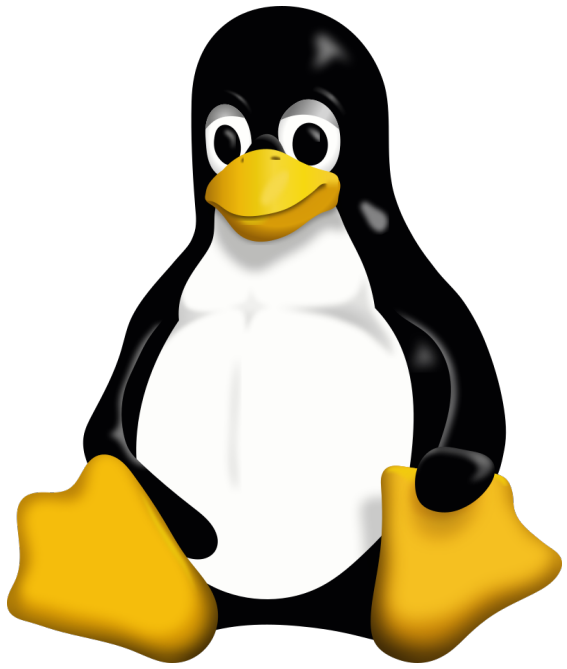
Getting Started with Linux

Zoltán Szabó @ Department of Statistics, LSE (Sept. 26, 2025)



Contents

- Desktop tour ✓
- Applications.
- A bit of Linux history.
- Linux distributions.
- Installation.
- Ricing and phones.

Applications: categorized; some handy ones

Notations:

- link. OD := Odysee, YT := YouTube (as fallback).
- M = '$\in$ main', A = '$\in$ AUR', W = web client, $_p$= proprietary.

Web & mail:

- browser:
  - librewolf-bin[†] (A; $\ni$ uBlock Origin), tor-browser-bin (A); to keep an eye on: Ladybird!

[†] Librewolf: the best browser? [YT]

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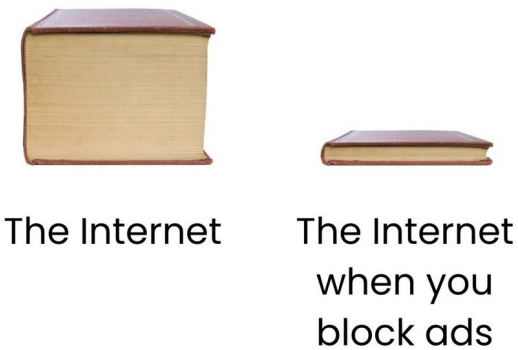

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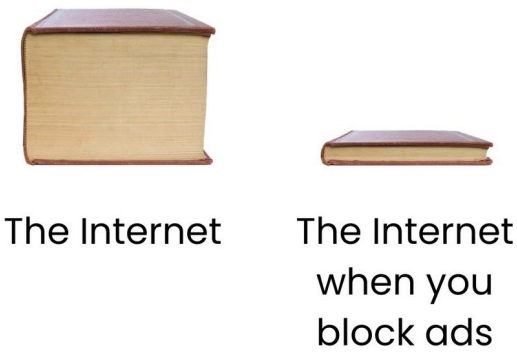

- e-mail: ProtonMail (W), thunderbird (M).

ProtonMail: get a free month on the Mail Plus plan!

† Librewolf: the best browser? [YT]

Applications+

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  - viewer: feh (M), gthumb (M).
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- video (& audio):
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  - recording, live streaming: obs-studio (M).
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  - editor: tenacity (M).

Applications+

- Text:
  - document viewer: xdvi $\in$ texlive (M, group), xpdf (M), okular (M),
  - .pdf annotation: xournalpp (M),
  - text editing: texlive (LaTeX, M, this group), kile (M) ($\approx$ WinEdt$_p$), vim (M), libreoffice-still (M).

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- Chat & collaboration:
  - chat: zoom$_p$(A), teams$_p$(A), BigBlueButton (W), Jitsi Meet (W), linphone-desktop-appimage(A),
  - version control: git (M),
  - calendar & reminder: remind (M).

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- validating, recursive, caching DNS resolver: unbound (M).

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- Programming: python (M), jupyter-notebook (M), spyder (M).

Applications+

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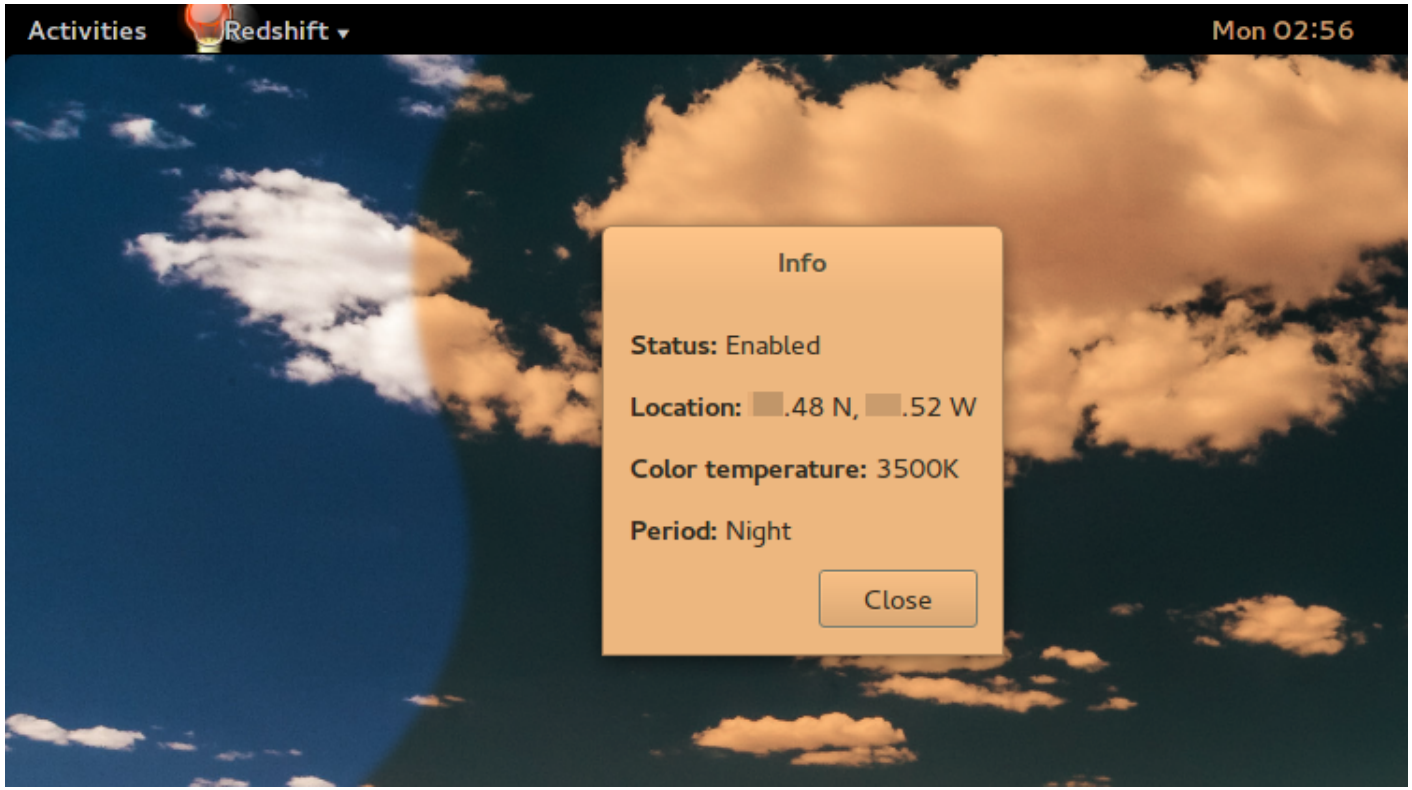

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My view

I do not miss anything, and have freedom.

A journey

Win

start

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$$\underbrace{\text{Win}}_{\text{start}} \rightarrow \overbrace{\text{Linux lab}}^{\text{school}}$$

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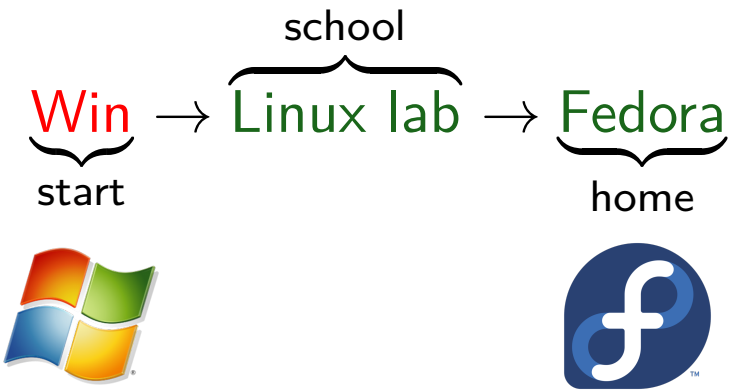

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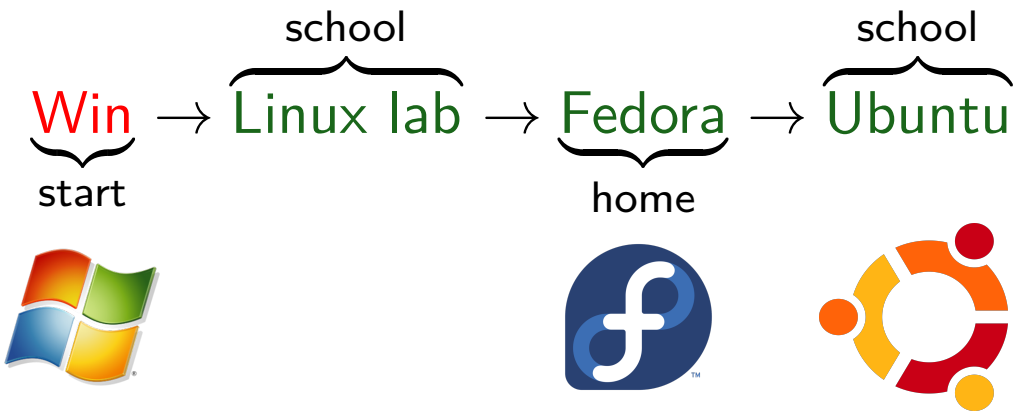

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$\Rightarrow$ Currently

- laptop, dept-al server, research computing (cluster),
- mobile phone: PinePhone Pro,
- paper-like tablet (Remarkable Paper Pro),
- router (OpenWrt $\in$ Flint 2),
- home automation (Home Assistant): reading about it.

Some fun (a 21Y Finish CS student)

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- At the heart of $>$ 3 billion Android devices.

Linux today – continued

- Web-facing servers, Microsoft's own Azure cloud, game consoles (SteamOS), smart TVs, smart watches, Amazon Kindle, international space stations, ...

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One of the main secrets

free and open source $\Rightarrow$ knowledge sharing $\Rightarrow$ creativity can kick in $\Rightarrow$ versatility!

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- Late 1970s: companies started to spread proprietary software $\Rightarrow$

- GNU project = GNU is Not Unix:
  - Goal: write a UNIX-like operating system entirely of free software.
  - Users are legally free (GPL)

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1. to study,
2. to modify, and
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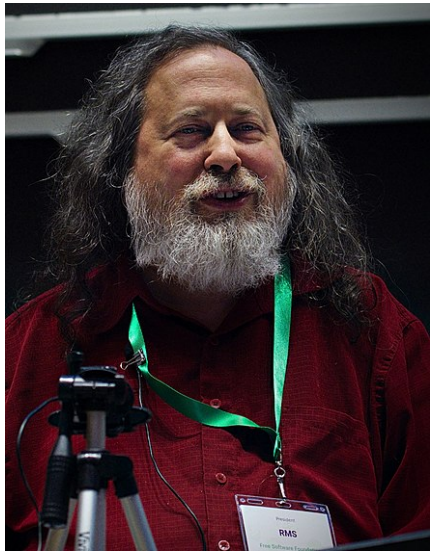
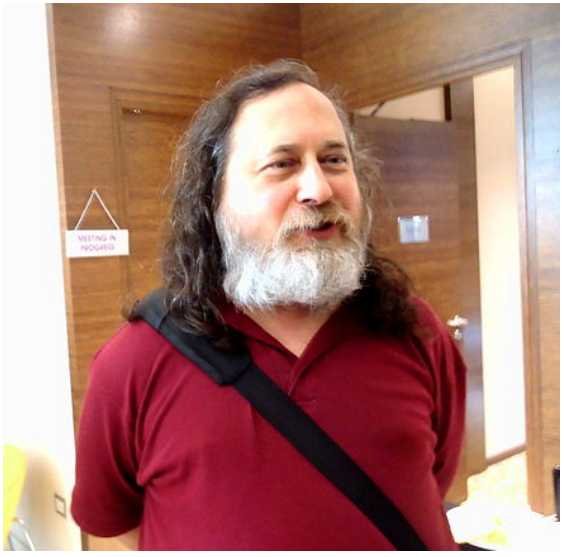
  - mass collaboration announced by Richard Stallman ('83; his website).

Richard (Matthew) Stallman: RMS – his hacker name;)



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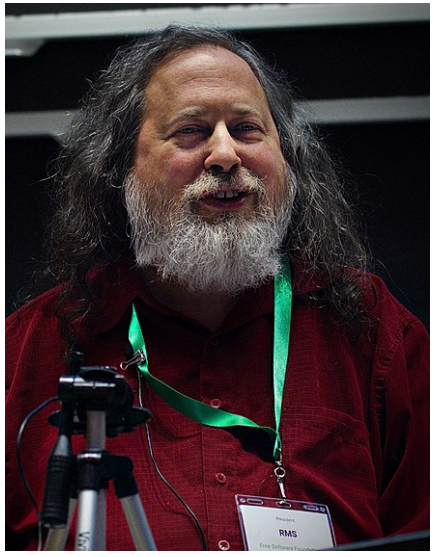

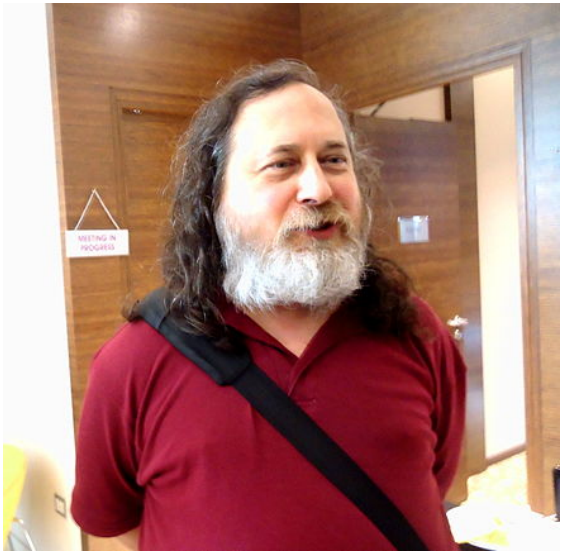


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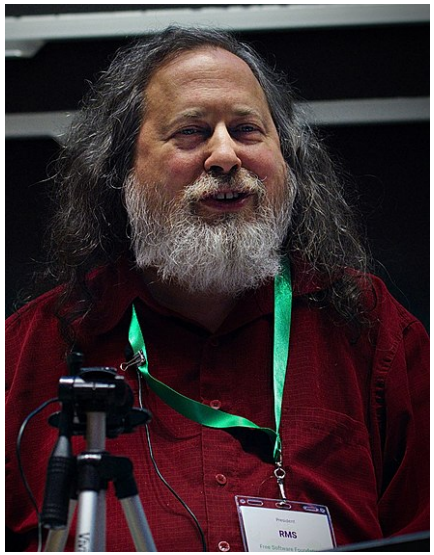


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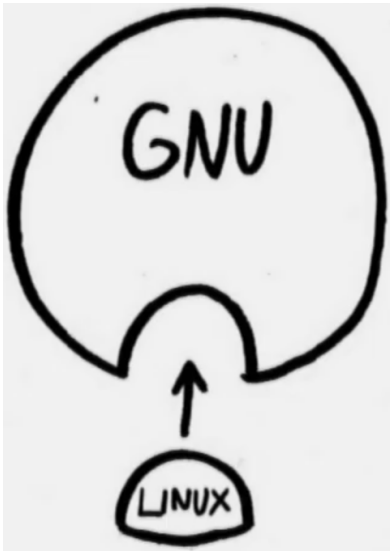
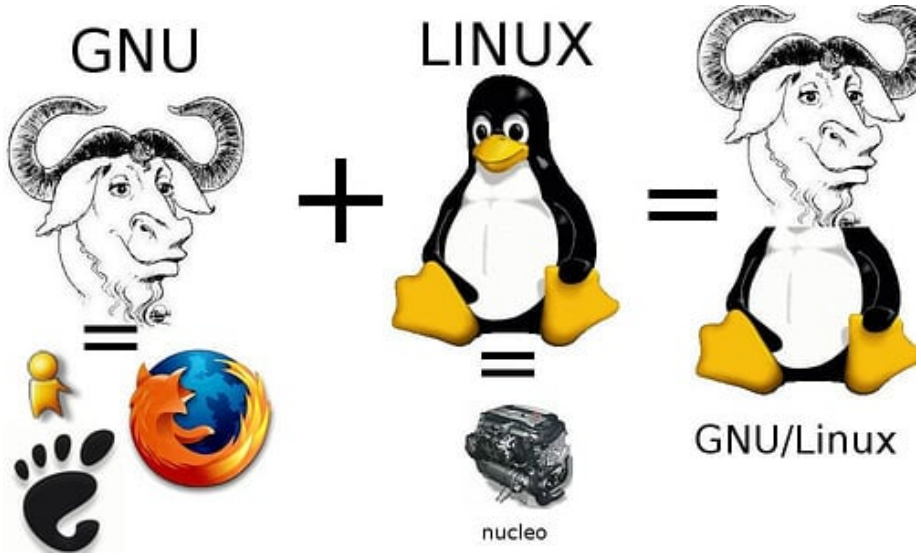
- Creator of GNU Emacs: 'text editor' (LISP interpreter).

GNU/Linux ('92-), shortly Linux



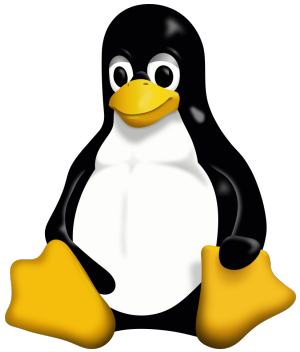


$\Rightarrow$

1. GNU utils: high-level utilities.
2. Kernel:
   - low-level 'stuff', written (mostly) in C, GPLv2,
   - manages the CPU, memory, device drivers, file system, ...

Linus+

- Tux (the mascot of the Linux kernel) := Torvalds UniX.



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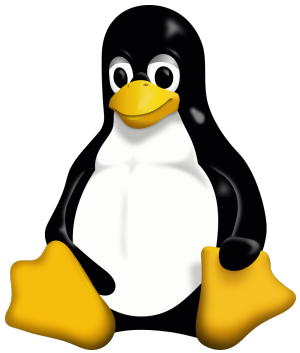

- Author of Git (GPLv2):
  - distributed version control system,
  - gold standard in collaborative coding efforts,
  - developed for the Linux kernel ('05),
  - # of lines in the code of Linux kernel: 40+ million (2025).

Free vs open

Free software (a.k.a. FOSS, libre software):

- goal: to respect user freedom and privacy.

to *not constrain* the user

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- free $\ni$ open-source, but
  - free $\neq$ open-source: text, video [OD,YT],
  - open-source code can 'spy' on you,

  privacy matters [OD,YT].

Free vs right to repair

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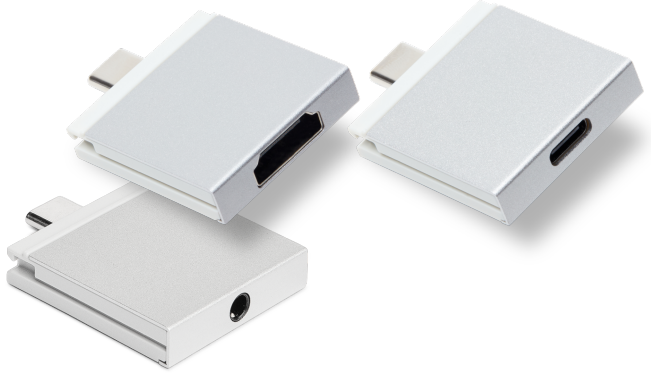
  - a laptop initiative: frame.work ≈ anti-MacBook ⇐ designed to be easy to upgrade & repair.



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  - standard for computing clusters (example: slurm).

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- there have been $>$ 1000 distributions,
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Primary choice to make

point release vs rolling release.

Point release model: Windows

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- Properties:
  1. occasional big changes,
  2. end-of-life date!

Point release: Linux distributions




(Debian $\rightarrow$) Ubuntu $\rightarrow$ Pop!_OS; Fedora; openSUSE.

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- openSUSE: Leap,
  - released $1\times$/year.

Rolling release: Linux distributions

- Arch Linux:

  - one-time installation with continuous upgrades,
  - lightweight and flexible,
  - follows the keep it simple (KISS) principle,
  - designed to teach its user.

Rolling release: Linux distributions

- other examples: openSUSE Tumbleweed, Gentoo.

Point release vs rolling release

point	rolling	
	always up-to-date	+
	(new software features, bug fixes, security patches)	
	supports even very new hardware	+
	more secure	+
	no need to reinstall it	+
	requires semi-decent internet bandwidth	−
	less suited for servers (where stability is max-ed)	−

My choice: Arch (released in 2002)

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1. great package manager (pacman),
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   Both are searchable.

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4. Follow the instructions.

Downloading note

- .iso size:
  - 15.8 GB (MacOS Tahoe) – for comparison.

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  - 5.9 GB (Ubuntu),
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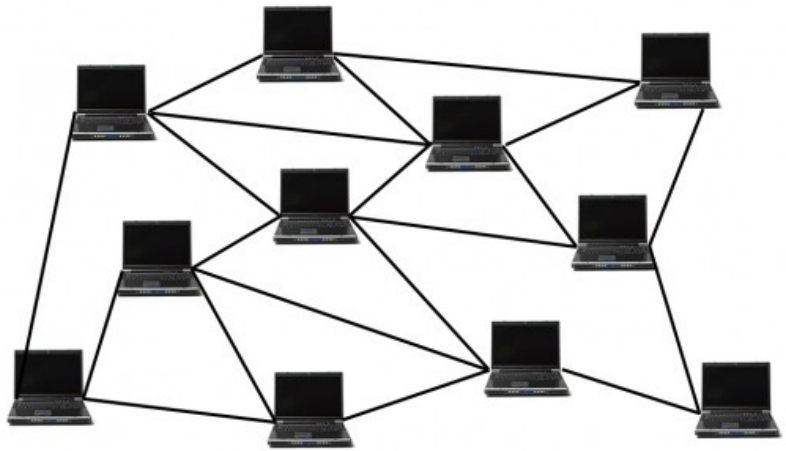
- downloading:
  - http; torrent: this can be faster ($\Leftarrow$ sharing).



Notes on the boot process — a bit technical

1. system's firmware (such as BIOS/UEFI/Coreboot/Libreboot) $\xrightarrow{\text{starts}}$
2. bootloader (such as GRUB $\Leftarrow$ GNU; features & others) $\xrightarrow{\text{loads}}$
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In practice:

- firmware:
  - probes for hardware, simple health checks,
  - it has a UI accessible with a magic key (Esc, F1/F2/...),
  - allows you to designate a boot device (USB/hard/CD/DVD drive, ...),
  - consults the GPT[†] partition table to identify the ESP[‡], and launches the target application (typically the bootloader).

[†]no chat 😉, [‡]EFI System Partition.

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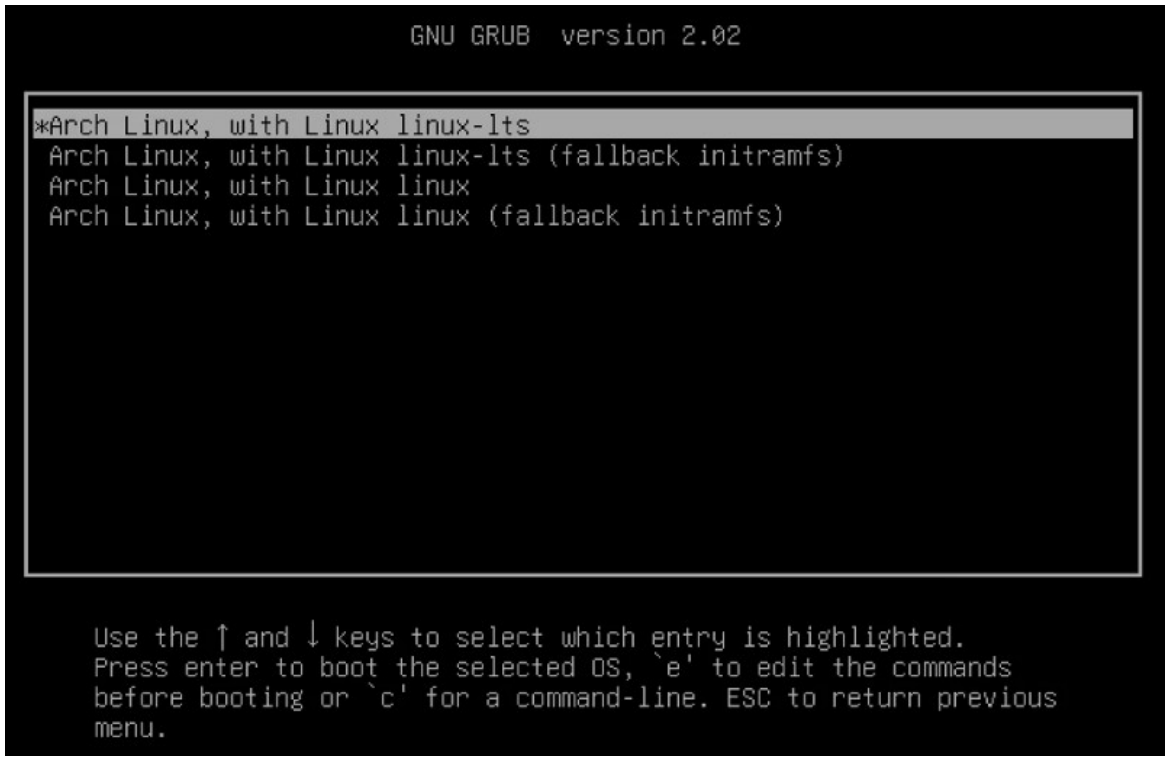
- bootloader:
  - gives a menu on which kernel / operating system to invoke.



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1. Step-by-step text guide (official one).
2. Video guide:
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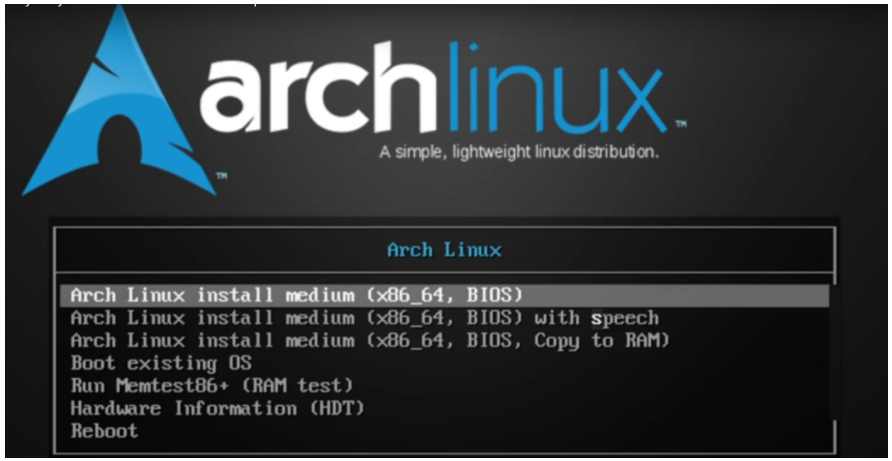
Definitions

- firmware: BIOS (very old machine), UEFI (semi-new computer).
- partition table: BIOS $\Rightarrow$ MBR (a.k.a. DOS, MS-DOS); UEFI $\Rightarrow$ GPT.
- LVM: adjustable layout, LUKS: encryption.
- LUKS: your data can't be read even if your laptop is stolen.

Instructions: BIOS or UEFI

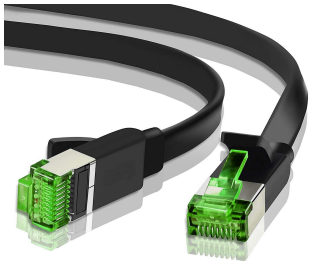
BIOS:



UEFI:

Installation hints

1. use ethernet: faster.



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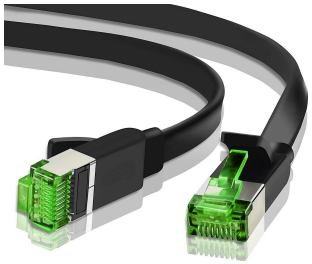
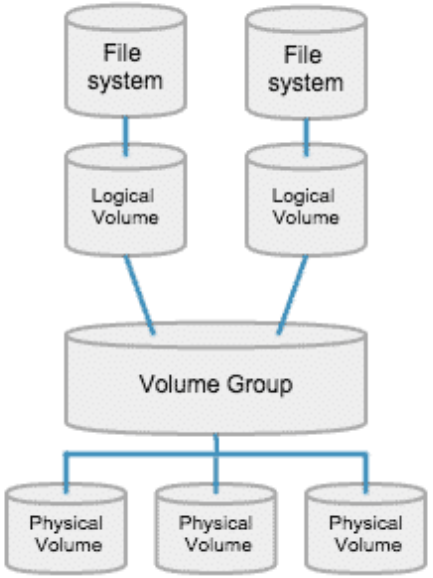


2. start simply: no encryption, no LVM.



Installation hints

2. start simply – elaborated (nerdness-level dependent):
   1. Live media/USB/image (Fedora, Ubuntu):
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      - declarative approach based on Nix [YT] $\Rightarrow$ reproducibility,
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†Start with a DE before a WM.

Installation hints – continued

3. partition formatting:
   - ext4: more settled – my choice,

   - btrfs:
     - modern alternative,
     - supports compression $\Rightarrow$ less space, increased storage lifespan,
     - copy-on-write $\Rightarrow$ consistency even in case of power loss,
     - snapshot feature,
     - limited LUKS support.

     $\Rightarrow$ It is worth keeping an eye on it!

Installation hints – continued

4. kernel (stable), LTS kernel (longterm) [others]:
   - stable: maintained until the next stable release,
   - LTS: maintained for a few extra years,
   - good to have both: flexibility.

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5. swap:
   - helps if RAM is exhausted (but slower, $\times 1000$!); size recommendations.
   - 2 types:
     1. swap partition: often preferred,
     2. swap file: easier to resize, but less tested.

Installation hints – continued

6. good boot time ($\sim$ 11s):
   - SSD matters: Samsung 970 EVO Plus $\leftarrow$ my choice (for laptop).

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7. Use a spare drive (to avoid the wrestling of the op. systems),
   - example: (used) Thinkpad $\rightarrow$ T480 [YT]: low-budget, flexible.

Installation hints – continued

8. Create a normal user (beyond the root; $\in$ wheel; sudo).

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9. Log your installation, usage, information sources (e.g. by Vimwiki)!
10. Post-installation:
    - think in terms of tasks not software, and use the native applications.
    - a weekly system update can be healthy.

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- Desktop environments:
  - windows manager, and
  - a bundle of applications (calendar, image viewer, file manager, ...).

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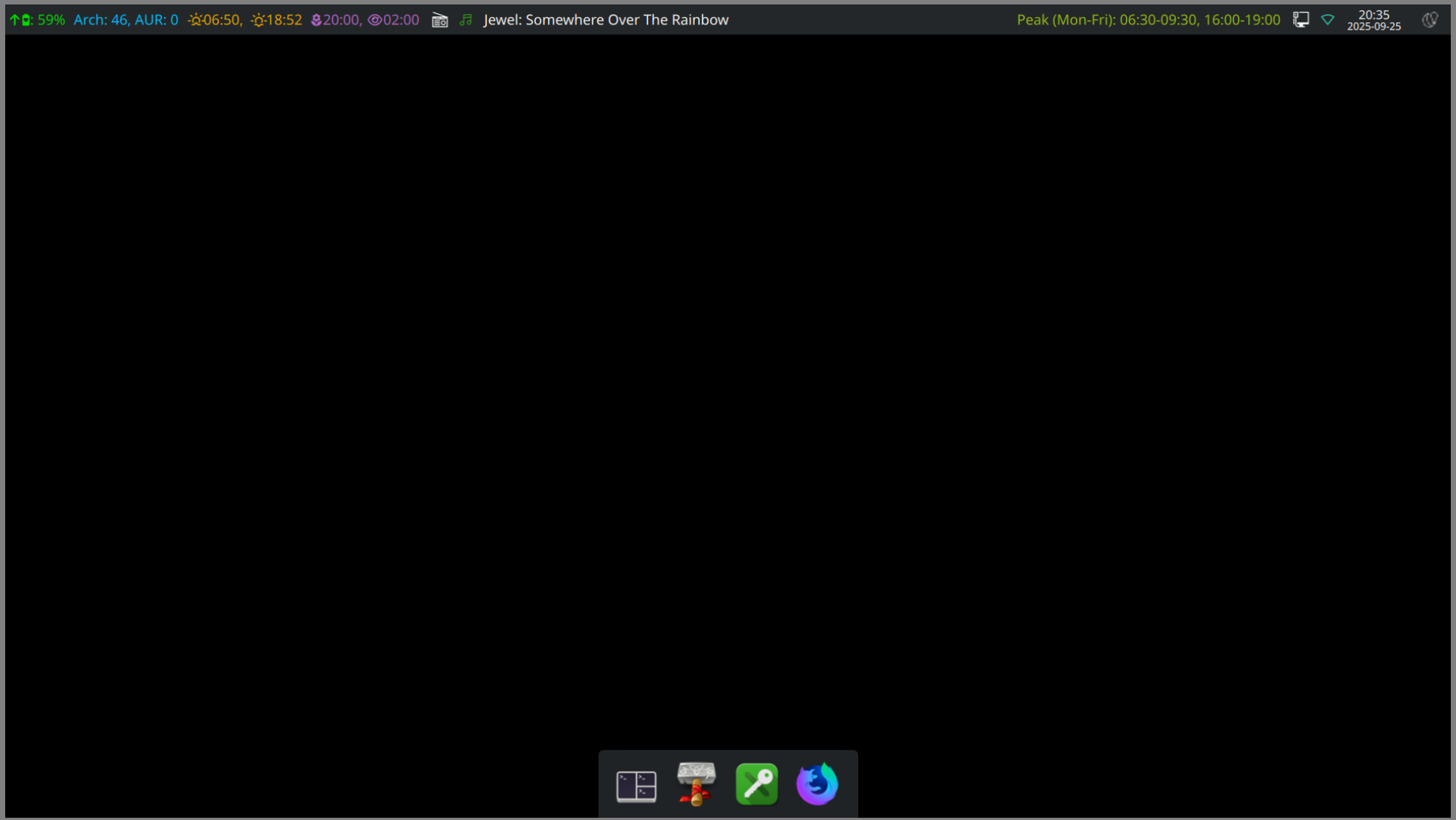
Examples follow

DE: KDE Plasma

$\xrightarrow{\text{spec.}}$ Win XP [YT] & Win 11 mimicing [OD, YT].

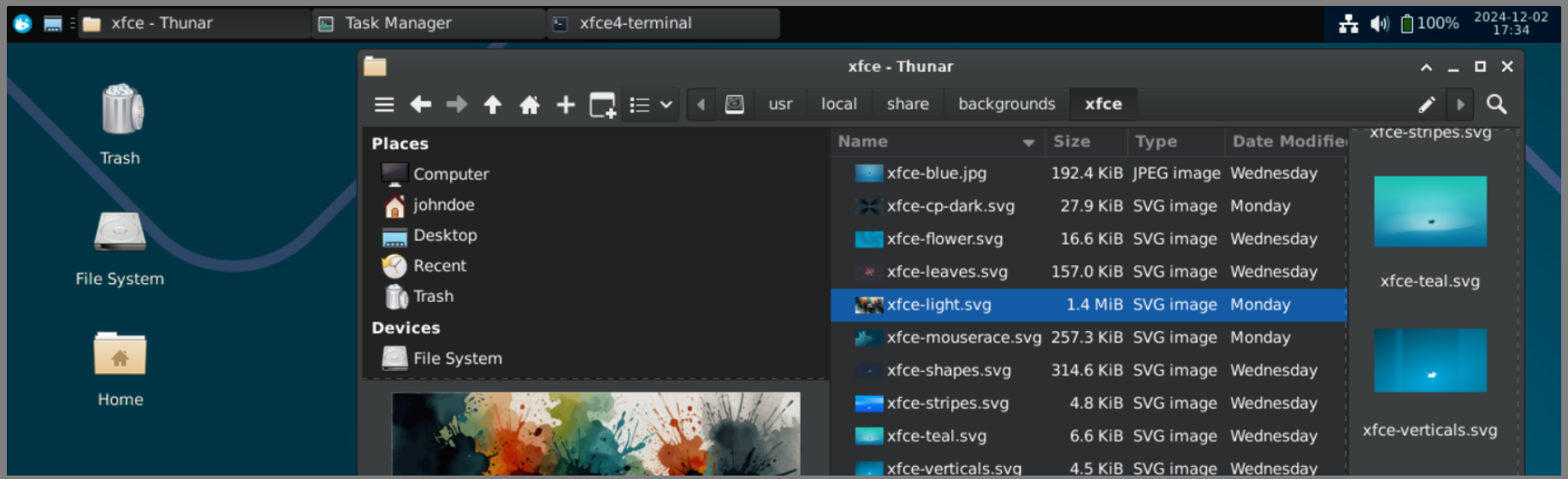
DE: KDE Plasma – my desktop



DE: GNOME


Sep 11 3:16 PM
Type to search
Fugue Live
Exhibit
Rendering
Translucency
Tone Mapping
Ambient Occlusion
Anti Aliasing
Light with HDRI
Light Intensity
Model Rendering
Show All Edges
Edges Width
Show Spheres
Points Size
Preview your 3D models

DE: Xfce


xfce - Thunar
Task Manager
xfce4-terminal
100%
2024-12-02
17:34
Trash
File System
Home
xfce - Thunar
usr
local
share
backgrounds
xfce
Places
Computer
johndoe
Desktop
Recent
Trash
Devices
File System
Name
Size
Type
Date Modifie
xfce-blue.jpg 192.4 KiB JPEG image Wednesday
xfce-cp-dark.svg 27.9 KiB SVG image Monday
xfce-flower.svg 16.6 KiB SVG image Wednesday
xfce-leaves.svg 157.0 KiB SVG image Wednesday
xfce-light.svg 1.4 MiB SVG image Monday
xfce-mouseracе.svg 257.3 KiB SVG image Monday
xfce-shapes.svg 314.6 KiB SVG image Wednesday
xfce-stripes.svg 4.8 KiB SVG image Wednesday
xfce-teal.svg 6.6 KiB SVG image Wednesday
xfce-verticals.svg 4.5 KiB SVG image Wednesday
xfce-stripes.svg
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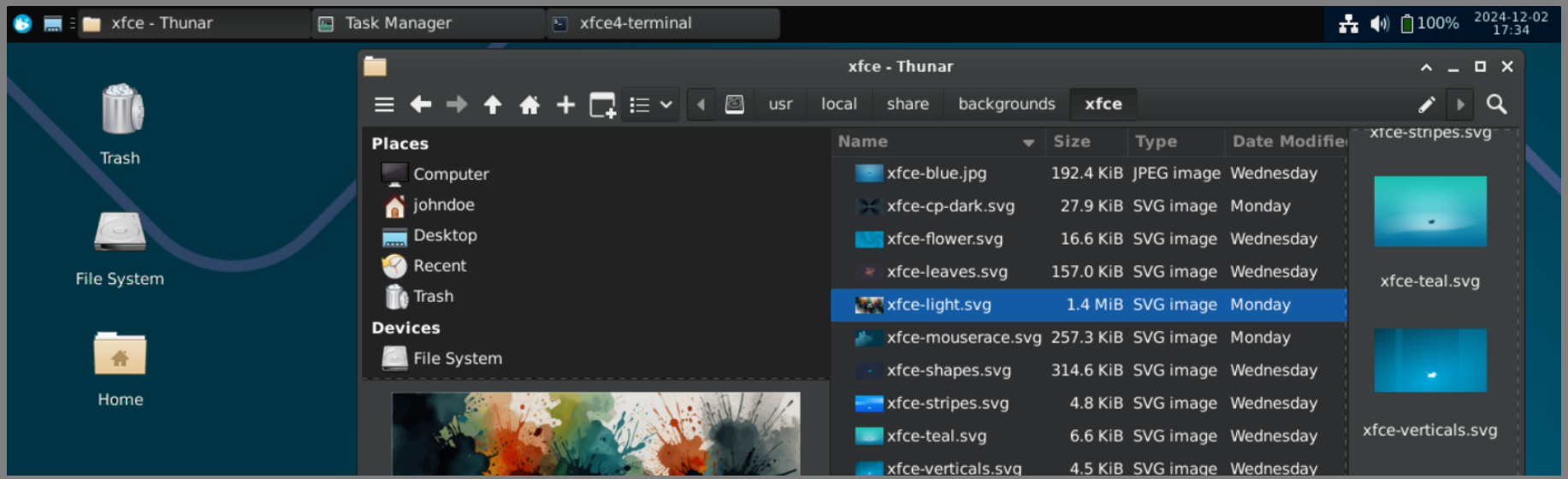
DE: Xfce



Extra DE inspiration

- unixporn (screenshots),
- COSMIC DE: worth keeping an eye on it! (Wayland-based)

Window managers (WM)

- It allows handling windows (open, close, min/max-ze, move, resize, . . .).
- It can be part of a DE or standalone.
- Idea: WMs can be even snappier than DEs.

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- Idea: WMs can be even snappier than DEs.
- 3 types:
  1. stacking (a.k.a. floating),
  2. tiling: non-overlapping windows,
  3. dynamic: allows switching between tiling and floating layout.

WM $\rightarrow$ DE

- Stacking:
  - KWin $\rightarrow$ KDE,
  - Mutter $\rightarrow$ GNOME,
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Examples follow

WM: i3

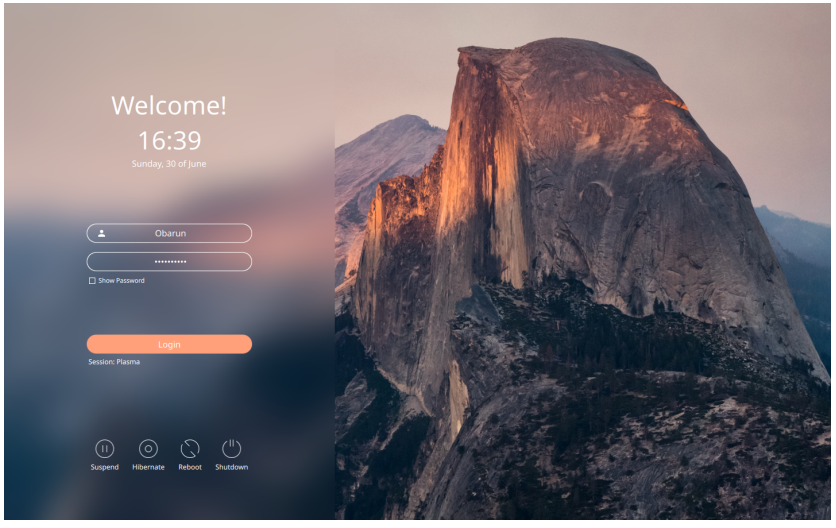

main.c (~/i3/src) - VIM
/* Set up i3 specific atoms like I3_SOCKET_PATH and I3_CONFIG_PATH */
x_set_i3_atoms();
struct ev_io *xcb_watcher = scalloc(sizeof(struct ev_io));
struct ev_io *xkb = scalloc(sizeof(struct ev_io));
struct ev_check *xcb_check = scalloc(sizeof(struct ev_check));
struct ev_prepare *xcb_prepare = scalloc(sizeof(struct ev_prepare));
ev_io_init(xcb_watcher, xcb_got_event, xcb_get_file_descriptor(conn), EV_READ);
ev_io_start(main_loop, xcb_watcher);
if (xkb_supported) {
ev_io_init(xkb, xkb_got_event, ConnectionNumber(xkbdpy), EV_READ);
ev_io_start(main_loop, xkb);
/* Flush the buffer so that libev can properly get new events */
XFlush(xkbdpy);
}
ev_check_init(xcb_check, xcb_check_cb);
ev_check_start(main_loop, xcb_check);
ev_prepare_init(xcb_prepare, xcb_prepare_cb);
ev_prepare_start(main_loop, xcb_prepare);
xcb_flush(conn);
manage_existing_windows(root);
if (!disable_signalhandler)
setup_signal_handler();
/* Ignore SIGPIPE to survive errors when an IPC client disconnects
* while we are sending him a message */
signal(SIGPIPE, SIG_IGN);
/* Autostarting exec-lines */
if (autostart) {
struct Autostart *exec;
TAILQ_FOREACH(exec, &autostarts, autostarts) {
LOG("auto-starting %s\n", exec->command);
start_application(exec->command);
}
}
/* Autostarting exec_always-lines */
struct Autostart *exec_always;
TAILQ_FOREACH(exec_always, &autostarts_always, autostarts_always) {
LOG("auto-starting (always!) %s\n", exec_always->command);
start_application(exec_always->command);
}
ev_loop(main_loop, 0);
src/main.c 464,9 99%
x200: mplayer S02/E05.avi
MPlayer
x200: git log
commit b87742172b3802badb615418f45d8556bfcf149b
Author: Michael Stapelberg <michael@stapelberg.de>
Date: Sun Jul 17 22:18:00 2011 +0200
Add missing function prototype for strndup on Darwin (Thanks Marcus)
commit 3da3a691063f7c4c7f09461bbe948fa48abeb5fd
Author: Michael Stapelberg <michael@stapelberg.de>
Date: Sun Jul 17 15:21:57 2011 +0200
i3-config-wizard: use fgetln on Darwin, use strndup from FreeBSD on Darwin (Thanks Mar
commit 02dfb8e891a759ed2152918778f6d0a928a71cac
Author: Michael Stapelberg <michael@stapelberg.de>
Date: Sun Jul 17 15:18:45 2011 +0200
use memmem and strndup from FreeBSD on Darwin (Thanks Marcus)
commit fc583adb9956ff95e9019bef8bb0e7c2e21d133b
Author: Michael Stapelberg <michael@stapelberg.de>
Date: Sun Jul 17 15:17:24 2011 +0200
makefile: link -liconv on Darwin (Thanks Marcus)
commit 7512f633a79b290f4e60287fb2b1cd689f025b42
Author: Michael Stapelberg <michael@stapelberg.de>
Date: Fri Jul 15 19:21:39 2011 +0200
:
1 2 3 4
2001:4d88:100e:23:21f:16ff:fe1a:f5b8 | 2,3 GB | DHCP: no | VPN: no | W: down | E: 192.168.1.42 (1000 Mbit/s) | BAT 74,15% [@] | 01% | 0,03 | 2011-07-22 15:02:32

WM: Qtile


monadtall
45.1%
739M/15419M
83.0°C
40G 10%
77%
?100%
1
14-11-2020 13:58
SUBSCRIBE

Login/display manager

- It gives graphical login – if you prefer not using/starting from tty;)
- Popular choices: (i) SDDM: tutorial [OD,YT] (inspiration+)



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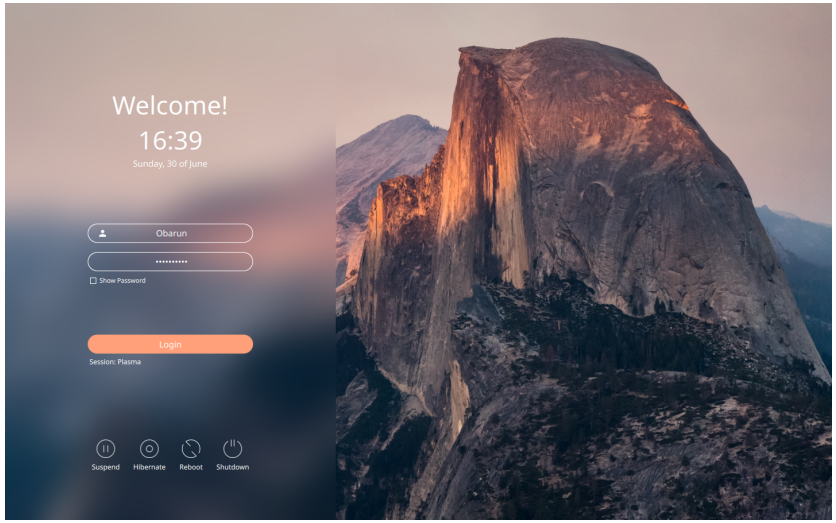

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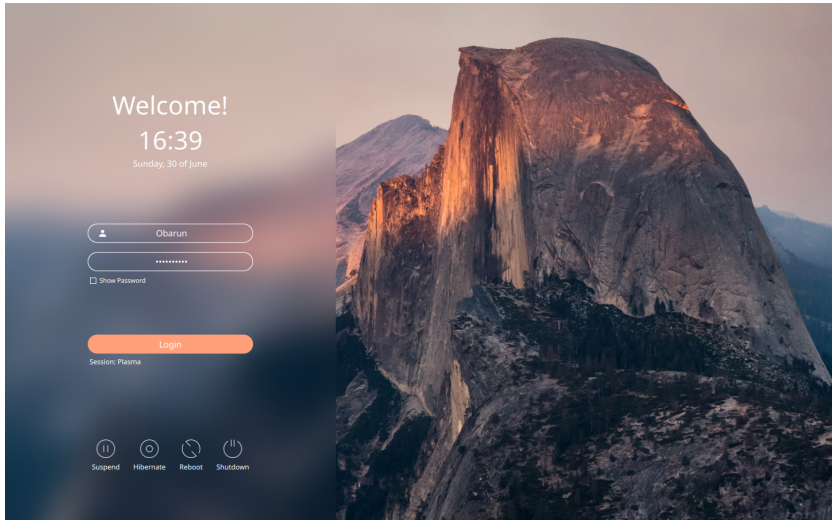
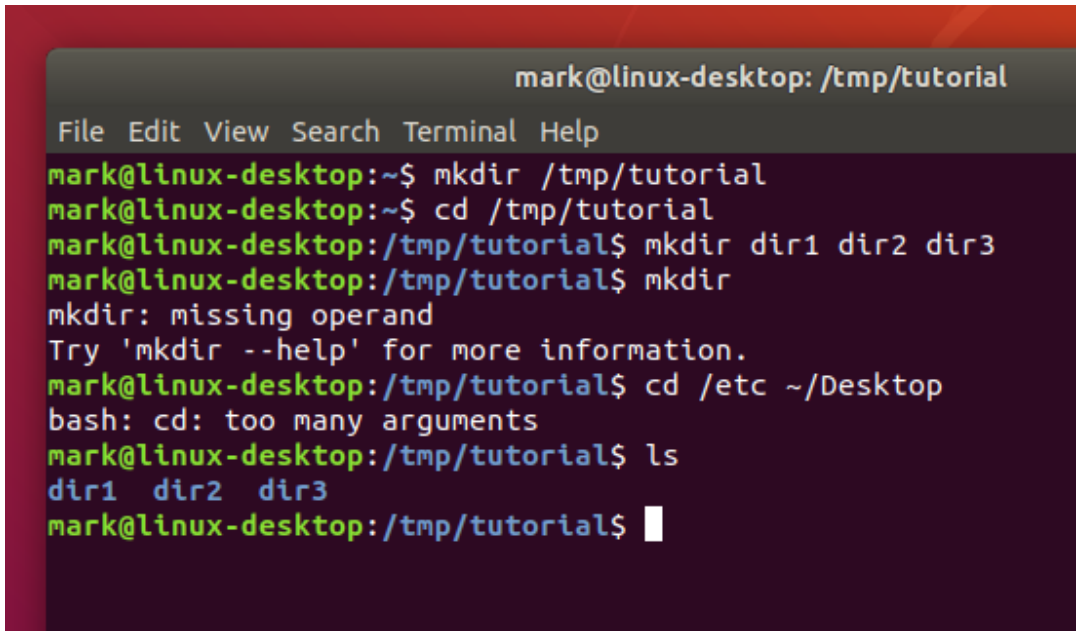


Terminal: used for instance @ Arch install

Command shell:

- like Jupyter notebook,
- interaction with the operating system,



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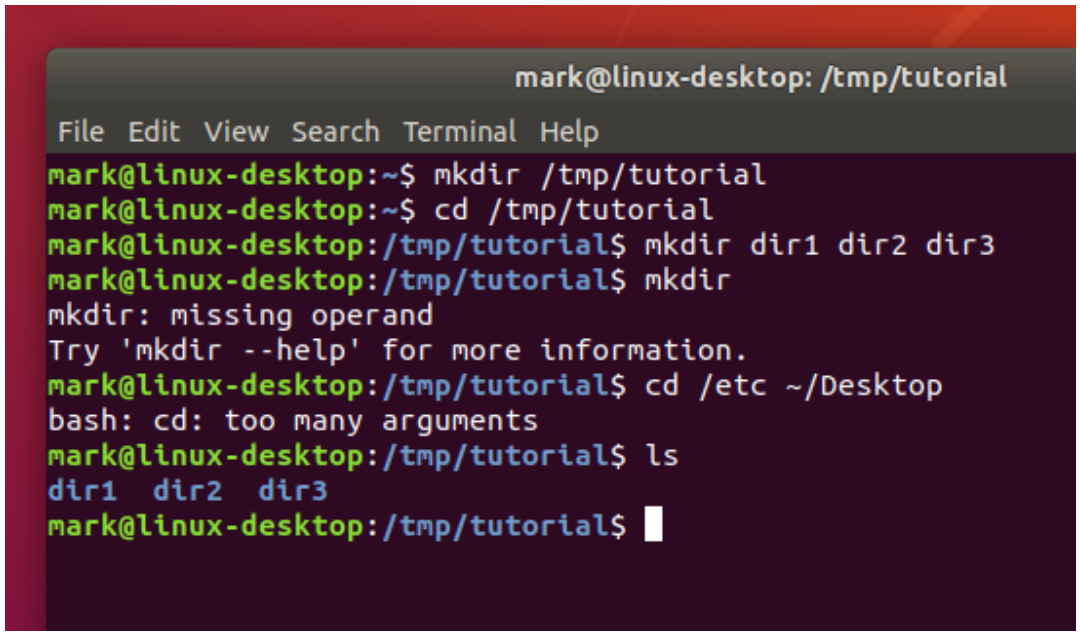

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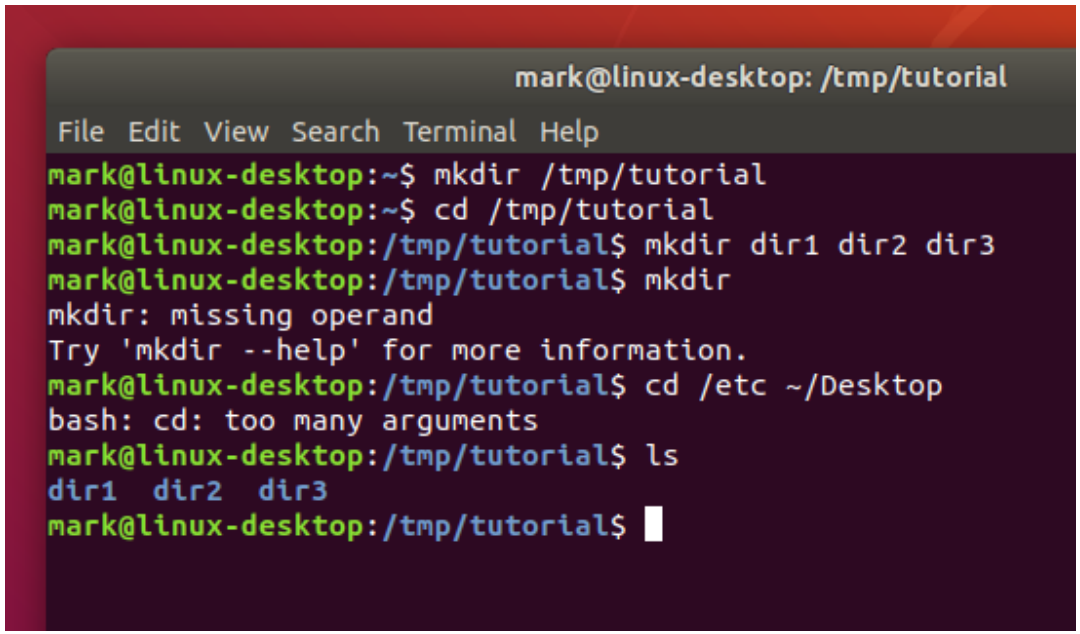

- Google Colab: `!shellcommand`,
- virtual console = text terminal + login prompt (ttyX = Ctrl+Alt+FX, X$\in$ [7]).

Command line (CLI) – continued

- Examples:
  - `$ cd` : change the current working directory,
  - `$ ls` : list directory content,
  - `$ pwd` : print the name of the current directory,
  - `$ cp` : copy files & directories,
  - `$ mv` : move or rename files and directories,
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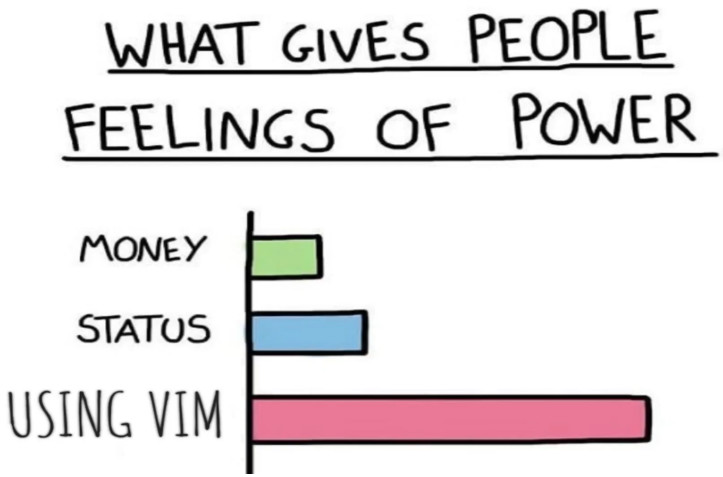
  $\Rightarrow$
  - shell/bash scripting [tutorial]
  - lot of automation possibilities.

Superb text editor: Vim

- modal editor $\xrightarrow{\text{change}}$ i = input mode, Esc = command mode,
- highly customizable & efficient,
- keyboard-driven, language-like.
- cross-platform.



Vim: usage example

:q	:	quit $\leftarrow$ most difficult;),
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y	: yank (copy),
yy	: yank line, . . .

Vim – continued (free ⇒)

- integration to browser, Jupyter notebook, . . .
- evolution: vi → Vim → Neovim (community-developed),

- personal Wiki: vimwiki,
- tutorials: $ vimtutor and

Name	Vids
ThePrimeagen	YT_1, YT_2, YT_3, YT_4, YT_5, YT_6
Missing Semester	OD, YT
DistroTube	OD_1, YT_1; OD_2, YT_2
Ben Awad	YT

Hint: How to ask?

- Netiquette [OD,YT]; discussion $\rightarrow$ guide.
- DIY mentality:
  - the community is friendly and helps *if* you put in effort,
  - $\Rightarrow$ read & do your research first!

Odysee (with LBRY) / YouTube channels: good educators

Name	Odysee	YouTube	
DistroTube	OD	YT	Linux
Learn Linux TV	–	YT	Linux
Brodie Robertson	OD	YT	Linux
Bread on Penguins	–	YT	Linux
ExplainingComputers	–	YT	IT
Eric Murphy	OD	YT	(less active nowadays†)
EF - Linux Made Simple	OD	YT	(less active nowadays†)
OldTechBloke	OD	YT	(less active nowadays†)
Mental Outlaw	OD	YT	Linux, privacy
Luke Smith	OD	YT	(less active nowadays†)
VeronicaExplains	–	YT	(less active†)
MobileTechReview	–	YT	laptop & mobile reviews
Naomi Brockwell: NBTV	OD	YT	privacy
Louis Rossmann‡	OD	YT	right to repair

† but her/his videos are nice. ‡ FUTO's Guide to a Self Managed Life: part-1 [YT_1], part-2 [YT_2], wiki.

Ricing: Conky

- system monitor: CPU, memory, swap space, disk storage, temperature, processes, network interfaces, battery power, system messages, e-mail, ...

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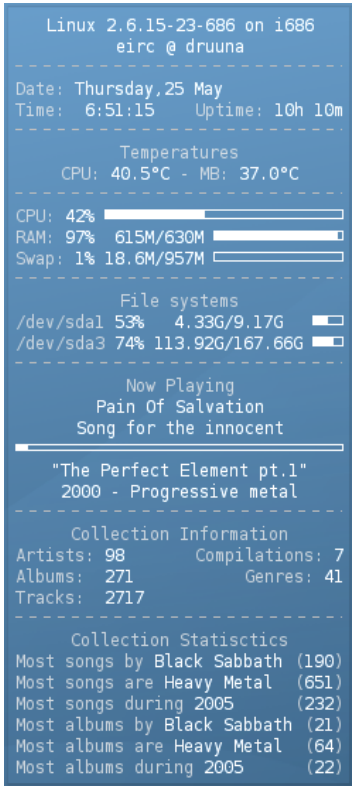

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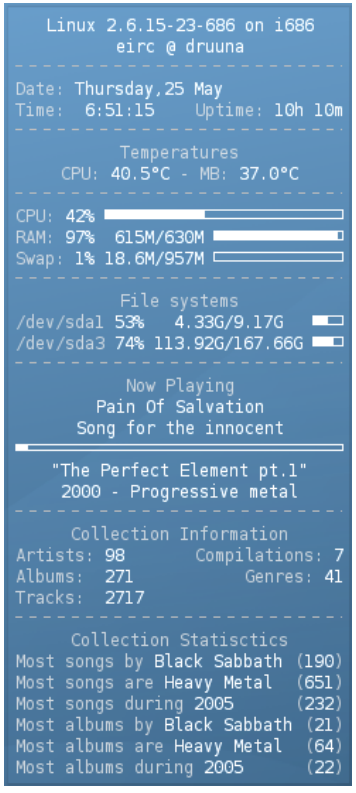

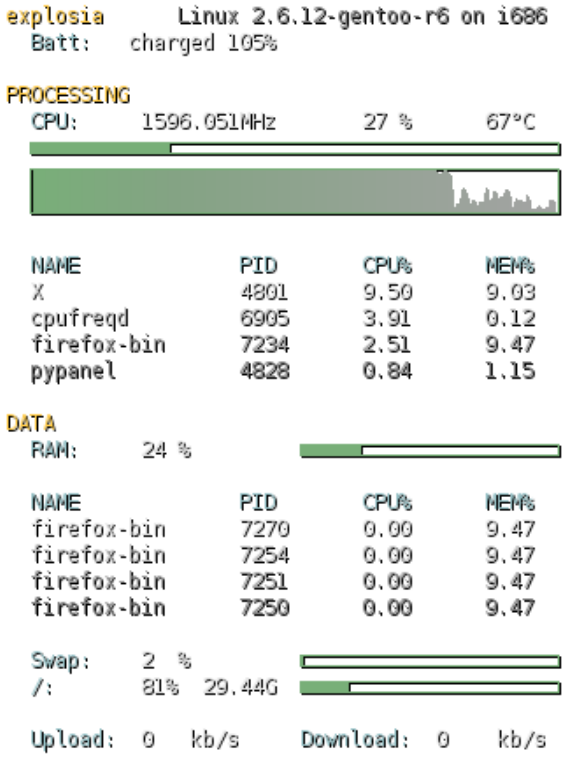

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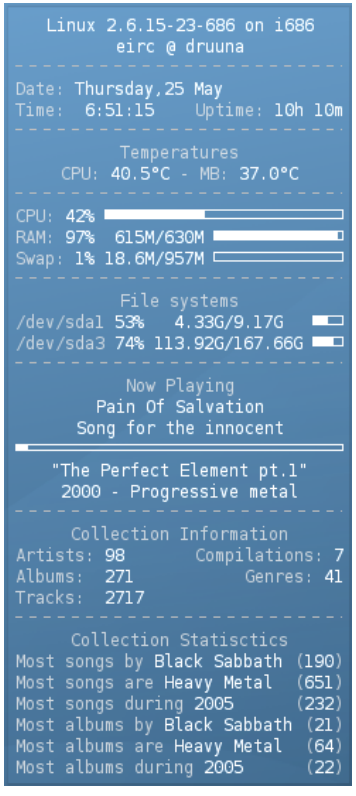

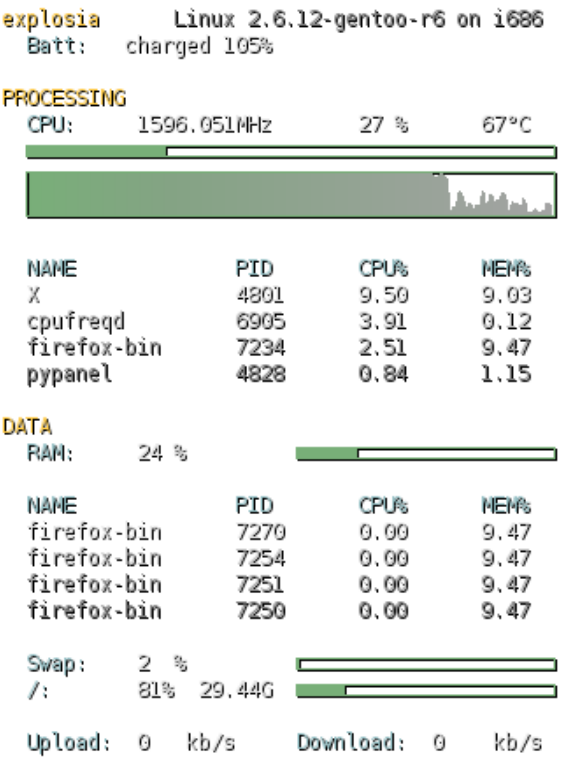

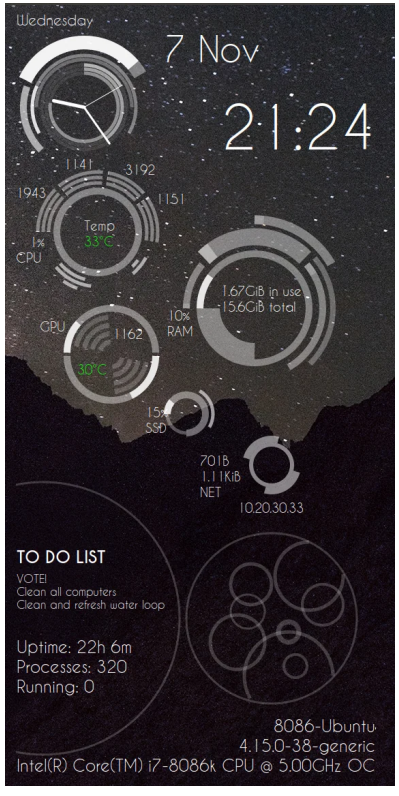

Ricing: Conky on desktop

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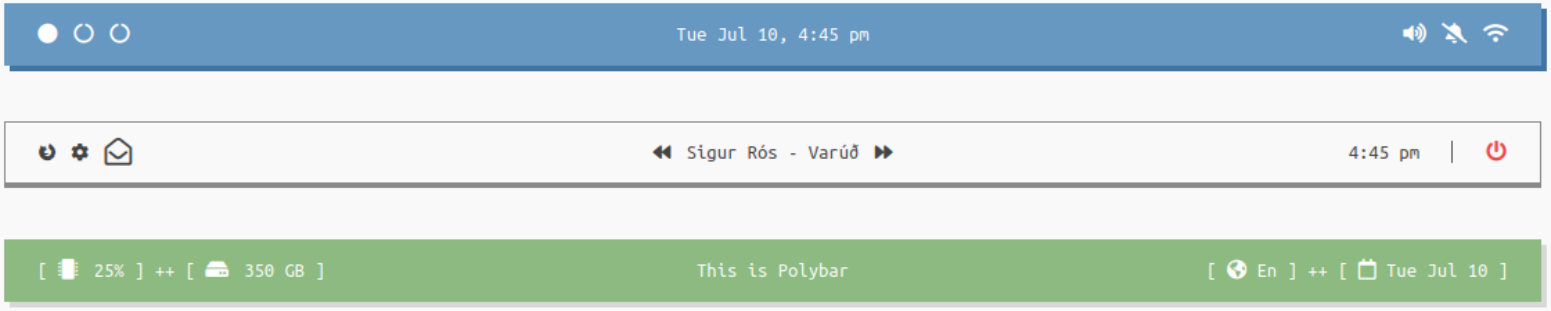
Ricing: Polybar (link$_1$, link$_2$)



- fast replacement of the status bar,
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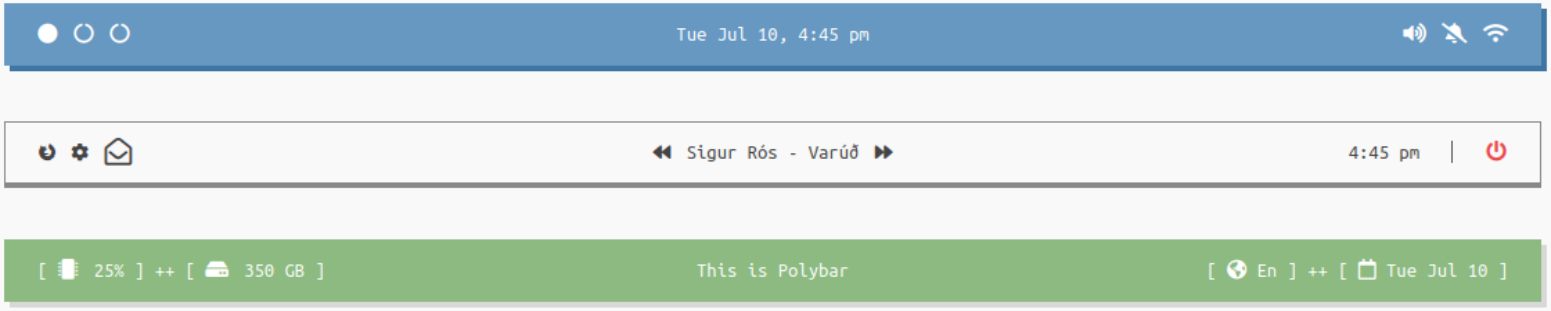

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Example follows.

Polybar example

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- They can
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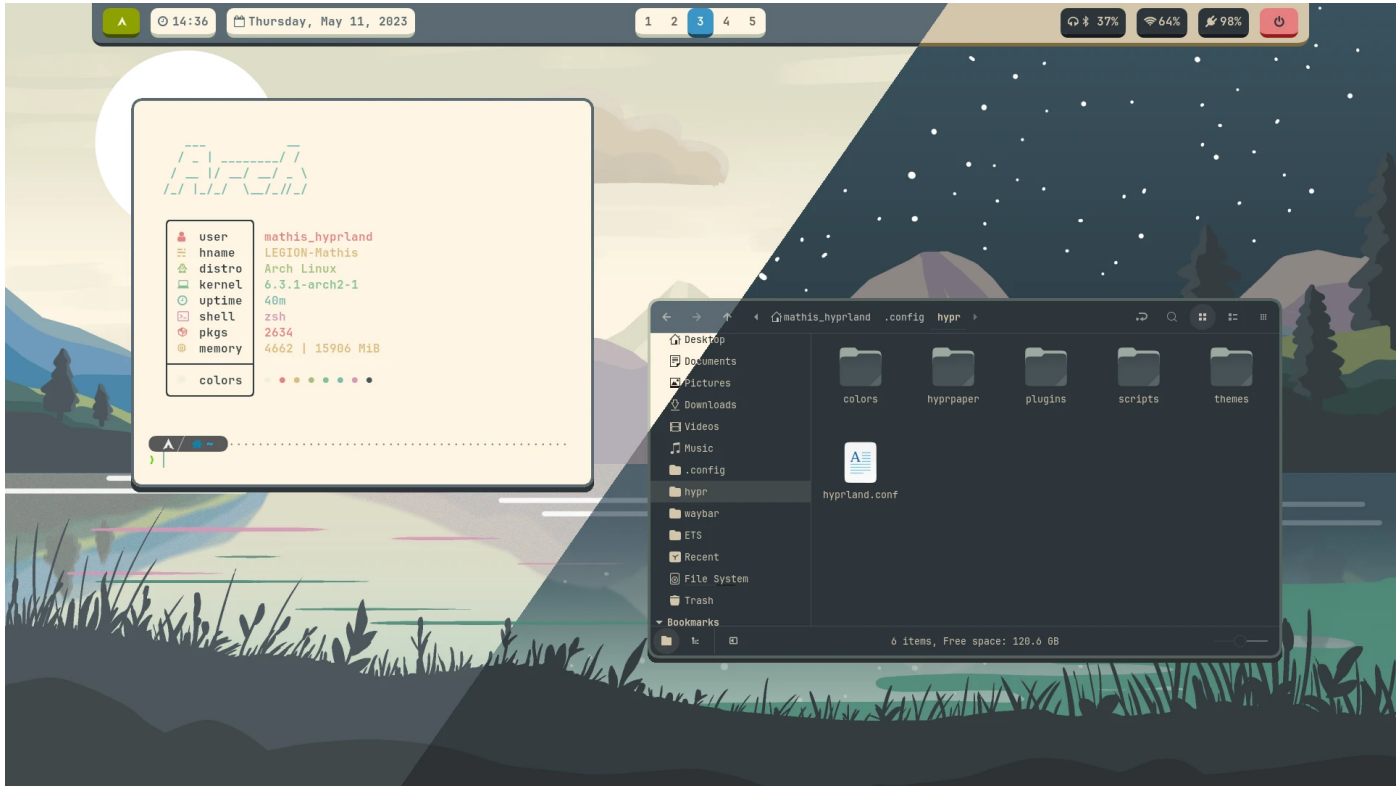
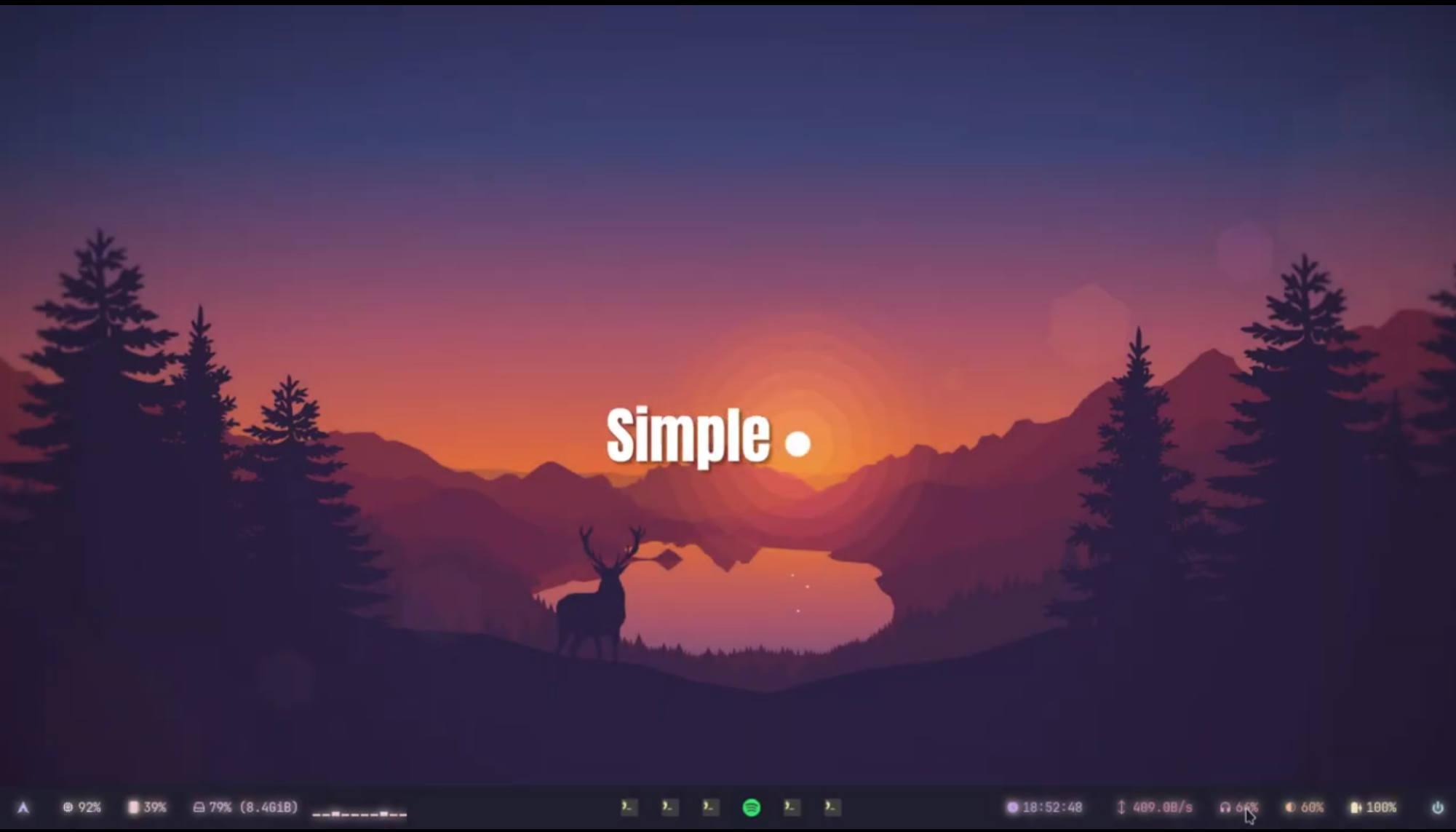
- For Hyprland: website, wiki; demo (screenshot):



Compositor: HyperInd$_{\text{vid}}$

Compositor: WayfireYT



Linux phones (security & privacy; beta!)

1. Librem 5:
   - by Purism, running PureOS.

Linux phones

2. PinePhone, PinePhone Pro:
   - by Pine64,
   - PinePhone Pro: Wiki; various op. systems ∋ Arch;)
   - recipe: YT_1, YT_2, YT_3, YT_4, YT_5.
   - exploring: Arch with Phosh (SSH, VNC, . . . ✓); sxmo: looks exciting.

My choice (more stable and transparent communication)

3. To keep an eye on: Liberux Nexx!

Summary

- desktop tour

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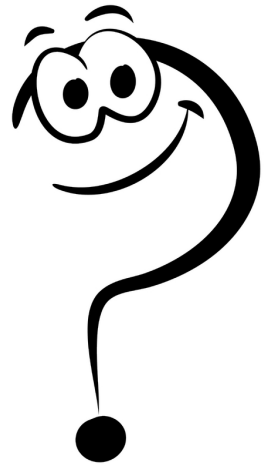
Are you ready to own your computer



Feel free to share your

- adventure (how you liked Linux, new softwares/channels found),
- constructive suggestions (what else would have helped you)!