Difficulties Introducing MediaWiki to Technical and Non-technical Audiences

(and a story… about a button)

Who Are We?

	Tina	**Mark**
Education	B.Sci in Comp Sci, Masters in Mechatronics	Diploma in Computer Engineering Technology
Specialties	MediaWiki, process automation, efficiency	Servers, storage, VM, DR/BC, electronics
MediaWiki Experience	~15 years	no
SQL	yes	none
PHP	yes	nope
Cargo	yes	pants or ships?
Linux on SBCs	ehh… maybe?	yes
Problem-Solving Style	“I think I brought enough tools”	“Let me find the datasheet”

Why Are We Here?

- We’ve been friends for 30 years.
- Tina is a MediaWiki advocate and has been telling Mark about it for a decade.
- An opportunity came up to build a small MediaWiki kiosk for a local museum and Tina wrangled Mark into helping.
- We spent the next four months about ready to strangle each other.
- We were both surprised at how differently we saw/approached MediaWiki.
- But it worked out, worked well, we are still friends, and other museums have signalled interest in setting up a wiki.
- Tina thought it would be a good idea to share our experience.

Mark: To do…

Rewrite the whole presentation this evening because of all the stuff I learned yesterday.

Stayed up too late, rewrite most of the presentation tomorrow morning

Woke up too late, try to fix stuff at breakfast.

Mark: To do…

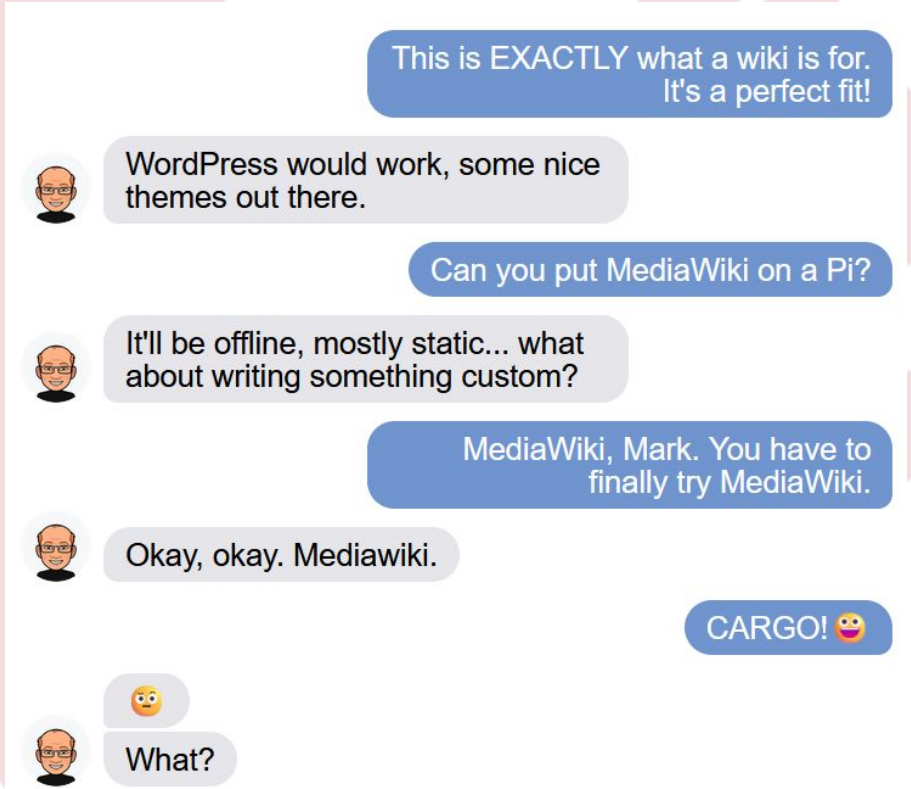
~~Rewrite the whole presentation this evening because of all the stuff I learned yesterday.~~

~~Stayed up too late, rewrite most of the presentation tomorrow morning~~

~~Woke up too late, try to fix stuff at breakfast.~~

The Task…

- A small kiosk so the public could browse the museum's collections of photos, information about the photos, as well as stories, documents, and potentially video.
- Able to arrange the content into "collections" while showing the relationships between the containers and items.
- No network connection available.
- Must be small, inexpensive, and reliable.
- The museum is staffed by volunteers, mainly retirees with different backgrounds but with comprehensive knowledge of the stories behind the photos and artifacts in the museum.
- More information about the build provided in our previous chat.


This is EXACTLY what a wiki is for. It's a perfect fit!
WordPress would work, some nice themes out there.
Can you put MediaWiki on a Pi?
It'll be offline, mostly static... what about writing something custom?
MediaWiki, Mark. You have to finally try MediaWiki.
Okay, okay. Mediawiki.
CARGO!
What?

MediaWiki: Amazing, Yet Frustrating

The power, flexibility, and usefulness of the WikiMedia platform is not in dispute:

- Wikipedia
- Fan wikis
- Product wikis
- Business wikis
- Wikis… about wikis

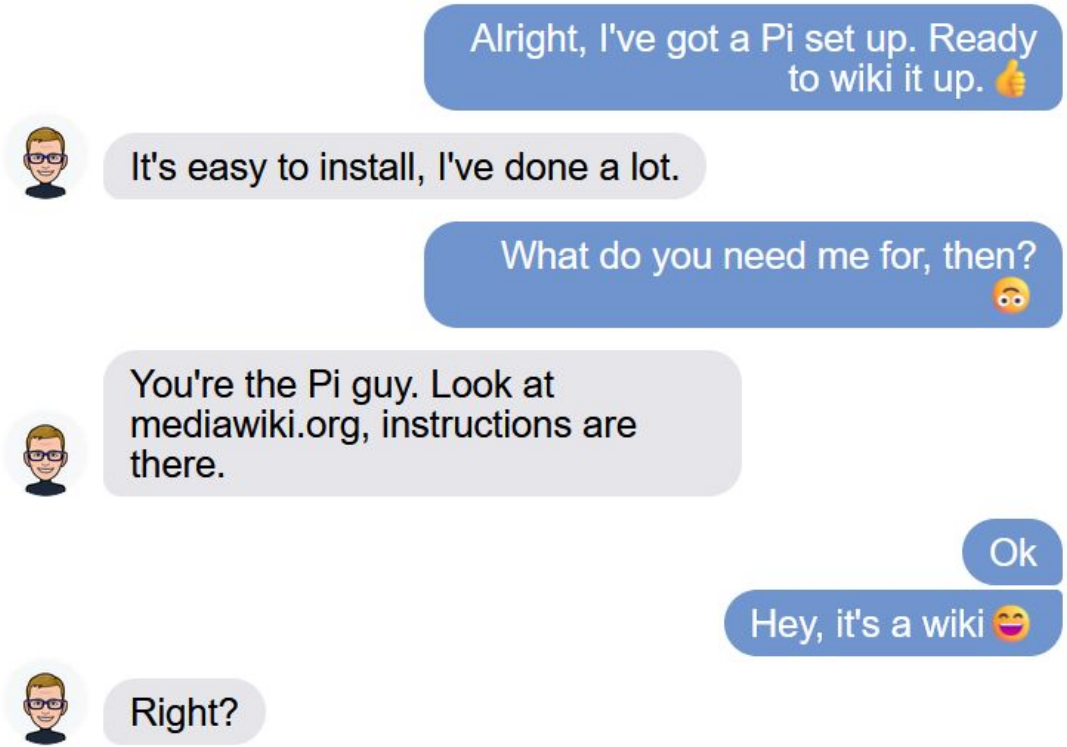
But unless you're already immersed in the environment, it can be difficult to get into or even understand how it may be the best tool for the job.

And saying, "You know, Wikipedia? It's like that" does **not** help.

Why?

- It’s a different way of thinking about information than traditional websites or blogs (Tina will touch on this in her upcoming talk).
- It requires a suite of other software (and the expectation of some knowledge with that software)
- Editing (particularly long entries) can be taxing.
- It’s involved enough that you can’t spend an hour on it and then come back a month later.
- Functionality that casual office software users expect is not part of the base install.
- Configuration files can be dead ends, red herrings, and long trips down a rabbit hole.
- Documentation isn’t particularly helpful for the casual or beginning user.

The Installation…



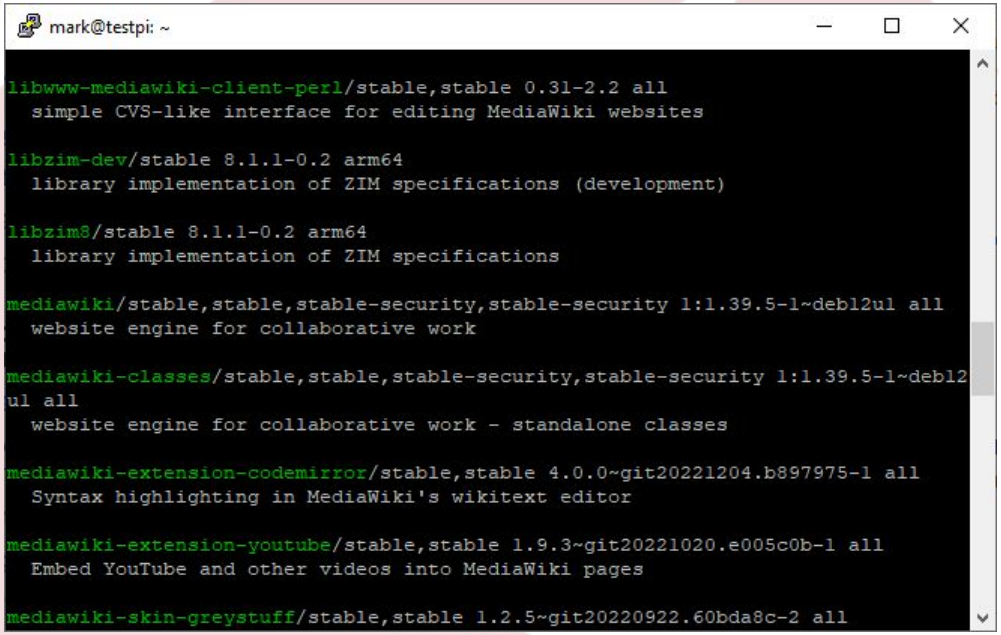
The Installation…

Set up and run MediaWiki

- **Download**, install and configure MediaWiki
- Add functionality by installing extensions
- Problems? See errors and symptoms and FAQ
- Don't own a server? Find hosting services
- Get professional development and consulting
- Join MediaWiki Stakeholders user group

Alternatives to manual installation

Some users may prefer to skip manual installation by using a pre-integrated MediaWiki software appliance or hosting services. Repositories of some Linux distributions also increasingly offer packages for MediaWiki, with different degrees of frequency and extensions coverage (e.g. Debian, Ubuntu, Fedora, Gentoo).



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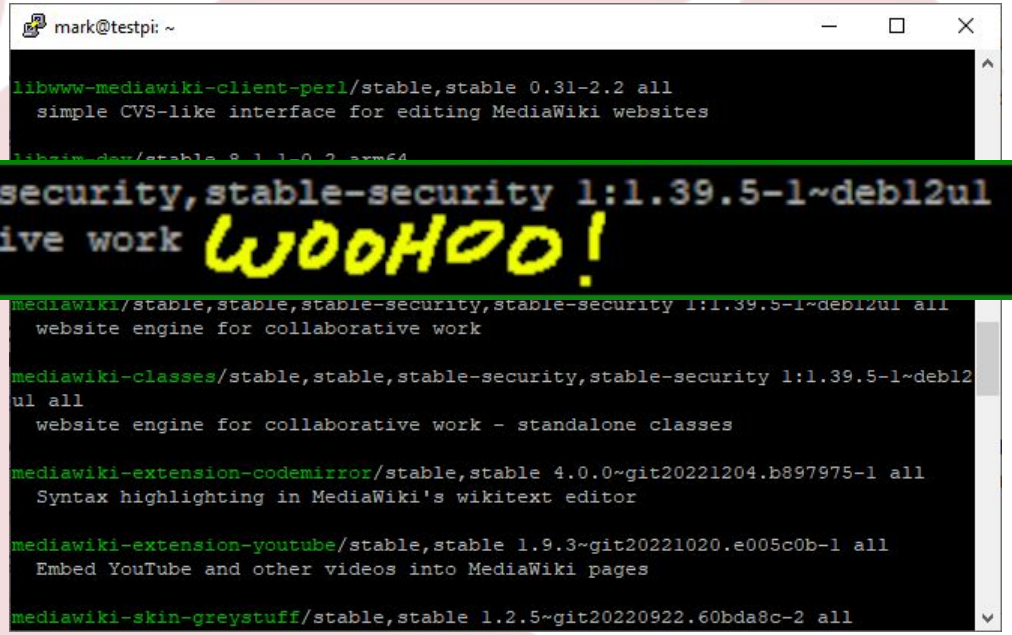
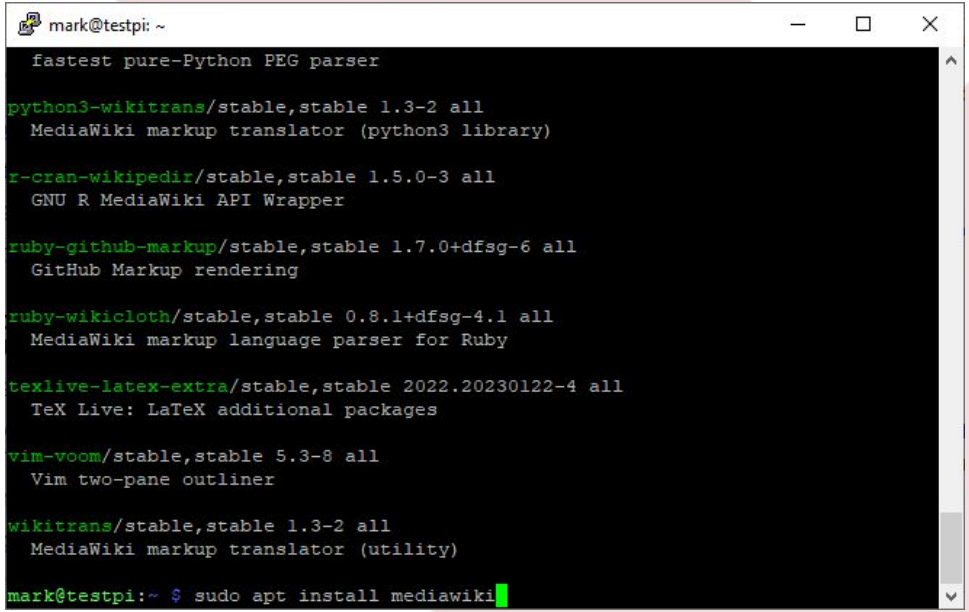
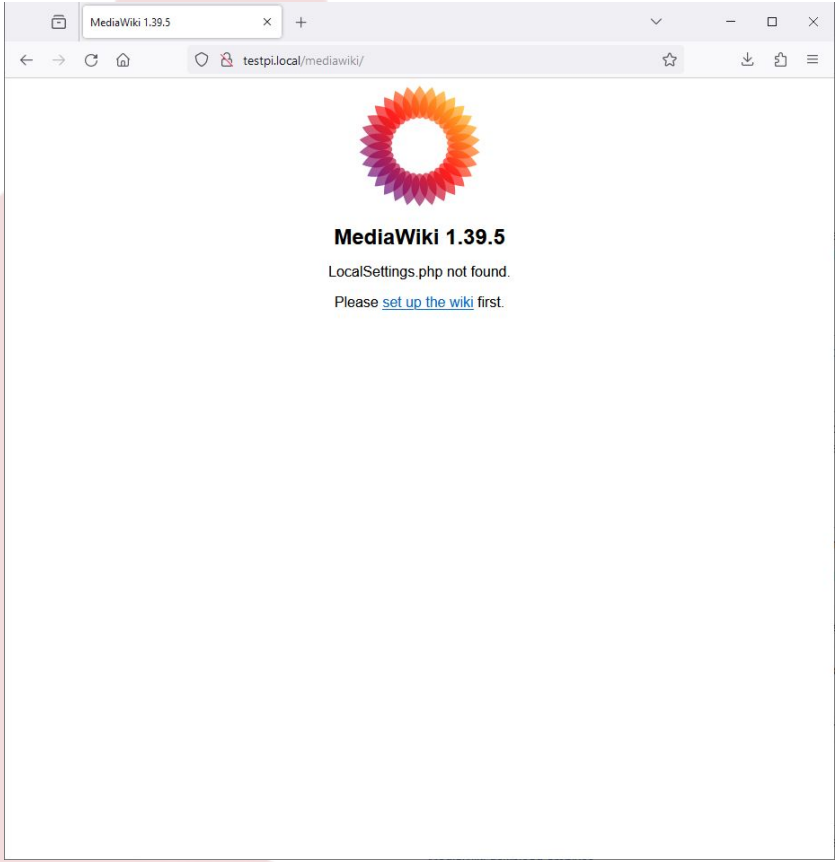
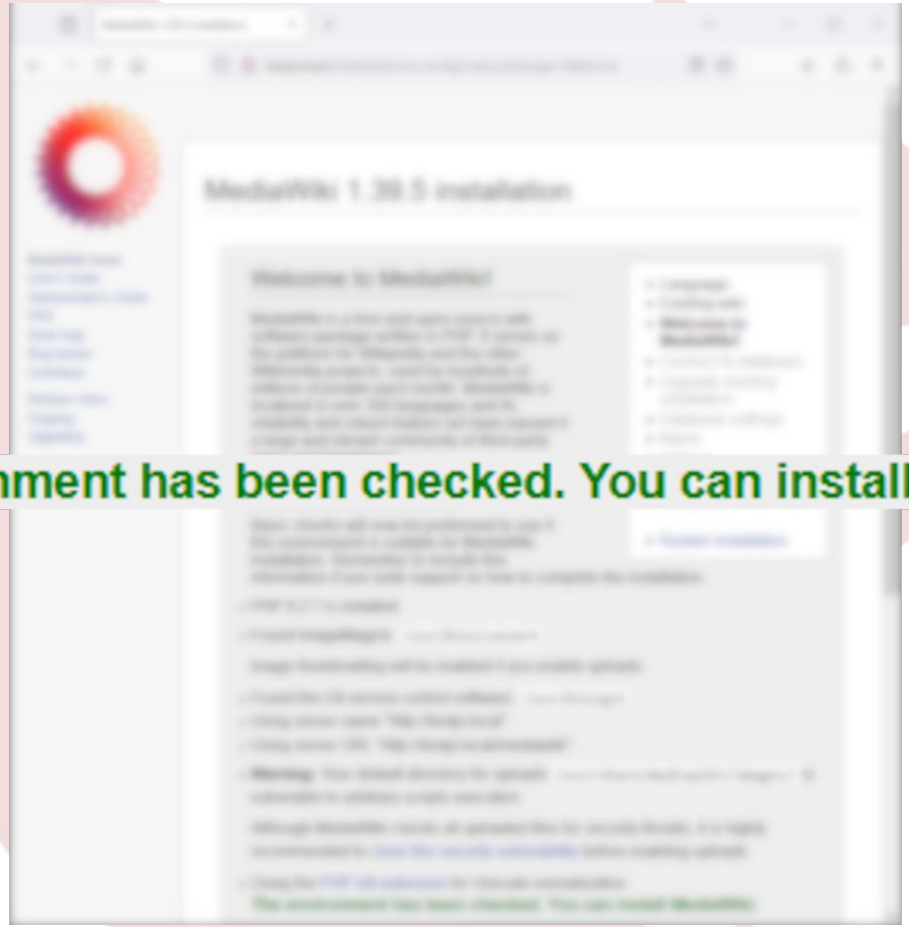


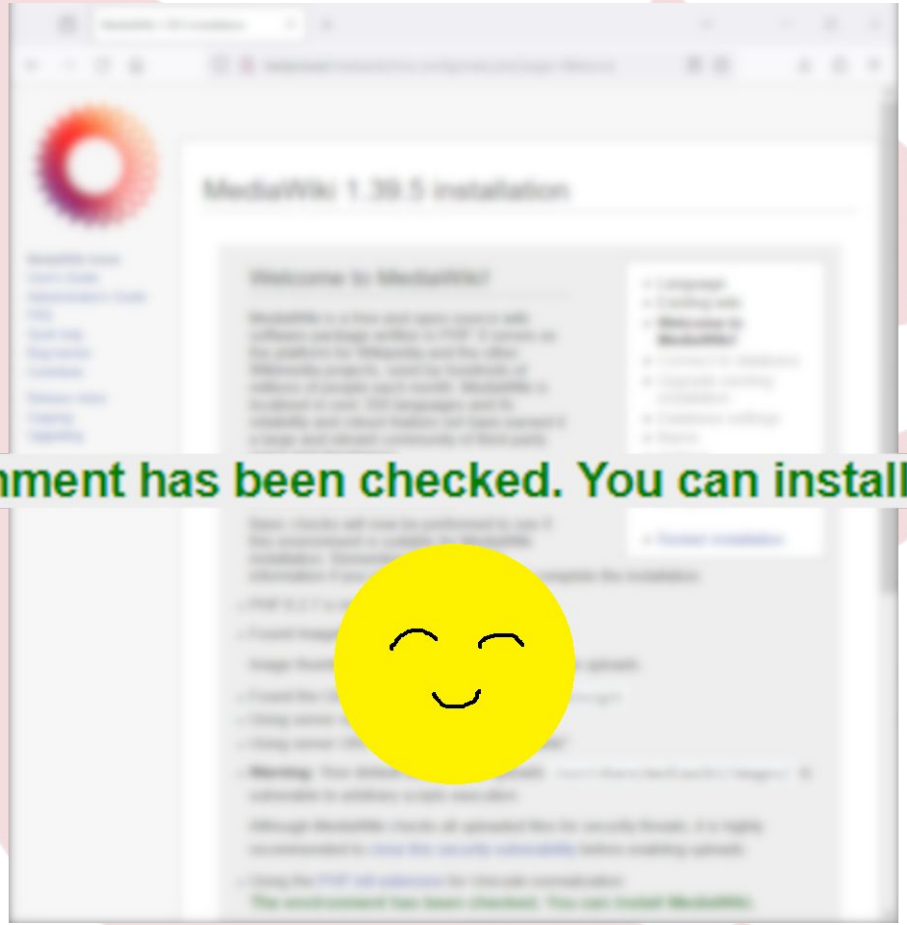
mediawiki/stable,stable,stable-security,stable-security 1:1.39.5-1~deb12u1 all
website engine for collaborative work
WOOHOO!

Doesn’t Get Much Easier Than This…






MediaWiki 1.39.5 installation
The environment has been checked. You can install MediaWiki.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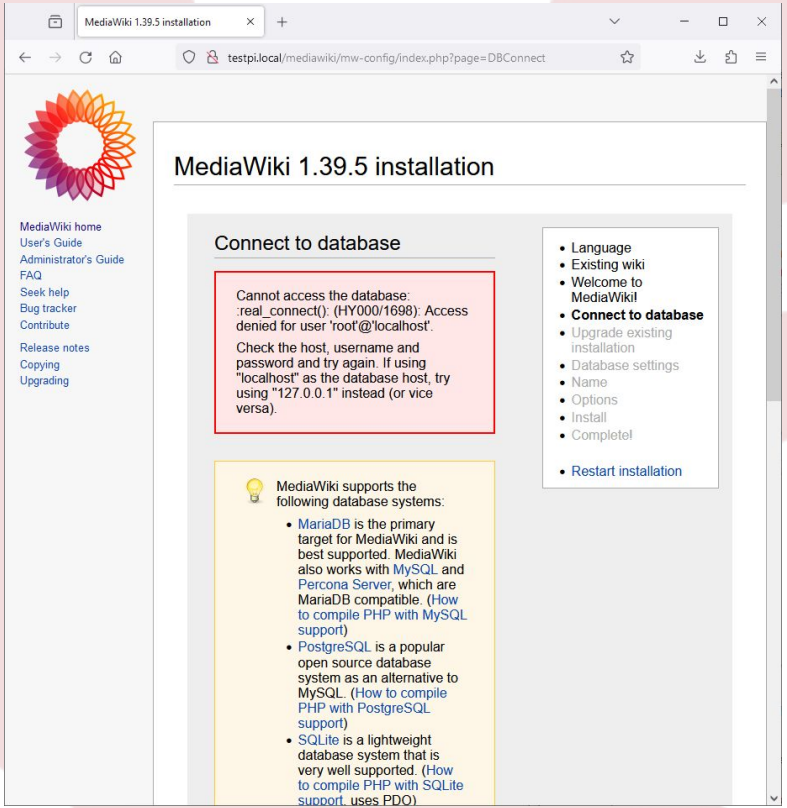
So… I've Never Been a DBA



Hey Tina?

Hey Mark!

What's up?

How often do you install SQL?

Which one? You should be using MariaDB

Okay, MariaDB.

Every time I make a new wiki. Why?

You have to provide individual installs for every wiki? 😧

No, just create a DB. SQL is handled by the shared hosting.

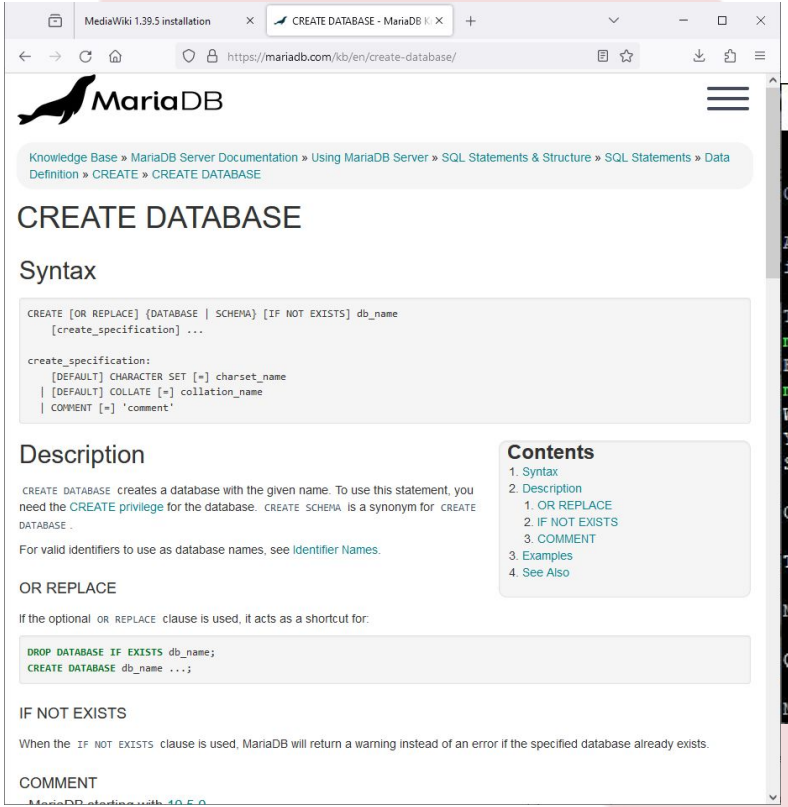
So you *don't* do a lot of SQL installs?

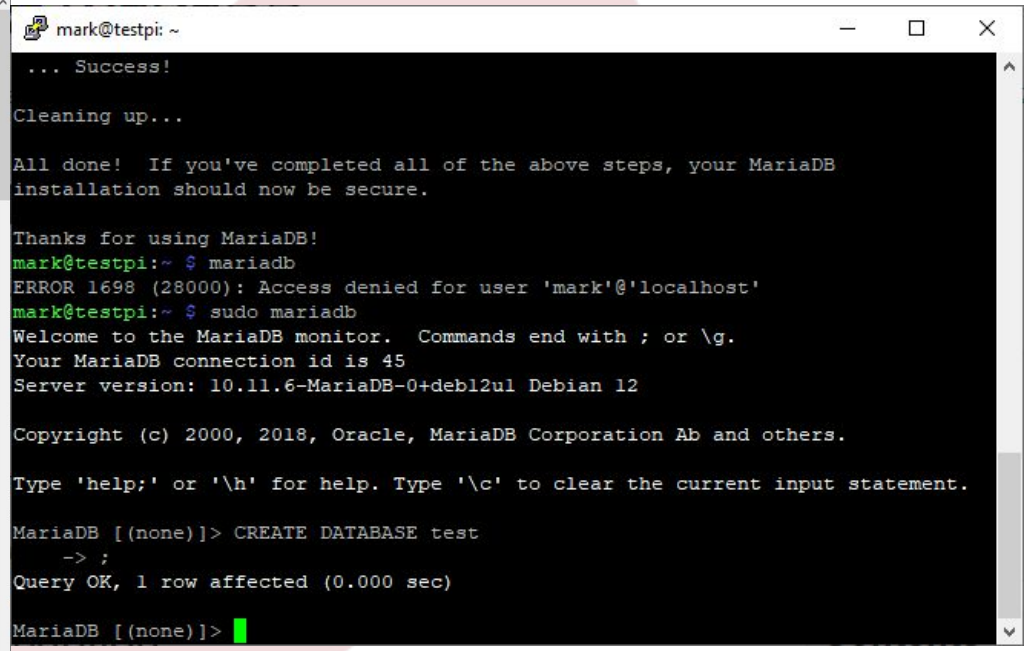
No

Why?

😳

MariaDB, MySQL Shenanigans





Tina?

Tina Tina Tina

TINA!!!

Yesssss?

I can't access the database during the install.

Access denied for root. Root login is disabled by default. I'd rather not enable it...

Is mariadb installed?

Yes, it's part of the MW distribution package.

Ok, you need to set it up. Grab phpMyAdmin, makes it easier.

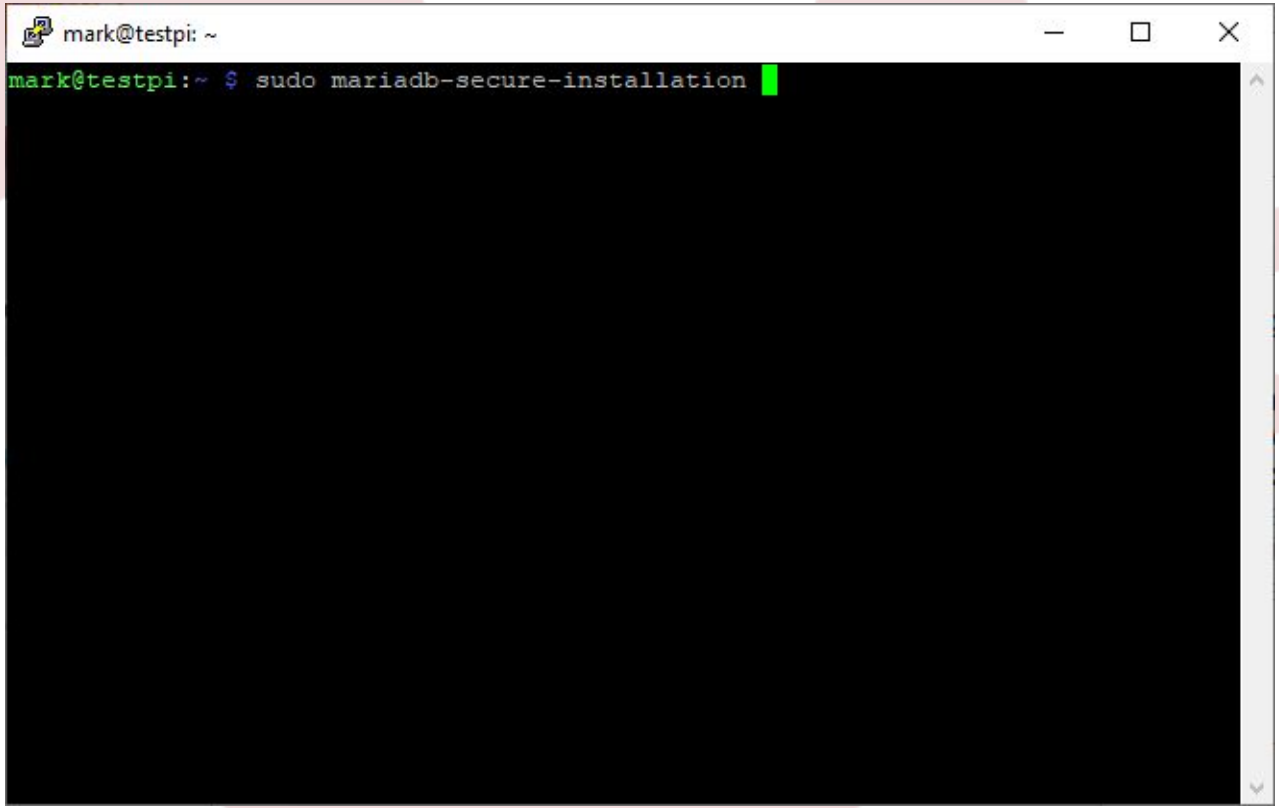
Ok no sweat.

How's it going?

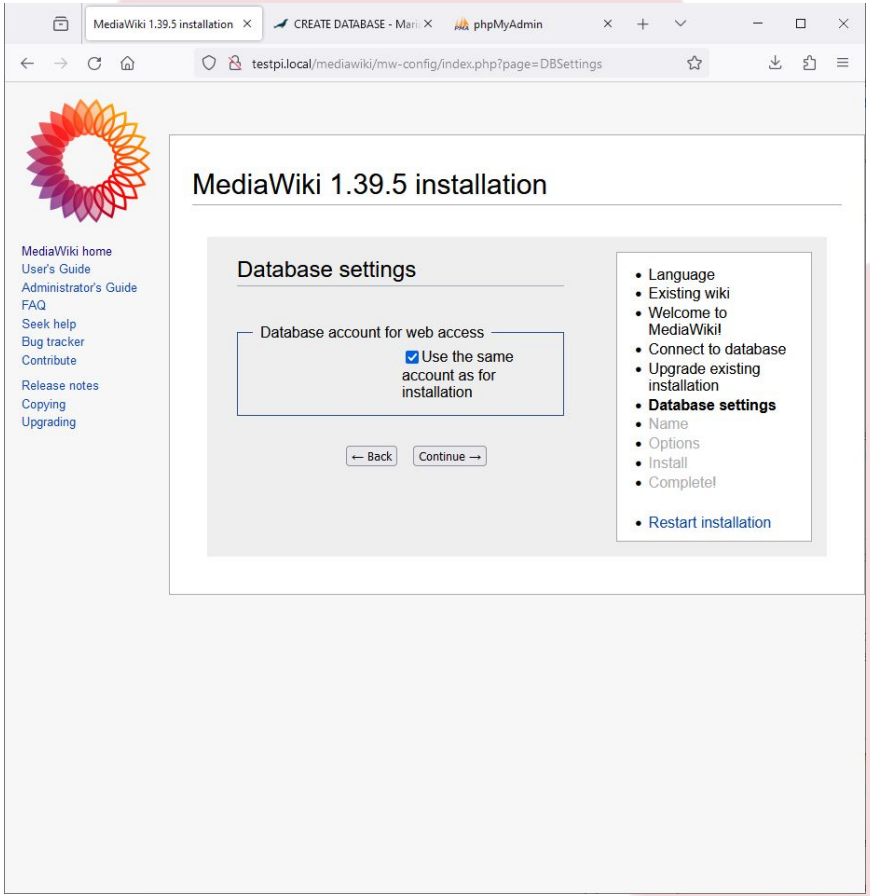
You've never worked with SQL?

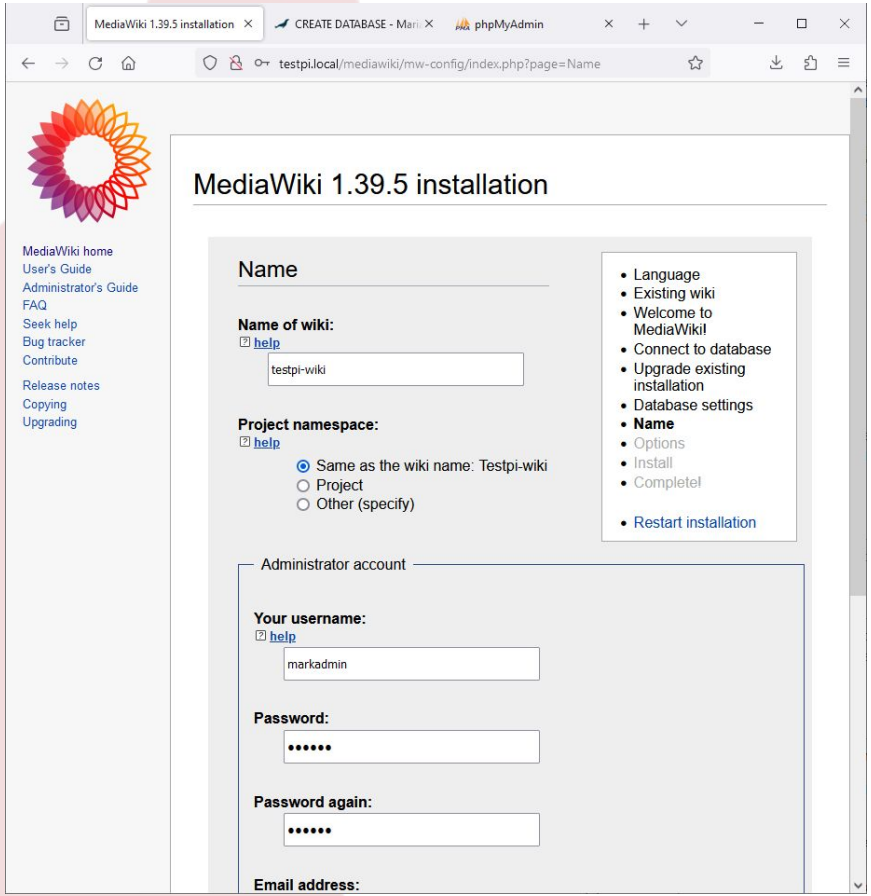
NO I HAVE NOT 😡

Fumbling Around…



Woohoo!


MediaWiki 1.39.5 installation
CREATE DATABASE - Mari
phpMyAdmin
testpi.local/mediawiki/mw-config/index.php?page=DBSettings
MediaWiki 1.39.5 installation
MediaWiki home
User's Guide
Administrator's Guide
FAQ
Seek help
Bug tracker
Contribute
Release notes
Copying
Upgrading
Database settings
Database account for web access
Use the same account as for installation
← Back
Continue →
Language
Existing wiki
Welcome to MediaWiki!
Connect to database
Upgrade existing installation
Database settings
Name
Options
Install
Complete!
Restart installation


MediaWiki 1.39.5 installation
CREATE DATABASE - Mari
phpMyAdmin
testpi.local/mediawiki/mw-config/index.php?page=Name
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MediaWiki home
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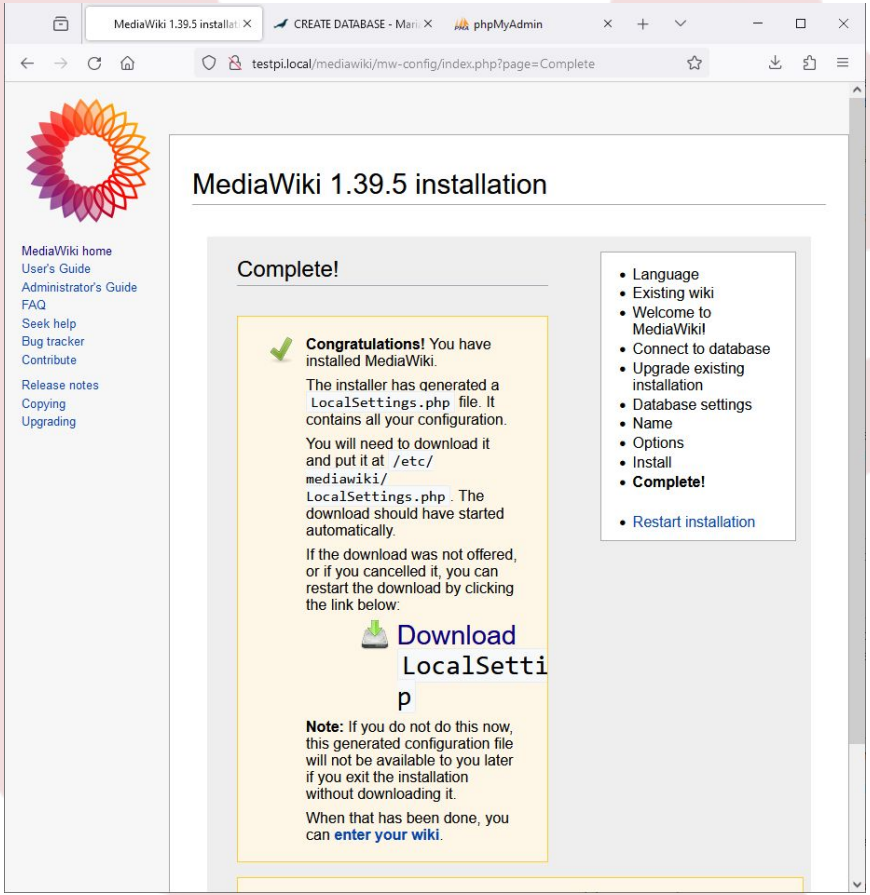
Release notes
Copying
Upgrading
Name
Name of wiki:
help
testpi-wiki
Project namespace:
help
Same as the wiki name: Testpi-wiki
Project
Other (specify)
Language
Existing wiki
Welcome to MediaWiki!
Connect to database
Upgrade existing installation
Database settings
Name
Options
Install
Complete!
Restart installation
Administrator account
Your username:
help
markadmin
Password:
Password again:
Email address: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CREATE DATABASE - Mari
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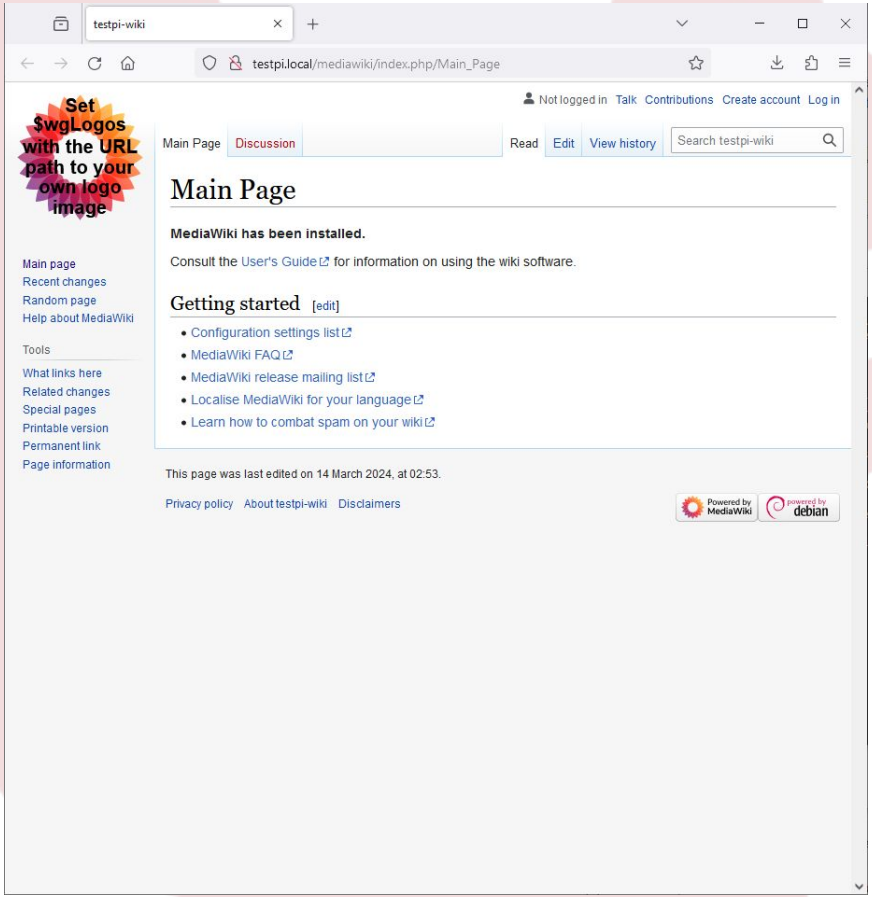
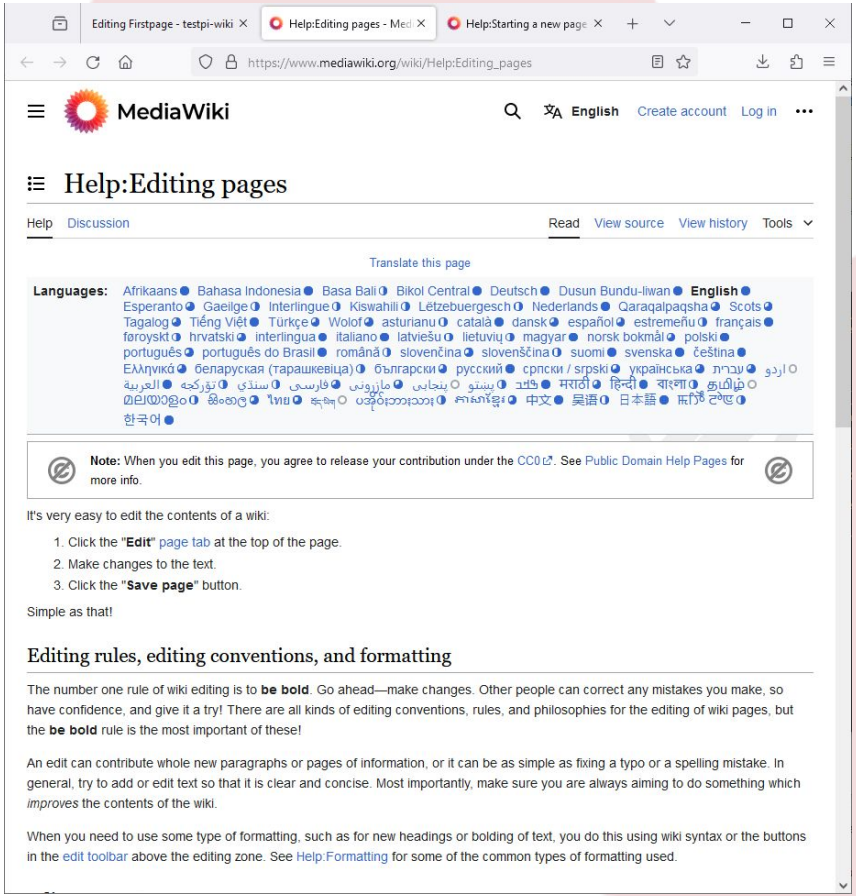
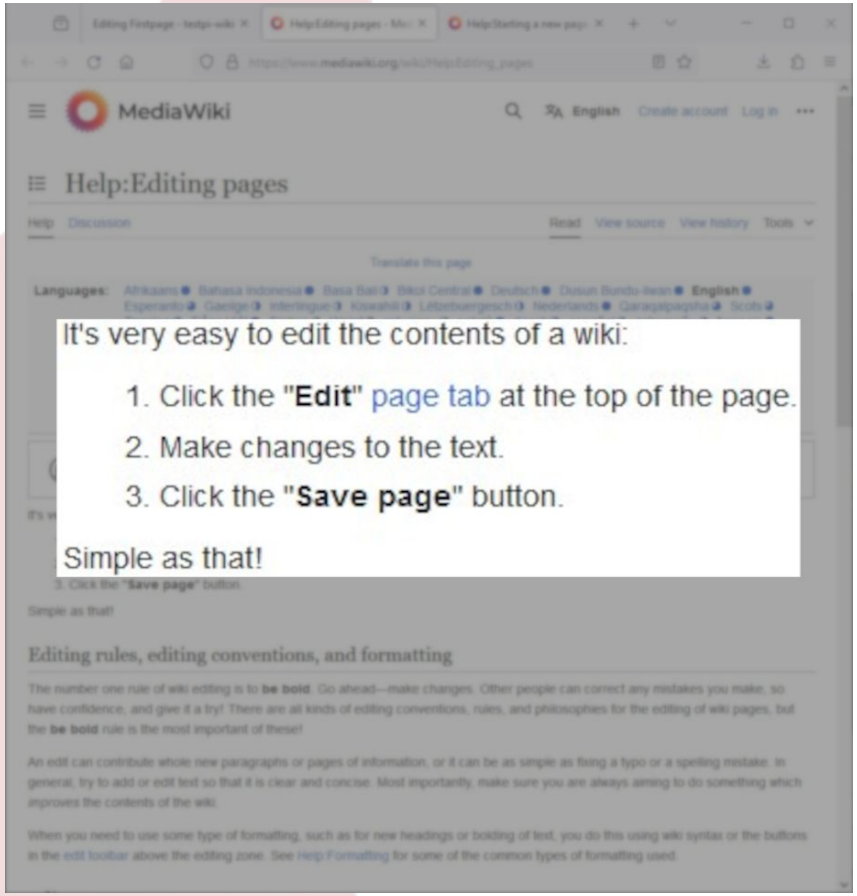
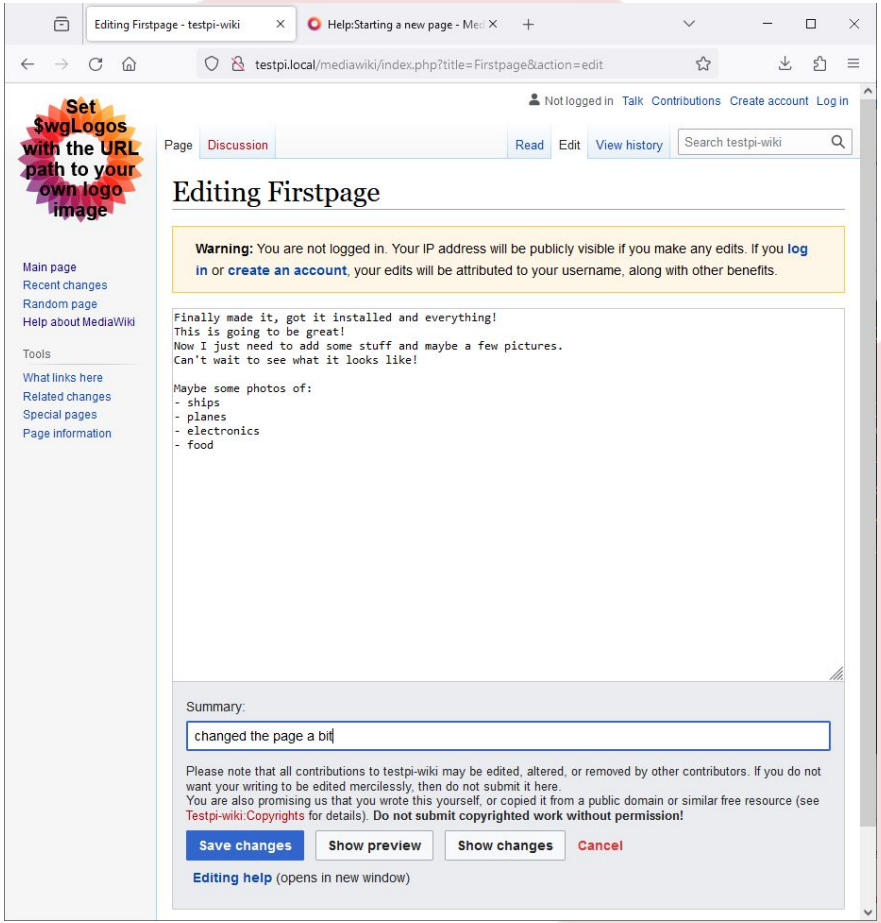
MediaWiki 1.39.5 installation
MediaWiki home
User's Guide
Administrator's Guide
FAQ
Seek help
Bug tracker
Contribute
Release notes
Copying
Upgrading
Complete!
Congratulations! You have installed MediaWiki.
The installer has generated a LocalSettings.php file. It contains all your configuration.
You will need to download it and put it at /etc/mediawiki/LocalSettings.php. The download should have started automatically.
If the download was not offered, or if you cancelled it, you can restart the download by clicking the link below:
Download LocalSetti p
Note: If you do not do this now, this generated configuration file will not be available to you later if you exit the installation without downloading it.
When that has been done, you can enter your wiki.
Language
Existing wiki
Welcome to MediaWiki!
Connect to database
Upgrade existing installation
Database settings
Name
Options
Install
Complete!
Restart installation

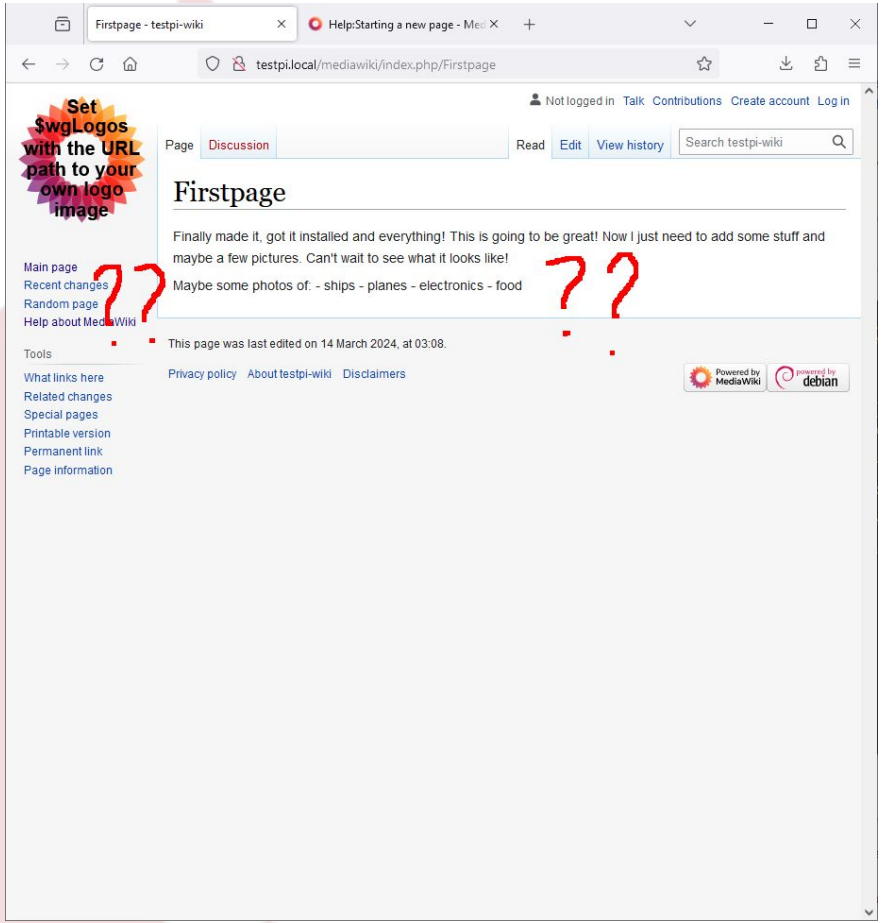

testpi-wiki
testpi.local/mediawiki/index.php/Main_Page
Set $wgLogos with the URL path to your own logo image
Not logged in Talk Contributions Create account Log in
Main Page Discussion
Read Edit View history
Search testpi-wiki
Main Page
MediaWiki has been installed.
Consult the User's Guide for information on using the wiki software.
Getting started [edit]
Configuration settings list
MediaWiki FAQ
MediaWiki release mailing list
Localise MediaWiki for your language
Learn how to combat spam on your wiki
Main page
Recent changes
Random page
Help about MediaWiki
Tools
What links here
Related changes
Special pages
Printable version
Permanent link
Page information
This page was last edited on 14 March 2024, at 02:53.
Privacy policy About testpi-wiki Disclaimers
Powered by MediaWiki
powered by debian

The Source Editor and Markup






Editing Firstpage - testpi-wiki
Help:Starting a new page - Med
testpi.local/mediawiki/index.php?title=Firstpage&action=edit
Set $wgLogos with the URL path to your own logo image
Not logged in Talk Contributions Create account Log in
Page Discussion
Read Edit View history
Search testpi-wiki
Editing Firstpage
Warning: You are not logged in. Your IP address will be publicly visible if you make any edits. If you log in or create an account, your edits will be attributed to your username, along with other benefits.
Finally made it, got it installed and everything!
This is going to be great!
Now I just need to add some stuff and maybe a few pictures.
Can't wait to see what it looks like!
Maybe some photos of:
- ships
- planes
- electronics
- food
Main page
Recent changes
Random page
Help about MediaWiki
Tools
What links here
Related changes
Special pages
Page information
Summary:
changed the page a bit
Please note that all contributions to testpi-wiki may be edited, altered, or removed by other contributors. If you do not want your writing to be edited mercilessly, then do not submit it here.
You are also promising us that you wrote this yourself, or copied it from a public domain or similar free resource (see Testpi-wiki:Copyrights for details). Do not submit copyrighted work without permission!
Save changes
Show preview
Show changes
Cancel
Editing help (opens in new window)


Firstpage - testpi-wiki
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This page was last edited on 14 March 2024, at 03:08.
Privacy policy About testpi-wiki Disclaimers
Powered by MediaWiki
powered by debian
Main page
Recent changes
Random page
Help about MediaWiki
Tools
What links here
Related changes
Special pages
Printable version
Permanent link
Page information

My Wife Is a Librarian

- She speaks many different kinds of descriptive tags and languages:
  - 620.12 CAR 2008
  - KE1232|b.O83 2020
  - <img src=”foo_pic.jpg” alt=”Link to foo” style="width:42px;height:42px;">
  - 008 191217p20192014nyu004 o v$eng d

- Then I showed her the Help:Formatting page.
- She had… questions.

So some HTML will work in here.
Yes.
It says "for example". Where's the full list?
Not sure 🤔
What happens when you mix them?
I don't know. Probably not something people would normally try.
The tags don't behave the same way. 😖
What?
This is going to be a nightmare for any new person trying to fix or figure out why formatting in a long document is wrong 😫
Or someone else trying to figure out what some new person did
It's a popular platform. Lots of people use it.
You're thinking about retrieving information. It's not friendly for putting information INTO it.

HTML vs. MediaWiki Markup

```
This is a test with no formatting.
```

This is a test with no formatting.

HTML vs. MediaWiki Markup

```
Opened with HTML, closed with HTML:

This is a test with <b>this part in bold.</b> This part should be plain.
```

Opened with HTML, closed with HTML:

This is a test with **this part in bold.** This part should be plain.

HTML vs. MediaWiki Markup

```
Opened with MW markup, closed with MW markup:

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```

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```

Opened with HTML, closed with MW markup:

This is a test with **this part in bold. This part should be plain.**

HTML vs. MediaWiki Markup

```
'''This is a test with bold using MW markup.

It ends at the end of the paragraph even without closing it, right?
```

This is a test with bold using MW markup.

It ends at the end of the paragraph even without closing it, right?

HTML vs. MediaWiki Markup

```
<b>This is a test with bold using HTML.

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```

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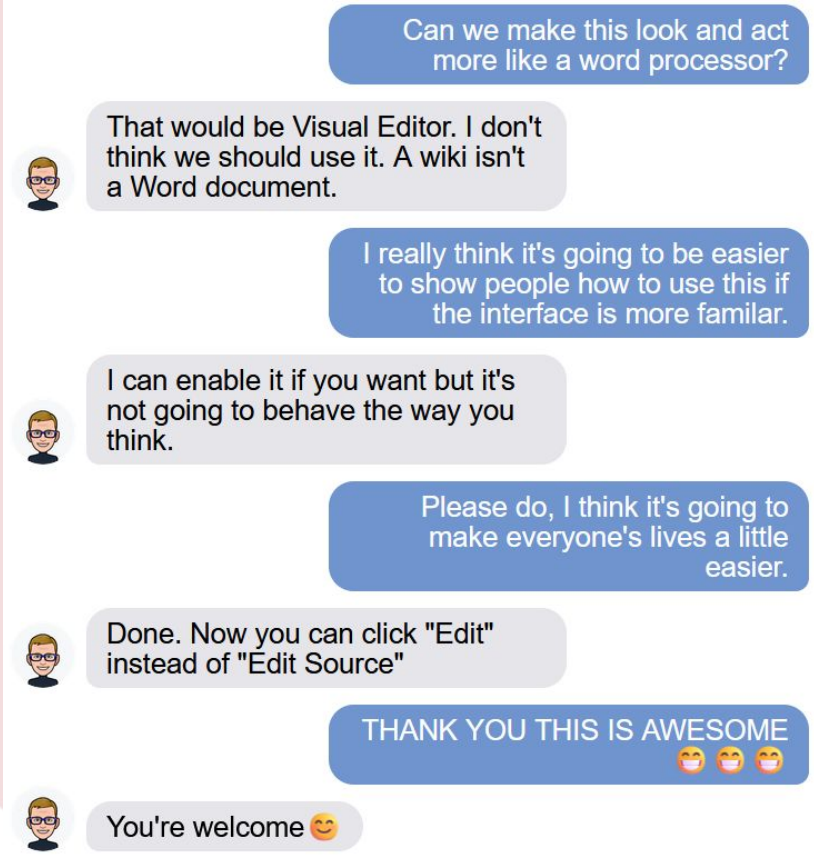
Visual Editor



Paragraph Insert Save changes...

Foo

Here's a test page. It has some text:

1. UPPER CASE
2. lower case
3. **bold**
4. underlined

```
t = 0
while (t <= 55):
print("hello")
t = t + 1
```

Here is an image:

My oldest TTL chip that still works

Here's another image:

Nothing special

And one more because what the heck:

It's a squirrel! With a nut!

And that's about it.

Page Discussion Read Edit Edit source View history More Search testpi-wiki

Foo

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Hey Tina?

Hey Mark!

Okay, so things aren't lining up on the page the way I expected.

This is why I warned you. Have you tried turning off wrap text for each image?

No. I figured that the editor would do that because I had a blank line above and below each image.

Visual Editor is not a word processor.

I don't think this is going to work.

Editing source gives you better control and you can see what's going on.

File Uploads and Page Creation

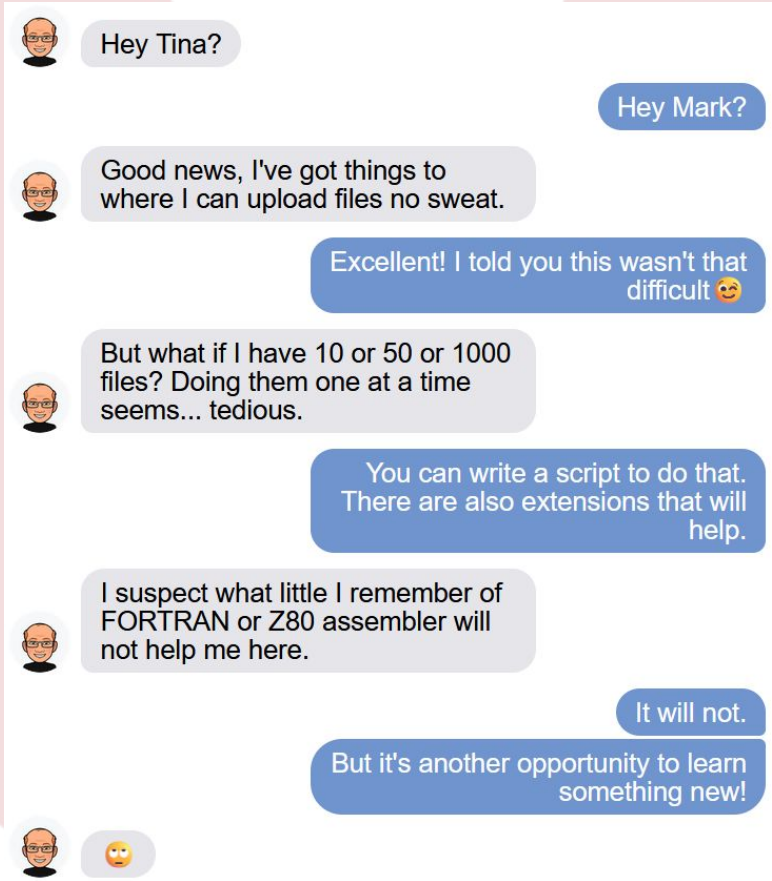
The museums we've spoken with already have a lot of data:

- Existing web presence
- Word documents
- PDFs
- Image files
- A lot of paper to scan/OCR/convert
- Artifacts to photograph and document

For people with average computer skills but no familiarity with MediaWiki, it takes over five minutes to upload one image and copy/paste to create a simple page - even more if there is formatting involved.

As you get used to it you can find timesaving tricks, but it can be frustrating at first.

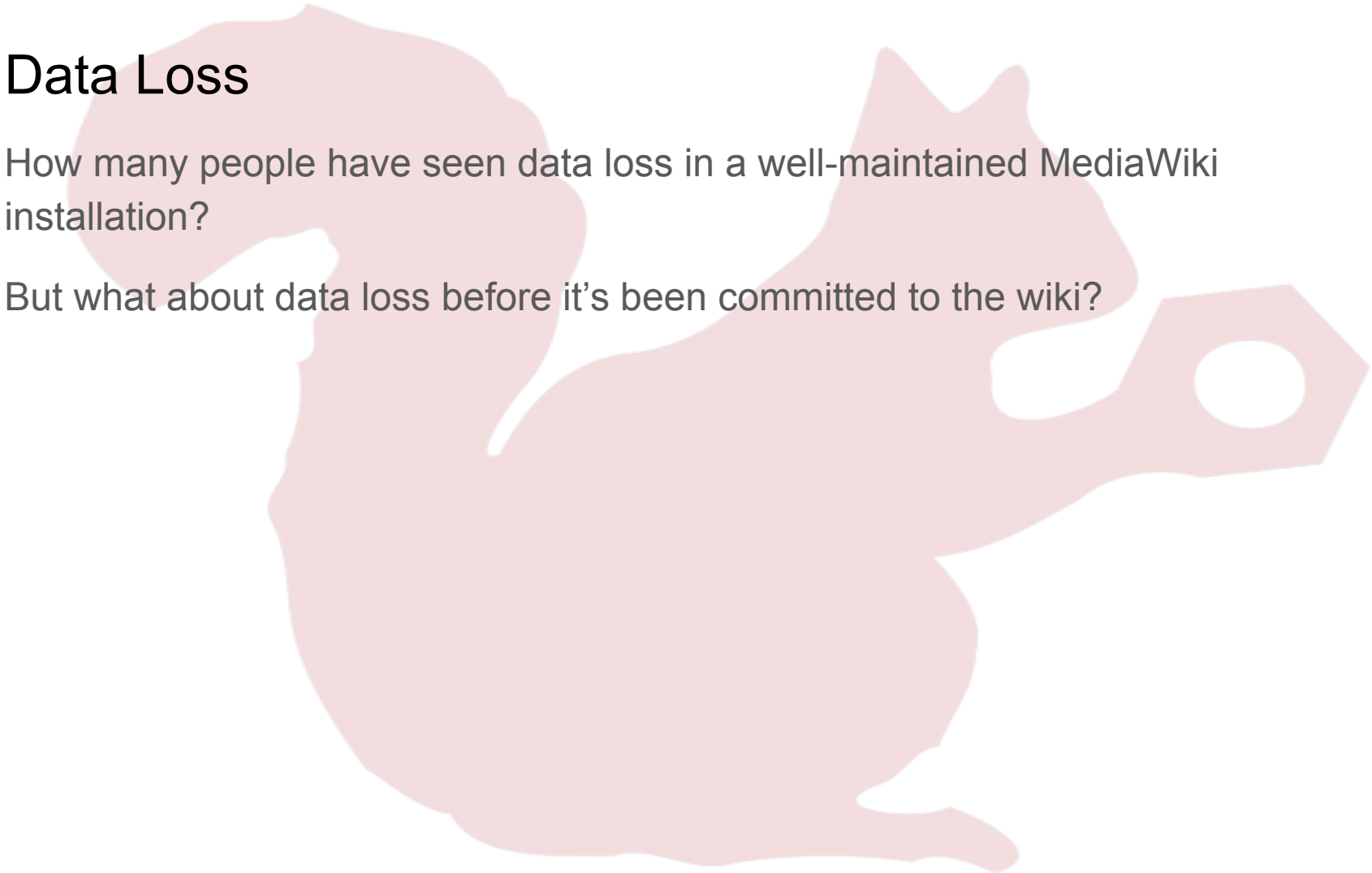
And What if They Have 1000 Images?



Data Loss

How many people have seen data loss in a well-maintained MediaWiki installation?

But what about data loss before it’s been committed to the wiki?



I got 500 Internal Server Error after I tried to edit a page.

This is on shared hosting? What did you put in there?

Yes. Lots of MicroPython stuff.

Did you wrap it with nowiki?

😟

Just go back in and take it out.

I searched the whole MW directory structure and can't find it.

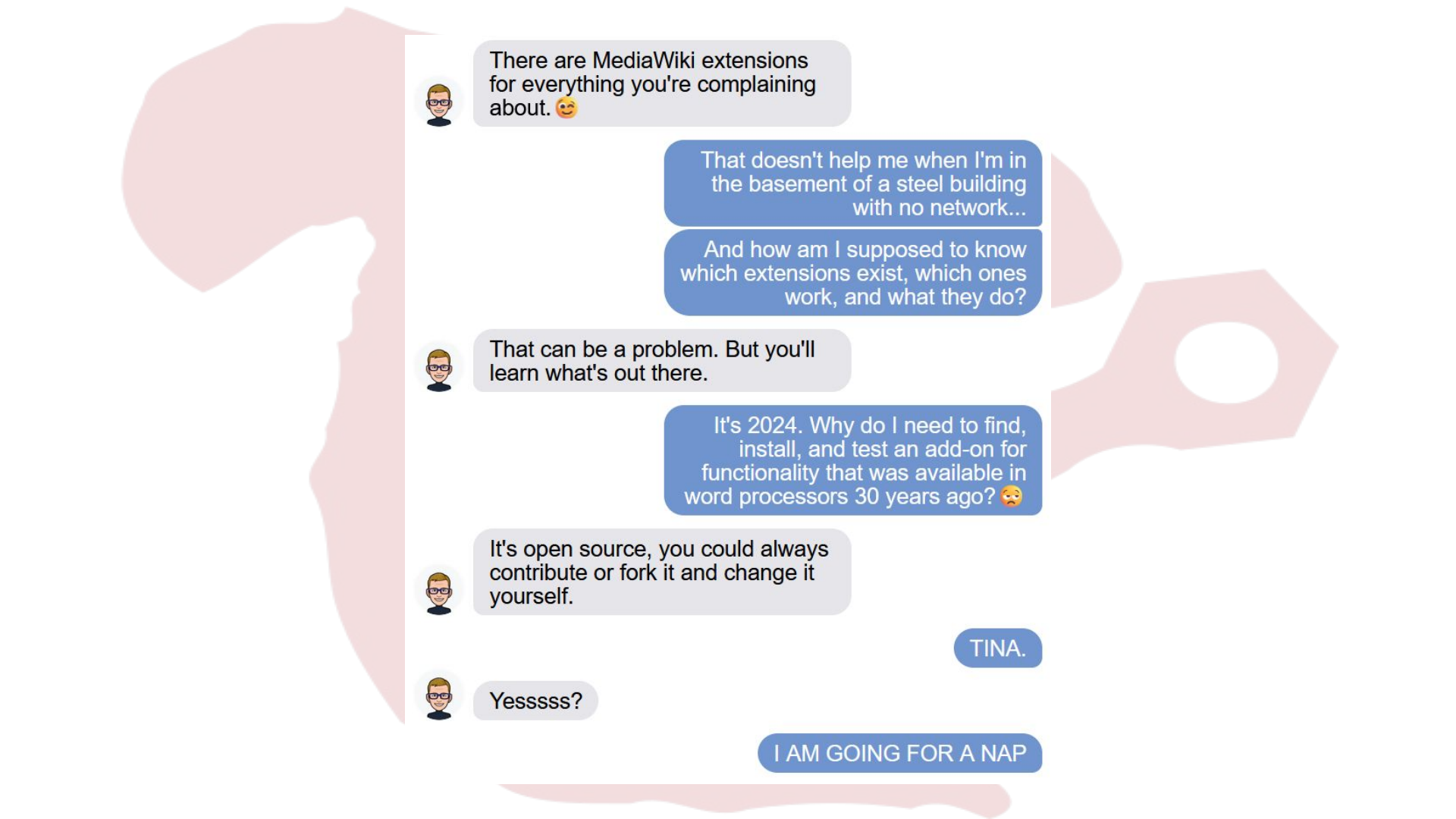
That's not how MW works. Your text is in the DB. Use the page editor.

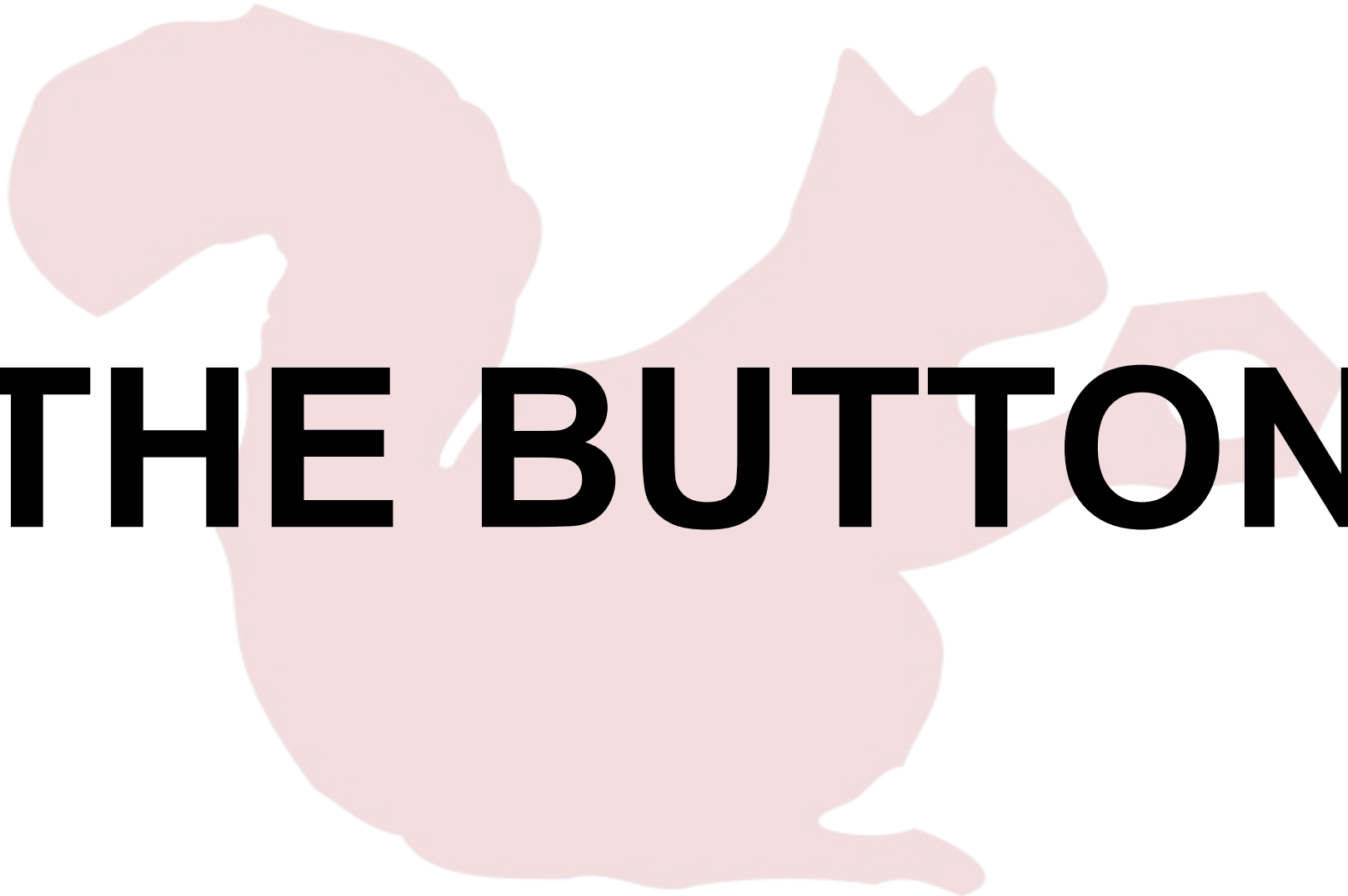
But... 500 Internal Server Editor 😧

MARK.

Ok, I'll take a look.

That was TWO HOURS of work 😖


There are MediaWiki extensions for everything you're complaining about.😉
That doesn't help me when I'm in the basement of a steel building with no network...
And how am I supposed to know which extensions exist, which ones work, and what they do?
That can be a problem. But you'll learn what's out there.
It's 2024. Why do I need to find, install, and test an add-on for functionality that was available in word processors 30 years ago?😟
It's open source, you could always contribute or fork it and change it yourself.
TINA.
Yesssss?
I AM GOING FOR A NAP


THE BUTTON

Powered by
MediaWiki

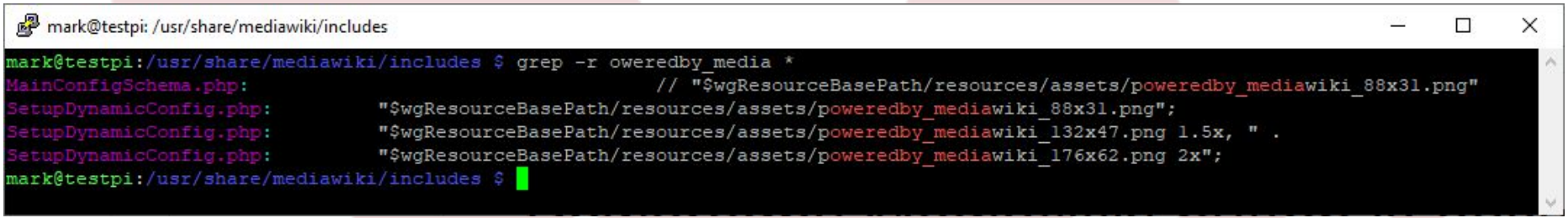
Powered by
MediaWiki

powered by
debian

Why remove those buttons?

- Offline wiki.
- Nowhere for the links to go
- Don’t want people to get errors or stuck
- Less work and should be easier to maintain than editing DNS or hosts, plus makes more sense than DNS or hosts just pointing back to the wiki.
    - Or, it should’ve been…

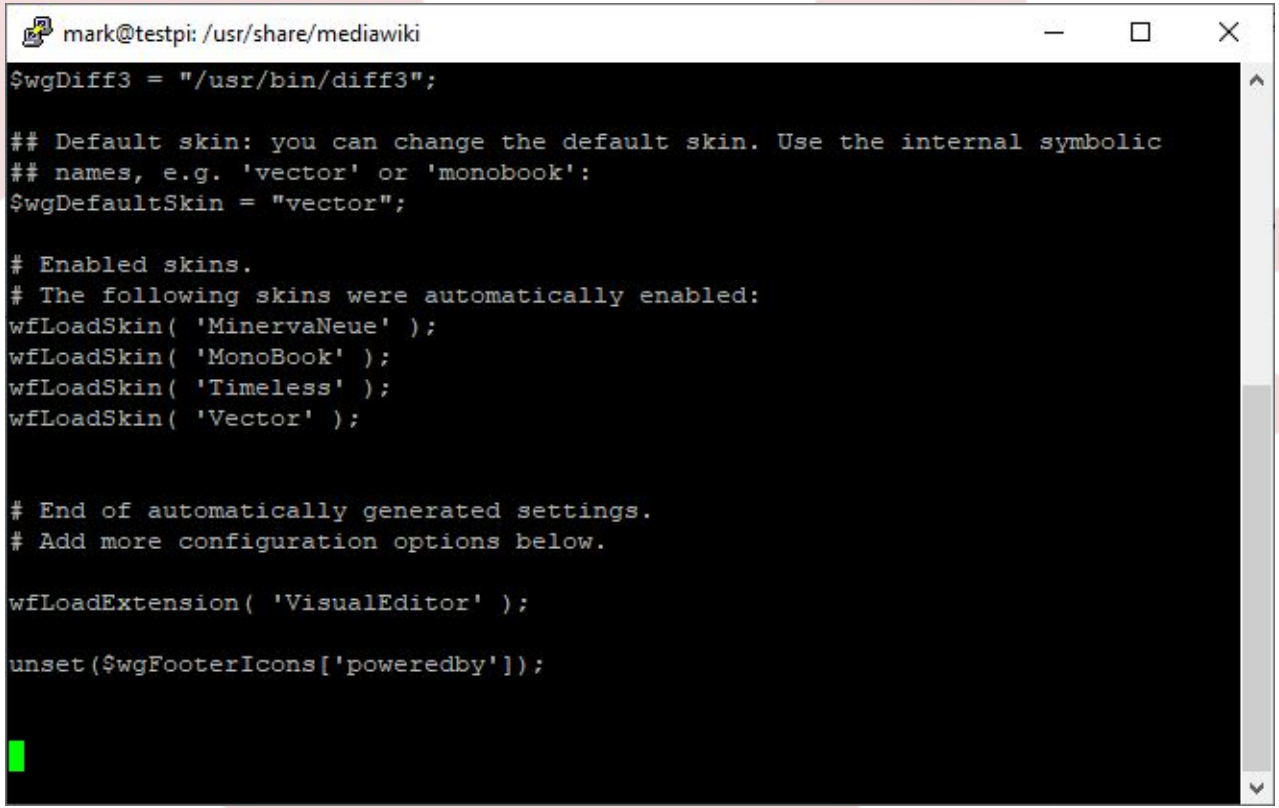
Poweredby MediaWiki button is easy to find



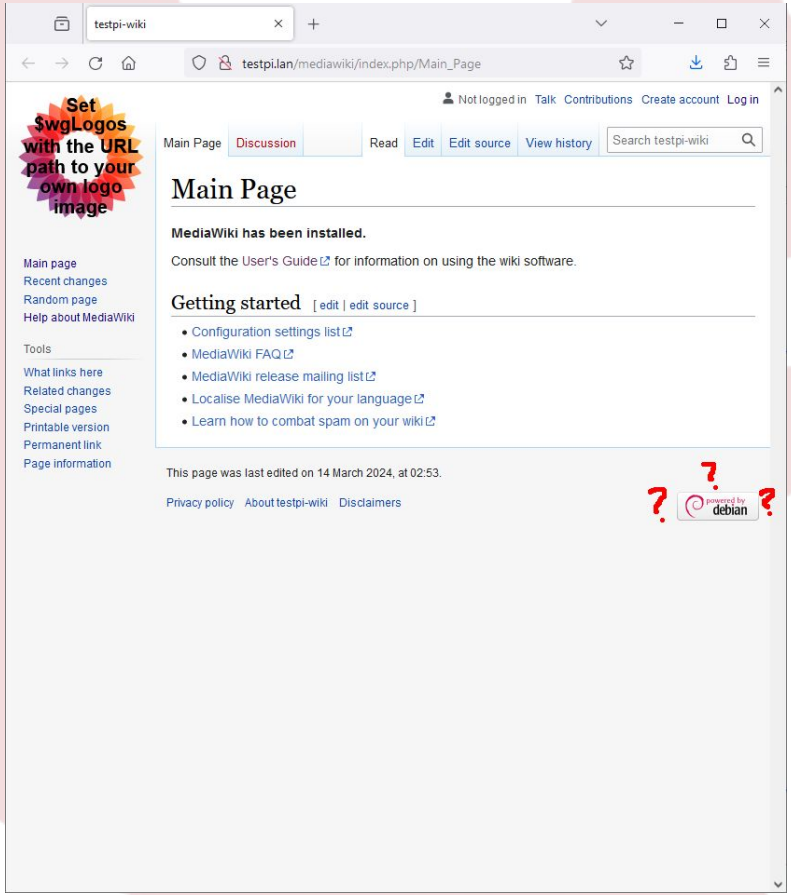
MainConfigSchema.php: Commenting it out: no change
SetupDynamicConfig.php: Commenting the block out: removed the button/link

But wait. Maybe there’s an easier way to do this…

Remember LocalSettings.php!



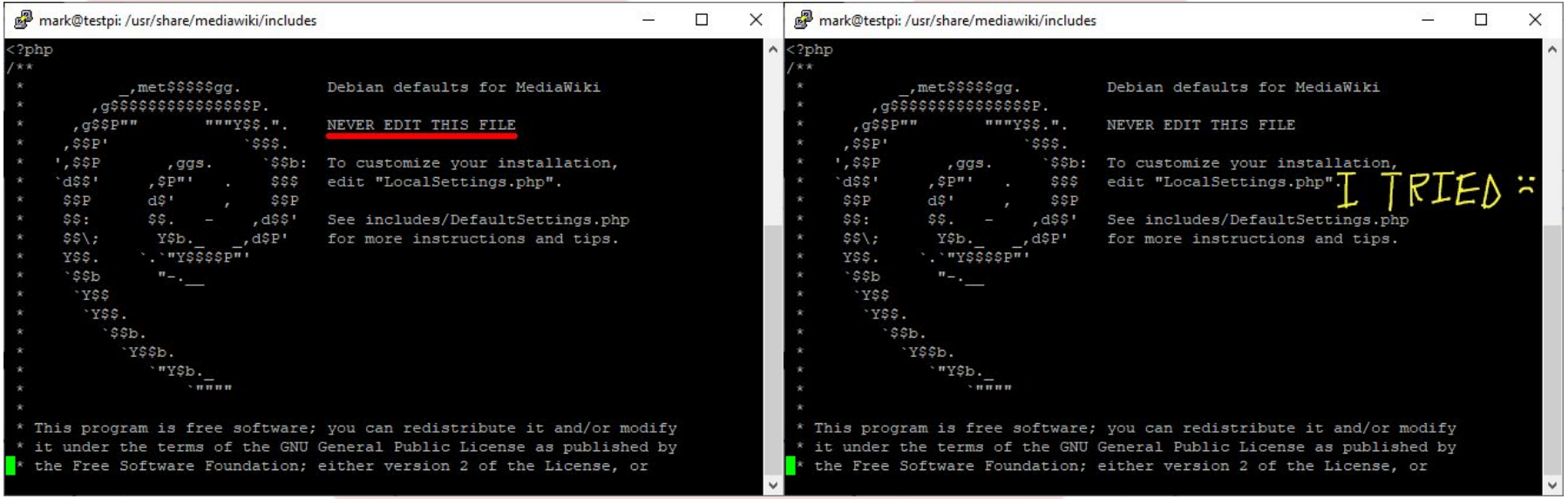
That’s… not quite right



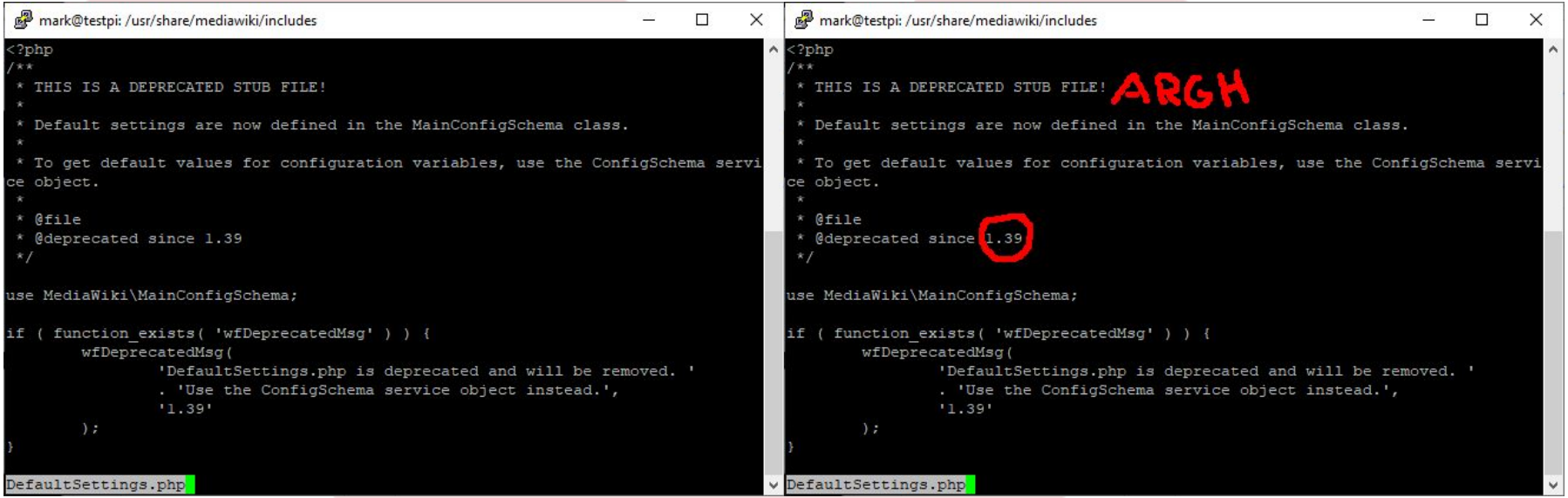
Next Step…

mark@testpi: /usr/share/mediawiki
mark@testpi:/usr/share/mediawiki $ grep -r weredby_deb *
grep: images: Permission denied
includes/PlatformSettings.php: 'src' => "$wgResourceBasePath/resources/assets/debian/poweredby_debian_1x.png",
includes/PlatformSettings.php: "$wgResourceBasePath/resources/assets/debian/poweredby_debian_1_5x.png 1.5x, " .
includes/PlatformSettings.php: "$wgResourceBasePath/resources/assets/debian/poweredby_debian_2x.png 2x",
mark@testpi:/usr/share/mediawiki $

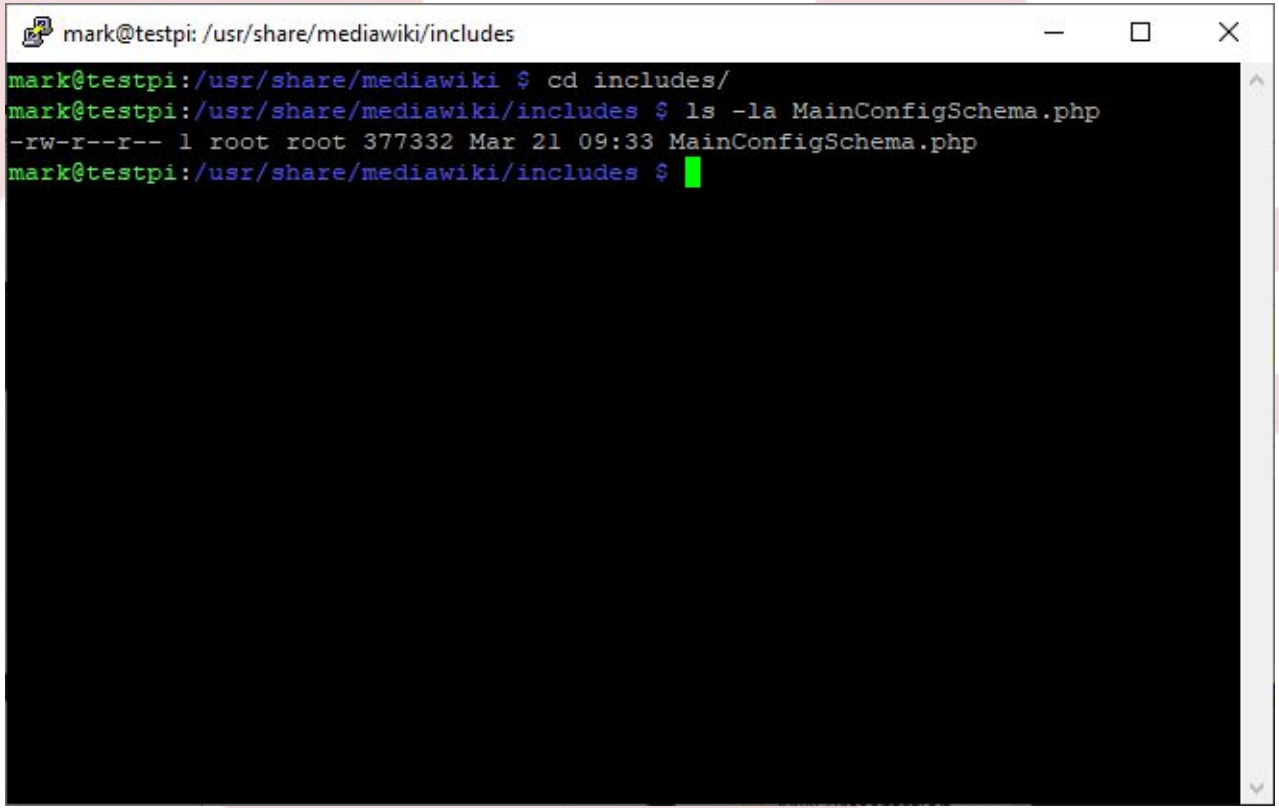
Finally! PlatformSettings.php! Makes sense! But…



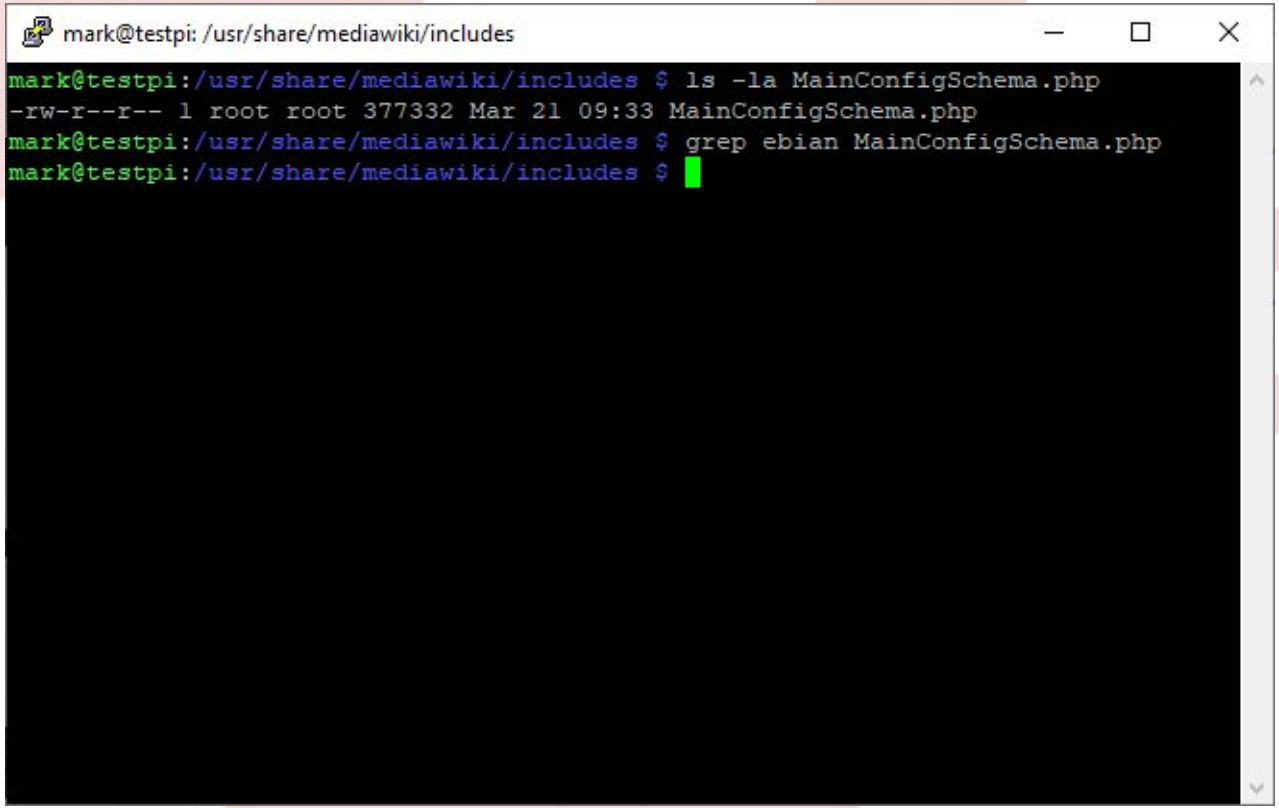
So, off to DefaultSettings.php! But…



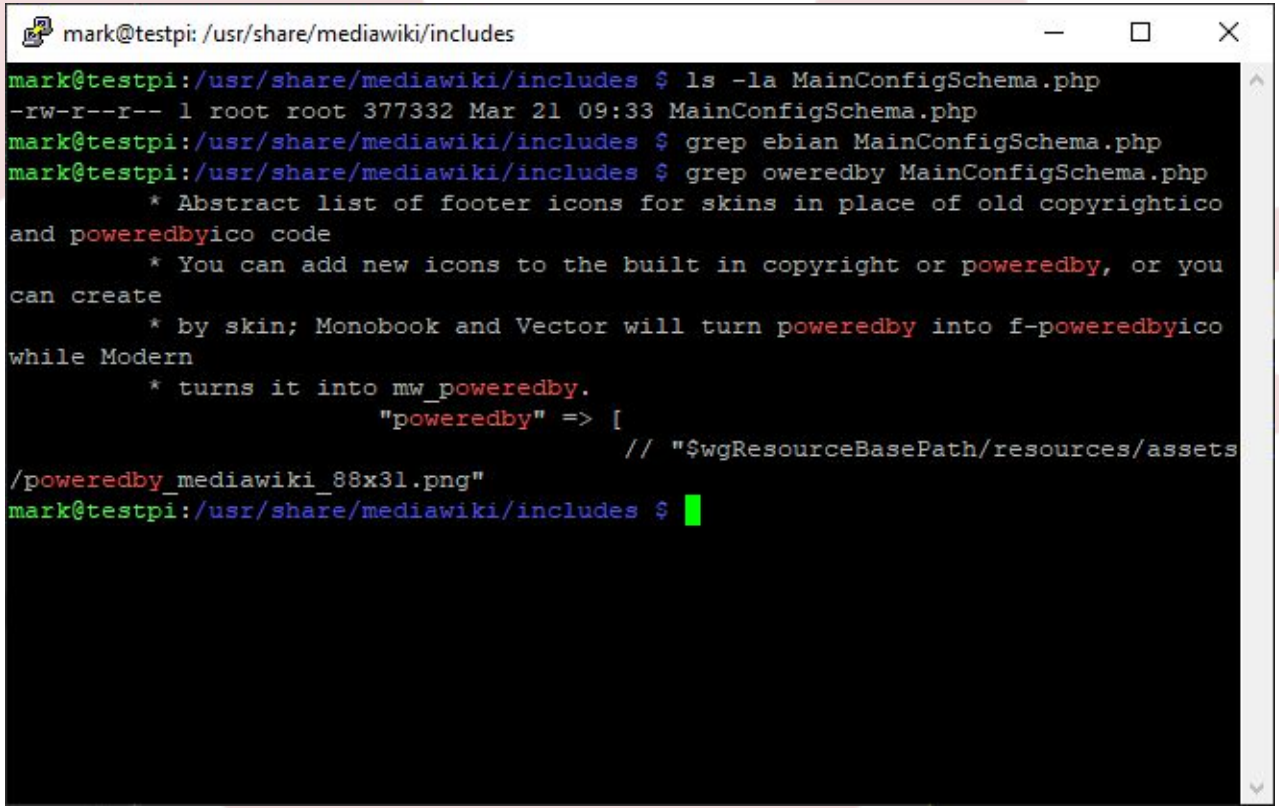
So… off to MainConfigSchema. It's large.

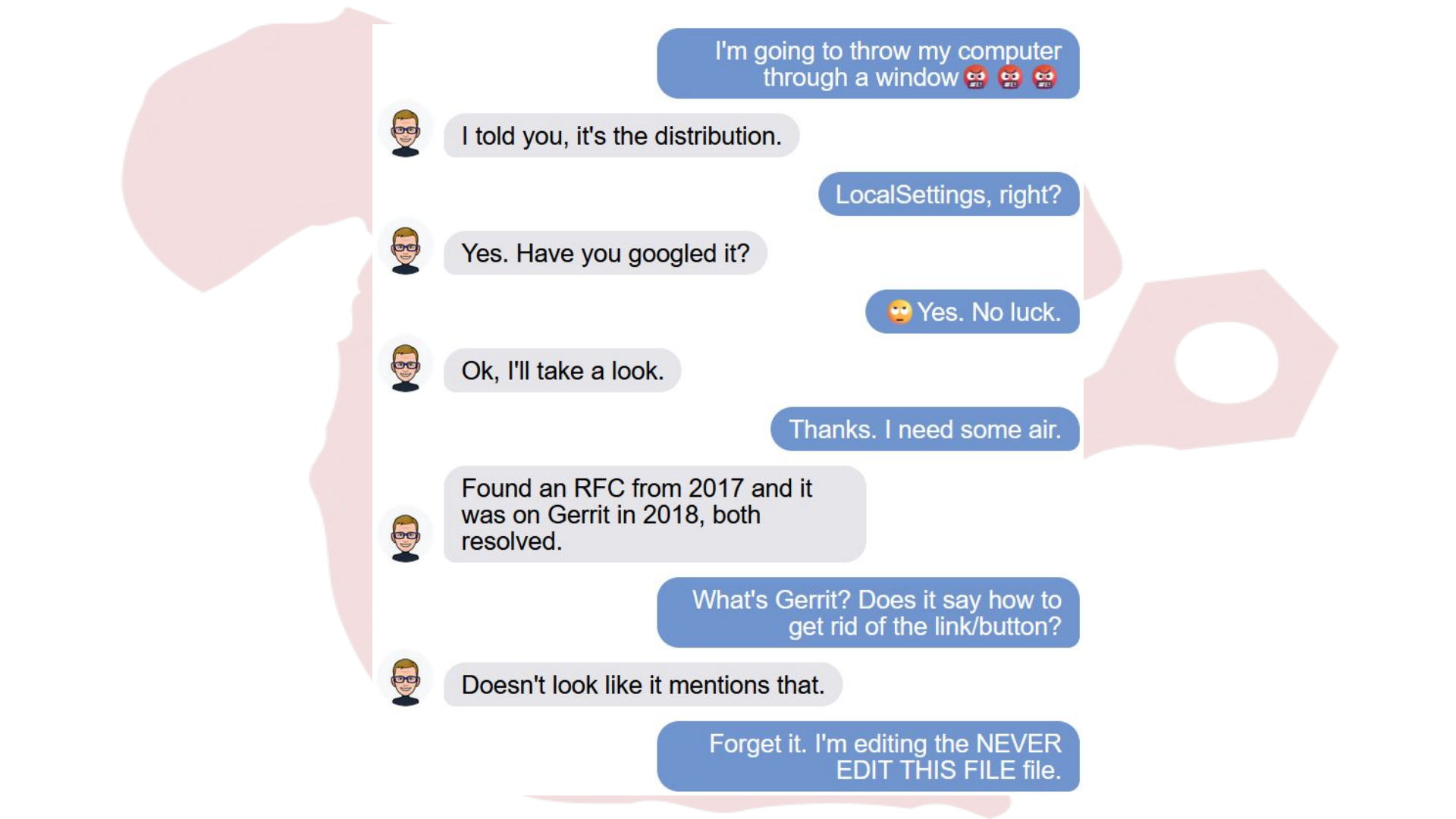


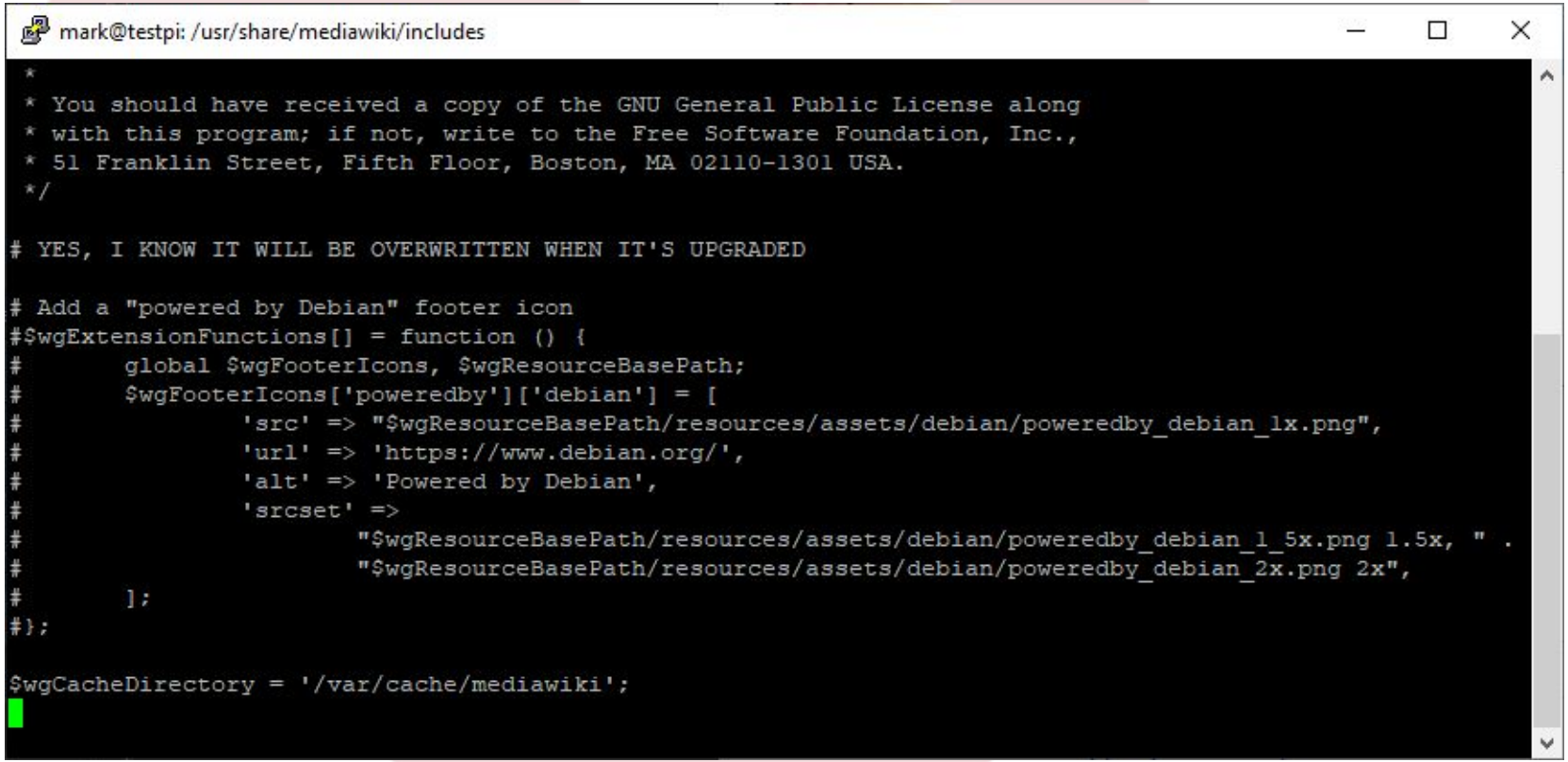
And Doesn’t Have “ebian” in it



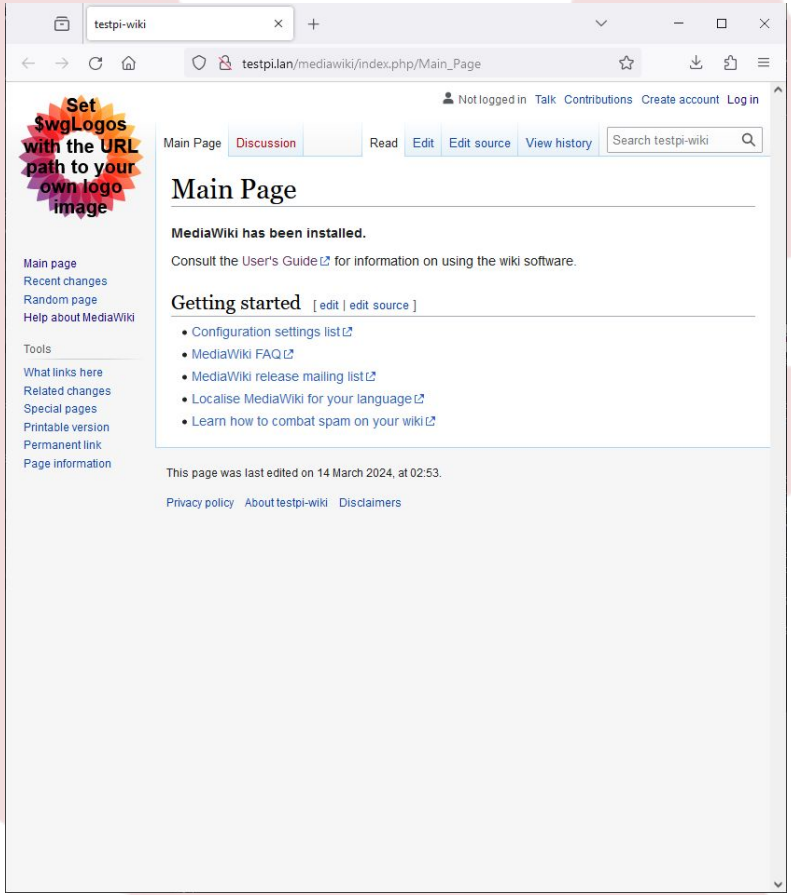
But it *does* have poweredby_mediawiki in it. So, uh…




I'm going to throw my computer through a window
I told you, it's the distribution.
LocalSettings, right?
Yes. Have you googled it?
Yes. No luck.
Ok, I'll take a look.
Thanks. I need some air.
Found an RFC from 2017 and it was on Gerrit in 2018, both resolved.
What's Gerrit? Does it say how to get rid of the link/button?
Doesn't look like it mentions that.
Forget it. I'm editing the NEVER EDIT THIS FILE file.

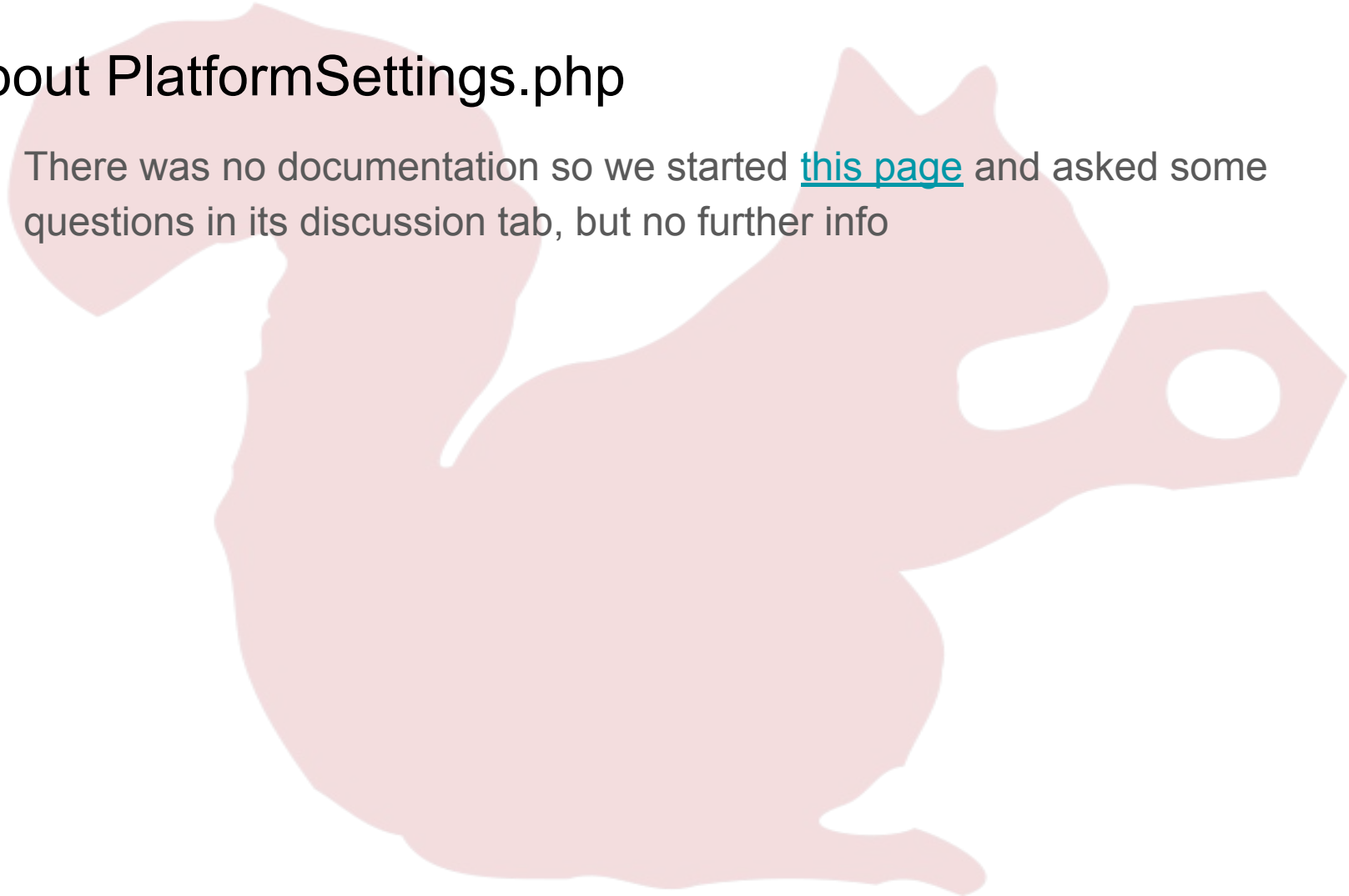

mark@testpi: /usr/share/mediawiki/includes
*
* You should have received a copy of the GNU General Public License along
* with this program; if not, write to the Free Software Foundation, Inc.,
* 51 Franklin Street, Fifth Floor, Boston, MA 02110-1301 USA.
*/
YES, I KNOW IT WILL BE OVERWRITTEN WHEN IT'S UPGRADED
Add a "powered by Debian" footer icon
#$wgExtensionFunctions[] = function () {
#	global $wgFooterIcons, $wgResourceBasePath;
#	$wgFooterIcons['poweredby']['debian'] = [
#		'src' => "$wgResourceBasePath/resources/assets/debian/poweredby_debian_1x.png",
#		'url' => 'https://www.debian.org/',
#		'alt' => 'Powered by Debian',
#		'srcset' =>
#			"$wgResourceBasePath/resources/assets/debian/poweredby_debian_1_5x.png 1.5x, " .
#			"$wgResourceBasePath/resources/assets/debian/poweredby_debian_2x.png 2x",
#	];
#};
$wgCacheDirectory = '/var/cache/mediawiki';

At least it worked - icons are gone.



About PlatformSettings.php

- There was no documentation so we started this page and asked some questions in its discussion tab, but no further info



So if I want to turn something off, I need to create a setting for it and then turn it off? 🤔

Don't blame MW, it's the distro that put that icon in there.

If you bought a car and a shop put square wheels on it, would you blame the manufacturer?

No, but the manual that comes with the car should tell me how to change the wheels without directing me to the middle of an abandoned airport, right?

You may have a point.

From The Non-Wiki-Savvy Perspective…

Initial installation, configuration, and population has stumbling blocks but is not that difficult.

It's different enough from common software that without practice the skills are easily lost. Even more so for those who are not particularly comfortable with computers in the first place.

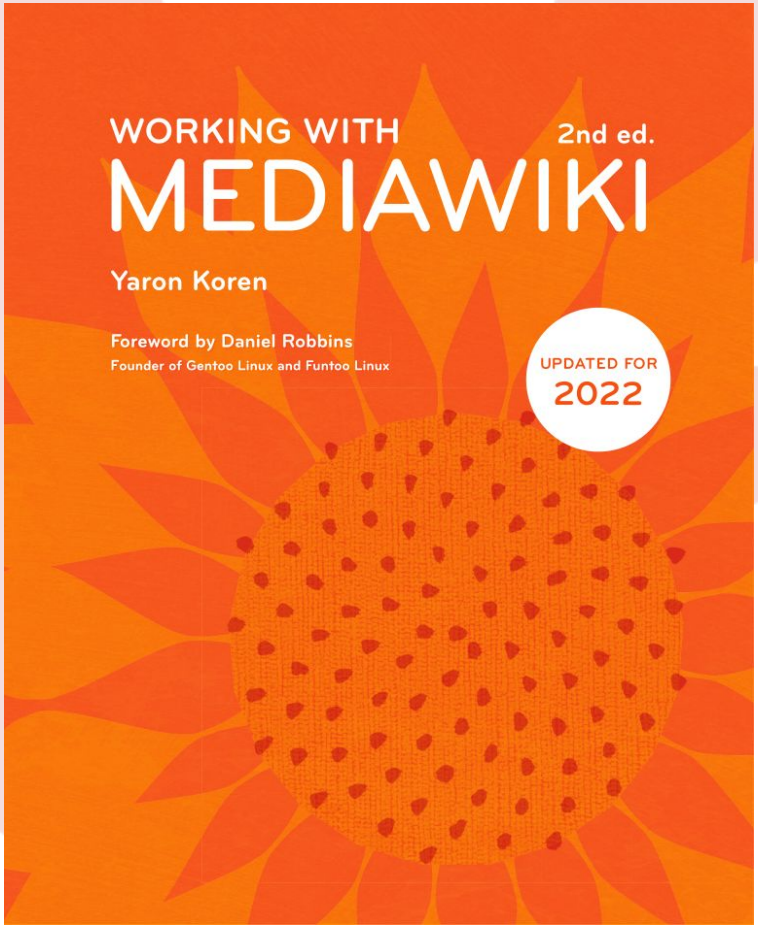
Creating new pages, updating existing pages, and removing dead pages tends to fall by the wayside.

People become frustrated with the stale data, knowledge is lost, and it becomes easier to just let it go instead of fighting with it.

Is He Here Just To Complain?

- Initially this presentation was called “Tina Made Me Use Mediawiki and I Don’t Like It: Please Don’t Throw Things At Me”.
- But the thing is, I do like it. It’s powerful, useful, stable, has a remarkable community behind it, works for organizations and collections of any size, and once you’re used to it, it makes a lot more sense.
- It’s not easy to take those first few steps, though. Both of us have had the same discussions with other people: Tina at work (and with Mark), Mark with several… “test subjects”.
- Clear, accurate, complete documentation is the single best solution to address the problems we ran into.
- How can people help?

I Wish Someone Had Told Me About This Six Months Ago



Questions?

(You can yell at us, too…)