Letters to the editor
Write access

■ Favoring Patents?

I just read your editorial in the March issue and was shocked. You do seem to favor software patents! Well they are going to be a killer for open software movement in general and Linux in particular. I have been buying your magazine from a newstand for about a year now and I WAS going to order it but after reading your editorial I decided this is the last issue I touch…
Kari Laine, By email

LM The editorial in issue 40 "Monopoly Money" was intended to spark a little debate on where we should draw the line on patents. The article was written in the hope that it would be ironic. The final lines were "Does a teaching hospital that comes up with some life saving treatment, or a teacher who has a new way to train the disabled, not have a responsibility to share that information for a better world?"

I hoped to indicate that if patents on everything were allowed, we would live in a terrible world where medical advances would only be available to the very rich, and education would be equally limited. Only by sharing knowledge can we ever hope to advance. John "Maddog" Hall of Linux International said very recently that Microsoft are currently trying to have thirty three thousand software patents approved. If this happens, we will never again be able to write free software, as we will spend all our time trying to understand the legal jargon of each patent and how it affects our programs.

Where do I stand?
Personally I am very against software patents. I signed the petition in Brussels. If you are interested in further information, the Electronic Freedom Frontier (EFF) issued a briefing about the directive, and an online petition which will be sent to key MEPs, *http://action.eff.org/action/moreinfo.asp?item=2873, http://action.eff.org/action/index.asp?step=2&item=2873.* ■

■ Poor PaX

I have been a faithful reader of Linux Magazine since Issue 1 and continue reading it as a subscriber. Since last summer the quality of Linux Magazine has been steadily improving with an interesting mix of well-written technical articles and excellent overviews of useful software that I would have never known about otherwise. In particular the quality of technical articles has dramatically improved.

Unfortunately at times the quest for technical articles takes the writer a little too far and the tone of "Breaking out Peace" in Issue 40, March, on p36, is often controversial and reads like a flame against OpenBSD, OpenWall and other non-PaX mechanisms. Reading it sounds like the author feels he is some sort of God in the field, all others being beneath him, and he needlessly delves into digs against systems which are basically "not PaX".

As a security professional I found it a very irritating read. It is a great pity as the article is interesting from a technical point of view, simply ruined by childish ego trips amongst the good stuff. The tone of the article detracts from the excellent work in PaX by focusing the reader on the writer's personal issues with other projects.

This is not to say that PaX isn't an excellent improvement to Linux, but it is definitely neither mainstream, nor ready for prime time. So much that only a few pages before, the article on Adamantix (an excellent article incidentally) acknowledges that some programs break and the closing paragraph titled "Satisfaction Despite the Deficits" is absolutely spot on.

Not only does the Adamantix article acknowledge that one of the strengths of OpenBSD is that it is an extremely homogeneous product but also points out the code audit work which is sorely lacking in Linux. It also mentions that RSBAC is a unique improvement present in Adamantix which lacks in OpenBSD

(indeed, grsecurity work is being included in -current at the moment and is most definitely not available in previous versions). The box on p26 is a well-balanced overview of the situation in stark comparison to the boasting of the PaX article which follows it a few pages later.

It is my personal opinion that Free/Open Source projects can only benefit from learning from each other's experiences and rant-less recognition for work in other projects is just one step in the right direction.
Arrigo Triulzi, Meyrin, Switzerland

LM We did not mean to cause offense with the "Breaking out Peace" article. Having re-read the article, and apart from the rodent and elephant jibe, it seemed more of a comparison.

Security is a very important topic for us. Our problem is trying to explain it in a way that avoids confusing the readers, or turning them away from the subject. Turning the magazine into a "My distro is better than yours" would not help the cause. Saying XFree86 had caused problems with OpenBSD recently, could cause some readers to lose faith in it. Hopefully OpenBSD users would follow the mailing lists to be forewarned.

We run the risk of turning readers away each month with the Insecurity news section, where we list the recent vulnerabilities. However, we hope that most understand that no system is perfect and it is better to be informed. ■