Linux Creator Wins Millennium Technology Prize

Written by Marco Attard

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The Technology Academy of Finland awards Linux creator Linus Torvald with the 2012 Millennium Technology Prize, an award one can describe as the tech equivalent of the Nobel Prize.

Torvald shares the prize (a pair of silicon crystal-tipped trophies and a €1.2 million award cheque) with stem cell pioneer Yamanaka Shinya. Torvalds and Yamanaka were named as prize finalists on April 2012, but the joint award remains a bit of a surprise.

As a result Torvalds joins the ranks of pioneers in obscure yet critical innovations, such as stem cell development, DNA fingerprinting, organic LEDs and the ARM 32-bit RISC processor.

Work on Linux started at the University of Helsinki, where Torvalds was a student. He posted the original system kernel on Usenet back in 1991, and since then the Linux kernel is found in every kind of device-- from network routers and servers to PCs, tablets, smartphones and supercomputers.

Even Microsoft-- whose Steve Ballmer once described Linux as a "cancer"-- runs Skype off Linux servers, and offers a Linux version of the Azure cloud service.

Torvald now works from home in Portland, Oregon, but remains something of a celebrity in his Finnish homeland.

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