

# LINUX VOICE YOUR LETTERS



Got something to say? An idea for a new magazine feature? Or a great discovery? Email us: [letters@linuxvoice.com](mailto:letters@linuxvoice.com)

## LINUX VOICE STAR LETTER

### THAT'S NUMBERWANG

*Mathematica* [reviewed in LV007] is nice, but there are several FOSS alternatives. *Octave* was recently reviewed in another publication, which got me interested as I've succeeded in getting my mentee enrolled in computer engineering at university and now find myself helping with homework, prompting me to review my college math books and note that we've moved on a bit from the days of hand-cranked desk calculators, slide rules, and books of tables.

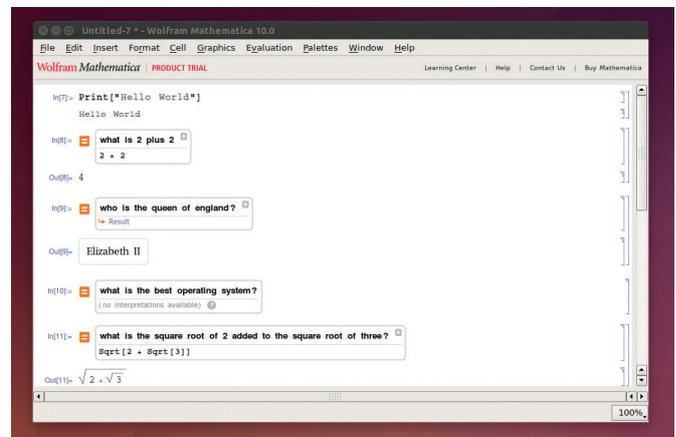
*Octave* is powerful, but not the best choice for analytical or symbolic math. I tried *Maxima*, which is in the Mint repository, but changed to *Sage* because I found a

beginner's guide to using it. *Sage* is very good and the plotting worked better than *GNU Plot* on my machine, but I know I am going to need geometry, which led to another search and the discovery of *GeoGebra* [[www.geogebra.org](http://www.geogebra.org)].

*GeoGebra* is relatively new and absolutely wonderful. Perhaps you could do a comparison of the leading FOSS computer-aided math applications in a future edition of Linux Voice.

**Andrew Shead.**

**Ben says:** As I said in the review, the idea of coding in a proprietary environment deeply troubles me. The software you mention are all good choices, but they all



Whatever the relative merits of *Mathematica*, a basic version of it now comes free of charge as part of Raspbian.

have their own shortcomings. Personally, my language of choice for mathematical computation is Python (with NumPy, SciPy and other

modules), although this also has its limitations. This does sound like an area ripe for comparison. We'll look into it for a future issue of Linux Voice.

### RELENTLESS CHEERINESS

Still loving the magazine, thanks for the *i3* tutorial – it was just what I need at the moment. I have two suggestions for the magazine.

Firstly, although the gaming section is welcome and a good read I wonder if it's time for it to become a bit more critical? As the gaming on Linux scene matures we are being asked to pay upwards of £30 for some of the games and it would be nice to know more about whether they will repay the investment.

Secondly, a plea for a rain-detection Raspberry Pi tutorial. My

wife is obsessed with line-drying clothes in the depths of winter so I would get major brownie points if I could build something that let her know if it rained. Maybe you could even cover serving requests on a web server so others nearby could access the same information? Take the British obsession with the weather and Linux-ify it.

Keep up the great work.

**Chris Beeley, Nottingham**

**Andrew says:** The gaming section is really there to provide a snapshot of what's going on, rather than an



in-depth review, and as such we don't feel there's any point including stuff that's rubbish. As for a Pi weather station, I want one too. Clothes dried outside always feel much fresher.

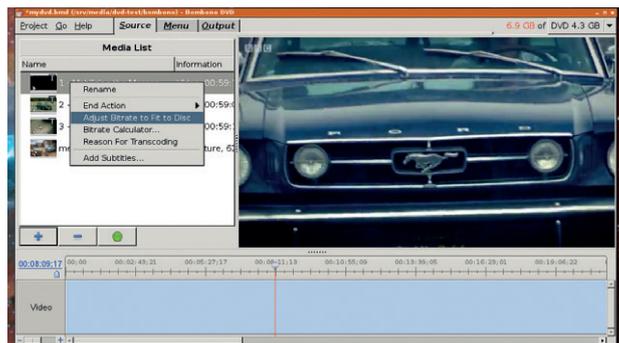
If ever we come across a big name title that's robbing people blind, we'll let you know.

## TOO EASY? TOO HARD?

Whatever the subject, be it computers, astronomy, mathematics etc, there is a tendency for those who know the subject well to forget how easy it is to confuse or 'scare off' those of us who are new to the subject, and in this case, your excellent magazine. If someone asked me, as a novice, how to copy a DVD, I would tell them that I used Kubuntu 12.04, which contains the K3b burning software as standard, and installed K9Copy from the software store. This allowed a 7.9GB protected DVD to be shrunk down to 4.2GB and burned onto a blank DVD. (K9Copy & K3b only work together

on KDE desktops; they do not appear to work on Ubuntu's Unity desktop). Whilst I have no doubt that your instructions are far more comprehensive and cover more situations, not all of us are yet ready for your 'Masterclass' approach. Please do not forget that we 'refugees from Windows' need to start at the easy end of the Linux subject.

**Andrew says:** Hmm. The masterclass section, by definition, is meant to provide an exhaustive examination of a particular application, and so it's never going to be aimed at anyone who just wants to get from metaphorical point A to



point B. That said, the balance has tipped away from new users in recent issues, and we'll have an opportunity to address that soon. Out of interest, is there anything that you'd like a beginners' guide to? Let us know and we'll do our best to provide one.

There are many ways to skin a cat in Linux; sometimes the most reliable way isn't the easiest.

## PANIC AND FREAK OUT!

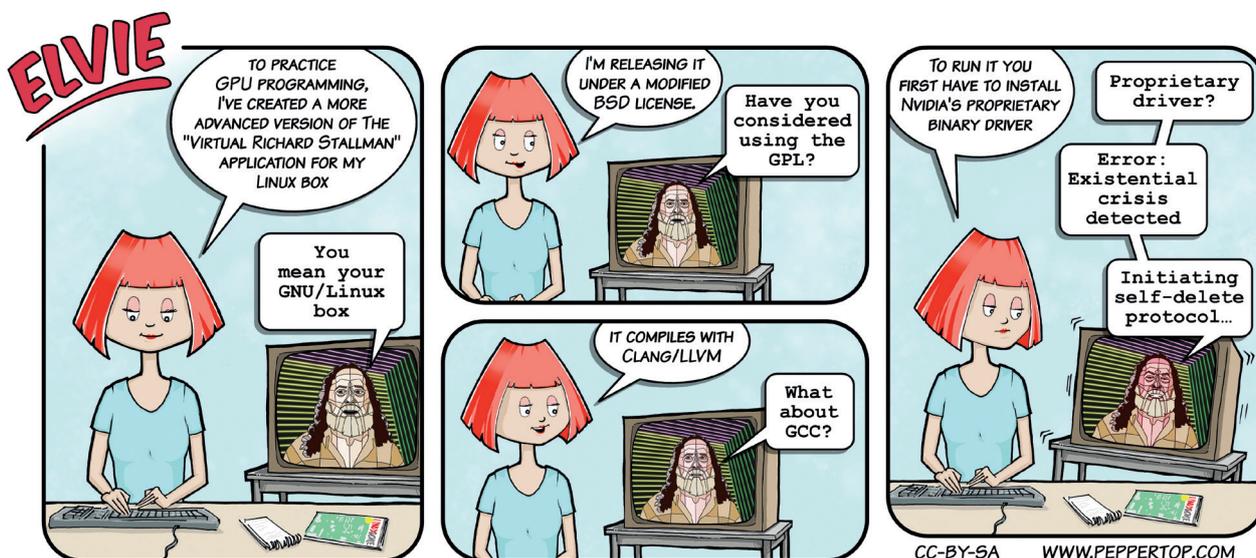
So, Symantec has discovered a new computer virus thing called Regin, and it's going to kill us all in our beds, or something. I looked on the BBC, Sydney Morning Herald and Symantec's own website and apparently this latest doomsday virus affects "computers". I have a computer! Should I be worried? Or is it actually more likely that this, like all them seem to be, is just a Windows virus and the media either doesn't know or is too craven to make the distinction that Windows computers ≠ all

computers?  
**David Watson, Melbourne**

**Mike says:** You're absolutely right David, and I tried to get in touch with the BBC's Rory Cellan-Jones to let him know about this oft-repeated error. At least, I hope it's an error: the cynic might suggest that the BBC et al are afraid of angering Microsoft by suggesting that it bears any culpability for the holes in its security, and instead is hedging its bets by using the vague (but still accurate) term "computer virus".



Far be it from us to illustrate the concept of a computer windows virus with a lazy stock photo search for the term 'computer virus'.



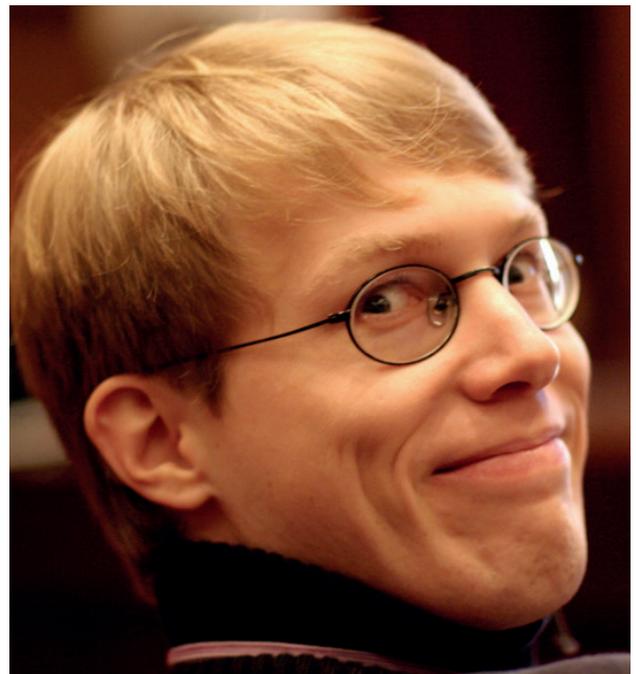
## CALM DOWN DEAR!

As a long time listener to your podcast (and as a listener to TuxRadar before then) I've laughed along with you on many occasions about the dafteries that free software throws up. But I'm a bit concerned over the Systemd argument that's raging on and that you've touched on recently in the podcast. I must admit that I don't understand the technical arguments (though I trust the Debian people, so if they're happy with it, I'm happy with it). But the level of personal invective that's been levelled at Lennart Poettering [the developer of Systemd] is on another level entirely, and is making me rethink the reasons that I got involved in the first place. I thought free software was supposed to be about inclusivity; instead it seems that there's a nasty element taking over. There's

a bullying culture about it now that I don't like.

**Andrew says:** Two things: yes, you're right. Technical criticism is one thing; personal abuse is quite another, and (apart from anything else) must be pretty alienating for anyone looking at free software from the outside in. But the other thing is that the pond life who are harassing the Systemd developers are representative only of themselves.

There are many, many people who contribute to free software, so the law of averages suggests that some of those people will be idiots. But they are only a minority. Actually, they're more than that; they're a vocal minority, and like all vocal minorities, they shout louder than the rest. Everyone has a different opinion, but as far as I can see the best thing to do is ignore them.



This man does not deserve the hate he gets online. Trolls, stop it! Image: Ramkrsna CC BY-SA 2.0.

## FREEEEEEEDOM!

I just wanted to get in touch to say a big well done on releasing issue 1 as Creative Commons CC-BY-SA. I subscribed when you launched before Christmas 2013 partly because I trusted your reputation from your old magazine, but what really grabbed me was your commitment to release your content free to the community. I've been looking forward to the day when you relicensed issue 1, and now you have I'm so happy I subscribed. You've done everything I wanted you to, and I'm really glad I backed you. Well done!

**Marco Pahl**

**Graham Says:** Modesty forbids me from bragging, but I do think we've done a brilliant job in such a short time. I'm especially proud of our giving content away under CC-BY-SA as well; it means that, as well as feeding our families, Linux Voice is producing something of value to society, and that's a really lovely feeling. Thanks a million for your warm wishes.

Issue 1 of Linux Voice is now free as in beer and speech from [www.linuxvoice.com/download-linux-voice-issue-1-with-audio](http://www.linuxvoice.com/download-linux-voice-issue-1-with-audio). Take it, share it, download it, change it, remix it, do whatever as long as you credit us, and we really do hope that it's useful to you.

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The magazine that gives back to the Free Software community

April 2014

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