mongol ambassadors.

14/

The conquest eventually led to fall of the Khwarazmian Empire, massacre of 25% of its population. Further Mongol conquests led to killing of 11% of the world’s population.

15/

1 in 200 men today are descendants of the affronted Mongol Emperor, Genghis Khan, who without the provocation from a greedy governor would probably have been content with his mountainous realms and only 500 beautiful wives.

(end)